

PLAN ELEMENT IX: NATURAL RESOURCES

Primary objectives of our efforts to protect the natural environment are to safeguard and improve environmental features as a means of promoting sustainable urban development, revitalization and quality of life. High priority is given to protecting our water, both surface and ground water. Other facets of concern are protection of floodways and floodplains, redevelopment and reuse of Rockford's brownfields, protection of mature trees, maintenance of required landscaping, and protection of our riverfronts and greenways.

Protection of the natural environment is clearly important to local citizens. In a poll carried out by Health Systems Research at the University of Illinois College of Medicine/Rockford on behalf of Rock River Valley Green Communities, nearly 9 out of 10 respondents (89%) stated that they were concerned about the environment. This figure includes the 36% who were very concerned and the 53% who were somewhat concerned. When asked to rate how the area's environmental quality has changed over the past 10 years, responses were fairly evenly divided between those believing it is better (27%), the same (29%) and worse (30%). Other results of the survey:

- ▶ Three out of four residents favor preserving open space.
- ▶ Only 25% agreed with the statement that land owners should be allowed to use their land however they want. Nearly half (46%) disagreed with the statement.
- ▶ There was strong agreement that development should occur in areas with access to public utilities (85%) and that vacant city land be used before extending development into the countryside (83%).
- ▶ Nearly 75% of respondents supported requiring impact fees for new development to finance schools and parks.
- ▶ Nearly 7 out of 10 respondents (69%) agreed that revitalizing downtown business districts, existing commercial corridors and residential neighborhoods should be a priority of public investment.
- ▶ Opinion was fairly evenly divided on the use of public funds to beautify roads entering urban areas — 37% agreed with the idea, 24% disagreed and 38% had no opinion one way or the other.

Proposals included in the Plan address most of these concerns. However, it may be necessary for the City to broaden its approach to the natural environment to ensure that it receives true protection. For this to be most effective, it will need to be done at least on an urban area basis rather than simply within Rockford's corporate limits. The process should include a comprehensive inventory and analysis of natural resources in the area, a determination of how best to provide long-term protection for various categories of resources (e.g., wetlands and floodplains), development of a regional framework for achieving such protection, and adoption of regulations and policies to be implemented regionally.

Groundwater Protection and Stormwater Management

For the first time, the Plan map shows wellhead protection areas around each of the City's water wells. These are in turn tied to provisions of Rockford's Zoning Ordinance which strictly regulates the types of uses that can be built within these areas. This combined with the requirement for any new development in the City or its extraterritorial area to have full urban improvements, including sanitary sewer, should aid in protecting our ground water supply.

Another aspect of protecting our water supply revolves around the issue of stormwater management. Although Rockford has enacted and enforces a flood detention ordinance, it is largely inadequate when dealing with macro stormwater management and quality. Requiring each new development to provide for detention on a piecemeal basis does not adequately address the larger stormwater management needs for various basins. The Department of Public Works has specifically identified the northeast and southeast as areas where further stormwater management plans need to be developed to identify better stormwater management facilities and best practices. As these plans are developed over the next 5 to 7 years, they should be adopted as amendments to this 2020 Plan as an integral part of the City of Rockford's

20% to 30% more than similarly sized lots without trees, and that mature trees saved during development add more value to a lot than new landscaping added after construction. A similar type of argument can be made for street trees, i.e., their importance lies not only with their impact on noise and air quality, but also from their role as the community's primary public space. Strong, mature street trees help to identify Rockford as the kind of place people want to be.



The City of Rockford has already taken an important first step in protecting mature trees through the landscaping, buffering and tree preservation chapter in its Zoning Ordinance (Section 1400). However, these provisions apply primarily to parking lots and open sales lots, outside storage lots and the like. The City should investigate broadening the scope of this ordinance to include mandatory protection of healthy, mature trees regardless of the type of development or

whether there are paved parking or storage areas or not. At the same time, the City needs to ensure adequate staffing to enforce these provisions of the ordinance. Such ordinances are becoming more common across the country as more communities realize the importance both environmentally and aesthetically of protecting mature trees and landscaping.



