January 6, 2017

Rapid City Common Council
300 Sixth Street
Rapid City, SD 57701

Re: Research Trip to Sioux Falls in Preparation for January 23, 2017 Special Council meeting

Dear Council Member:

It was an interesting Council meeting the other night, and we accomplished what I was hoping we would accomplish. That was, to take a baby step toward resolving the flat parking lot in the 500 block of St. Joseph Street.

Several of you have expressed feelings or opinions related to a potential development on the parking lot. The unresolved issue of President’s Plaza has been going on longer than any of you have been on the Council. While some of you have extensive knowledge and experience with President’s Plaza, others are fairly new to the situation.

I am writing, mainly to share my belief that in order to successfully develop the parking lot in a way that complements Rapid City, and is in accordance with the Downtown Master Plan, we must discard our biases on this particular subject. Clearly, we have had much time to think about this topic, but there have already been some assumptions made that could cloud future decision-making on this project. One such assumption has to do with the parking ramp and who will build and own it. It may seem logical that the responsibility would fall upon the City; however, any assumptions we make while constructing a request for proposal will only limit the potential scope or attractiveness of the project. I am asking that all of us keep a completely open mind regarding this project.

I have been contacted by various groups, mainly investors, who are interested in the parking lot project. The level of expertise within the development/investment community is such that I feel we could stifle this project if we are not careful.

I firmly believe that the development of this parking lot will become the new cornerstone of Rapid City’s Downtown. I cannot adequately emphasize how important this project will be to Rapid City’s future. To that end, we must exercise extreme caution as we move forward.
Sioux Falls is currently getting ready to launch a selection process for the development of the former rail yard in downtown Sioux Falls. I know Sioux Falls officials feel about the rail yard as I do about the St. Joseph parking lot. I received a quick briefing on the process they will use and I believe it would benefit Rapid City to send a contingent of people to Sioux Falls prior to the January 23, 2017 Special Council Meeting. The team would travel to Sioux Falls and meet with Sioux Falls officials within their respective areas of interest, then return to Rapid City prepared to brief the Council at the Special Council Meeting. My executive coordinator is currently making arrangements for this trip.

My only request of you is that you refrain from becoming attached to a theory or plan, whether it be a building configuration or parking lot construction, until we have adequate time to consider all relevant options.

If you have any questions or would like City staff to produce anything specific at the Special Council Meeting, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Steve Allender, Mayor
Rapid City, South Dakota