

Airport will be main topic of special Commission meeting on April 24th

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — Issues surrounding the Butler/Choctaw Co. Airport and the Airport Authority dominated much of the April 9th meeting of the Choctaw Co. Commission.

J. Michael Helmsing, P.E., Vice President of the Mobile-based Volkert and Associates, Inc., discussed with the Commission a \$450,000 grant which he said it is still possible to get and use to upgrade the airport, but that action to do so must be taken by May 1st.

Volkert is working with the Authority on a plan of action to correct several deficiencies and safety issues that surfaced during a 2006 state Dept. of Transportation inspection of the facility.

However, it was recently discovered that the Airport property was never formally deeded or leased to the Authority, which has functioned under the assumption that it owned and/or controlled the property since at least 1990.

"Where are we now with our situation as far as our airport and this grant money, what stage are we in?" Commissioner C.D. Ruffin wanted to know.

Ruffin referred to the state's decision to suspend the airport's license until the deficiencies are addressed.

Helmsing said the FAA grant the Authority is seeking is a 95-percent "entitlement" grant which requires a five-percent "local" match. However, the state will pick up 2.5 percent of that amount, which means the Commission would end up paying only 2.5 percent in exchange for getting almost half a million dollars in return.

Helmsing said the Authority plans to use a large portion of the grant to buy property at each end of the airport runway in order to appease the FAA and the state DOT which cited the facility because tall trees protrude into the flight approach zone on the west end, and a church, house, and cemetery are located too close to the east end of the runway.

"If they could buy that property, these licensing issues would not be an issue any longer,"

Helmsing said. He said he has met several times with the Authority, and that the board is currently trying to decide what course of action to take in regard to trying to buy the property.

Helmsing said that if it is not possible to obtain the property, the Authority could shorten the length of the runway with painted striping to displace the threshold by as much as 400-600 feet to accommodate a restricted Runway Protection Zone.

On the east end of the runway, St. Mary United Methodist Church and cemetery, a house and trailer sit smack in the middle of the approach zone.

"So there wouldn't be any danger of closing the airport because the county might not be able to obtain the property?" May asked.

"Not if we shorten the runway," Helmsing said. "That would not close the airport and it would still be useful to the gross amount of traffic coming in here."

After a grant is given, the airport would have three years to complete the work.

"Our problem now is getting something approved under that grant," Helmsing said. "Once that is done, you have three years to finish it."

Helmsing said that in order to apply for the grant, at least \$25,000 in identified work must be specified, and that — excluding the purchase of property — the Authority may have to re-think what it wants to do at the facility in order to get the amount of the grant request above that threshold.

Lovette asked if the Authority is responsible for paying any of the expenses associated with Volkert's services up until this point.

"Yes, we did assume that the Authority had the authority and the wherewithal to pay our bills," he said.

The Authority operates on an annual budget of \$12,000.

Of all the improvements that need to be made to get the license re-issued and the facility open to air traffic again, Commissioner Clyde Dixon asked if the \$450,000 would be enough to cover the cost.

Helmsing said yes, but added there are priorities.

"Property acquisition is number one," he said. "If we don't do that it could jeopardize the whole airport. Next, we need to improve the lighting so the airport can go back to nighttime operations. Then, we would turn our attention to reclaiming the land that was lost on one end of the runway that had to be shortened in the past because of drainage problems."

Commissioner Brown said that he believes when the airport was built in the early 1970's that some concessions were given to the county by property owners on the east end of the runway.

"If that's true, you could solve one of your major problems right now and probably get your license back right now," Helmsing commented.

Helmsing said that FAA statistics show that most airplane crashes occur in the RPZ.

"You might could get an exception for just that cemetery but not for the church itself," he said. "It would just be too disastrous if a plane were to crash into a church."

The FAA, he said, expects safety-related items to be worked on first.

"Are you actively involved in contacting the landowners about acquiring the property?" McPhearson asked.

Helmsing said no, that that will be left up to the Authority after Volkert advises them of what specific properties need to be acquired in order to satisfy state and federal officials.

If the Authority or the county fails to act on the current grant, it would have to wait until this fall to start the application process all over again, and Helmsing said, there is no guarantee that federal funds will be available in such a large amount.

The judge said the bottom line is, the county must decide if it wants to leave the Authority in control of the airport, or if the Commission wants to operate the facility directly, with the Authority acting strictly in an "advisory" capacity.

"Personally, I think we need to leave it 'as is' if they can legally do what they are doing,"

BOE discusses Recovery Plan

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — "We're going to make as little adjustments as we can in order to meet what we have to meet for the state," Supt. Sue Moore told the group who gathered at CCHS for the Board of Education's work session last Tuesday.

In order to further explain the BOE's acceptance of a Financial Recovery Plan to move the system toward compliance with the Accountability Act of 2006, Moore spoke about the issue during the work session. Among her comments were explanations about the possible loss of jobs set down in the Recovery Plan. The plan, which was drawn up by the state and approved by the BOE on March 13, set down cut-backs for the school system, including:

- Eliminate 2.88 locally funded positions through attrition or reassignment to save approximately \$172,800.

- Eliminate four custodial positions that are probationary employees for a savings of \$100,000.

- Review the instructional aide program which employs 16 aides with salaries paid by various funding sources. Submit a plan to the Board in April to reduce the number to those that are essential and can be paid from federal fund sources for a savings of \$480,000.

