

STATE OF THE CITY SPEECH

“Rockford Rising”

INTRODUCTION

Good evening. City Alderman, elected officials, city commission and committee members, city employees, partner agencies, community leaders, and citizens of Rockford, It is my honor and privilege to present to you the State of our City, Rockford, Illinois.

COMMUNITY VISION: “EXCELLENCE EVERYWHERE”

Last April 5th, there was a call to action from this community to bring about rapid and positive change for Rockford, Illinois. Our community called for a renewed commitment, focus, and action to improve our schools, reduce crime, and make the core investment in the 4 Rs: roads, rail, river, and the fiber optic ring. This reflects our broader city-wide vision of “excellence everywhere.” The community asked us to raise the bar on standards to achieve excellence, and I am proud to stand before you tonight and tell you that the State of our City is Rising. *Ladies and Gentlemen, Rockford is Rising!*

“Excellence Everywhere” is the vision for our community. It stands for a commitment to the exceptional, instead of the mediocre, and a commitment to achieving high standards throughout the community, instead of accepting a city of those who “have” and those who “have not”—those who live on a “good side of town” versus a “bad side of town.” If we are committed to this vision of excellence everywhere, then every side of town must be the good side, and we must come to expect that excellence is the standard for every place and everyone.

While this vision may be easier said than done, it is a vision that must be spoken, believed, acted upon, and emulated every day, in order to be achieved.

Tonight, we will discuss the importance of adopting Excellence Everywhere as our vision for the future, the challenges to achieving this vision, and the strategies and successes over the past year to move us toward this vision.

A community that exhibits excellence everywhere is one that holds itself accountable for its failures, as well as its successes. We will assess several fundamental areas where cities compete: Public Safety, Education, Infrastructure, and Economic Development.

We will detail strategies and objectives to improve in each of these areas. We will also describe how we are building a City organization and community based upon customer service, accountability and common goals.

Finally, we will also look to the immediate opportunities we must embrace as a community to move toward this vision.

GLOBAL COMPETITIVE ISSUES:

WHY WE MUST EMBRACE EXCELLENCE EVERYWHERE

First off, one might ask, why is the pursuit of Excellence Everywhere so important to Rockford's survival in today's marketplace?

In today's world, cities are competing just like companies. If we are not competitive, we will lose to those cities that are more attractive for economic investment, more attractive for education, and more attractive for quality of life .

And while our community seems to have a general sense that we need to move forward and do better, there are myths and misunderstandings about how we should do this.

Some still think that all Rockford needs is good-paying, secure jobs with benefits that require limited skill. Unfortunately these jobs just don't exist anymore. Not in Rockford; not on Earth!

Author Thomas Friedman has described the changed world in his best-selling book, "The World is Flat." Friedman's thesis is that the world has been flattened by innovation, technology and numerous global-political changes.

As we know all too well in Rockford, the result has been jobs lost through outsourcing, technology, corporate consolidation, and global productivity gains.

Americans living in this "flattened" world can no longer depend on a birth-right to a superior standard of living. If we want better jobs, we must improve our skills!

To begin, we must embrace Excellence Everywhere for Everyone. This means community improvement at every level: education, public safety, and core infrastructure.

PUBLIC SAFETY, PUBLIC HOUSING, & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Public Safety

Police and fire protection are essential for maintaining healthy neighborhoods and businesses, as well as for attracting new growth and economic opportunity. Our police and fire departments are doing their best. They put their lives at risk on a daily basis so that your business, your family, and your children are safe. I am proud of these brave men and women.

Yet, we must face the fact that Rockford has been a perennial leader in the state crime rate. For 8 out of the last 10 years, Winnebago County has led the state in crime rate.

The Police Department can't do it alone. Cities that have been successful at reducing their crime rate have focused on community participation models.

Such efforts involve every city department, churches, schools, neighborhood groups, as well as businesses and community development agencies.

We must solve the root causes of crime and neighborhood decay, and address them aggressively before those conditions result in criminal acts. While communities with home rule have more tools to solve these problems, we have moved forward on this front with our existing resources.

With the support of City Council, we passed a daytime curfew ordinance and a littering ordinance, and just recently updated our garbage ordinance.

