



Council Meeting Date: June 12, 2023

**TOWN OF LEESBURG
TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

Subject: Air Traffic Control Update and Control Tower Project Addition to the Capital Improvements Program

Staff Contacts: Scott Coffman, Airport Director
Keith Markel, Deputy Town Manager
Renée M. LaFollette, P.E., Director, Public Works & Capital Projects
Karin Franklin, P.E., Senior Engineer, Public Works & Capital Projects
Betsy Arnett, Senior Management Analyst

Council Action Requested: Adopt a resolution to amend the Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Capital Improvements Program by adding the Airport Control Tower project and appropriating \$270,000 from the Unassigned Fund Balance to the Fiscal Year 2024 Airport Control Tower project budget.

Staff Recommendation: Adopt a resolution to amend the Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Capital Improvements Program by adding the Airport Control Tower project and appropriating \$270,000 from the Unassigned Fund Balance to the Fiscal Year 2024 Airport Control Tower project budget.

Commission Recommendation: The Airport Commission's priority list includes the provision of air traffic control through the Federal Contract Tower Program and recommends construction of the Airport Control Tower project as part of the Town's Capital Improvements Program.

Fiscal Impact: A supplemental appropriation of \$270,000 for Fiscal Year 2024 from the Unassigned Fund Balance is needed to complete the first phase, a siting study for the project.

The project is divided into four phases, including siting, environmental study, engineering design, and construction. The first two preliminary phases of siting and environmental study are expected to take up to three years to complete and cost up to \$570,000. The outcome of the preliminary siting study will determine the tower location and thus a much more accurate estimate of the total project cost. The total project cost is currently estimated at \$16 million based on other towers recently completed in the region.

The preliminary phases are grant-eligible, however the Town will need to pay for this work up front and be reimbursed under future grants from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Virginia Department of Aviation (DOAV). FAA and DOAV grants cover 98% of project costs and require a 2% match from the Town. The 2% local match of the preliminary siting work is \$5,000.

Work Plan Impact: This project will be added to the current work plan for the Department of Public Works and Capital Projects and will become a priority project for the department which will require another project to be assigned as lower priority.

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Town Plan Impact: Strategy 4.3.4 of the Legacy Leesburg Town Plan states “Continue Planning for the Future of the Leesburg Airport” by following the Airport Master Plan. Maintaining air traffic control services through the construction of a permanent Airport Control Tower facility will ensure safe efficient aircraft operations and is critical to the future of the Leesburg Executive Airport.” Once the location of the Control Tower is identified through a Siting Study, the Airport Master Plan will be updated.

Executive Summary: The Airport Control Tower project is a new project caused by the recent decision by the Federal Aviation Administration to cancel the Remote Tower Pilot Program.

A mobile air traffic control tower will serve as a temporary solution until a permanent control tower facility can be constructed. To begin the process to site, design, and build a tower, the Airport Control Tower project needs to be added to the Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Capital Improvements Program (CIP). A draft CIP page is attached for Town Council review. See Attachment #2.

A supplemental appropriation of \$270,000 to the Fiscal Year 2024 budget from the Unassigned Fund Balance is needed to start the siting study, which is the first step for the project. The cost for the siting study will be included in a later application for grant funds from the Federal Aviation Administration and the Virginia Department of Aviation (requiring a 2% match from the Town) and will be reimbursed once the grant agreement is executed. The siting study will also provide context for an estimate of an overall project budget as the current ballpark total cost estimate is \$16 million. The Town will seek to secure grant funding prior to starting construction, which would cover approximately 98% of the total cost.

Background: In February 2023, the Federal Aviation Administration informed Town officials that the Remote Tower Pilot Program would be terminated on June 14, 2023, and that Leesburg Executive Airport would not have air traffic control (ATC) services after that date.

The Town was accepted as a candidate in the FAA’s Federal Contract Tower (FCT) program in October 2020, but did not pursue development of a permanent tower at that time because the new remote tower facility was under construction with significant financial support from the FAA and the program appeared to be progressing toward certification. Moving forward, a permanent control tower facility will need to be built for the airport to continue to provide ATC services. Acceptance into the FCT program comes with a five-year deadline for construction of a tower. Leesburg’s original deadline was October 2025, which is an unrealistic timeframe for the development of a new tower.

After a series of meetings with the Town, the FAA has agreed to the following:

- Leesburg’s candidacy in the FCT program will be extended until October 1, 2028.
- The FAA will allow a mobile tower unit to be placed on the airfield to provide ATC services from the time that the remote tower is shut down until Leesburg has constructed a permanent tower.
- The FAA will pay for both the lease of the mobile tower and the cost of the controllers through the end of the current federal fiscal year (September 30, 2023).

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- The FAA will pay for the controllers through the end of federal Fiscal Year 2028 (September 30, 2028).
- Leesburg will be responsible for the lease of the mobile tower from October 1, 2023 until the permanent tower is completed.

The Town Attorney is working with the FAA's legal division on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining the above points.

The Airport Control Tower project needs to be added to the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) so that the initial steps of the permanent tower project can begin. A proposed CIP page has been drafted and attached for reference. See Attachment #2. The cost and timing are estimated based on limited information and potential construction locations. The CIP project page will be updated when more information is available. The project is estimated to take up to seven years, including the following phases: siting study, environmental assessment following the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, detailed design, and construction. Attachment #3 outlines each step in the project, including expected timeframes, costs, and potential funding sources. A graphic version of the expected timeline is included in Attachment #4.

The siting study is the first phase and is estimated to require 12-18 months to complete. Completion of this study will require a task order with the on-call airport engineering firm, Talbert and Bright, in addition to compensation paid directly to the Federal Aviation Administration through a reimbursable agreement with a total estimated cost not to exceed \$250,000.

Contract Start/End Date: Contract Start: 09/15/23 Contract End Date: 9/16/24

Proposed Legislation:

RESOLUTION

Amend the Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Capital Improvements Program to add the Airport Control Tower Project and Appropriate \$270,000 for Fiscal Year 2024 from the Unassigned Fund Balance

Draft Motions:

1. I move to approve the proposed Resolution to:

- (1) Amend the Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Capital Improvements Program to add the Airport Control Tower Project.
- (2) Approve a supplemental appropriation of \$270,000 for Fiscal Year 2024 from the Unassigned Fund Balance.

OR

2. I move to deny the proposed resolution to:

- (1) Amend the Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Capital Improvements Program to add the Airport Control Tower Project.
- (2) Approve a supplemental appropriation of \$270,000 for Fiscal Year 2024 from the Unassigned Fund Balance.

OR

3. I move an alternate motion.

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. Draft CIP Page
3. Airport Control Tower Project Timeline
4. Airport Control Tower Project Timeline Graphic
5. Airport Control Tower Project Funding Sources