

# Mount Vernon Airport awards bid for solar energy project

*Project involves installing panels on two hangars*

**BY TRAVIS MORSE**

tmorse@morningsentinel.com

MOUNT VERNON — Mount Vernon Outland Airport recently awarded a bid to Sun Solar to install roof-mounted solar panels on two hangar buildings, a project that will eventually save the airport significant money on energy costs.

The panels will be placed on the two hangars south of the airport's terminal — Hangar A-1100 and Hangar A-1200. It likely will not be until next spring before the panels are actually mounted and begin producing energy, but airport officials are excited about the project.

The total cost of the project is estimated at around \$420,000, and roughly 93% of that will be covered by solar incentives that are offered through the state and federal government, and through Ameren Illinois.

The airport plans to borrow money to cover the up-front 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 account. The net cost to the airport will be around \$28,749. The first year energy savings for the airport is estimated at \$28,582, and the savings is expected to increase

from year to year, said Airport Director Chris Collins.

"We're very excited to get this kind of help from the state and federal government," Collins said. "We just went through increasing the tax levy to combat some of (the costs) we're experiencing. ... To be able to obtain a \$28,000 savings every year means a lot. We wouldn't have been able to do a project like this without the subsidies, because it's a lot of money to get into this. ... Like everyone else, you want to try to raise your revenues and decrease your costs, and this is a good way to do those things."

Bids were received for the solar panel project on Aug. 30. Five bids came in on time and a sixth bid had to be disqualified because it came in a couple of days late.

"So that's amazing to have six bids for a project," Collins said. "That's almost unheard of. I haven't seen that many bids for a project in a long time. ... It shows the interest in this type of project is really off the scale."

For this project, airport officials did not set up the bidding in the typical way, with a low and high bid. In this case, \$420,000 was the fixed total amount for this project and could not be exceeded by the bidders. The bidders turned in bids ranging from \$396,509 on the low end to \$420,000 on the high end.

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The winning bidder, in this case Sun Solar, was the one that had a bid that would produce the most power under the fixed cost total. Sun Solar's bid was for \$419,547 to create a solar panel system that will generate 182.9 kilowatts (direct current) and 178.33 kilowatts (alternate current) for a production estimate of 249,164 kilowatt hours.

The Mount Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners voted to award the bid to Sun Solar. Collins has been given the authority to sign the contract once the legal reviews are completed. Currently, the airport's legal counsel is reviewing all of the documents. The airport wants to make sure that it has a performance guarantee in the contract, in case the Sun Solar system does not generate the amount of power that was promised, Collins said.

The airport may end up pursuing additional solar panels, and is also considering leasing some of the airport's fields to solar developers. However, the field project has not yet reached the Request for Proposals stage.

"I want to thank Affordable Gas & Electric, specifically Ross Rubenacker, for guiding the airport through this process," Collins said.

For more information, contact the Mount Vernon Outland Airport.

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