

Airport moves forward on solar project

*Proposals being sought,
site visits held Wednesday*

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MOUNT VERNON — Mount Vernon Outland Airport is moving ahead on a project to establish solar power at the airport.

This week, the Mount Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners formally approved issuing a Request for Proposals to solar developers. The RFP requests proposals from qualified companies

capable of designing, engineering, installing, financing and maintaining solar PV systems at the airport, states a news release from Affordable Gas & Electric (AGE), which is administering the RFP process on the airport's behalf.

Airport Director Chris Collins explained that the RFP was actually issued last month and that the board's approval this month was retroactive. The Airport Board could not hold a meeting in January due to lack of a quorum. Collins then consulted with commissioners individually by phone who gave him the go-ahead to issue the RFP. Time is of the essence with this project

since there are only a limited amount of Illinois Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SRECs) available, Collins said.

The airport is seeking a "capital free solar deployment to serve the airport's largest electricity accounts," the release states. The goal of the solar project is to offset 80 to 90 percent of the kilowatt hours currently consumed by the airport's largest three Ameren electric accounts, the release states.

"The pool of available Solar Renewable Energy Credits available from the State of Illinois is evaporating quickly," Collins said. "Our goal is to put the airport in a posi-

tion to secure SRECs, thereby making solar an attractive economic option to reduce our overall operating expenses. Our goal is to leverage the available credits into long-term operational savings, without capital outlay on behalf of the airport."

According to Collins, RFP responses are due by Feb. 28. Last week, a conference call was hosted for interested parties who intend to submit proposals. A total of 11 companies were represented on the call. Site visits were held on Wednesday to provide companies with additional information prior to their submission of proposals.

"The good news is, we have three

or four guys who have done airport builds before," said AGE Managing Partner Jeff Haarmann of the companies that will likely submit proposals. "If the numbers come back the way we'd expect in the long term, it's a great scenario for the airport."

Collins said deploying solar at the airport will involve a "performance guaranteed contract" tied to the facility's general operating fund. By leveraging the available SREC credits, the airport should be able to complete this project without using airport capital.

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According to Sentinel archives, the solar project is estimated at around \$1.2 million, which includes the purchase of the solar panels, replacing a 21-year-old roof for the panels to be placed on, and other energy conservation methods. The credits would cover an estimated \$300,000 of the cost.

The airport's largest three Ameren electric accounts contribute 75 percent of the airport's utility bills, including the Koziara Terminal, all the airfield lighting and the com-

munity hangar. The goal with the solar initiative is to offset that bill and target 90 percent usage.

Collins previously said the airport wants to find a company to finance this capital project through the money the airport pays Ameren every year, an amount estimated at \$80,000 to \$83,000.

"So imagine 90 percent of that bill is used to finance this project, we would own all of it and ultimately after about 11 to 12 years, it would be paid for and then we wouldn't have that payment coming out to pay for the project anymore and now we are truly into the black," Collins said previously.

According to the news re-

lease, AGE wrote and distributed the RFP to a base of local, regional and in some cases national solar developers, including those developers who may have expertise in airport solar developments. After conference calls and site visits, AGE will compile the results of the RFP responses and submit to the airport an executive summary and recommendations.

Recently, AGE administered and managed a similar process for the City of Carbondale, which approved a \$2.4 million project with zero capital outlay for the city, the release states. Carbondale is expected to see a savings of nearly \$1.4 million over the 25-

year life of their solar system, the release states.

"These types of projects can be very complex and developers all have their agendas," Haarmann said. "Our role is to normalize the proposal process while allowing for those companies who have specialties in specific areas to enhance those benefits. We will roll the raw data into a simplified summary and work with Chris on (the) ultimate solutions that make the most sense. As Chris stated, the goal is to take advantage of the incentives available and deploy a solution that will provide long-term operational benefits."

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