Airport budget calls for increase

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Airport commissioners briefly discussed Tuesday the Metro Airport’s 1990 budget, which calls for a 4.1 percent increase in expenses and anticipates a 7.6 percent rise in revenues, before sending it to the city-parish’s regular budget hearings for a thorough going-over.

The airport agency staff is seeking total appropriations, excluding depreciation, of $4,976,740, representing a $196,330 increase over the 1989 budget of $4,780,410. It is predicting 1990 self-generated revenues will rise $415,250 to $5,868,290 from $5,453,040.

Included in the higher budget expenses is an approximate $69,000 collective increase in salaries for the 62 airport employees, reflecting merit increases for some employees, and a 5 percent “longevity requirement” for Iray Ledoux, aviation director, and a 10 percent longevity pay increase for Anthony Marino, assistant aviation director.

The longevity increase is part of the city-parish pay plan designed to retain local government employees, Marino said. After 10 years, a city-parish employee receives a 5 percent increase in salary as part of his or her longevity requirement; after 15 years, the...
employee receives a 15 percent increase.

With the longevity increases, Ledoux’s budgeted salary rises $3,310 to $69,490 and Marino’s rises $5,220 to $57,410.

A total of $55,510 in longevity increases for 30 airport employees are included in the budget.

Besides the jump in longevity pay, the collective salary increase includes $14,080 in funds for merit raises for 29 airport employees. Merit increases are a sore point between the airport and the city/parish.

An internal city-parish audit released last week said the city-parish government appears to be violating a state constitutional provision that mandates equal pay for equal work.

According to the audit, some Metro Airport employees are being paid up to 23 percent more than other city-parish employees who do the same types of work in other government areas.

The discrepancy goes back a few years when the airport was able to give merit raises to its employees because of its self-generated funds while the city-parish could not, Ledoux said.

But Mike Babin, an airport commissioner and Metro Council member, predicted the disparity between airport and other city-parish employees will create trouble in the future.

“It’s going to create a real problem. We could have a lawsuit at any time,” Babin said.

“This issue is going to be, “How can the city-parish not afford to raise some employees and the airport can?” said Walter Monsour, another commissioner.

“You got two different sources of revenues: that’s the bigger issue,” he said.

The overall salary increase among total employees also includes additions of a professional engineer, a clerk typist and one attorney and reflects the deletion of one utility worker and a custodial worker.

The salary total also incorporates two employee slots currently vacant that won’t be filled until November 1990, which is expected to save $22,970 in salaries, Ledoux said.

The budget also includes a $12,360 increase in supply costs due to inflation, a $25,000 increase for a new flatbed/dump truck to replace a 1979 flatbed truck and a 1977 dump truck and a $164,870 jump in contractual services for repairing automotive and plant equipment.

After approving the budget, the commissioners also passed a resolution in recognition of the hot air balloon championship slated for Aug. 4-13 and approved the transfer of a dump truck and a flatbed truck to the city parish.

In other business, Ledoux reported airport activity increased for the first six months of the year compared to the January though June 1988 period.

Enplanements rose 4 percent, car rentals jumped 11 percent, concessions grew 3 percent and public parking revenues increased 2 percent, he said. More dramatic increases occurred in June 1989 compared to June 1988 as one-month figures showed enplanements rose 17 percent, concessions jumped 8 percent and public parking grew 6 percent. Car rentals rose 11 percent in June, the same rate of increase experienced through the first six months of the year.

Ledoux has said the increases occurred as a result of the airport’s successful push for the airlines to charge fares on par with those fares charged at the New Orleans airport.