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Airport to take bids on operator lease

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AUBURN - The DeKalb County Airport could be getting a new fixed-base operator, a service now provided by Victory Aviation.

The Board of Aviation Commissioners last month instructed airport manager Russ Couchman to prepare a request for proposals to operate the airport. The decision came, Couchman said, after ongoing negotiations for a new lease with Victory Aviation failed to produce an agreement.

At issue is the price Victory Aviation is willing to pay the county to operate the airport, and the value placed on the operation as the result of an appraisal by Misner and Associates of Fort Wayne.

The appraisal sets the value of the terminal building at \$4 per square foot, and the value of the service hangar at \$2.65 per square foot.

Victory has been paying the equivalent of \$1.30 per square foot for the entire 30,000 square feet of space, according to Couchman.

The lease with Victory expired last year, and has been extended month to month while Jeff Turner, vice president of the board, and Brad Stump, treasurer, negotiated with Victory.

"Victory feels like they are paying too much now," Couchman said, Victory rejected a proposal to increase the lease fee by 60 percent in the first year of a five-year lease, with 5 percent increases in each of the four years that follow.

"That would get us to 80 percent of the appraised value, at which time we could get a new appraisal and take a look to see where we should go from there," Couchman said.

By seeking competitive bids, Couchman said, the BOAC will allow the market to set the value of the airport facilities.

"It seems to be the fairest way to do it," Couchman noted. "The process may be good for them (Victory) because if the (bid process) lowers the market value, it will be to their benefit."

Couchman was given 60 days to prepare the bid request, but said it may take a little longer because he also must update the airport's minimum standards document, which he said guides the airport's operation. The document outlines the responsibilities of the fixed-base operator and the services it must provide to the flying public.

Couchman said the BOAC may hire a consultant to assist with preparation of the bid proposal request.

Todd McCutchan of Victory Aviation was not available to comment on the board's decision.

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