



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE

### Introduction & Background

Economic development can mean different things to different people. Generally speaking, anything a community does to foster and create wealth through the development of a healthy economy can fall under the definition of economic development. From the public's perspective, local economic development may involve the allocation of local (limited) resources such as land, labor, capitol, and education in a way that has a positive effect on business activity, income distribution, employment, fiscal sustainability, and financial health. Economic development is a targeted approach implemented by the responsible governing bodies in a region to influence the direction of private sector investment towards those opportunities that can lead to sustained economic growth over time. It's important to note that economic development and community development are different. Community development is the planning process for making somewhere a better place to live and work. Economic development is based on the creation of wealth for which a community will see the benefits gained from increased economic activity.

### Workforce Characteristics

Understanding the socioeconomic characteristics of the community's residents is essential in planning for our region's future because it influences a wide range of topics, including land use, housing, transportation, education, and community infrastructure. Workforce characteristics in particular can have a large impact on a city's overall economic health. One of the key components in determining a city's economic health is the number of individuals with

in the labor force. The labor force is the sum of all employed and unemployed persons who are actively engaged in the workforce. The workforce, on the other hand, is the employed portion of the total labor force. The difference between the two indicates the unemployment rate and the overall quality of the local economy.

The City of Rockford, and its surrounding neighbors, have experienced periods of labor force loss and recovery over the past few decades that closely mimic national trends and population migration numbers. For instance, the overall population of individuals 16 years or older within the city decreased by 3.8 percent between 2010 and 2019. This decrease could explain recent declines in the city's labor force, which had a 2.9 percent reduction between 2010 and 2019. While the overall number of individuals in the labor force has decreased, the percentage of people in the labor force compared to the total population has remained stable, with 61.2 percent in 2010 compared to 61.7 percent in 2019.

*NOTE: Armed Forces (active duty) labor statistics account for where individuals live while enlisted*

Labor Force	2010		2019	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Civilian labor force	72,718	61%	70,665	62%
Armed Forces	49		25	
Not in labor force	46,141	39%	43,748	38%
Population 16 years and over	118,908		114,438	

*U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 5-Year ACS estimates. DP03*

Another workforce characteristic used to measure a city's economic health is per capita income. Per capita income is calculated by dividing the total income earned during a given period of time by the total population. Per capita income provides a context for the standard of living in an area. However, per capita income does not represent the disparities among the different income levels within a community. The city's per capita income has increased by 19.1 percent between 2010 and 2019 from \$21,422 per person to \$25,517 per person. While the city's per capita income has increased, it still lags behind the national and state per capita income of \$34,103 and \$36,038, respectively.

## Employment Characteristics

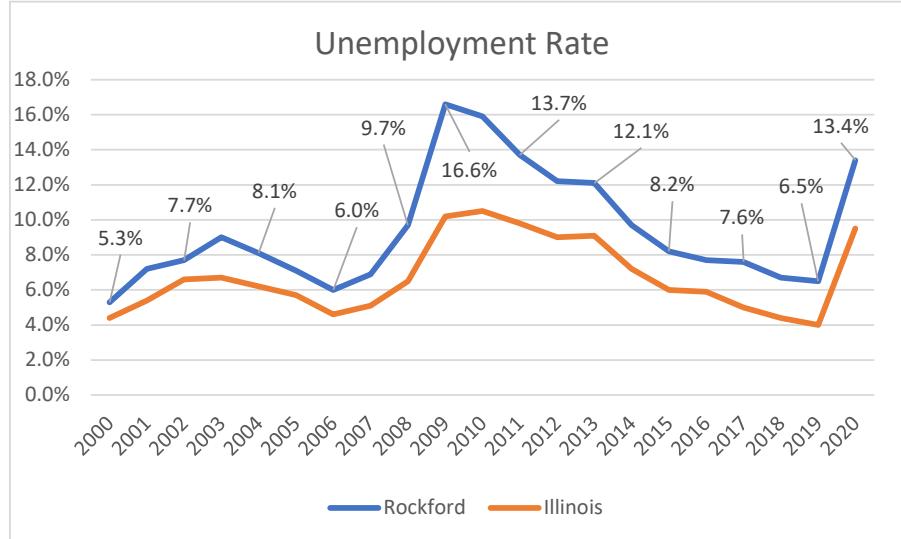
In addition to the number of residents in the workforce and per capita income, it is important to understand other employment characteristics for the regions population. This would include unemployment rates, high-employment industries, and commuting patterns of individuals. The following section provides a summary of these characteristics.

Per Capita Income	2010	2019
Rockford	\$21,422	\$25,517
Illinois	\$28,782	\$36,038
United States	\$27,334	\$34,103

*U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 5-Year ACS estimates. S0801*

### Current Characteristics

Overall, Rockford has seen stable employment numbers for the population 16 years and over when comparing the 2010 and 2019 numbers, which only show a decrease of 1.7 percent. However, unemployment levels from year-over-year in Rockford have not been as stable, instead rates have reflected the economic climate of the nation as one would expect. As shown in the figure to the left the unemployment rate has consistently been above the state average since 1990. The city's unemployment rate peaked in 2009 at 16.6 percent. Since this time, it has been on a gradual downward trend with annual unemployment rates at 6.5 percent in 2019, the lowest rate in some time.<sup>i</sup> However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on employment during 2020 when the unemployment rate skyrocketed to 13.4 percent. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the rate has since fallen back to 6.5 percent as of July 2022.