These are the types of problems we are working to eliminate. These are slides I took myself during ward tours with our aldermen. We have real problems, real disorder. This disorder discourages investment and encourages crime.

We each have a responsibility to make a difference. We stand firm with our commitment to excellence and no longer accept trash on our streets tossed by a thoughtless person. In our excellent City, we prize beauty and order, we encourage neighborhood clean ups, and we write citations for littering and vandalism.

It is possible to make a difference. When we focus on excellence, we can do great things. When Ruth Miller and the Park District Foundation came together to beautify Rockford last year, our City gained national recognition by winning the 2005 America in Bloom contest. Congratulations Rockford!

In 2005, we established a Zero Tolerance Policy for businesses and homes used for illegal drug activity, and whose premises were co-opted by criminals. We hold these businesses and homes responsible for the activities on their property.

“Weed and Seed” has been a successful program designed to “weed out” problems in a targeted neighborhood and “seed in” new opportunity.

Rockford had talked about Weed and Seed for years and it was suggested to me that we couldn’t start a weed and seed program because we hadn’t received a federal grant.

Well, we did it anyway. In 2005 we established our first “weed and seed” targeted enforcement zone with the partnership of the Winnebago County States Attorney, the Winnebago Health Department, and the leadership of Chairman Christiansen. The results are very promising.

This year, we will expand our community policing strategies, including weed and seed enforcement areas, throughout the City, with or without the federal government’s help!

For the first time in five years, and with an additional six officers approved in the 2006 budget, the Rockford Police Department will be at full strength in June!

In 2005, we also negotiated a new contract between the City and the County for 911 Emergency Services and worked with the County to put additional manpower on city streets during weekends. The 911 center will be fully renovated by the end of this year.

The City Council also appointed a new Fire & Police Commission that has recommended a new Police Chief, who has extensive experience in community policing. I look forward to working with the new Chief and Police Department on establishing community policing goals and objectives for a safer Rockford.

Public Housing

Our commitment to excellence also leads us to the conclusion that our public housing strategy has failed us. Like other cities across the country, we must tear down

failed housing projects and build up hope and high standards, with Excellence Everywhere.

Several years ago, the Jane Addams Housing complex was studied as a possible federal Hope VI project. Well, whether we get those funds or not, that complex as well as Fairgrounds and Concord Commons must be torn down. Our people deserve better housing options. Let's build neighborhoods, not projects!

I support the RHA's continued efforts to improve safety. In 2005, each of the RHA family developments were outfitted with cameras to reduce crime. More than 70% of the crimes committed at RHA are by non-residents. I applaud RHA's efforts to hold itself and its tenants accountable for reducing crime and improving standards.

RHA provides permanent housing for some of our most vulnerable population: the elderly and the handicapped. For everyone else, public housing should be temporary and not lifetime housing. I support the RHA's effort to offer pathways for independent living.

We will reduce crime in Rockford, not only through an improved Criminal Justice Center and more police, but by attacking poverty and lost opportunity. We are changing our approach to both the physical and human aspects of our community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Rockford is Rising!

EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING, AND THE TRUANCY CRISIS

The surest way to reduce crime and improve community health is to improve the educational attainment of our community. As go our schools, so goes Rockford!

A 2005 Report on Illinois poverty put Winnebago County on the poverty warning list, one of 14 counties to receive this unenviable distinction. The report states that counties on the list must take corrective action.

Currently, we are lagging behind the competition in educational attainment. Overall student performance for District 205 falls well below State of Illinois averages.

Our community's percentage of population with a bachelor's degree or higher is well below national averages.

In addition, our economic shift from manufacturing to services has contributed to a significant decline in per capita income. This growing disparity of household income has created geographic inequities in our community.

The Mayor's Office has a critical role in coordinating and improving this community's resources and approach to lifelong learning.

The City has created a new position within the Mayor's Office, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning. He will work with our public and private sector educational partners to coordinate Rockford's educational assets, to develop a strategic plan, and to communicate City policy on issues like truancy, vocational training, and job training.

This evening, for the first time, I am pleased to announce that Adam Smith, formerly of Rock Valley College, has been hired to fill this important position. Adam, please stand up and be recognized. Welcome aboard, Adam.

