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Local airport project to serve more planes

Friday, October 7, 2011
By Joanne Glamm

The number of planes using the Le Mars Airport soared this summer with crop dusting flights.

A decision by the Le Mars City Council Tuesday will help the city serve those agribusiness airport customers and other pilots and planes.

A 100-by-150 foot addition will be made to what is known as apron space at the airport. Pilots park and/or tie down their aircraft on apron space which is a concrete surface east of the runway, near the terminal.

Converting a grassy area to apron space is estimated to cost between \$50,000 and \$65,000.

Crop dusting to control fungus in soybeans and corn crops brought planes to the airport for about a month this summer, Earl Draayer, airport manager told the council.

"I had six airplanes tied down there this summer, but that leaves no room for transient aircraft," Draayer explained.

The apron activity isn't limited to the summer crop dusting, according to Draayer.

"This expansion would help us in the agriculture area, but also for jet aircraft that are coming in right now," Draayer said. "We've seen a large expansion of jet traffic and turbo prop traffic going through Le Mars."

A mid-size corporate jet known as a Hawker 800 was at the airport Monday which Draayer said creates a bottle neck due to the limited parking for plane traffic.

Six other planes also came into the airport the same day, Draayer said.

See additional information on page 3, Airport Parking and Tie Down Benefits.

Councilwoman Delana Ihrke asked if there were landing fees paid to the city for the plane traffic.

Draayer said larger airports in Minneapolis, Des Moines or Chicago charge fees for planes, but airports such as Sioux City and Le Mars do not.

The airport manager said the impact of the crop dusting activity extended beyond the airport.

"We had six pilots there for four weeks taking motel rooms and meals, plus the guys who service the airplanes with chemicals," Draayer said.

Options for paying for the project ranged from applying for Iowa Aviation Program money through the Iowa Department of Transportation to Airport Improvement Program federal dollars. A third option was to pay for the project with city money.

Both federal and state programs require the city to provide some of the money and might not be available until after July of next year, according to Scott Langel, city administrator.

Councilman John Leonard said the project could cost twice as much, if federal funding was involved.

The city's airport improvement fund has a balance of about \$200,000 to \$300,000, due

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to grants that have come in, Langel said

Ihrke said the project had not been budgeted, which Langel indicated was correct.

"I am not proposing that you take general fund money, additional new Tax incremental Financing or Urban Renewal money, Langel said.

Langel said the local money proposed for the project involves existing money sitting in the airport improvement program fund.

Councilman Ken Nelson indicated the increased airport traffic had been a priority for the city.

"We wanted commerce at the airport and it looks like we're getting it so I think we move along with it," Nelson said of the airport project.

The council action authorized use of the airport improvement fund for the additional concrete apron area.

The project is to be completed in time for the 2012 crop spraying season.

Aircraft parking and tie down benefits

The additional space will allow:

* Additional agricultural companies to set up supply trucks to load agricultural spray planes. The current space allows up to three trucks, but it is crowded and, at times, becomes a bottleneck for incoming spray planes to refuel and reload. The extra ramp space will allow another two trucks and relieve the bottleneck.

* Tie downs to be placed so that spray planes can be secured in the event of a thunderstorm or high winds without crowding the planes into a small area. This will prevent many aircraft from being damaged, in the event one or more spray planes would be broken loose from the tie downs in a microburst.

* Larger, corporate jet aircraft to be parked without creating an obstacle for other inbound or outbound aircraft to maneuver when parking or when leaving the airport.

* Piling of snow in an area that does not impact the current aircraft tie down area, in the event of a large-scale snow storm.

Source: Le Mars Municipal Airport Manager Earl Draayer

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