

Airport eyes Airport: ongoing projects

Joint Base Jefferson and lighting project among updates

BY JOSH JONES

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MOUNT VERNON — The Mount Vernon Airport Authority (MVAA) Board of Commissioners heard updates on various projects during its recent board meeting.

The first project with a significant update was the Air Evac Joint Base Jefferson. According to Sentinel archives, the base will house aircraft and crews from both Air Evac Lifeteam 11, currently located on Aviation Drive, and Air Evac Lifeteam 172, temporarily located at 100 Firebaugh Drive.

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The base is to be constructed at 500 Firebaugh Drive in the airport's Innovation Park. The new location not only provides safer arrivals and departures during VFR (Visual Flight Rules) conditions, but meets all requirements for IFR (Instrument Flight Rules) approaches during poor weather conditions.

Airport Director Chris Collins introduced Architect Brian Edmison, who is handling the early stages of the project. Collins said that the airport had a good turnout of general and trade contractors when they visited on May 2. Edmison said that bids are due on May 18.

"I have had numerous phone calls from interested parties," Edmison said. "I feel really good about the amount of interest and I feel we are going to see some good competition on this project. It is really going to be a great addition to Innovation Park."

Collins said one gas line that was showing on the plans has been confirmed to be abandoned.

"The one gas line showing on the plans has been abandoned. Ameren sounds 99% sure of that," Collins said. "It was there because it fed the terminal from (the) 1975 airport road side, that is why it was there."

Collins said that some time in the 1980s another line was connected.

"Everybody is pretty certain that it is not in use anymore," Collins said.

Collins said while they had the contractors in the room, they also informed them of the upcoming

Fixed Based Operations (FBO) addition project. Sentinel archives state that the board began to look at the addition after noticing how much traffic they were getting from pilots. Collins said that the FBO building acts as a "front door" for pilots to Mount Vernon and Southern Illinois and is a first impression to many pilots. The addition is to be 24 feet wide by 32 feet long including large windows for visitors to view the runways and taxiways, a 24/7 restroom and it shifts the entry of the building to the west. Edmison said he was 75% complete with the plans.

Collins also gave an update on a major lighting project that had been placed on the April 2023 IDOT letting. The MVAA has been planning a major lighting replacement project that includes replacing lights on the primary runway, the cross runway and the taxiways at the airport. Original estimates had the airport paying a local share of \$98,000, but increases in the cost of materials and other factors have led to concerns that the local cost will be much more, Sentinel archives state.

Collins said he had good news as the bids related to the project are looking better than when it was previously bid.

"On these things IDOT doesn't want contractor names and the amounts released just yet, until they give us the approval to do so, because they like it to come from them instead of the consulting engineering," Collins said. "But I can say that I have calculated that our total local share for both projects is going to be somewhere around the \$158,000 mark for complete lighting of the entire facility. Now that

is still \$57,000 more than what is in our bond proceeds, because the cost of materials increased. But that is less than \$200,000 that they were thinking. Probably next month we will be able to release the low bidder and the actual bid amounts."

When asked why the amount was so different than expected, Collins said another contractor who wasn't on the previous lettings was on this one.

"They are close and they have the knowledge of our facility, they have done all the electrical projects here and they were excluded," Collins said. "They weren't excluded for any bad things, they were excluded because they had too many IDOT projects going the last two years. I don't agree with that philosophy but IDOT were the ones making the call."

Collins said that they are moving forward with getting the Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting truck, but it will take about two years until they get the new truck.

Collins said that the lift station project has been completed. Sentinel archives state that in mid-January the airport was made aware of a failure in the riser pipe, which comes out of the pump chamber of the lift station, which is located 35 feet below ground.

"We now have a new submersible pump in the wet well side of the new piping going around and bypassing everything," Collins said.

Collins said that the project came in about \$11,000 under budget. He said both the new and old systems work and the airport can bypass the old system any time they face an issue.

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