Truancy is at a crisis level in Rockford. With a truancy rate of four times the State average, Not only are our children hurt, but District 205 loses more than \$6.5 million in annual State aid.

Prior to my election, I said that the City must get involved and we have. In 2005, City Council passed a daytime curfew to encourage our children to be in school, to highlight education as a very high priority, and to send the message that we will not tolerate truancy.

I thank Aldermen Mark and Jacobson and Beach for their leadership in introducing and passing that legislation, and also Superintendent Thompson and the District 205 Board, the United Way, YWCA, Chief Judge Zenoff and Judge Heaslip for embracing the Abolish Chronic Truancy plan.

We are pleased to report that our Abolish Chronic Truancy plan is working. Over 225 children have been helped. Tonight I want to recognize one of them, Ryan Verneti. After a difficult time at a few of our high schools, he had all but dropped out. While no one likes being arrested, Ryan credits his brush with the law as the turning point in his life. He is in class, getting good grades, and on his way to graduation. Ryan Verneti is here with his mother and grandmother. We support you Ryan, please stand.

We are devoting resources to early childhood educational programs to respond to ever-increasing levels of children living in poverty. With rising need, the City has obtained \$900,000 in federal funding under a competitive grant process for the Rockford Early Learning Project that brings coaching for teachers, book drives, family literacy events, and backpacks of books and supplies to more than 5,000 3-and 4-year-olds in the city.

I am also a proponent of neighborhood schools, or zone schools. In order to support excellent schools filled with great teachers, we need excellent neighborhoods.

The City of Rockford must be a strong partner in achieving this result.

We want District 205 to move forward in confidence with a new student assignment plan. Excellence Everywhere means that no neighborhood will be left behind!

In addition, we must be open to alternatives such as flexible education networks, vocational training, and charter schools. For their leadership and collaboration with the City on fostering flexible education networks, I want to thank the partner members of the Higher Education Alliance, Doctors Jack Becherer of Rock Valley College, John Peters of NIU, Paul Pribbenow of Rockford College, Martin Lipsky of the University of Illinois College of Medicine.

We are working closely with educational institutions, the Workforce Investment Board, the manufacturing community, the Rockford Chamber of Commerce, and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council to help educators better understand the needs of the business community.

For the first time, District 205 teachers visited several manufacturing plants in Rockford to see first hand the skills needed in the modern manufacturing environment.

We all know that reversing the negative trends I cited a moment ago will not be easy. But this goal must be widely adopted and it must be achieved. Our educational initiatives are making an impact! At the end of the day, we must settle for nothing less than excellence everywhere in education and lifelong learning in Rockford. Our future prosperity depends upon our success.

In raising educational standards, we raise Rockford.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Rockford is Rising.

INFRASTRUCTURE, URBAN PLANNING, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Decades of urban sprawl development threatens the unity of our city. While we have seen a 72% increase in area since 1970, our population has only grown by 3%. Urban sprawl has placed a tremendous strain on our infrastructure and older neighborhoods leading to urban decay with more abandoned and boarded-up homes.

Some of the infrastructure investments are very basic and some more innovative. I speak of the 4 Rs: Roads, Rail, River, and Ring.

The First “R”: Roads. During 2005, we had some significant successes toward our physical infrastructure goals. We successfully worked with Senators Obama and Durbin and Congressman Manzullo to secure over \$13.2 million in federal highway funds for West State Street and South Main Street. We obtained a competitive state grant for \$2 million to relocate and widen Springfield Avenue, completing a major transportation link of the regional beltway system.

City Council has also approved a comprehensive road capital plan for 2006 which will fix many miles of arterial streets and hundreds of blocks of neighborhood streets. The City’s capital plan leverages over \$15 million in federal funds to fix dilapidated roads like Harrison Avenue and deteriorated bridges such as the Horace Avenue, Kishwaukee Street, and Harrison Avenue bridges. That plan depends upon successfully passing the 1% sales tax capital project referendum on March 21st.

The City is accountable and responsible for improving its roadways. The State of Illinois must do the same. This past Fall, we were successful in lobbying for an additional \$20 million more in state highway funds within Rockford, for a total of approximately \$120 million for the Rockford region. Unfortunately, the State can’t agree on a capital plan. Meanwhile, Rockford residents and businesses suffer with crumbling State highways. I urge you to call your state elected officials to do what it takes to pass a capital bonding bill NOW!

