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Liberty, County to benefit from airport's growth

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Reporter

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LIBERTY - Growth and big changes at the Pickens County Airport will be reflected in Liberty and the entire county.

Airport director Skeets Cooper briefed Liberty City Council on the airport's future during a work session last week.

"As the airport grows, the City of Liberty will grow, and Pickens County will grow," Cooper said. "There are a lot of planes from different parts of the country landing at our airport. People coming here are from all walks of life."

Cooper has been airport director for three years.

Cooper said that people, including many sports celebrities, are choosing to land at the county airport rather than the larger airports in neighboring counties.

"We can handle jet traffic," he said.

A 35,000 pound single wheel plane, or a 65,000 pound dual wheel plane, can land on the 5,003 feet of paved runway, putting the local airport in direct competition with the Greenville Downtown Airport, he said.

"People would rather land here in Liberty rather than the Greenville Downtown Airport because the hassle of Greenville," Cooper said.

Another quality of the airport is the location, he said.

"Liberty is centrally located between Atlanta and Charlotte," he said.

In coming months, patrons of the airport can expect to see some major changes occurring, including the construction of a new terminal for the airport he said.

"The current terminal is a lean-to built on the side of a hangar," he said. "And it was built in 1969."

A new terminal facility is in the works, with the bidding process to begin sometime this month, Cooper said. The modern terminal will feature an open waiting area, a kitchenette and a conference room.

In addition, 16 new hangars - ten small and six large - are to be constructed, and although the hangars have yet to be built, each has been rented, Cooper said.

“We will be able to accommodate 16 more aircraft here, and six of the hangars will be large enough to house the bigger planes,” he said. “Those hangars will be 60 feet by 60 feet.”

Letters were mailed to aviators informing them about the soon-to-be-built hangars and asking that those interested could place a six month rent deposit to hold a hanger with the remaining six months rent coming due on completion, Cooper said.

The response was overwhelming, he said.

Funding for the new facilities is through state and federal grants, with about \$300,000 of county monies, he said.

Officials are attempting to re-establish a flight school at the airport so anyone wishing to learn to fly could train locally, he said.

“We are trying to get a full-time flight school, much like the one that (operated) here in the 1990s,” he said.

Cooper encourages county residents to enjoy the atmosphere and beauty of the airport.

“This is something Liberty can be proud of,” he said.