

Airport to seek bids on project

Sign won't have mounted plane as had been hoped

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MT. VERNON — Mt. Vernon Airport officials hope to seek bids soon for replacing the airport's outdated entry sign.

Even so, the design of the new sign has changed. Airport Director Chris Collins said it's no longer feasible to mount a mockup concept jet on top of the sign as had originally been planned. The concern is the plane could be knocked off the sign by high winds.

"The air frame's just not structurally sound enough to display in that manner," Collins said.

The two-person SW21 concept jet was donated to the airport last year by the Hansen Air Group.

Collins had wanted to incorporate the plane into the new sign, but an analysis of the plane determined it would need an \$8,000 structural skeleton in order to be mounted. Collins said this is too much of an expense, but the plane can still be displayed elsewhere at the airport.

Updating the entry sign is part of the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority's Momentum 2020 capital development plan. Collins said \$25,000 has been budgeted for the sign but the hope is it will cost less than that.

The current wooden sign dates back to 1975. The new sign will be made of fabricated aluminum and will be back-lit by LED lights, Collins said.

Collins said Tuesday he now plans to create bid specifications for the sign and to go out for bids. There's no time frame on the project but Collins would like to get bids by next month's MVAA Board of Commissioners meeting.

"That would be really neat to be able to go right into 2018

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with a new sign coming," Collins said.

Also on Tuesday, the Airport Board renewed a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services for the USDA to provide wildlife management for the upcoming year at a cost of \$11,000.

The airport had been getting these services for free in 2017 but the pilot program for it ends this month. The Illinois Department of Transportation will no longer provide discretionary grants for the three Southern Illinois airports to have these services at no charge, Collins said.

"They made a cut," Collins said. "The grant ended and they didn't extend it."

Collins recommended to the board that the airport continue with the agreement because of the

expertise that the USDA provides in wildlife management.

With the program, USDA staff are on site at the airport one to three days a month to give training, help manage permits and renewals, assist with FAA inspections, and more.

"We're actually out on the airfield doing wildlife management on the airfield while we're here, along with providing the annual training that's required for the airport personnel," said Travis Guerrant, assistant director for the USDA's Animal

and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Without having the USDA program, the airport would be required to complete a Wildlife Hazard Assessment and Plan every five years at a cost of roughly \$45,000 to \$55,000, Collins said.

Guerrant said the USDA's presence is important for the airport.

"Really, it's just showing that you're being proactive with your wildlife management to the FAA when they come down here for your inspections," Guerrant said.

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