

Airport requests rent from Iowa National Guard



Timothy Meinch, tmeinch@dmreg.com 9:27 p.m. CDT April 14, 2015



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Tension continues to escalate between the Des Moines Airport Authority and a long-standing tenant, the Iowa Air National Guard.

Airport officials say a new lease agreement is well overdue for 170-some acres the Iowa Guard rents for a nominal fee of \$1 per year.

That rate should increase since F-16 combat jets were removed from the airport last year, according to letters from the Federal Aviation Administration.

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The combat aircraft were moved last spring, but the Iowa Guard is still paying \$1 a year to rent the land. On Tuesday it requested a third extension to delay an updated agreement with the airport.

The Airport Authority Board approved a 90-day extension following a closed session, but offered some criticism for ongoing delays from the Iowa Guard.

"You have not paid us any rent; you have not paid the storm water fee and you've asked for two extensions," said Ed Hansell, chairman of the Airport Authority Board. "We've given those to you and now you're asking for another extension."

"How much more time do you think you need?"

The Iowa Guard failed to provide the airport authority with an appraisal on the property, which was due at the end of March under the previous extension.

The appraisal is necessary to determine the fair market rental value of the airport land. The Guard now has until July 1 to deliver the appraisal.

Brig. Gen. Drew DeHaes of the Iowa Air National Guard said necessary details have been held up by federal entities outside his control.

"We're working at the speed of government. And it's the federal government," DeHaes said.

The future purpose and use of the Guard's 132nd Fighter Wing at the airport depends on reorganization plans expected in the months ahead from the Department of Defense.



On Saturday, Sept. 7, the 132nd Fighter Wing, Iowa Air National Guard held a ceremony to mark a transition from manned aircraft to remotely piloted aircraft. Three F-16's performed a fly-over as the theme from 'Top Gun' amplified across the airfield.

Airport base lacks 'mission' status

The Iowa Guard has paid \$1 a year for property at the Des Moines airport since 1975, according to Kevin Foley, executive director and general manager of the airport.

The agreement was approved by the FAA due to the fighter jets that gave the Guard's facility an "aeronautical mission." The fighter jet program provided the airport with firefighter services in lieu of paying market-rate rent for the property.

But the firefighter services left in September, shortly after the departure of the F-16s. The airport authority picked up the annual \$1 million-plus cost to provide firefighting services, according to airport officials.

"In the meantime, our little airport here in Des Moines, Iowa, is subsidizing the federal government," Hansell said.

Military pilots are scheduled to [begin conducting remotely piloted aircraft missions \(/story/news/politics/iowa-politics-insider/2015/02/08/iowa-guard-set-fly-drones-year/22979065/\)](/story/news/politics/iowa-politics-insider/2015/02/08/iowa-guard-set-fly-drones-year/22979065/) later this year from the property at the Des Moines airport. But these operations do not qualify as an "aeronautical mission."

Status of the Iowa Guard base

Officials with the Iowa National Guard say they expect the "aeronautical mission" status to return to the base, pending approval from federal authorities to relocate 12 aircrafts — 10 of them Blackhawk helicopters — to Des Moines from a U.S. Army aviation unit based in Boone.

Final approval and implementation of that plan would take at least two years, DeHaes said.

The potential relocation complicates and delays negotiation of the rental agreement with the airport authority, DeHaes said. He expects an update on the status of the Des Moines airport base within two months.

Foley said Tuesday that the airport authority cannot wait two or three years.

"We're in noncompliance as we sit here today, so I'm not sure we have the luxury of waiting two to three years," Foley said.

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