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Swieter Aircraft Leaving Waterloo After Three Decades

TIM JAMISON ON SEP 17, 2018

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Sept. 16--WATERLOO -- Contractual issues are causing the departure of a 32-year Waterloo Regional Airport mainstay.

Swieter Aircraft Services Inc., which has provided aircraft maintenance in Waterloo since 1986, is moving to the Waverly Municipal Airport beginning in November, along with McCandless Avionics and McCandless Aircraft Sales.

Company president Irv Swieter blamed the Waterloo airport administration for being slow to begin negotiations on a new lease and then proposing a major rent hike for the office, shop and hangar building he occupies on the east side of the airport.

"I anticipated that I would remain here until I decided to retire," Swieter said. "So it was not a very easy decision, and it wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision.

"I had been trying to get a proposal from (Airport Director Keith Kaspari) since March," he said. "I could not wait and wait and wait. I finally got it in August. The proposal he gave me was not feasible."

Kaspari countered that Swieter's current rent had not increased for 20 years while the city recently used Iowa Department of Transportation grants to make more than \$150,000 in building improvements.

He noted the airport has a fiduciary duty to both the Federal Aviation Administration, which subsidizes the airport, to ensure rents are fair. The city of Waterloo also requires the airport to avoid losing money and requiring general fund tax support.

Kaspari delivered an initial lease proposal to Swieter Aug. 7 which called for the rent to jump from \$10,600 to \$24,000 a year, included a 2.5 percent annual rent increase going forward, and put Swieter in charge of maintaining the shop and office areas of the building.

"My comment to him was to give it a review, and if you find anything out of the ordinary to contact me," Kaspari said. "Let's talk about it so that we can agree to a fee schedule that works for us both, as I do not want to see you leave as an airport tenant.

"I wanted to keep everything open, honest and transparent," he added. "But there is no way that I could give him an extension at the current rates that he is paying today."

Kaspari said he heard nothing back from Swieter before the Waverly City Council voted unanimously Aug. 20 approve a contract for Swieter to operate its airport, taking over for current fixed-base operator Cedar Valley Aviation.

Swieter said he did not sign any agreement with Waverly until after getting Waterloo's initial proposal. The prospect of maintaining a 1961 building which already needed repairs was a bigger concern than the rent, he added.

Hugh Field, chairman of the airport board, also said he was disappointed to see Swieter leave but echoed Kaspari's assessment that it was time for a rent increase.

"Irv has had the same lease at the airport for 20 years," Field said. "He has a lot of facility that we provided and, quite frankly, he was due to have an increase.

"We didn't want him to leave," he added. "He provides a great service for the aviation community."

Swieter said Waterloo's initial proposal came too late because it would have forced him to abandon his option for the Waverly post and take his chances negotiating a acceptable lease in Waterloo.

He began looking at Waverly in June after watching protracted lease negotiations between the Waterloo airport administration and Livingston Aviation, the airport's other fixed-base operator.

"It was very, very clear seeing what Livingston was going through last year trying to renew their lease that I knew it was coming my way," Swieter said.

Tim Newton, at Livingston Aviation, acknowledged his business had a difficult time negotiating a new lease which was eventually approved. He said the initial city offer would have forced Livingston out of business.

"While we're competitors, I really hate to see Irv go," Newton said. "It's a huge loss to the airport. It's a big loss to the community too."

Lynn Moller, who relies on Swieter to service two aircraft he pilots, was also disappointed to see Swieter moving to Waverly, noting his expertise especially on twin-engine Cessnas attracts plane owners seeking maintenance from all over the country and Canada.

"For Waterloo to lose somebody like Irv is totally ridiculous," said Moller, who expects he'll be flying the aircraft to Waverly for maintenance in the future.

Swieter begins managing the Waverly airport Nov. 1. His lease in Waterloo expires Jan. 31, 2019.

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