- Eliminate one non-certified position in the central office through attrition (such as retirement), or reassignment for a savings of \$40,000)

- Employ future career tech personnel under the length of contract provided by state funds as attrition occurs.

If implemented in its entirety, the plan would

potentially save the system a total of \$792,800. With a potential loss of some jobs beginning next school year, Moore took the opportunity at the work session to address the issue.

"When you look at the 2.88 units, we aren't talking about 2.88 people," she said. "We have bits and pieces that we can take to make up this. We are going to try to reassign people to other areas, if possible. If someone retires, we won't replace them. These are partial parts of salaries we are talking about."

In reference to the potential loss of custodial positions, Moore added that there are 3 janitors at each school, but that may change next year.

"In the fall, we would not rehire some of those positions," she explained. "But they will be the first people we will call to bring them back as soon as we can." A similar situation would also apply to the instructional aides.

"We have 6 who are non-tenured," she said. "We would not renew them. If we see we have the funds back, we would hire them back — not find new people."

Moore repeated the plan's provision that deals with central office staff, stating that the board would reassign job duties and not hire new employees for positions when a staff member retires or is reassigned. She also reiterated explanations about the career tech staff and the plan to bring new employees in on 9-month contracts for that department instead of 12-month contracts, which require local funding to pay the difference remaining after state funds end at 9 months.

Lovette said.

The terms of several members of the Authority have expired, and one passed away last year. No action has been taken to reappoint those members or to nominate any new members.

Dixon said he prefers the Airport to remain under the Authority's management but Ruffin disagreed.

"I'd like to see the Airport managed by the Commission with the County Engineer taking the lead position, with members on the Authority being an advisory board," Ruffin said.

Garry Grantham, the new engineer, however, said he has no practical experience in managing an airport.

A motion was made by Ruffin and Lovette for the Commission to dissolve the Authority, take over the operation of the facility, and appoint new Authority members as "advisors only", but was withdrawn after May expressed concerns.

May said the Commission needs to clearly define what it wants and who is responsible for what. Given the current state of confusion, May said he wanted from McPhearson a definitive legal opinion regarding who actually controls the Airport.

The Commission will hold a special meeting at 9 a.m. Tuesday, April 24th to discuss the Airport and possibly some other items of business.



TAMKO Roofing Products, Inc. is a premier national manufacturer of residential and commercial roofing products, waterproofing, cements and coatings. Since 1944, TAMKO has operated with a commitment to excellence, honesty, integrity, hard work, quality and character. TAMKO seeks individuals who work hard, do their best, are fair and honest, and believe in those around them.

LABORER POSITION

Position requires the ability to work in an industrial environment, operate related machinery, and work well with others as a team with minimal supervision. Must be willing to work rotating shifts, have good reasoning and basic computer skills. Rate: \$11.83/hr

Interested candidates may mail their resumes to:
TAMKO Building Products, Inc.
Attention: Human Resources
23920 Hwy. 10 East
Butler, AL 36904

(Resumes will be accepted by mail only. Please do not inquire by phone or in person.)



Calvary Baptist Church
Ladies Ministry of Butler, AL
Cordially invites you to

The First Annual Ladies Retreat
April 28th 2007
The Theme: "Scrap Booking Memories"
Your Walk With God
Schedule: 9:30 am
1st Session - 10:00 - 11:30 am • Lunch 11:30 am - 12:30 pm • 2nd Session 12:30 - 2:00 pm
A Nursery will be provided with advanced registrations!

Please Contact Stephanie Bonner at bonner2696@yahoo.com or call 877-640-2873

Registration Forms may be mailed to:
Diane Barlow 605 Gibbons Blvd. Butler, AL 36904
113 Pickens Ave. • Butler, Alabama

Registration Form
Name _____ Address _____
Phone #(s) _____ E-mail _____
Number to attend \$ _____ Total Paid _____ Yes, I will need the nursery for _____ Children.
\$10.00 each
List Childrens Names and Ages _____

6275@SUN07

Plaza Golf Cart Sales
New & Used Golf Carts
Hwy 80 W. • Demopolis, Al. 334-289-5891
M - F 8-5, Sat. 8 - 12 Appreciate the business. Visa - M/C Disc

OVER 300 New & Used Carts to choose from
NEW E Z Golf Club Carts • NEW Yamaha - The Drive Starting at \$4595.00 & Up



Bring in this Coupon for \$100 OFF your purchase of a new or used cart Good thru May 1st
The Choctaw Sun

7406@SUN07

GOING OUT OF BUSINESS!!

SELLING OUT TO THE BARE WALLS! NOTHING HELD BACK!!

EVERY ITEM REDUCED SAVE UP TO 65% OFF RETAIL

BUY AT, NEAR, AND EVEN BELOW COST!

EVERYTHING MUST GO!

LIVING ROOM SUITES
BEDROOM SUITES
(MATTRESS SETS IN ANY SIZE)
ROCKER RECLINERS
BUNK BEDS
FUTON SOFAS

BEMCO
BEDDING by BEMCO

MATTRESS & FURNITURE LIQUIDATORS

PHONE (601) 483-9913
Mon-Sat 9am - 6pm

1732 NORTH FRONTAGE ROAD - MERIDIAN
(IN FRONT OF SAVE RITE GROCERY, BY McDONALDS RESTAURANT)