We are working to ensure that transportation planning will be coordinated with zoning, land-use, and economic development on a regional basis. For the first time, our Metropolitan Planning Organization known as the Rockford Area Transportation Study (or RATS), will be joined at the technical level by the Rockford Area Economic Development Council and the Rock River Reclamation District, our Sanitary Sewer District. This is a huge step and another example of a collaborative effort amongst the City, the County, and our RATS partner agencies to improve the planning processes for the region.

Our City Council also just approved a contract for the first significant re-write of our zoning code in 30 years. The re-write of our zoning code will help us to meet our goals of being a city where:

- Barriers to infill, mixed-use and adaptive reuse development are removed.
- Flexible and various housing options exist.
- Multiple transportation options are available through transit-related development and walkable neighborhood design. The auto should be a luxury if not a necessity for our residents.
- Common-sense design standards promote beautification and economic development; and
- We create a sense of place for our business and residential neighborhoods, streets, and boulevards .

The Second “R”: Rail. We worked with our congressional delegation to secure \$2.4 million in federal transit funds to conduct alternatives analysis and preliminary engineering to extend commuter rail service from Elgin to Rockford.

We must continue to develop both regional and local strategies for mass transit that involve rail, bus, biking, and walking. Most importantly, we must connect both physically and psychologically to Chicago and the world.

Why does Mayor Daley want the Olympics to come to Chicago? International recognition? Definitely. Economic infusion? Absolutely. But the real win with a 2016 Olympics is the chance to develop a world-class infrastructure that enables a city not only to compete for an Olympics, but also to compete every day. The opportunity is to build a world-class rail infrastructure where Chicago is a hub connecting cities like Rockford, South Bend and Champaign-Urbana.

We must partner with Chicago to do this and we must make sure our own Illinois Department of Transportation puts us in their planning future.

This was never more evident than when I recently spoke at the Midwest High Speed Rail Association Annual Meeting and was handed this IDOT map you are now viewing . Notice something missing? How about Rockford and pretty much all of Northwest Illinois? We still have a lot of grass-roots lobbying to do to get our State to take Rockford rail development seriously.

The Third “R”: River. Our commitment to Excellence Everywhere is also a commitment to excellence for everyone. Unfortunately, our riverfront and our roadways have historically resulted in a physical divide, a segregation of cultures and ethnic groups in Rockford. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, it exists and we must acknowledge it.

The very river and roads that divided us can be redesigned and redeveloped to bring us together. Our riverfront can be the place where everyone comes together to share in our greatest natural asset: our river.

We must tie together, through a public riverwalk, places like our museum campus, public library, Davis Park, and the Coronado Theatre; and we must work with private developers to create new residential and retail development, restaurants, and a new Olympic-quality whitewater park.

In 2005, we took the first step by establishing a coalition with the Rockford Park District and Winnebago County to develop a comprehensive riverwalk plan. The goal is to create public access along much of our downtown riverfront and to be a catalyst for private investment and economic development to our downtown waterfront. The coalition has already applied for \$4.5 million in grant funds from the State of Illinois to build the first phase of the project.

Our staff has also met with many developers regarding downtown properties, many by the MetroCentre and the new Federal Court House. Thank you Congressman Manzullo and Senator Durbin for your tireless efforts on this project.

In the coming months, we will bring forth a financial plan for the redevelopment of the MetroCentre. Based on substantial public investments in efforts like our Riverwalk, better and more logical roads downtown, investment in a new Federal Court House, a new Criminal Justice Center, and MetroCentre, the coming months should bring many exciting announcements regarding private development projects downtown.

As we redevelop our riverfront and downtown, we can create the connections for our community that bring us together both physically and psychologically.

The 4th “R”: Ring. We continue to support broadband fiber optic deployment as a critical part of our long-term infrastructure. Communities that offer the fastest broadband connections at the cheapest prices will have a distinct economic development advantage.

