

Gary airport scoops up property for expansion

Wednesday, May 30, 2007 10:49 AM CDT

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GARY || The Gary/Chicago International Airport continues to secure property west of the airport for the 1,900-foot expansion of its main runway.

At Tuesday's airport authority meeting, the board approved purchasing six acres from Majestic Star Casinos for \$52,000 and another acre and a building owned by Reichman Transport Inc., for \$106,000.

So far, the airport has not had to use condemnation proceedings to obtain properties totaling about 72 acres, but instead has entered into sales agreements with owners.

"That is always the preferred way, when you can come to a mutual understanding, that's what we tried to do," said Airport Director Chris Curry.

Some purchases already completed or agreed upon include the \$1.84 million purchase of the 44-acre Beemsterboer Inc. property and the \$820,000 purchase of the Truck City of Gary dealership and repair facility.

Truck City of Gary will keep operating at its West Chicago Avenue location until it moves to a new state-of-the art facility it is building at 25th Avenue and Taft Street, in Gary.

The airport expansion plan has an estimated price tag of \$90 million. It will extend the main runway to 8,900 feet from its current length of 7,000 feet, making it capable of handling large airliners.

On Tuesday, the airport authority also authorized the hiring of Quality Environmental Professionals Inc., of Indianapolis, to conduct environmental investigations of three other properties for \$219,929. Those investigations will determine the extent of contamination at the sites.

Environmental cleanup has the potential to add to the \$90 million price tag of the expansion, but so far all signs are good, according to authority attorney Patrick Lyp.

"Investigations so far have found nothing that was unexpected," Lyp said.

The authority also approved a contract with the Northwest Indiana Forum to have its environmental affairs director, Kay Nelson, assist with environmental remediation at the airport.

Forum Executive Director Vince Galbiati has been assisting the airport in negotiations with railroads over moving railroad tracks that stand in the way of the runway expansion.