

Review of Rutherford County Airport

The Rutherford County Airport is an asset to all of Rutherford County. In addition to providing direct increased tax revenue through the value of aircraft based at the Airport, the Airport also serves the County; the Forestry Service; and other agencies with critical air response fighting fires; search and rescue; and transporting patients/medicines. It also serves existing industry through immediate delivery of parts and supplies plus quick access to other businesses and to larger airports with scheduled airline service.

Review:

Although the Rutherford County Airport Authority is a separate entity under North Carolina law, it is wholly integrated with the County for all of its finances and administration. The Airport generates annual rental revenues (\$25,828) from land leases for hangars and a restaurant. In FY2012-13, the Airport generated net fuel revenue of \$40,867 on the sale of 97,656 gallons of fuel; an average margin of \$0.42 per gallon. Beyond that, all of the remaining revenue came from general County appropriations (\$112,658) and miscellaneous revenues (\$218). Total grants awarded to Rutherford in FY12-13 by NCDOT-Aviation were \$541,028 which required County matching funds of \$60,115.

The January 1, 2013 assessed value at the Airport property is \$2,025,050 (exempt)

Aircraft.....	\$15,085,460
Real Estate (Hangars).....	\$ 1,966,000
Other (e.g., restaurant; other business personal property).....	\$6,290
Total.....	\$19,082,800 (\$17,057,750 taxable)

Although there is no direct allocation of a revenue source to the Airport from aircraft and business personal property taxes generated from property located at the Airport, at the current tax rate of \$0.607 per \$100 assessed value. Airport-based property generated \$103,540.54 in general tax revenue to the County.

The FY2013-14 budget for the Airport is summarized below:

<u>Expenses</u>	
Personnel	\$54,711
Maintenance and Operations	\$84,084
Subtotal	\$138,795
Fuel Purchases	\$300,000
Total	\$438,795

Revenues

Fuel Sales	\$350,000
Rent	\$ 18,400
General Fund	\$ 70,395
Total	\$438,795

The Airport Authority took over fuel sale operations after the most recent Fixed Based Operator (FBO) resigned from their contract effective June 30, 2012. Fuel sales have climbed significantly. The present Airport Board and Chairman, who has been appointed interim manager, have purposefully kept the margins low on fuel so as to provide a benefit to aircraft owners housed at the Airport and aircraft coming into the airport. Another purpose is to encourage more aircraft to become based at the Airport, which will increase use of existing businesses, encourage development of new businesses, and increase the tax base.

Fuel Sales (Gallons)

FY 2013-14	119,050	(budget)
FY2012-13	97,656	
FY2011-12	49,251	
FY2010-11	50,450	
FY2009-10	56,553	

FY2013-14 fuel sales are anticipated to provide \$50,000 in revenue after the cost of fuel.

Existing businesses at the airport, in addition to the Airport-operated fuel sales, include an aircraft restoration and sales company (CAAMS) and an aviation maintenance business (Plane Werks). Both of these companies have excellent reputations in their field.

During the past several years, substantial improvements have been made under the current Airport Board. Notable are the tremendous increase in fuel sales, the fencing project, the paving project, the water line and fiber project, and the purchase of adjacent property. This latter has caused substantial controversy in the County due to the price paid for one of the properties and the seller being a member of the sitting Board of Commissioners.

A list of the actual improvements/land acquisitions is attached. (Attachment A)

Based upon the approved Airport Layout Plan (2005), future improvements include: fuel tank relocation capacity increase and electronic sales; hangar expansion; and wind cone and rotating beacon relocation.

During the past year, the Airport Board has worked with the Economic Development Department, the Tourism Development Authority, and the towns of Chimney Rock and Lake Lure to find ways to utilize the Airport more to encourage tourism and business growth. This brings the Airport back to its 20th century roots as an economic development tool, but in a manner to serve businesses in the County and encourage business growth in the 21st century.

Challenges face the airport. The Airport needs consistent, independent policy making away from day-to-day airport operations. This is exemplified by one part time staff person being worked so many hours in the first half of the 2013 calendar year that he may be unavailable much of the second half without being made a full time employee – which is what the Airport Board recommended in its budget proposal and the County Manager now recommends but within the current budget. Further, many questions have arisen about uses authorized under existing airport ground leases versus actual uses on the Airport property. Current Airport Authority Board Member Keith Hunter recently wrote a summary of issues that has been included as an attachment. (Attachment B)

NOTE: The only mention here to the tragedy of Ed Robinson's death in 2012 is to note it occurred and the sadness of all who knew Mr. Robinson. No further mention is made here due to potential litigation.