In 2005, the City Council approved hiring NIU’s Broadband Development Group to help develop a strategic master plan for broadband deployment throughout our city. This master plan will be coordinated with other local and regional municipal organizations as well as private partners, including the Northern Illinois Technology Triangle, an initiative to connect our community with communities along Interstate 90, Interstate 88, and Interstate 39 with broadband technology.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Rockford is Rising!

JOB CREATION, TECHNOLOGY, TOURISM & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The first half-decade of the new millennium has been tough on Rockford. We had a decline in jobs that has created unemployment that is higher than state and national averages. The changes in the global economy have certainly highlighted our local economic vulnerability. To reverse these trends, we must have a constant focus on the fundamentals we have discussed this evening: good schools, safe neighborhoods, and great infrastructure.

For Rockford to compete, we must also remember the fundamental principles upon which this City was built: innovation, commercialization, and entrepreneurship.

The gains this City made historically were a direct result of entrepreneurs who developed from scratch or commercialized various technologies and innovations that were the backbone of our economy. Jobs were created from these efforts. The same is true today.

Broadband technology has enabled “flexible networks” of individual small businesses to work together to get larger jobs done. Locally, the Manufacturing Alliance of the Rock River Valley, or MARVV, has been a state leader in this area. We support this effort as it focuses on local businesses working together to create competitive solutions.

The EIGERlab is another great example of current research that can help us stay ahead of the field in areas of manufacturing research and commercialization. We thank local visionaries like Jon Lundin of the Abilities Center and Congressman Manzullo who has pushed for federal funding for these research efforts. We also thank our Governor and State representatives for their funding assistance.

Thus, despite our economic struggles, there have been many positive signs for our region's economy due to our investments in physical and human capital:

On the industrial front:

1. Last year, Rockford was selected in a multi-state search over three other communities for the Lowe's Regional Distribution Center. This \$100 million construction project has brought in hundreds of new construction jobs and will bring 750 permanent, living-wage jobs with benefits, as well as millions of dollars in direct and indirect investment.

Thank you to Chairman Christiansen, the Winnebago County Board, all the property-taxing bodies and the State of Illinois for their help in the the incentive package. We won by working together.

2. One of the most important economic development investments ever made in this City was the City Council's decision in 2005 to embark on a historic upgrade to the City's water system. The decision to invest \$75 million to upgrade our drinking water quality and system reliability will be a major catalyst for investment throughout all of Rockford.
3. In 2005, we also secured a new heavy freight distribution center at the UPS freight hub in Rockford's Global TradePark, creating 60 new jobs.
4. Anderson Packaging has also announced plans to build a 3rd facility in the Global TradePark which will eventually add 200 new jobs to the 1200 existing jobs.

5. In 2005, we also established an industrial jobs recovery tax incentives area in the Kishwaukee-Harrison corridor to remove blight and redevelop these older industrial corridors. The first project has been completed, the expansion of an existing manufacturer, Bourn & Koch. Their president, Tim Helle, joins us tonight, and I thank him for investing in Rockford's future.

We are also taking steps to improve the economic opportunities for our minority and disadvantaged business owners:

- In 2005, I established a volunteer group of community members to be part of the Mayor's Advisory Council on Minority Issues. They will provide assistance to our City Council and me as we develop policies and strategies on minority and diversity issues, including minority job creation, business development, and contract procurement.
- A major goal in 2006 will be to implement legislation for more minority inclusion in the city's procurement policies for goods and services. I thank Alderman Thompson for her leadership and extensive work in developing, with other community members and support from City staff, a draft of this policy.
- This policy is now being reviewed at the committee level of City Council and I look forward to signing into law a final version of that policy in the near future.

Tourism, Entertainment, and Quality of Life

It is important to remember the message of Rebecca Ryan of Next Generation Consulting who said, as keynote speaker at the annual meeting of our local Economic Development Council, the name of the game today for cities is, "Live First, Work Second." A high quality of life is just as important as our access to supply chains and information. We must have all the tools necessary to incubate and attract talent to our city. The talent must be able to learn here, work here, live here, and play here.

Our tourism industry is important not only for jobs in the visitor industry, but to give us the look and feel of a community that can recruit talent for many other jobs.

