

Mount Vernon Airport eyes solar projects

Airport board also accepted a bid for new ARFF truck

BY TRAVIS MORSE

tmorse@morningsentinel.com

MOUNT VERNON — Mount Vernon Outland Airport is moving forward on some solar power initiatives that could end up generating revenue and saving the airport significant money on energy costs.

At Tuesday's Mount Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners meeting, the board discussed three solar-related projects. Firstly, Airport Director Chris Collins presented a fi-

nancial plan to pay for installing roof-mounted solar panels on two hangar buildings at the airport. The board also approved putting out a request for proposals, or bids, for the project.

The total cost of this project is estimated at around \$420,000. About 90% of that will be covered by solar incentives that are offered through the state and federal government, and through Ameren Illinois.

The airport would borrow money to cover the upfront cost. Later on, however, the incentives would help the airport pay off the loan, and the remaining costs would be covered through the airport's capital projects ac-

count. The net cost to the airport for this initiative is estimated at \$38,000. It could end up saving the airport around \$28,000 a year in energy costs, Collins said.

"What we're trying to do with this project is (to) take a bite out of the large terminal electric bill," Collins said.

Also on Tuesday, the Airport Board gave Collins permission to work with Affordable Gas & Electric to develop RFPs to possibly lease some of the airport's fields to solar developers. The fields in question include a couple located northeast of

Please see **Solar**, Page 3A 7/13/24

Continued from Page 1A

the airport, and one large field east of the airport lake. These are fields outside of the fencing that are not suitable for "compatible land usage," Collins said. This means a hangar or complex could not be built in these fields to connect to the taxiway.

Collins said that leasing these fields could be a way to bring in more revenue for the airport. This is especially important as the Personal Property Replacement Tax line item was down by 27% from the prior year in the current 2024-2025 airport budget.

"If we could find revenues like that, we could continue our freeze of property taxes," Collins said, referring to the property tax levy that the airport collects.

The third solar project discussed Tuesday was a proposal to have a floating solar-generating system on the airport lake. The board commissioners rejected that proposal, Collins said.

In addition Tuesday, the board accepted a \$454,543 bid from Siddons-Martin for a new Air Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) truck. This was the lowest of the two bids that were received.

An ARFF truck is used to respond to aircraft accidents at the airport or away from the airport. 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.

"We're very excited about this upgrade," Collins said. "The truck

that's being replaced is nearing 20 years old. Although the technology is sound and it's a great truck, it's outdated and needs updating."

One of the upgrades on the new truck is that it has a separate pumping system in the rear compartment. This allows it to be attached to a fire hydrant or tanker truck to keep fighting a fire after the truck's water supply has been depleted. The new truck carries 300 gallons of water and 450 pounds of dry chemical agent.

"It's a significant upgrade over the truck we have now," Collins said.



Chris Collins

The new truck is mostly being paid for through "Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funds," Collins said. He said that 90% of the cost is covered by the federal government through the BIL program, 5% comes from the state and 5% is local funds. The airport's share is \$22,727.

Now that the Airport Board has accepted the bid from Siddons-Martin, the airport will work with the FAA and the IDOT Division of Aeronautics to award the bid. Equipment for the truck, including hand tools and fire extinguishers, will be bid out separately. Those equipment bids are expected to come in on July 26.

Also on Tuesday, the Airport Board heard updates on a number of projects, including a new parking lot rehabilitation project, the Air Evac Joint Base Jefferson project, a runway lighting upgrade and the Fixed Base Operations modernization project.