Airport Politics:

Any discussion about the Rutherford County Airport would be sorely incomplete without mentioning the toxic politics on and off the airfield. Most of the current politics date back to a change in the FBO in 2000, but some of the acrimony precedes that as evidenced by removal of an Airport Authority member in the mid-1990's. The bad blood among Airport Authority members, aircraft owners, and other members in the community became acute in the spring and summer of 2013 when the Airport Authority authorized the purchase of land owned by Commissioner Julius Owens at a price of \$300,000 when a fee appraisal showed the market value at \$165,500. This purpose of the land purchase was to remove obstructions (trees) in the approach to the airport rather than moving the runway or shortening it below the 5,000 length sought by insurance carriers for landing small (corporate) jets. On the other hand, the Airport Authority had reached an agreement with Mr. Owens in 2010 for \$12,000 for removal of the obstructions and the County Manager was told that trees had been trimmed in the late 1980's or early 1990's. However, to confirm this, it was later found that Airport Authority minutes from the 1980's could not be located. In the end, in discussions with legal counsel, it appears that the Owens property purchase was a legal transaction. Further, the NCDOT Division of Aviation is currently processing the grant funds as the transaction resolves the obstruction issue.

The acrimonious politics at the Airport and on the Airport Board have also been reflected in:

- An Airport Authority member declining to take a role and eventually declining to attend meeting the last six months of his term;
- An Airport Authority member starting a rumor among staff to see how fast rumors travel at the Airport;
- Two Airport Authority Board members being sued for “invasion of privacy” by an Airport-based business owner

Recommendation:

As part of preparing the report, the County Manager has discussed the issue with all members of the Airport Authority and all members of the Board of Commissioners. Further, the County Manager has reviewed documents from the Airport’s distant and recent history, along with layout and other plans prepared by the Airport engineer (WK Dickson). The County Manager also interviewed key persons with knowledge about the Airport plus citizens who have asked to speak with the County Manager about the issue.

In the end, what the County Manager found was that the Rutherford County Airport is a very important asset to the future of Rutherford County. The Airport can be and should be utilized for both industrial growth and tourism development, along with encouraging recreational aviation while tapping into the concomitant commercial growth of the aviation field.

The horrible politics that surround the Airport are a serious impediment to the development of the Rutherford Airport for the good of the County. The current Airport Authority is not solely to blame; the bad politics transcends their term. The County Manager feels strongly that no Airport Authority member is serving who wants anything but the very best for Rutherford County Airport. However, the excellent work by the current Airport Authority to move the Airport forward have been over-shadowed by actions that have caused the public to lose trust in the current Airport Authority. Trust must be re-built in order for the public to see the intrinsic value of Rutherford County Airport and not be blinded by the political bad blood flowing today.

Further, it is essential that the Airport Authority cease being involved in direct management of the Airport. The Authority should be a policy-making board and not a board of five managers. The operation of the Airport should be the responsibility of staff who work within the framework established by a policy-making Airport Authority. The same applies to enforcement of rules established by the Authority board.

Because of the immediate need to re-establish trust in Airport governance and operations and the need to clarify the roles of the Airport Authority and the staff working at the Airport, the County Manager recommends that the Board of Commissioners become the Airport Authority for an estimated period of six to eighteen months or for a period it may take to accomplish these two goals. During its time as Airport Authority, the Commissioners need to delineate the policy role of the Airport Authority separate from the operations and rule enforcement of the Airport by staff.

Further, the County Manager recommends that there be one full-time and two part-time Airport Service Technicians to cover the 67 hours per week the Airport fueling service is available and that the additional funding (\$20,385) for this position and part-time personnel be covered by the existing budget pending a mid-year review by the County Manager.

