

## Budget error leaves DeKalb airport funding short

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AUBURN — A clerical error has resulted in a \$150,000 decrease in funds for the DeKalb County Airport for 2011.

According to airport manager Russ Couchman, the error boils down to a steep learning curve since the DeKalb County Airport Authority was formed — and the former DeKalb County Board of Aviation Commissioners was dissolved — in January.

Couchman said he noticed the error, made by both the airport and the DeKalb County auditor's office, when the most recent round of tax disbursements was paid. The airport received more than \$40,000 less than it expected, and Couchman began to dig to find out the reason.

The error resulted from an oversight on an 18-month budget form the airport authority is required to submit to the state. The form was completed in June 2010 and sent to the state with the amount of \$150,000 listed for additional appropriations.

"It really was our fault and the auditor's office's fault," Couchman said.

DeKalb County Airport Authority treasurer Brad Stump said the airport will run very lean, keeping maintenance and spending to a minimum through June 2012 when tax disbursements return to normal.

"To some extent, the taxpayers win," Stump said. "(The \$150,000 shortfall) is that much less in taxes the airport has to collect."

Couchman said the 18-month budget form will be sent to the airport for review in future years.

The airport authority also preliminarily approved its 2012 budget at the June 17 meeting. Couchman said the primary budget will weigh in at \$682,138 and be funded in its entirety by tax revenues.

A cumulative building fund, which is a separate tax levy, is set at \$71,500.

A third fund, the airport's rainy day fund, will be funded through airport revenue only. Couchman said the overall goal is to save money in the rainy day fund to be used on for larger projects — such as a planned runway extension — at a later date.

At the end of the year, Couchman said, up to 10 percent of additional funds in the operating budget can be rolled over into the rainy day fund. This method creates the savings model promised to the county taxpayers when the airport authority was formed.

"I think the people will be happy to know that we are funding all three accounts at a lower tax rate than we did previously as a board of aviation commissioners," Couchman said.

The 2012 budget now goes to the DeKalb County Council for its binding approval. Stump said it is the airport authority's intention to follow the council's recommendations. The 2012 budget is expected to receive final approval from the airport authority at its July meeting.

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