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Friday, December 23, 2011

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Airport could open door for Free Trade Zone

By Joe Benedict/Staff Writer
Published: Thursday, December 22, 2011 12:42 PM CST

Lee County has been trying to become part of a Free Trade Zone for several years and hasn't yet achieved that goal.

A visitor to the Lee County Board of Supervisors may have a solution to getting FTZ status. Tim Bradshaw, airport director at the Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids told the board that the airport has a 2,000 acre free trade zone that the government is allowing them to expand to 28 counties.

Lee County is one of the proposed counties. But some free trade zone rules put Lee County right on the edge of inclusion.

Supervisor Janet Fife-LaFrenz said there had been a distance rule from the port of entry and asked if that still applied.

Bradshaw said that rule still is in effect. Areas in the free trade zone have to be 90 minutes from the port of entry. So from the Eastern Iowa Airport to the top of Lee County, a person has to push it to get there in 90 minutes.

That puts doubt on whether the entire county could be included in the free trade zone. Other points of entry in Des Moines and the Quad Cities puts Lee County in the same just-out-of-reach area.

But, Bradshaw said if the county wrote a letter of support, it could ask that the entire county be included in the FTZ since part of it would be covered by the 90-minute travel restriction.

It isn't going to cost any money for the county to write the letter and supporting one FTZ will not restrict it from being supportive of other FTZs that may come along.

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