

City of Gainesville

Inter-Office Communication

City Manager's Office

Mail Sta. #7

334-5010

TO: Hon. Mayor and Members of the City Commission **DATE:** December 9, 1998

FROM: Wayne Bowers
City Manager

SUBJECT: Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting Services at the Gainesville-Alachua County Regional Airport

Under agreement with the Gainesville-Alachua County Regional Airport Authority (GACRAA) for several years the City has provided two firefighters on duty at the Airport at all times. Last summer during the budget approval process, the City was notified by GACRAA that due to a reduction in the size of aircraft serving the Airport, effective October 1, 1998, only one firefighter would be required on duty at any time. In response to objections from Fire Chief Richard Williams and Local 21527 of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) the GACRAA Board on September 10, 1998, postponed the reduction of firefighter positions for 90 days to January 1, 1999. GACRAA requested that during this three month interim a compromise be discussed with the City Manager, Fire Chief, and GACRAA staff. In addition, the GACRAA Board appointed two of its members (Jon Morris and Marilyn Tubb) to meet as an ad hoc committee to facilitate the resolution of this issue.

The ad hoc committee met on October 7, October 23, and November 3. At these meetings the committee heard reports from the Gainesville Fire Rescue Department, Airport staff, Union representatives, Alachua County Fire Rescue, and other parties. After considering numerous alternatives, the committee requested that the City Manager, Chief Williams, IAFF President Jeff Lane, and Director of Aviation Gene Clerkin draft a specific proposal for implementation prior to January 1, 1999. The committee requested that this group report back with a proposal on November 24, 1998.

The staff group met several times and agreed on the following objectives for inclusion in a compromise proposal:

1. Retain two firefighters on duty at the Airport.
2. Minimize additional costs to the City and GACRAA.
3. Make productive use of firefighter availability to provide additional services of value to the Airport.

The staff-working group determined that the City had budgeted payments from GACRAA for fire fighting services in the 1998-99 budget of \$385,948.00. The GACRAA budget included only \$238,107.00 to cover the cost of one firefighter on duty. The shortfall to be addressed, therefore, is \$147,841.00.

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The staff proposal to the committee included four elements:

1. The Fire Chief and Union will work together to change the current 24 hour per day staffing to 18 hours of daily coverage. The first plane currently leaves the Airport at 6:05 AM and the last arrival is scheduled for 11:00 PM. Federal regulations require on site fire fighting capability only during the hours when commercial airlines use the airport facilities. The anticipated savings from changing to 18-hour staffing are \$42,000.00 per year.
2. The Fire Chief and Union agreed to make firefighters available to provide grass mowing services at the Airport. GACRAA currently has several employees dedicated to ground maintenance for the Airport facilities. One member of the maintenance crew who is already a City employee will be transferred to another general government department resulting in savings of approximately \$40,000.00 to GACRAA. The Airport firefighters will then provide the equivalent of 40 hours per week in grass mowing services. GACRAA has agreed to provide a new enclosed cab lawn mower that will allow the firefighter to be in constant radio contact with the Airport tower. When a call is received, if a firefighter is mowing the grass, the mowing operation can be immediately terminated and the firefighter can respond with the other Airport firefighter to provide emergency services.
3. GACRAA will contribute the extra \$40,000.00 (the amount included in the Airport budget for 1998-99 to temporarily retain the second firefighter position) on an annual basis to partially supplement the cost of the additional firefighter position.
4. The City will contribute \$25,841.00 in order to allow retaining two positions at the Airport fire station.

The amount of these savings and contributions is equal to \$147,841.00 on an annual basis. The staff group recommends that this proposal be adopted for two years in order to have sufficient time to work out any operational problems and to give all parties a chance to reassess GACRAA's financial condition.

The ad hoc committee unanimously endorsed the joint staff recommendation on November 24, 1998. The committee recommendation will be presented to the full GACRAA Board at the December meeting. The proposal will be submitted to the City Commission for approval on December 14, 1998. Should you have any questions concerning this recommendation, please contact me.

Respectfully submitted,



Wayne Bowers
City Manager

WB/jr

cc: Aviation Director Gene Clerkin
Fire Chief Richard Williams
IAFF President Jeff Lane