

18 potential bidders line up to lease Lambert

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ST. LOUIS — All the contestants in the controversial high-stakes derby to lease St. Louis Lambert International Airport are now out in the open, as the city announced Friday that 18 companies and teams of firms have turned in applications.

A city committee, the Airport Advisory Working Group, will now review the submissions and decide which to seek bids from.

One prospective bidder on the list had previously disclosed its interest publicly — STL Aviation Group, a consortium led by California-based Oaktree Capital Management that hired several politically connected lobbyists. The group includes a company that runs airports in France and elsewhere.

But a prominent no-show was Ferrovial Airports, a Spanish company that had hired former Mayor Francis Slay — now an attorney in private practice — to help lobby for it.

The list does include various other firms that hadn't figured in political speculation over Lambert privatization over the past year.

Among them is Lambert Gateway Partners, a consortium including the Public School and Education Employee Retirement Systems of Missouri and Blackstone Infrastructure Group, among others.

Another teacher group also declared its interest — the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan Board, which is working with Ontario Airports Investments Limited and Copenhagen Airports International.

Among other applicants are Netherlands-based Royal Schiphol Group, which runs airports in Amsterdam, other Dutch cities and elsewhere, and Luxembourg-based CAAP, which also is involved with various airports.

The 18 entities responded to a "request for qualifications" issued a month ago by the airport working group. The deadline for submissions was 5 p.m. Friday.

Other applicants are AENA Internacional, AMP Capital, Atlantia, daa International, Global Infrastructure Partners, GRID Realty, Manchester Airports Group, Momentum Aviation Partners, Morrison & Co., Odinsa, OMERS Infrastructure and Fraport, Public Sector Pension Investment Board/AviAlliance and Vantage Airport Group/Corsair-Vantage Investment Partners.

Paul Payne, the working group's chairman, said the panel's next step will focus on whether potential bidders have the operational and financial capacity to run Lambert.

Payne, who also is the city budget director, has said objectives are improving Lambert, generating revenue to spur "transformational changes and benefit" for St. Louis and aiding economic development in the region.

The privatization study was begun by Slay near the end of his tenure in 2017 and continued by Mayor Lyda Krewson.

Comptroller Darlene Green and other critics have complained that the process has been set up to favor special interests.

Criticism has focused on the involvement of Grow Missouri, a nonprofit funded by political megadonor Rex Sinquefield, which is one of several consulting firms advising the working group.

Sinquefield funded the city's application to the federal government to be allowed to consider privatization and is paying the consultants, with reimbursement only if a deal is reached.

The working group expects to decide by early next month which companies to seek bids from. Payne called the 18 submissions "a healthy response" and said more details about the respondents may be released next week.

- *Index terms: local-politics;local-government;st. louis lambert international airport;airport privatization;oaktree capital management;public school and education employee retirement systems of misso;blackstone infrastructure group;airport advisory working group;#breaking;ferrovial;francis slay;paul payne;lyda krewson;darlene green*
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