

January 14, 2015

Mayor Sam Kooiker  
Members of the Rapid City Common Council  
300 6<sup>th</sup> Street  
Rapid City, SD 57701

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MAYOR'S OFFICE

Dear Mayor Kooiker and Rapid City Common Council:

It is with a great deal of interest that I am hearing about the issue of fire protection services at the Rapid City Regional Airport. During my 32 years with the RCFD my various assignments included duty at the Rapid City Regional Airport as a firefighter/security person, serving as a union steward during the 1989 privatization of the airport fire protection issue and ultimately serving as Fire Chief. I can tell you that through my years of experience I have learned that the value of the training and experience in the many disciplines involved with emergency services provided by the RCFD far outweighs what private providers could provide.

The privatization issue initially came up a few years before 1989 when the firefighters were asked to do security duty at the Airport. The RCFD felt this additional duty took away from the Airport Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) core mission. The firefighters did get extra pay for providing security duty. In 1989 the privatization issue came up again in an effort to require the firefighters to provide security duty without receiving extra pay. Now we hear about this privatization issue again.

Whether these privatization proposals were solicited or not, the reverberation throughout the Fire Department is significant and causes consternation for the firefighters and management as they wonder about their livelihoods.

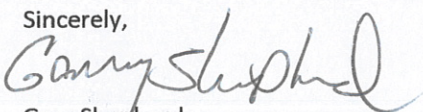
In the September 5, 1989 meeting of the Rapid City Common Council a motion was made and unanimously approved directing legal staff to draft an ordinance requiring the RCFD to provide ARFF and related services to the Rapid City Regional Airport but was never brought forward through some oversight. This ordinance was designed to prevent situations like the 1989 issue from continuing to occur in the future.

It appears that some at the Airport consider this ordinance as micro managing by the City. This is City property and the buck ultimately stops with the elected officials. Whether this Airport Board agrees or not with this proposed ordinance, the current board members will not be there forever and as Airport Board members change I believe this will happen again. As I understand it, the RCFD and the Airport Board are in the process of drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that further clarifies the details of the RCFD's responsibilities. It is also my understanding that the Airport Board has threatened to withdraw the proposed MOU if the Council moves forward with implementing this ordinance. If the MOU process is so fragile that it can't withstand implementation of this proposed ordinance that has nothing to do with the MOU then I wonder if there are other underlying issues.

Please don't make the Rapid City firefighters the pawns in all of this like they were in 1989. The RCFD provides a comprehensive, multifaceted, integrated emergency services system to the Rapid City Regional Airport and the firefighters don't deserve this. I am asking for the Mayor and Council to all stand together and support this ordinance. This is one issue where being unanimous sends a powerful message.

I would urge your support in completing the ordinance process that was unanimously approved for draft years ago so the parties involved can get on with the business at hand.

Sincerely,



Gary Shepherd  
Rapid City Fire Chief, Retired