And we have a great opportunity in this area due to Rockford's rich history of ethnic and cultural diversity. This offers us a variety of ethnic neighborhoods with retail businesses, restaurants and entertainment offerings. The City's strategy is to enhance and market those areas, and that is why we have hired a new Director of Tourism, Culture, and Special Events, Cyndie Hall.

Our tourism and cultural assets are many, and we are working closely with those partners to enhance them. I want to thank outgoing visitor's bureau CEO, Wendy Fisher, for her many years of leadership, vision, and creativity in boosting tourism in Rockford.

Other tourism and quality of life highlights for 2005 included:

- The development of a new governance model for the Coronado Theatre plus a new 10-year business plan. I thank the City Council, and specifically Alderman Doug Mark, for leadership in moving in this direction.
- Better fiscal management and direction for the MetroCentre.
- Outstanding expansion plans at the Riverfront Museum Campus, with the re-birth of Jane the dinosaur at Burpee Museum and one of the best children's museums in the country, Discovery Center.
- Expansion of Anderson Japanese Gardens
- The Rockford Park District recently unveiled plans for a new Conservatory and Botanic Garden for their centennial anniversary.

- And construction has started on a new 45,000 square foot indoor water park with extensive renovations to the Clock Tower Resort, a \$27 million project.

These investments are all things that help enhance our quality of life for ourselves and our visitors.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Rockford is Rising!

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS & CUSTOMER SERVICE

It is my pleasure to be the leader of the professional organization known as the City of Rockford. Citizens should know that our organization is filled with talented and committed public servants.

One event exemplifies extraordinary effort by City employees and shows our capacity to come together in a time of crisis or need. When we welcomed evacuees from the gulf coast into our community during the Hurricane Katrina crisis, many partners worked together to help make them feel at home. In fact, some of those visitors now live here and have joined us here tonight. Please stand and be recognized as new residents of Rockford. Welcome.

The outstanding effort during the Katrina crisis demonstrates our commitment to excellence. The key to achieving this type of excellence every day, however, is to make sure we have a management strategy to get it done all the time and not just at a time of crisis. We should be prepared for visitors every day.

I found out early in my administration, however, that day-to-day customer service was an area in need of major focus and improvement.

One day I called my own office; the phone rang 30 times, and when I received an answer from our frantic receptionist, I was asked to “hold”. I did. And when I received a

response, I was told that the lines had been blocked solid all morning. That's when I found out that all general information calls to the City had historically been routed to the Mayor's office.

And when no one answered a direct call to another department, then those calls were also routed to the Mayor's office.

The bottom line: we need major improvement in customer service tools and training.

Every Alderman and every citizen, should be able to get regular reports on the health and status of their ward or neighborhood. Such reports cannot be created today in a timely fashion. We lose the value of such information by not having a systematic approach to collect the data, deploy resources where necessary, and learn from observable patterns.

Our path toward customer service improvement and overall day-to-day excellence starts by articulating a focus of organizational attitude at the City: a core set of organizational values to guide our efforts. When staff at the City wants to know where the Mayor is coming from, they should always be able to point back to these guiding values:

I have discussed these values with our Department Directors and our leaders in organized labor groups, and I am unveiling them to the rest of our staff and the general public for the first time this evening. The core organizational values are:

Accountability to ourselves and each other, across departments and across the community;

Customer Focused on achieving results for the businesses and residents that make up our community;

Team Driven with respect and support for each other;

Innovative and Open to ideas and communication within and across departments
and across the community;

Never give up! Our people will be resilient and commit to solving problems and
providing solutions for our people.

Together these values will lead to A.C.T.I.O.N.

With these core values to guide us, we will improve customer service by working
with management and labor to invest in better strategies and better tools for taking and
tracking customer service requests. We will learn from those requests to better manage
our resources.

Cities like New York and Chicago have been moving in this direction for the last
several years. Baltimore has developed the most comprehensive, measurement-based
approach to City customer service known as “CitiStat.”

CitiStat expanded on the accountability approach used to revolutionize the New
York City Police Department by applying those accountability and measurement
approaches throughout their city organization. This has helped Baltimore have consistent
and dramatic improvements in customer service and productivity.

In Rockford, we will emulate these best practices through our own program which
will be known as “ROCKSTAT.” This program will enable us to move beyond guess
work and management by anecdote and will transform our organization into a modern,
corporate environment driven by measurable data.