Attachment A

Airport Grant Log Sheet

	Grant Book #	Award Date	Expiration Date	Completion Date	Federal Funds	Local Funds	Total Project	Project Descriptions	Notes
9.9489002	1	1/6/2000	1/1/2001	1/11/2005	20,000.00	20,000.00	40,000.00	Update Airport Layout Plan	
36244.28.2.2	1-A	1/6/2000	1/1/2001	11/29/2004	40,000.00	4,444.00	44,444.00	Land acquisition and obstruction removal for runway approaches	
9.9289000	1	8/31/2000	1/1/2002	1/16/2002	1,350,000.00	150,000.00	1,500,000.00	Rehab Apron, taxiway & rehab and widen runway	
9.9989010	2	6/4/2001	8/25/2003	8/25/2003	27,000.00	3,000.00	30,000.00	upgrade airfield electrical vault, add radio controls	
36237.20.2.1	1	8/9/2001	7/1/2002	3/15/2002	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab Airfield Lighting & Electrical System	
36237.20.3.1	1-A	5/2/2003	7/1/2004	11/10/2004	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab airfield lighting & electrical system; grading & paving hangar access road; aircraft parking apron expansion	
36237.20.4.1	1-A	10/16/2003	1/1/2006	10/12/2005	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab parallel taxiway (partial, north end)	
36244.28.4.1	2	6/10/2004	1/1/2007	3/17/2006	275,000.00	30,556.00	305,556.00	pavement rehab of poor & failing sections	Amt amended Aug 2005 from \$185,000
36237.20.5.1	2	9/27/2004	1/1/2008	7/25/2008	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab parallel taxiway, expand aircraft parking ramp, security fencing	
36237.20.6.1	3	5/16/2005	1/1/2009	12/29/2008	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	ALP Update, obstruction clearing/certification, ramp expansion, corporate hangar area expansion site preparation	
36237.20.7.1	3	9/6/2006	1/1/2010	1/26/2010	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Ramp Expansion/corporate hangar area, site prep/paving, hangar access road extension	
36244.28.5.1	3	10/31/2007	7/1/2011	6/19/2008	200,000.00	5,128.00	205,128.00	Apron Taxiway - hangar construction	
36237.20.8.1	4	11/8/2007	7/1/2011	5/18/2010	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Localizer Stand By Power, REIL Replacement, Hangar Area Expansion Site Prep, Paving, Access Road, Taxiway;security fencing	
36237.20.8.2	3	12/3/2007	7/1/2011	1/6/2009	88,000.00	9,778.00	97,778.00	Approach survey for Runway 1-19	
36244.28.6.1	4	5/28/2008	7/1/2012	4/4/2013	200,000.00	5,128.00	205,128.00	Land Acquisition & West Terminal Area Development (to include fuel farm)	
36237.20.9.1	4	6/20/2008	7/1/2012	4/6/2009	70,468.00	10,360.00	81,927.00	recorded in General Fund	
36237.20.10.2	5	11/5/2009	7/1/2013	PENDING	79,532.00	8,837.00	88,369.00	Obstruction Clearing & Hangar Area Preparation	Open PO \$6000 for Trees
36237.20.10.3	7	11/5/2009	7/1/2013	5/16/2011	606,203.00	86,250.00	692,453.00	Shuler Grant - Rehabilitate Taxiway & Apron	Modified 10/12/11
36237.20.10.1	5	11/6/2009	7/1/2013	1/25/2013	535,047.00	53,505.00	588,552.00	Taxiway & Ramp Improvements (west side hangar area development, site prep & Paving)	Modified 10/12/11
36237.20.11.1	8	3/3/2011	7/1/2013	EXPIRED	122,728.00	12,272.00	135,000.00	Westside Hangar Development Paving, SWPPP (Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan, Fencing)	Modified 10/12/11
36237.20.12.1	8	12/15/2011	7/1/2015	OPEN	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Airfield Improvements/Land Acquisition	
36244.28.7.1	9	8/27/2012	7/1/2017	2/28/2013	180,000.00	20,000.00	200,000.00	Land Acquisition - East Terminal Development Area	
36237.20.13.1	9	10/29/2012	7/1/2014	OPEN	401,143.00	-	401,143.00	Land Acquisition - Runway 19 Runway Protection Zone	7/1/2014 (portion to expire 6/30/2013)

Attachment A

Grants Outstanding	Grant Award (incl match)	Balance	Description	Expiration Date
36237.20.10.2*	\$ 88,369.00	\$ 28,038.58	Obstruction Clearing & Westside Hangar Area Development Site Preparation & Paving	7/1/2013 - Remaining funds have expired; Open Purchase Order remains for Tree/Obstruction Removal \$6,000
36237.20.11.1**	\$ 135,000.00	\$ 22,890.00	Westside Hangar Development Paving, SWPPP (Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan), Fencing	Expired 7/1/13
36237.20.12.1	\$ 166,667.00	\$ 73,582.03	Airfield Improvements/Land Acquisition	completed
36244.28.7.1	\$ 200,000.00	complete 2/28/13	Land Acquisition - East Terminal Development Area	completed
36237.20.13.1	\$ 401,143.00	\$ 99,318.16	Land Acquisition - Runway 19 Runway Protection Zone	7/1/2014 (portion to expire 6/30/2013)
Total Open Grants		\$ 172,900.19	(excludes balance of 36237.20.10.2 & 36237.20.11.1 - funds have expired)	

* 36237.20.10.2 Balance is less \$13,000 purchase order for obstruction clearing. If purchase order work not done, \$13,000 more is available for other projects.

