Foothills Regional Airport Authority
Minutes
Stated Meeting
April 29, 2026
Airport Terminal Building

PRESENT: Those members present were: Joe Gibbons, Chairman; and Board members: Jeff Branch, Tommy Fraley, Tom Smith, Randy Burns, Butch McSwain, and Lewis Carswell. Also present were: Brent Brinkley, Airport Manager; Derek Brown, Assistant Manager; Norm Sherwood, Accountant; Pat Turney, Engineer; Keith Rigsbee, City Attorney; Jessica Lowman, Clerk; and members of the public.

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order by Chairman Gibbons at 12:12 p.m. A quorum was present.

AGENDA: Upon motion by Smith, seconded by Branch, and passed unanimously, the Agenda was adopted as presented.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Upon motion by McSwain, seconded by Smith, and passed unanimously, the Minutes of the regularly scheduled March 25, 2026 meeting were approved as presented.

FINANCIAL REPORTS: Mr. Sherwood presented the financial report for March 2026. Account balances increased from approximately $8.64 million at the beginning of the month to approximately $8.66 million at month-end. This increase was primarily attributable to interest earnings through the Capital Management Trust account. He also noted that funds had been transferred from the Capital Management Trust account to the operating account to cover recent expenditures, including improvements to the formerly open community hangar. As of April 27, 2026, airport accounts totaled approximately $8.63 million.

Sherwood reported significant recent increases in fuel costs, noting that recent AvGas purchases were approximately 39% higher than prior purchases and that Jet-A fuel costs had increased substantially since January. He stated staff continue working to balance fuel pricing in order to remain competitive while maintaining operating margins.

Sherwood reviewed year-to-date operating revenues and noted revenues remained lower than the prior fiscal year primarily due to elevated fuel sales experienced during the prior year following Hurricane Helene. He reported that total operating revenues remained approximately $131,000 lower than the prior fiscal year, while operating expenses without grant-related expenditures were approximately $19,000 lower than the prior year. Sherwood credited staff with maintaining expense control despite increased operating costs. He further reported that hangar rental revenues continued to increase across multiple hangar categories, while interest earnings had decreased due to declining interest rates.

Sherwood also reviewed county ad valorem tax contributions received during the month and noted that future revenue is expected to increase as additional hangar development occurs on the Burke County side of the airport property.

Upon motion by Branch, seconded by Burns, and unanimously approved, the Board approved the financial report as presented.

FBO REPORT: Mr. Brown presented the FBO report and reported that approximately 91% of accounts receivable remained within the current billing cycle, with less than $400 outstanding beyond 90 days. Brown stated payroll for March was routine, although eight callout hours were recorded during the month as seasonal activity levels continue increasing.

Brown reported continued strong hangar occupancy, with overall occupancy averaging approximately 89%, reduced primarily by remaining availability within the tie-down area. He further reported that AvGas sales were down approximately 5% year-to-date and Jet-A sales were down approximately 29% as compared to the prior year. Brown noted these figures reflected slight improvement over the previous month’s reported decreases.

Brinkley reminded members of the airport’s Customer Appreciation Day scheduled for May 2, 2026, at noon. He stated the event would provide an opportunity to introduce PF Flyers and Skyview Aviation to airport customers and the local community. Brown also reported that the donated Bonanza aircraft had been transferred to the school aviation program for instructional use and expressed appreciation to the Board for its support of the donation.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Ashley Bolick with Caldwell County Economic Development provided an update regarding the EDA sewer grant application to extend sewer service from Lenoir to the airport property. Bolick reported the federal grant application had officially been submitted the previous week and stated preliminary feedback may be received soon following upcoming meetings with EDA representatives.

Bolick also reported that since the beginning of the year, airport property had been submitted for consideration for three separate state-level economic development projects, including a small data center project, a pharmaceutical-related project, and a domestic manufacturing project involving aluminum primers. Bolick stated economic development staff continues to actively market airport property for industrial and economic development opportunities.