Our City Council took the first step on this path toward continuous improvement
by approving a budget to purchase a comprehensive customer service request system. It
will be the back-end data management tool for our ROCKSTAT system. The system will
be implemented over the course of this year.

ROCKSTAT numbers will be pulled from Neighborhood Accountability Zones, which will be one of the driving forces of the ROCKSTAT effort. These zones will have boundaries that mirror police patrol zones, as well as property standards improvement zones. The boundaries will be consistent so that we can compare numerous socioeconomic health indicators and benchmark and drive towards improvement and excellence in every zone of the City.

By creating these Neighborhood Accountability Zones, we will gather data based upon real-time crime data, neighborhood property standards data, and citizen request for service data. By understanding the data, we will be able to respond to neighborhood redevelopment in a meaningful and thoughtful way.

Simultaneously, we will engage in comprehensive process improvement efforts. We will invest in tools and training to track projects and permit approvals across departments. And we will reduce the time for permits and approvals across departments, resulting in more consistent service for our customers.

Management by anecdote is over, and management by data and results has begun.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Rockford is Rising!

CALL TO ACTION: SALES TAX PROPOSAL

During recent City Council hearings on the 2006 budget, it became abundantly clear that the City's past practices for paying for roads and other infrastructure improvements had hit a dead end.

Our citizens have voluntarily agreed, year after year, to raise their own City taxes to fund road improvements. We have also continued to require the purchase of a City vehicle sticker for the privilege of driving on our local roads.

In doing so, we have raised our local municipal property tax rate to one of the very highest in the State while folks who live near Rockford, but out of town, who still drive on our roads, pay none of those taxes.

Well, that's the bad news. The good news is that the Council unanimously agreed to put on the ballot this Spring a proposal to fund capital investment in our businesses and neighborhoods without raising property taxes anymore.

The proposal is to pay for capital improvements through a 1% sales tax, so we can invest in infrastructure without increasing our City's property tax rate.

For the first time, the burden of paying for infrastructure would be supported in part by non-residents who shop in Rockford. Approximately 35% of sales revenues we receive comes from outside Rockford.

The 1% proposal would decrease the City property tax rate by 20% by 2016, restoring the Rockford city property tax rate back to 1985 levels.

This proposal would also allow us to eliminate the vehicle sticker starting in 2007.

And the bottom line is that we would get an additional \$3 million for infrastructure projects while City taxpayers, as a group, would pay an estimated \$1 million less each year to 2016 than what we currently pay.

This 1% sales tax would not apply to groceries, prescription and non-prescription drugs, or titled vehicles such as automobiles and motorcycles.

We want to join those other successful communities who recognize that a higher sales tax that is partially paid for by non-residents helps hold the line on property tax increases, and allows them to invest in their infrastructure and be a progressive city.

I urge your support of this 1% capital proposal on March 21st. We have delivered on our promise to build projects with your tax dollar in past road referendums, and we hope that you will continue to recognize the importance of this infrastructure investment in your community.

CONCLUSION

In closing this evening, let me thank you for the trust you have given me as Mayor. I will honor that trust as we honor the proud legacy our predecessors bestowed upon this community.

You see, ours is not the first Rockford generation to demand excellence everywhere. Ours is not the first generation to seek a rising Rockford.

Rockford is not a City that loses. Rockford is a City that wins.

Excellence is in our community DNA. It's part of all of us. We are reawakening that spirit today and giving it new life.

Our quest for excellence will not be easy in this fast-moving, "flat" new world. But the truth is that it is never easy to achieve excellence; but our pursuit of excellence should not be a miserable experience.

As the President of Southwest Airlines said, "work is either fun or drudgery. It depends on your attitude. I like fun."

And it's a lot more fun when you're winning and not losing!

I am confident that this community is ready to do what it takes to succeed. We are ready to win.

Trust this vision of excellence. Let's make it our life's work.

Trust our greatest gift – which is each other.

We will save ourselves,

. . . as we move forward with faith, not fear; hope, not despair; and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

My friends, Rockford is Rising!

May God bless us on our journey, and may God bless the City of Rockford.