**36237.20.11.1 Grant Matching funds on May 2011 agenda; approved August 1, 2011 (grant originally for \$333,333 - modified 10/12/11 to move funds to 36237.20.10.1)

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9.9989010	2	6/4/2001	8/25/2003	8/25/2003	27,000.00	3,000.00	30,000.00	upgrade airfield electrical vault, add radio controls		
36237.20.2.1	1	FY01-02	7/1/2002	3/15/2002	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab Airfield Lighting & Electrical System		
36237.20.3.1	1-A	FY02-03	7/1/2004	11/10/2004	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab airfield lighting & electrical system; grading & paving hangar access road; aircraft parking apron expansion		
36237.20.4.1	1-A	FY03-04	10/16/2003	10/12/2005	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab parallel taxiway (partial, north end)		Amt amended Aug 2005 from \$185,000
36244.28.4.1	2	6/10/2004	1/1/2007	3/17/2006	275,000.00	30,556.00	305,556.00	pavement rehab of poor & failing sections		
36237.20.5.1	2	FY04-05	1/1/2008	7/25/2008	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Rehab parallel taxiway, expand aircraft parking ramp, security fencing		
36237.20.6.1	3	FY05-06	1/1/2009	12/29/2008	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	ALP Update, obstruction clearing/certification, ramp expansion, corporate hangar area expansion site preparation		
36237.20.7.1	3	FY06-07	1/1/2010	1/26/2010	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Ramp Expansion/corporate hangar area, site prep/paving, hangar access road extension		
36244.28.5.1	3	FY06-07	10/31/2007	6/19/2008	200,000.00	5,128.00	205,128.00	Apron Taxiway - hangar construction		
36237.20.8.1	4	FY07-08	11/8/2007	7/1/2011	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Localizer Stand By Power, RELL Replacement, Hangar Area Expansion Site Prep, Paving, Access Road, Taxilane; security fencing		
36237.20.8.2	3	FY07-08	12/3/2007	1/6/2009	88,000.00	9,778.00	97,778.00	Approach survey for Runway 1-19		
36244.28.6.1	4	FY07-08	5/28/2008	4/4/2013	200,000.00	5,128.00	205,128.00	Land Acquisition & West Terminal Area Development (to include fuel farm)		
36237.20.9.1	4	FY08-09	6/20/2008	4/6/2009	71,567.00	10,360.00	81,927.00	recorded in General Fund		
36237.20.10.2	5	FY08-09	11/5/2009	7/1/2013 PENDING	70,468.00	7,830.00	78,298.00	Obstruction Clearing & Hangar Area Preparation		
36237.20.10.3	7	FY09-10	11/5/2009	5/16/2011	79,532.00	8,837.00	88,369.00	Vision Supplement		Open PO \$6000 for Trees
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36237.20.12.1	8	FY11-12	12/15/2011	7/1/2015 OPEN	122,728.00	12,272.00	135,000.00	Westside Hangar Development Paving, SWPPP (Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan, Fencing)		Modified 10/12/11
36244.28.7.1	9	FY12-13	8/27/2012	7/1/2017	150,000.00	16,667.00	166,667.00	Airfield Improvements/Land Acquisition		Modified 10/12/11
36237.20.13.1	9	FY12-13	10/29/2012	7/1/2014 OPEN	180,000.00	20,000.00	200,000.00	Land Acquisition - East Terminal Development Area		
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**36237.20.11.1 Grant Matching funds on May 2011 agenda, approved August 1, 2011 (grant originally for \$333,333 - modified 10/12/11 to move funds to 36237.20.10.1)

Attachment B

From: Keith Hunter [keith@kehunter.com]
Sent: Monday, July 29, 2013 8:46 AM
To: Bo Richard; Julius Owens; Bill Eckler; Eddie Holland; Greg Lovelace
Cc: Carl Classen; Bob Howard
Subject: Rutherford County Airport Authority

28 July 2013

To Rutherford County Commissioners:
Bo Richards, Greg Lovelace, Bill Eckler
Julius Owens, Eddie Holland.

Sirs:

I'm Keith Hunter, the Current Vice-Chairman and Treasurer of the Airport Authority. I have 36 years experience in aircraft management and as an Operations Manager/Director for Lockheed Martin. There are a few things that I would like to call your attention to regarding the Rutherford County Airport. I do not think that all this information will be in the report that Carl Classen will be putting together for you.

First of all I have, over the past few years, been very critical of the airport and the way it has been managed by the former FBOs and previous Airport Authorities. This is one of the main reasons that I elected to use my experience in making the airport profitable and to put an end to the "good old boys" that had run the airport for their own personal use.

