By BOBBY ARDOIN
Advocate correspondent

OPELUSAS — The city of Opelousas wants to become the governmental authority for the St. Landry Parish Airport Commission, Mayor John Joseph said.

The funding for the daily operation of the airport was not included in the police jury's budget, and the facility needs approximately $6,000 worth of maintenance work to remain operating, commission member Laddie James said.

Without the jury's funding, James said the airport is "slowly going broke."

Joseph said the city's budget committee is considering providing the $6,000 needed by the commission to replace a non-directional radio beacon, in addition to re-establishing weather programming.

Joseph said the city was also considering assuming the responsibility as the commission's governmental authority.

He said City Attorney Richard Milspaugh was researching the matter and would report to the City Council at a later date.

Police Jury President Pat Miller said the commission received $7,000 annually for airport operations, but because of financial problems, jurors excluded the funding in this year's budget.

"The money for the airport just isn't there," Miller said. "Because of our ongoing financial problems, the budget did not call for funding the airport commission."

James said the Police Jury appointed five members of the airport commission, despite the lack of funding.

Obtaining money from the city to replace the radio beacon would allow pilots to land at a 500-foot minimum. Reinstating the daily weather advisories originating from the airport would bring the facility up to state Federal Aviation Agency standards, James said.

Weather advisories are currently received from the Lafayette airport, James said.

"Once we repair those two items, we would be eligible to apply for nearly $1 million in state and federal money for airport improvements," James said.

Other improvements call for fencing around the perimeter of the airport, paved ramps and other improvements, James said.

He added the proposed improvement proposal is part of a 10-year master plan being studied by a parish engineering firm.

"Since the airport commission is no longer receiving funding from the Police Jury, they have come to us and have asked the city to help contribute to the maintenance costs," the mayor said.

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“We are currently studying our pretty tight budget and looking for ways to address the request for funding from the commission,” he said. “Our interest is in several directions. Once the airport can make the repairs it needs, then it would be eligible for grant funding,” Joseph added. “We also want to look into the possibility of becoming the governmental authority. An improved airport could have a tremendous impact on the area.”

James said the airport commission gets a certain percentage of fuel sold by the fixed base operator at the airport, in addition to obtaining rent from airplanes parked in the hangars.

The commission also has the authority to lease property near the airport for farming, James said.

He estimated the airport currently houses 22-25 planes per month.