Airport engineer has handled $11M in projects

Talbert & Bright history with Oconee dates to 1990

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — The engineering consultant handling the stalled runway extension project at the Oconee County Regional Airport has monopolized lucrative aviation projects in Oconee for two decades.

Talbert & Bright, Inc. — the firm overseeing a $4.2 million runway project that has been shut down for weeks because of apparent permitting irregularities — has been Oconee's exclusive engineering firm at the airport since at least 1990, county records show.

Since then, Talbert & Bright has handled at least 19 federally-funded projects worth more than $11 million.

The long-standing relationship between the firm and Oconee County appeared to be of some concern to the FAA, as the agency required the county to bid out engineering of the current project as a condition to receiving $2.7 million, sources knowledgeable about the situation told The Journal.

Oconee issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in 2008, but Talbert & Bright was the only firm to reply. Oconee entered into a new contract with the firm on Nov. 18, 2008.

It is unclear what impact the current permitting problem will have on the long relationship between Oconee and Talbert & Bright.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said this week in a news release that the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) told the county that a stormwater permit on the runway project had not been obtained. Moulder said the Talbert & Bright project engineer had told the county otherwise.

County officials flatly stated that the construction phase of the project would not have gone forward if they'd known that a stormwater permit had not been secured.

To complicate matters, Moulder said the Talbert & Bright project engineer showed the county either the original or a copy of the permit DHEC claims was never issued.

DHEC had no comment on what appears to be the falsification of papers or misrepresentation on the part of the project manager.

The erosion control plans related to the runway project contain the initials of two Talbert & Bright engineers.

Jay Talbert, a principal with the company, has not responded to numerous requests for an interview.

Oconee officials have no idea when DHEC will allow the project to proceed. It was to originally to have been completed before the start of the Clemson University football season that gets underway Sept. 4.

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685