BUSINESS:

a. Hickory Airport – Commercial Air Service

Airport Manager Brinkley reported that the City of Hickory is pursuing restoration of commercial air service at Hickory Regional Airport and has retained a consultant to assist with the process. Brinkley explained that the consultant recommended establishing approximately $1 million in incentive funding to attract an airline carrier, with Hickory pursuing a federal grant expected to provide approximately $800,000 toward the effort, which would require a local match. Brinkley stated local governments, tourism entities, businesses, and community organizations have been asked to provide letters of support and, where possible, financial commitments to strengthen the grant application.

Ashley Bolick with Caldwell County Economic Development shared additional information from the consultant presentation, including regional travel demand data showing New York City, Orlando, and South Florida among the top destinations for travelers within the airport's regional catchment area. Discussion included the possibility of service from a smaller regional carrier operating limited weekly flights initially.

Following discussion, upon motion by Burns, seconded by Branch, and unanimously approved, the Board authorized the Airport Director and Chair to provide a letter of support for Hickory Regional Airport's commercial air service grant application.

b. Aerial Asset Accessibility Grant

Airport Manager Brinkley and Engineer Pat Turney provided an update regarding the Aerial Asset Accessibility Grant application currently being prepared with Talbert, Bright & Ellington. Brinkley reported the grant deadline is June 15 and explained the airport is pursuing funding primarily for emergency power improvements, including standby generators for the terminal building, open hangar, maintenance shop, runway light building, and fuel farm. Brinkley noted the proposed improvements would significantly improve airport operations during emergency events and extended power outages.

Turney reported the project may also include expansion of aircraft parking ramp space near the terminal area, portable backup generator capabilities for hangars, and potential infrastructure upgrades to accommodate future electric aircraft charging stations. Turney stated the grant request is expected to fall within the approximately $3–$4.5 million range, depending upon final project scope and anticipated statewide competition for available grant funding.

Turney further reported staff has explored installation of dedicated high-speed fiber internet service to the airport, with AT&T expected to absorb the primary infrastructure installation costs other than account setup and monthly service fees. Discussion also included alternative internet service options and overall emergency communication reliability.

c. Parallel Taxiway

Engineer Pat Turney reported the parallel taxiway project continues moving forward and stated a preconstruction conference is expected to be scheduled within the next several weeks. Turney advised that material submittals are currently under review and the contractor anticipates transitioning crews from another project to begin work on the taxiway project once available. No formal action was requested.

d. New T-Hangar/NC Grant Funding

Turney next provided an update regarding the existing T-hangar site preparation project. He reported lingering paving correction items remain outstanding due to delays by the paving subcontractor in responding to the prime contractor regarding scheduling corrective work. Turney stated staff has continued issuing weekly correspondence urging resolution and advised the prime contractor has now been directed to consider replacing the paving subcontractor if timely action is not taken. Turney explained that once paving corrections are completed, staff intends to conduct a final walkthrough to identify remaining punch list items so the project can be closed out, final payment issued, and the one-year warranty period initiated.

Turney also reported the new T-hangar building construction project is progressing, with material submittals currently under review and a preconstruction conference scheduled for later that afternoon. He stated the goal is for the site preparation contractor to complete work and vacate the area before the building contractor mobilizes due to limited available workspace. Turney estimated construction activity on the building project could begin within the next one to two months.

Regarding the NC grant-funded box hangar project, Brinkley reported that Requests for Qualifications for engineering services had been issued following authorization at the February meeting. Brinkley stated two responses were received from The Wilson Group of Charlotte and Clayton Engineering & Design of Hickory. Brinkley advised that while both firms appeared qualified, Clayton Engineering & Design demonstrated greater familiarity with local permitting and construction requirements and was therefore recommended for selection.

Upon motion by Branch, seconded by Smith, and unanimously approved, the Board accepted the proposal submitted by Clayton Engineering & Design for engineering services related to the box hangar project.

NEXT MEETING:

The Chairman stated the next meeting would be set for noon on Wednesday, May 27, 2026 at the Airport Terminal.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by the Chairman at 12:53 p.m.

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Joe Gibbons, Chairman Jessica Lowman, Clerk