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Bastrop commissioners approve incentives for airport

75 percent of county property taxes would be refunded over 30 years



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 AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Bastrop County commissioners unanimously approved incentives Monday for a proposed \$150 million private airport and business complex in the western part of the county.

The county would refund 75 percent of county property taxes for the proposed airport over 30 years as part of an agreement with the project's developer.

The airport is far from a done deal — parts of the project still must be approved by the county and federal regulators — but the commissioners' incentive offer is a significant step.

"This was done with the taxpayers' concerns in front of it," said Lee Diddy, commissioner of Precinct 4, where the proposed site of the airport is located. "Both sides acted in good faith. I feel very comfortable with this agreement."

Diddy said public money will not be used to build the airport and related improvements.

Jim Carpenter, managing partner of Central Texas Airport LLC, the would-be developer of the airport, said, "The Central Texas Airport completes the missing infrastructure asset that was needed for Central Texas." Carpenter began discussions with the county on the project at least a year ago.

He said the airport would help fill a need when an annual Formula One race comes to Austin, scheduled to begin in 2012.

"Formula One will bring a tremendous demand for aviation," he said.

The proposed airport now includes plans for a 7,200-foot runway on about 1,100 acres, and will be for private chartered aircraft and business jets. According to the agreement, the airport cannot be a general commercial airport.

Some people who live near the proposed site are concerned about airport noise, flight patterns, declining property values and how the airport will be used.

"We are not happy about the proposed airport. We are not happy about the approval of this agreement," said Catherine Roberts, who lives south of the site and is president of the homeowners association for the River Crossing subdivision. "We just really hope this won't come to fruition."

The agreement pertains only to the first phase of the project, which county documents show includes the runway, 250,000 square feet of hangar space, a fuel farm, fire-and-rescue facilities and commercial development.

Under the agreement, construction of the first phase of the airport project would begin no later than June 30, 2012, and be finished no later than June 30, 2014.

Currently, the county receives about \$4,000 in property taxes per year from the property, which is now agricultural land, proposed for the airport, county staff said.

The value of one-quarter of the property — the amount taxed under the agreement — would be significantly higher, according to county staff.

The county still must approve construction plans and the Federal Emergency Management Agency must approve changes to a flood plain on the property, which would need to be moved for the project.

Carpenter said he was waiting for the incentive agreement before proceeding with buying the property, but said Monday that he would go forward.

He said his company hopes to start construction before the end of the year and complete work by the end of 2011 or early 2012.

Aircraft maintenance services and green businesses are part of the overall airport plans, Carpenter said.

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