

County looks at Lexington airport upgrades

By David Sykes

Morrow County has started looking at possible upgrades to the Lexington Airport, which is owned and operated by the county. The first step in future airport development, which could include additional hangar space and other supportive improvements, is a feasibility study which will be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration, FAA, for approval.

A study of the airport improvements was recently completed by Centurywest Engineering and presented to the county commission at a Nov. 4 meeting. In the study, future improvements were broken down into four phases. In phase one there would be four box hangars located SW of taxiway B and include a vehicle access road. The four hangars would be constructed as one building with multiple hangars. Cost of phase one would be \$400,000 for site development and \$700,000 for hangar construction for a total of \$1.1 million.

In phase two there would be relocation of the agricultural operations to the infield area between taxiway G and C. There would be demolition of existing hangars on the south side of the airport for construction of additional new box hangars. Cost of phase two would be \$950,000 for site development and \$2.3 million for hangar construction, for a total of \$3.6 million.

ONLINE TOOLS

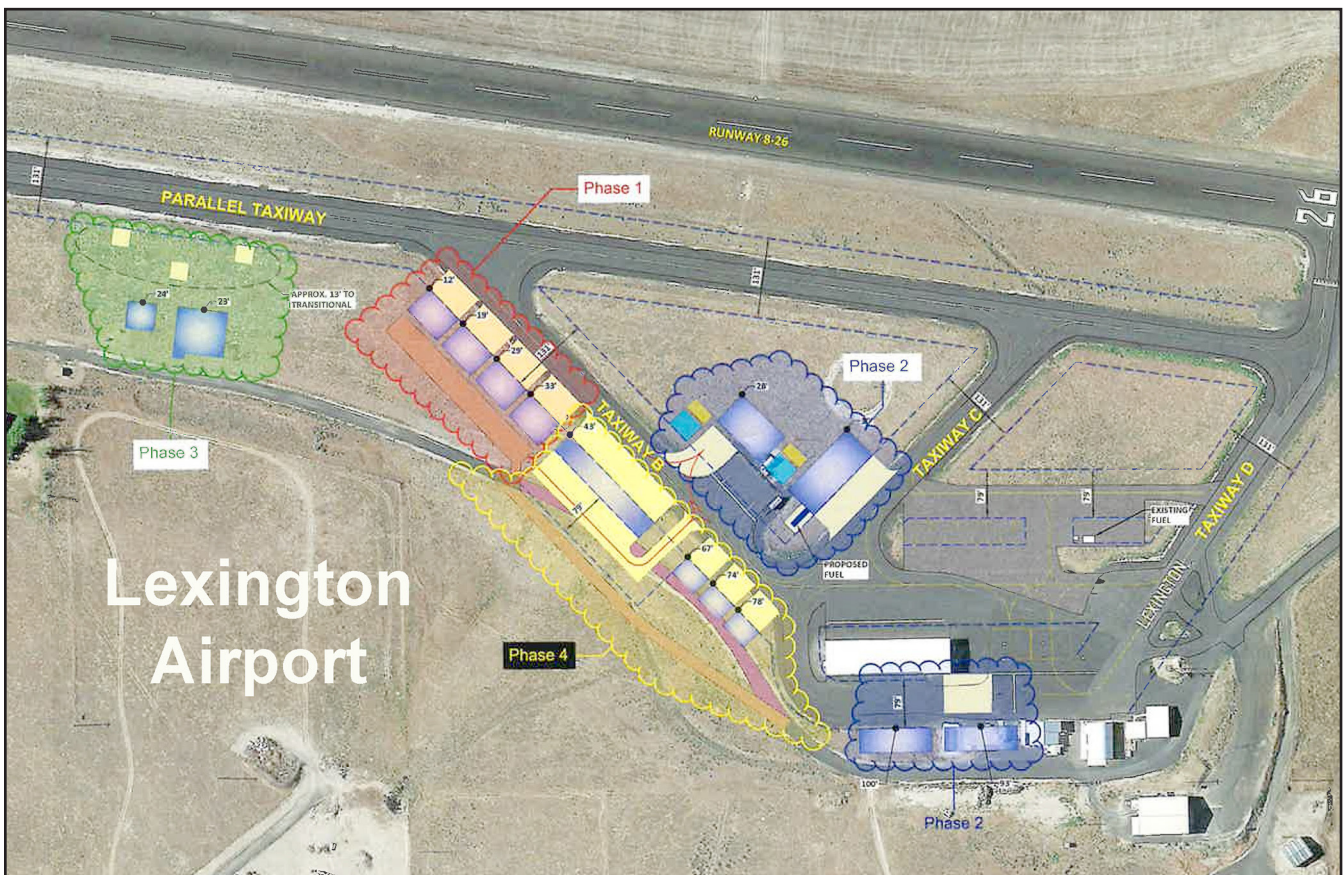
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Blaine said the new system will also streamline internal court processes – promoting increased efficiency – and provide the courts with better data. He said that data could inform further efficiencies, support efforts to better understand jury composition and response, and promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

According to preliminary information from the Oregon Judicial Department, about 60 percent of potential jurors are opting in for text messages when given the new option.

