

July 8, 2018

Elevate Rapid City
Co-Chairmen Emery, Lust, and Scull
444 Mt. Rushmore Road North
Rapid City, SD 57701

Dear Campaign General Chairmen,

Congratulations on an aggressive strategy rooted in an inspiring economic development vision for Rapid City. Rapid City is the heart of Western South Dakota, the guiding community for the region, and a place I think of as home. Now living in Sioux Falls, I graduated from Rapid City Stevens and still have significant family connections in Rapid. I read about Elevate Rapid City in the Argus Leader, immediately going to your website for more information. The collective effort among multiple economic development organizations is forward thinking. And impressive. Again, congrats!

While you have a thorough strategic plan, I believe you should also consider including an important industry, one that not only drives our economy but is also essential to the quality of life in Rapid. It is a part of the community that is prominently featured on your website but not mentioned directly that I could find in your plan. I'm talking about the arts and creative industry.

The arts are the way we as a community celebrate, mourn, and tell our stories. It brings our many unique cultures together in a way nothing else can, and the arts truly build community. But beyond that, they are an economic driver. The non-profits art industry alone in the Black Hills generates over \$115,000,000 in annual economic activity and employs over 3,500 FTE jobs. As you look to generate new capital investments in Rapid, you will benefit from having a healthy creative community. What is one of the top three qualities high paying industries are looking for in new, professional-level employees? It is creative problem-solving. The arts provide and nurture a culture of creative problem-solving.

I may have missed it, but I did not see anything directly related to growing an active arts and creative sector in your strategic plan (aside from a brief mention of the STEAM education concept). I encourage you to give this critical element

to sound economic and community building strong consideration as you move forward. Invite the arts community to have a "seat at your table" and look to the creatives in your community to help with creative problem-solving. You are fortunate to have a city rich in creative culture ready to join conversations as to how the arts can be a significant force in economic development.

Although I live in Sioux Falls, Rapid City and the Black Hills will always be home. If there is anything I can do to be of assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me. Again, congrats on a vision based on a partnership for the future of Rapid City. Thank you for the work you are doing for my hometown.

Best Regards,

Jim Speirs
Executive Director

Cc. Rapid City Mayor Allender