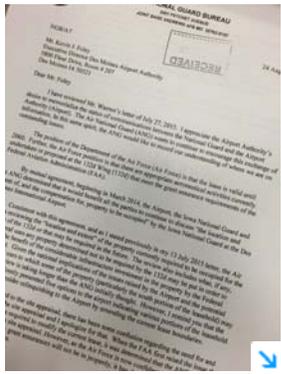


National Guard declines to negotiate new airport lease



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3:55 p.m. CDT September 8, 2015



(Photo: Register photo)

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The Air National Guard won't doesn't plan to obtain an appraisal needed to renegotiate a lease with the Des Moines International Airport, an Air Force official said in an Aug. 24 letter to airport officials.

The letter marks the latest volley in a debate between Iowa's largest airport and the National Guard over how much the Iowa Air National Guard should pay for its lease. The National Guard currently leases 172 acres at the Des Moines airport for \$1 a year.

The fight stems from the Pentagon's decision in 2012 to eliminate F-16 fighter jets stationed at the Des Moines airport. To receive Federal Aviation Administration grants, the airport is required to charge a fair market rent to all airfield tenants, except military units with an aeronautical mission. Based on the rent of other tenants, airport officials say the National Guard base is worth about \$5 million a year.

At the heart of the debate is whether the National Guard unit's new mission — which includes remotely piloting unmanned aircraft, surveillance and cyber-security — qualifies as an aeronautical mission.

But National Guard officials say that point is now moot. The Iowa Army National Guard recently received approval from the Secretary of the Air Force to move 10 Black Hawk helicopters from Boone to the Des Moines airport.



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"There is no question that is an aeronautical mission," said Col. Greg Hapgood, a spokesman for the Iowa National Guard.

Currently, there are two Black Hawk helicopters and two fixed-wing military airplanes stationed at the airport, Hapgood said. Eight more helicopters will be moved to the airport pending an environmental study.

The airport had asked the National Guard to conduct an appraisal of its base to determine a fair rental rate and decide how much the land it could give up now that it is no longer flying fighter jets.

The letter from Col. Michael McDonald, director of installations and missions support for the United States Air Force, to Kevin Foley, executive director of the Des Moines International Airport, said the Air Force would do neither.

"The position of the Department of the Air Force (Air Force) is that the lease is valid until 2060. Further, the Air Force position is that there are appropriate aeronautical activities currently undertaken or proposed at the 132nd Fighter Wing (132d) that meet the grant assurance requirements of the federal aviation administration (FAA),"