Blaine noted that, while the new system is a big improvement, some members of the public may have a more basic question about jury duty.

“Some people have asked why jury trials are continuing at all during COVID-19,” said Blaine.



A proposed Lexington Airport upgrade would add multiple new hangars and other infrastructure at the facility.

Phase three would extend fiber cable from highway 207 to the UAS buildings, construction of a new septic holding tank system in the infield for use by both hangars and installation of new water lines for the new hangars. Phase four would install 3-phase power to serve the hangar units. Cost of this work would be about \$2.4 million.

The plans will be submitted to FAA first, and if approved by the agency, the county will begin applying for construction grants for the projects. Public Works is responsible for the airport and has been very successful

in the past obtaining grants to pay for almost all improvements and work to the airport. The county feels airport improvements will promote economic activity for the south county area. At its Nov. 4 meeting the county commissioners approved the proposed development plan.

In other airport action the commissioners approved the transfer of a surplus 2002 Ford Explorer from the assessor’s office to be used as an airport courtesy car. The car would be used by pilots who land at the airport and need a ride into town to attend meet-

ings, buy food or other business. “Our remote location is a challenge for anyone to come in and expect to do business in our community,” the county said in providing the car. “Pilots on flights with multiple overnight stops are often faced with the problem of selecting an airport that is near or accessible to hotels and restaurants. Often the most route efficient airports are miles from the nearest town and too far to walk and may have not taxi service. Wanting the economic growth, it is apparent that we need to provide visitor ease of transportation,” the county added.

In other business at its November 18 meeting the county approved an agreement with Wight’s Electric of Heppner to be the county’s contracted electrical contractor. The agreement gives the county good response and service for electrical work. The agreement is for three years and Wight’s will bill the county at an \$88 per hour rate with no travel time since the company is local. The county put its electrical contracting services out for proposals and received one other bid from Shelco of Hermiston.

The county likewise agreed to a plumbing con-

tract agreement with local business Blue Mountain Plumbing, LLC. The company was the only plumbing business to respond and said it would charge an hourly rate of \$90 per hour for regular hours. Emergency overtime rates would be \$135 per hour.

In other business Commissioner Jim Doherty discussed its relationship between the county treasurer’s office, which has a new person recently elected who will take over in January, and the commissioner. Doherty made a point of saying he wanted to see all the money that comes and goes out of the county. “I am assuming that is the case now and if it is not the case now then I want to know why. Certainly, it (the treasurer’s office) is an elected position and there is some give and take but ultimately, we are the fiduciary, right?” he asked rhetorically. “The buck stops here.” There have been tensions and arguments in the past between the commissioners and retiring treasurer Gayle Gutierrez over the duties of the treasurer’s office and appropriate oversight by the commissioners. County Assessor Mike Gorman reminded Doherty that the treasurer “doesn’t just handle the county’s money, she handles all the other (taxing) district’s money too.” Gorman said there are state statues and policies the treasurer must follow regarding how those funds are handled as well.

“That’s a good question. People charged with a crime have a right to a speedy trial. People and businesses involved in some civil cases may also have a right to a trial by jury. That right doesn’t go away during COVID-19. Courts are an essential service in our communities. People depend on us to hear criminal cases and resolve civil disputes.”

To protect rights, maintain access to justice, and promote safety, Blaine said Oregon’s state courts have adapted their processes, facilities and technology to accommodate social distancing and other precautions.

“In addition to making extensive use of technology for remote hearings whenever possible – which we have long done in our part of the state, here in Umatilla

and Morrow counties we separate prospective jurors into smaller groups where they can be seated socially distanced and observe and participate in initial phases of the jury selection process by video with the courtroom where the trial is being held,” he said. “After a jury is chosen, only the judge, court staff, parties and the selected jurors sit in the courtroom for the trial; observers are asked to watch remotely by video. During deliberation, the jurors are seated around the courtroom rather than in a small jury room. We screen for COVID-19 symptoms on entry to the courthouse and work to maintain safe social distances for everyone. Appropriate face coverings – masks – are required to enter the courthouse. A mask is provided to anyone who does not

have one.”

The Oregon Judicial Department piloted the updated online juror response system with the Marion County Circuit Court between September and mid-November. The circuit courts in Umatilla, Morrow and Deschutes counties are in the first group to follow that pilot. Though use of the new system is optional, so far about 26 of Oregon’s 36 state circuit courts are expected to make the transition by the

beginning of April.

The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) includes the Oregon Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, Tax Court, circuit courts in every Oregon county, and the Office of the State Court Administrator. The Department is committed to protecting rights and democracy by maintaining a strong, fair, and impartial court system. For more information, visit www.courts.oregon.gov.

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