

Spotlight: REPI + Communities

School, Sports Center, and Business Park Protect Compatibility and Enrich Community in South Dakota

When it comes to neighbors, Ellsworth Air Force Base (AFB) won the jackpot. Located in western South Dakota between Rapid City and the City of Box Elder, Ellsworth AFB benefits from the support of a state, county, and local community that are invested in the installation's long-term mission viability. But together, the installation and its REPI partners are ensuring the benefits flow both ways.

The warm relationship between Ellsworth and the surrounding community owes a lot to the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority (SDEDA), which the State Legislature created in 2009. SDEDA's mission is to work as a liaison between local governments, businesses, citizens, and the installation in order to protect community needs, Ellsworth AFB's current mission capacity, and the installation's future growth potential. This charge has resulted in a number of efforts improving the quality of life for civilians and military families within the Ellsworth community.

The 28th Bomb Wing, one of only two B-1B Lancer bomber wings in the world, operates out of Ellsworth's single runway. In addition to providing access to nine million acres of training airspace, the runway supports regular overseas missions. Because of Ellsworth's specialized mission, the runway and installation are uniquely vulnerable to incompatible development. While one end of the runway is compatible ranchland, the other end stretches close to the City of Box Elder.

Therefore, SDEDA, Ellsworth AFB, Box Elder, country governments and a local foundation stepped in to protect the installation in a fashion that also enriches the town. In exchange for land within the installation's Accident Potential Zone (APZ), Ellsworth AFB donated a large parcel outside of the main base and APZ to SDEDA, which then acquired adjacent lands using state funds. SDEDA transferred the nearly 60-acre donation to the local school district, which built a new K-5 elementary school on the property. The school is now in the middle of its second year of operation, and together with the South Dakota National Guard, the school district runs a program to

introduce elementary children to science, planes, and space, with special field trips to Ellsworth AFB.

Now, SDEDA is working with the town to design and build a sports complex that will develop the remaining land donated by Ellsworth.

Local sports teams are helping fundraising efforts for the facility, which will feature a baseball diamond, soccer fields, and a football field with artificial turf. At the same time, SDEDA is also working with a developer to further protect the base and grow the local economy by creating a “certified ready” business park next to the sports complex. Local government is coordinating with SDEDA to ensure appropriate zoning for the park, and SDEDA is in the process of actively recruiting businesses. While adding economic and social value to the community, the school, sports complex, and business park ensure a long-term solution to the installation’s concerns of incompatible development inhibiting mission flexibility and future encroachment.

Executive Director Scott Landguth summed up his team’s efforts over the last half a decade: “The Authority is very motivated to work on projects that impact the community around the base, specifically if our efforts can improve the quality of life for the local community and our children.”