

Outland Airport tables equipment purchase

Officials are going back to the drawing board because of how costly the bid was

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MOUNT VERNON — Mount Vernon Outland Airport has tabled a project to purchase a new Air Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) truck after the bid that they received was deemed way over-budget, said Airport Director Chris Collins.

An ARFF truck is used to respond

to aircraft accidents at the airport or away from the airport. However, the vehicle also has the added benefit of being an extra tool for local fire and emergency response agencies dealing with a tank fire on the railroad or interstate, or an industrial accident. The current ARFF truck used by Mount Vernon Airport is a 2004 model and the systems are outdated, Collins said.

"It works very well but it's a 20-year-old truck and so we're trying to make sure that we keep the airport as safe as possible with the latest technology as possible," Collins said.

The airport is only mandated to have a Class 1 truck, which carries 100 gallons of foam and water. However,

with this new purchase, Collins was hoping to upgrade to a Class 3 truck (a 500-gallon system) to help better protect the airport and visitors. This plan will now have to be reconsidered, though, due to the costly bid that was received, Collins said.

On March 15, the airport received one bid for a new Class 3 ARFF truck from the firm Rosenbauer at a cost of \$834,974. This base bid did not include the FAA-required foam test cart and that piece of equipment was part of a separate bid in the amount of \$24,858. The Rosenbauer bid also did not include battery-powered extrication equipment estimated to cost around \$35,000. All in all, if Mount Vernon

Airport were to award the bid to Rosenbauer and add in the extra materials, the total cost would be about \$894,832.

Collins discussed the bid with the Mount Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners at Tuesday's meeting. The airport board voted to table the project. Collins will now draft a new specification for the purchase of a Class 1 or 2 truck (100 to 300 gallons) and will bid the project out again.

"This is about \$200,000 over our budget," Collins said of the Rosenbauer bid. "Now, this is for a larger truck than we are mandated to have, so this makes us go back to the literal

drawing board about what we're going to do. ... This would have been a Class 3 truck, which is a 500-gallon system. It was our intent to protect the airport and the visitors by having a larger truck because of how complex the trucks are and their ability to fight fires with a dry chemical system. But we just don't think it's financially prudent to expend this much money. We wanted the capability of the larger truck to be able to offer it to the rails and roadways, manufacturing facilities, tank farms, in the event of a tragic event. But it just doesn't make sense for us to spend this kind of money."

Please see **Airport**, Page 2A

Airport:

Continued from Page 1A

What makes the situation especially disappointing, Collins said, is the fact that other airports were able to buy a Class 3 truck that size for \$400,000 or less only four years ago, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collins contacted the broker for Rosenbauer to ask why the bid was so high. Probably the biggest factor in the cost increase were some new diesel engine particulate mandates from the federal government that went into effect about two weeks before the bid was submitted. This increased the cost by about \$100,000. There were also cost increases on the chassis of the truck, Collins said.

"I just can't spend this kind of money, knowing (that) it cost much less four years ago," Collins said. "I understand inflation but it just doesn't make sense, so I am disappointed."

Another reason why the airport has to be more frugal and not spend this kind of money on an ARFF truck is due to the fact that the airport is looking to eventually build a new Snow Removal Equipment (SRE) building. Currently, there are two pole barn structures for this equipment at the airport — one portion was built in the mid-1970s and the other portion was built in the mid-1990s. The structures were never meant to be there in the long term, and one of the structures has elevation challenges and roof issues, Collins said. Both structures are standing in the way of future development of the Innovation Park at the airport, Collins said.

"So those need to be dismantled to make way for future development of the airport, so a new SRE building is coming into focus," Collins said.

The long-term plan is to build a new SRE building on the perimeter access road inside the fence just west of Runway 33. This is in a very prominent location on the airport property that is visible to motorists passing by on Illinois Route 15.

The engineer's estimate for a new SRE building is a little over \$1 million and the airport would receive some funding for this project from the state and federal government. What the airport is trying to do is



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EQUIPMENT PURCHASE TABLED — Mount Vernon Outland Airport has tabled a project to purchase a new Air Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) truck after the bid they received was deemed way over-budget.

purchase a new ARFF truck at a reasonable price so that a majority of the airport's available funds can be left over to put toward the new SRE building project, Collins said.

"So spending \$900,000 on a crash truck is not very attractive. That's why I'm trying my best to do both of these projects on that funding, and not affect the rest of the transportation improvement project plan," Collins said. "If we can set a budget around \$500,000 for a new ARFF vehicle, we might have \$825,000 left over to put toward the million dollar (SRE) building. I'm just trying to be fiscally responsible with the money and get the things done for the airport that need to be done. The bottom line is, it's time to start talking about a new SRE building."

Once it's built, the SRE building will fit in nicely with the new Innovation Park Development at the airport. This is an area that the airport is seeking to develop in the southwest quadrant of the site.

"Once the old SRE buildings are removed, passersby will see five attractive modern buildings right in a row by the big runway," Collins said. "It'll be a fantastic place to use for economic development of the area."

Also on Tuesday, the airport board heard project updates, and approved the purchase of a new painting/stripping machine from Sherwin Industries at a cost of \$23,981. There was also an executive session held to discuss personnel issues.

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