Some of you may remember that one of the previous Authorities changed their leases from 25 years to 40 years so they would not revert back to the county. All the Airport Authority members at the time owned hangars and profited by this move. The county lost the ability to have at least 10 hangars for sale or rent. A previous chairman controlled the building of hangars. He would not let anyone build a hangar unless his company or a subcontractor he hired built it.

Right now at the airport there are about 6 people and one Authority member who are raising all the fuss about things that we do. The good old boy system dies very hard. All they want is something for themselves and not something for the county.

Here are a few of the things that I have found since being on the Authority for two years. The previous FBO had a sweetheart deal with the previous Authority. She was charged \$1 to run the airport. She was supposed to pay 1½% of her gross to Rutherford County. To my knowledge nothing was paid. She left due to personal and other reasons.

Next, none of the hangars were ever inspected in the last 25 years per the state fire code. Approximately 10 violations were noted and corrected.

Attachment B

Hangars did not conform to lease requirements and violated FAA requirements as well. Hangars had bulldozers, boats, trailers, jet skis, many cars and other non-aircraft related items. It's an ongoing problem.

Propane tanks were installed in car parking lots. None had protection car stops as required by the state fire code. This could have caused a major explosion if a tank were punctured.

Pilots violated take off and landing requirements. Some landed on taxi ways.

Handicap parking was missing. An eye wash station and emergency shower for employees were not installed. Both violated state and federal laws.

Hangar leases and right of ways on some of the airport property are incorrect and not deeded to the Airport Authority.

Groundwater contamination issues were present.

One thing to note is that some people go on TV or talk to the paper because they feel they are being singled out or picked on, when all the Authority is doing is making certain that all lease, state, federal, and FAA requirements are being followed. They are not something the Airport Authority just made up!

Last year when the FBO left and turned over the operation of the airport to the Authority, we did not ask the county for more money to hire an airport manager, nor did we decide to hire an FBO for \$60k to \$100 k. We elected to run it ourselves. I put in about 25 hours a week. I visit the airport twice a day. I make sure the water lines are installed correctly, the well is working, and I get contractors in here when something breaks and I check many other things. Bob Howard spends a lot of time clearing the runways every morning before he goes to work. He orders fuel and deposits money from sales.

In 2010-2011 the FBO pumped 36,101 gallons of fuel and paid us 5 cents per gallon. In 2012-2013 the Airport Authority increased this to 83,936 gallons and made over 50 cents per gallon. We lowered our gas prices, advertised them, and this brought in a lot of business. We also gave all the planes based here a 10 cent per gallon discount. All that money went into the County coffers. We also made approximately \$15,000 on hangar rental space, another \$10,000 dollars on hangar lease space, and around \$160,000 in taxes. We will oversee the cutting down of trees from the 52 acre parcel .We sold the timber for \$21,000 dollars.

2013 -2014 Issues

Here are some of the remaining things that need to be

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accomplished this coming year:

Implement a new lease for private commercial businesses as required by the Airport Authority rules and regulations.

Require commercial businesses that repair aircraft to carry liability insurance that protects the Authority and the county. They currently do not.

Hangar lease inspection of all hangars is due. Hangars are checked for non-compliance. Often items not related to aircraft such as autos, boats, trailers and other things are kept in hangars.

County fire inspections are due next year.

Some aircraft based at the airport are not being taxed. Some are abandoned and some are in areas we cannot get into. I have been working with the tax department and Sherry Lavender to solve the problems.

Some private hangars have structures built inside that did not have building permits and were not approved by the Authority. They may be in violation of local building codes.

Airport asphalt needs to be repaired. There are large cracks and areas that are caving in. Big task!

The sides of the runway have a significant amount of erosion that needs to be repaired.

Remove the old house and fill in the well that is open on the 52 acre tract.

Repair the fuel containment facility. It needs to be sandblasted and recoated because it currently has cracks.

Replace fuel lines as noted in fuel audit from Eastern Aviation.

As all of you can see, there have been a lot of things accomplished at the airport and there are many other goals to accomplish this year.

If the County Commission does not vote to take over the Airport Authority, I think it would be very beneficial, as Carl Classen has suggested, to have a Management Agreement with the county to help us enforce the rules and regulations at the airport. No matter how the commission votes, I want to be a part of the future of the Rutherford County Airport. My goal has always been to grow the airport, increase our tax base by adding new aircraft, increase our fuel sales, expand as required and use the airport for everyone who lives in the county and not just a few that want to use it for their own private gain.

Thank you,

Attachment B

Keith E Hunter
Rutherford County Airport Authority
Vice-Chairman and Treasurer