Protecting mature landscaping and trees is only part of what needs to be done. A second step would be not only to require that certain types of landscaping be installed in certain situations, but that it be maintained to a certain standard over time as well. If the effects of lack of maintenance could be limited to the property directly involved, this issue would not be so important. However, failure of one property owner to maintain required landscaping not only flies against the intent of the ordinance that required it in the first place, it also has a negative impact on neighboring properties. In those cases where the property is on a major thoroughfare such as State Street, it can affect how travelers coming into Rockford view the community as a whole. In other words, it's not just concern for the environment or for aesthetics, it's also economics that point to the need for better maintenance of landscaping. Existing ordinances should be amended to include as part of the approval process submission of a long-term maintenance plan for any required landscaping, including litter and debris cleanup, and replacement of all dead plant material covered by the agreement. Then we need to make sure we have the resources to (a) comply with them on municipal sites and (b) enforce these ordinances throughout the community.

Natural Resources Implementation Matrix

Goal	Objective	Action	Who	When	
Safeguard and improve environmental features as a means of promoting sustainable urban development, revitalization and quality of life in Rockford.	Protect our groundwater supply.	Continue enforcement of the Minimum Wellhead Setback provisions of the Rockford Zoning Ordinance.	Zoning staff; City Council	Ongoing	
		Continue to require all new development to hook up to sanitary sewer and City water.	City staff (Community Development, Public Works, Legal); City Council	Ongoing	
		Ensure that all developed properties of 1/4 acre or less have access to sanitary sewer and City water by 2020	City staff (Public Works, Finance); City Council	10-15 years	
		Evaluate ways and means to provide stormwater management by basin; implement resulting proposals.	City staff (Public Works, Community Development, Legal); City Council	2-5 years	
	Protect our floodways and floodplains.		Work with WinGIS, its other partners and FEMA to redraw flood insurance maps for all of Winnebago County.	Public Works Dept; WinGIS; FEMA	2-5 years
			Do not allow development in floodways.	City staff (Public Works, Community Development)	Ongoing
			Plan for acquisition of areas designated "Public Acquisition" on the 2020 Plan in cooperation with other appropriate jurisdictions.	City staff (Community Development, Public Works, Legal); Rockford Park District	Ongoing
			Continue to enforce existing regulations in the 100-year floodplain.	City staff (Public Works, Community Development)	Ongoing
	Redevelop Rockford's brownfields.		Within the Superfund area:		
			Inventory and evaluate current and planned uses to establish a solid database to work	Community Development	1-2 years
			Develop a detailed plan for future development or redevelopment of the area with owner and resident input.	City staff (Community Development); Council of 100; public	1-3 years
			Continue to pursue innovative approaches to handle the liability and remediation issues.	Community Development	Ongoing

Natural Resources Implementation Matrix cont.

Goal	Objective	Action	Who	When
Safeguard and improve environmental features as a means of promoting sustainable urban development, revitalization and quality of life in Rockford. Cont.	Redevelop Rockford's brownfields. Cont.	Outside the Superfund area:		
		Identify brownfield sites of 2.5 acres or more; inventory current and planned uses.	Community Development	1-2 years
		Develop an action plan of what the City and other government bodies can and should do to alleviate the negatives; and what the private sector can do.	City staff (Community Development); Council of 100; public	2-3 years
		Implement resulting plan.	Determined by action plan.	3-10 years
		Develop an information program for owners of brownfield properties.	City staff (Community Development); Council of 100	1-2 years
		Review City codes to eliminate possible bottlenecks adversely affecting redevelopment of brownfield sites.	City staff (Community Development, Legal); City Council	2-3 years
	Protect mature trees and maintain required landscaping.	Broaden the scope of tree preservation requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.	Community Development; City Council	1-2 years
		Require long-term maintenance plans as part of submission process for required landscaping.	Community Development; City Council	1-2 years