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George C. Ford

George Ford has spent decades covering business news across Eastern Iowa. Ford is a native of Lexington, Ky., but has [...]

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Updated: 26 October 2012 | 4:16 pm in B380

Cedar Rapids airport activates new baggage inspection system

Officials also keeping eye on proposed stormwater utility fee increase



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Travelers flying out of [The Eastern Iowa Airport](#) will find that checking their luggage has returned to the way it was done before Sept. 11, 2001.

A new baggage-handling system was activated Friday morning that moves the inspection of checked luggage out of the lobby and behind closed doors. Passengers will check their luggage at the ticket counter and see it again when they arrive at their destination.

After 9/11, the federal [Transportation Security Administration](#) installed large baggage inspection machines in the passenger lobby. Airport Operations Director Sara Freese said those machines will remain in the lobby for the next 30 days while the TSA ensures that the new system is operating correctly.

"We will submit information to the TSA each week so they can review how the bags are going through," Freese told members of the Cedar Rapids Airport Commission at a Friday session.

"At the end of 30 days, the system will be turned over to the airport. We are looking to remove the additional baggage inspection machines from the lobby between Thanksgiving and Christmas."

Freese said some worn areas of carpeting around the machines will be replaced in advance of a major remodeling planned for the lobby next year. She said the final cost of the \$4.4 million system remains within 5 percent of the budgeted amount, and it will be completed three months ahead of schedule.



The baggage makeup room at The Eastern Iowa Airport is part of a new \$4.4 million baggage handling system that was activated on Friday. The system returns the way passengers check their baggage to how it was done before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. (George C. Ford/The Gazette)

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Airport Director Tim Bradshaw said the commission likely will receive a task order for design of the terminal renovation at its Dec. 17 meeting. The commission would like to seek construction bids in the spring and begin construction in the summer of 2013, he said.

"We're very excited about the opportunity to take advantage of natural lighting and open up the terminal," Bradshaw said. "I think it will look very different when everything is completed."

The Cedar Rapids Airport Commission also heard Friday that the airport's stormwater treatment bill is likely to soar if a recommended increase is approved by the Cedar Rapids City Council.

"Right now, the city is charging us \$4.78 per location and we have 11 water meters," said Donald Swanson, director of finance and administration. "That's running under \$1,000 a year.

"Now, the city is looking at \$133.84 per location, which will increase our annual bill to over \$17,000."

Currently, every Cedar Rapids city water customer pays the same stormwater utility fee, \$4.78 a month, regardless of the size of their property or the amount of stormwater runoff. The Cedar Rapids City Council is considering tying the monthly stormwater utility fee to the amount of runoff that comes off a property after a rain shower or storm.

The airport commission has spent more than \$5 million within the last few years to construct facilities that retain and channel aircraft de-icing chemicals into the city's stormwater treatment system. The facilities were constructed to bring the airport into compliance with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Swanson said the airport was not provided advance notice of the proposed fee increase, which was not included in the budget for the next fiscal year.

The City Council's Infrastructure Committee has given conceptual approval to a proposed tiered fee schedule, which creates nine rates based on the size of a landowner's property. The proposed schedule keeps the monthly fee at \$4.78 per month for 40,338 residential customers and increases the fee for another 4,100 or so property owners, depending on the size of their property.

Dee Baird, president and CEO of the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance and a member of the airport commission, said the business organization plans to hold forums for some of the community's large employers to discuss the proposed stormwater utility fee changes.

"We're going to hopefully help some folks think this through," Baird said.

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