

City transfers park lease to Summersville school

School considering site for a baseball field

BY TRAVIS MORSE
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — The Mt. Vernon City Council has transferred the lease and recreational equipment for Airport Park to Summersville Grade School.

Along with recent action by the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority Board, the council's approval of the transfer Monday paves the way for Summersville to possibly develop a home team baseball field at the site.

The airport owns the property at the park and had been leasing the site to the City of Mt. Vernon. The city owned the recreational equipment at the park and had handled maintenance there and some improvement projects like resurfacing the parking lot.

Under the new proposal, the airport will now lease the property to Summersville Grade School which will pay a minimal lease fee and be responsible for maintaining the site.

"This park area has always been a lease between the airport and the City of Mt. Vernon," said City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel. "However, the improvements were made by the City of Mt. Vernon and Summersville school has shown interest in acquiring the lease as well as the recreational equipment and improvements of this park. They want to use it for the school and for the public."

The City Council unanimously approved transferring the lease and equipment to Summersville at Monday's council meeting. The Airport Board also recently approved the lease transfer, pending approval by the airport's attorney, said Airport Director Chris Collins.

Please see **City**, Page 5A

City:

Continued from Page 1A

Airport Park is located off of Airport Road near Mt. Vernon Fire Department Station 3. There is currently a rarely used ball field at the park but it's not in a condition where organized games could be played there because it doesn't have amenities like dugouts, Collins said. There are also two tennis courts, a basketball court and some playground equipment at the site.

"This gives (Summersville) a home field again and we're happy about that," Collins said of the lease transfer. "A lot of residents use that park. It's a great partnership relationship."

According to Sentinel archives, Summersville officials had been seeking a partnership with the airport to lease the park after the city had announced it was looking to decrease the number of parks it was maintaining.

Summersville school doesn't currently have the acreage for a baseball field after recently building a gym and retention pond on its property. School officials have been wanting to establish a dual purpose baseball and softball field and acquiring the park lease presents just such an opportunity. Even so, the baseball field project has not yet been finalized and there is no time frame yet for its development.

"Rather than see something

detrimental happen to the park system and particularly Airport Park, we put our heads together and decided well we want to take that over," said Summersville Board of Education Member Chad Curd. "We (think) we can do it with minimal expense."

Curd spoke to the City Council about the project and said it's a win-win situation. Summersville school would take the maintenance of Airport Park off of the city's hands and in return would have a place the school could build a baseball/softball field. School officials say the goal is to maintain the park for both student athletes and the Summersville community.

"We keep it in our community and our kids can go down there and play," Curd said.

Mt. Vernon Mayor John Lewis thanked Summersville school for stepping forward to take over the park lease. He also addressed a criticism from the public that the city is giving taxpayer assets away by transferring the lease, an assertion Lewis considers "completely false."

"The taxpayers, you have paid for it once already," Lewis said. "If we transfer it to another taxing body and charge them for it, you are paying for the same equipment a second time. So the only thing that is happening here is we are transferring your assets to another taxing body. That taxing body has agreed to step up and make that a park this city can be proud of."

May 13, 2015
tmorse@morningsentinel.com



Sentinel Photo/TRAVIS MORSE

LEASE TRANSFER — Chad Curd, a member of the Summersville Grade School Board of Education, addressed the Mt. Vernon City Council Monday about the city transferring the lease for Airport Park to the Summersville school.