City of Rockford				
Year	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
2010	72,101	60,729	11,372	15.8%
2011	70,646	60,977	9,669	13.7%
2012	69,815	61,354	8,461	12.1%
2013	68,403	60,114	8,289	12.1%
2014	67,577	61,105	6,472	9.6%
2015	67,523	62,015	5,508	8.2%
2016	67,110	61,914	5,196	7.7%
2017	66,109	61,052	5,057	7.6%
2018	67,055	62,618	4,437	6.5%
2019	66,533	62,019	4,514	6.8%
2020	.	.	.	13.4%

*U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 5-Year ACS estimates. DP03*

Representative of its industrial heritage, manufacturing continues to comprise the largest employment sector in Rockford employing 22 percent of the labor force in 2019. Healthcare and social services are the second largest employment sector containing 16 percent of the total employment. This is followed by retail trade at 12 percent. Tied for the 3rd and 4th highest employment sectors are professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services at 10 percent, and arts entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services also at 10 percent.

Employment by Industry (2019)		
	Number	Percent
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	63,083	-
Manufacturing	13,867	22%
Health care and social assistance	10,082	16%
Retail trade	7,291	12%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management	6,571	10%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	6,321	10%
Educational services	3,666	6%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3,409	5%
Other services, except public administration	3,258	5%
Construction	2,753	4%
Finance and insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	2,076	3%
Public administration	1,440	2%
Wholesale trade	1,304	2%
Information	890	1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining	155	0%

*U.S. Census Bureau 2010 & 2019: 5-Year ACS estimates, S2405*

The following table lists the top twenty employers in the region, many of which employ Rockford residents.<sup>ii</sup>

All but one of the top five employers in the region are located within the City of Rockford, as of January 2022. Rockford Public Schools are the largest employer in the region, employing approximately 4,075 individuals. With healthcare being one of the leading employment industries in the city the top three regional healthcare systems hold the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th ranked major employer spots, with UW Health (formerly Swedish American Health System), employing 3,780 workers, MercyHealth employing 3,000 individuals, and OSF Healthcare employing a total of 2,200 people (all numbers are estimates as they fluctuate regularly). It is important to note that workers at these three employers are spread throughout the city at various schools, facilities, and clinics. The regions 5th largest employer is a three-way tie between Collins Aerospace, UPS and Woodward, all with an estimated 2,000 employees. Woodward is located in Loves Park.

Commuting patterns of residents and employees is tracked by the U.S. Census at the county level. Commuting pattern data from 2015 (the most recent data available) shows that the majority of people who live in Winnebago County also work within the county (83.2 percent). Winnebago County residents also commute to a number of neighbor-

Top 20 Employers in the Rockford Region (January 2022)		
Company	Industry	Employees
Rockford Public Schools - RPS205	Education	4,075
UW Health (Formerly SwedishAmerican Health)	Healthcare	3,780
Mercyhealth	Healthcare	3,000
OSF Healthcare	Healthcare	2,200
Collins Aerospace	Aerospace Manufacturing	2,000
Woodward	Aerospace Manufacturing	2,000
UPS	Logistics & Distribution	2,000
Amazon	Logistics & Distribution	1,535
Wal-Mart Stores	Retail	1,470
Stellantis (Formerly Fiat Chrysler Auto)	Manufacturing	1,459
Winnebago County	Government	1,429
Harlem Consolidated Schools	Education	1,147
Lowe's	Distribution Center, Retail	1,110
City of Rockford	Government	1,102
Belvidere Community Unit Schools	Education	950
Magna	Auto Parts Manufacturing	816
General Mills/Green Giant	Cereal/Snack Bars	650
Syncreon	Automotive Supplier	600
Taylor Company	Ice Cream Machines	500
Bergstrom, Inc.	Manufacturing	400

*Source: Rockford Area Economic Development Council and City of Rockford*

ing counties for work. This include 5 percent of residents commuting to Boone County and 3.2 percent commuting north to Rock County, Wisconsin.

Commuting Flows - 2015		
Live in Winnebago County		
County of Employment	Number	Percent
Winnebago	107,104	83%
Boone	6,395	5%
Rock, WI	4,074	3%
All Other Counties	2,285	2%
Cook	1,755	1%
Ogle	1,646	1%
McHenry	1,409	1%
Dekalb	1,092	1%
Stephenson	1,088	1%
Kane	1,030	1%
Dupage	496	0%
Lake	159	0%
Lee	119	0%
Will	56	0%
Total	128,708	100%

*Source: U.S. Census 2011-2015 ACS Commuter Flow*

Conversely, a large number of workers are commuting to Winnebago County from outside for employment, making up 20.2 percent of all workers in the county. Most workers commuting to Winnebago County are traveling from adjacent counties, including Boone County (6.7 percent), Ogle County (3.8 percent), and Rock County, Wisconsin (3.2 percent).

Commuting Flows - 2015		
Work in Winnebago County		
County of Residence	Number	Percent
Winnebago	107,104	80%
Boone	8,960	7%
Ogle	5,117	4%
Rock, Wi	4,313	3%
All Other Counties	2,223	2%
Stephenson	2,157	2%
McHenry	1,250	1%
DeKalb	1,056	1%
Cook	845	1%
Kane	613	0%
Lee	261	0%
Lake	160	0%
Dupage	112	0%
Will	57	0%
Total	128,708	100%

Source: U.S. Census 2011-2015 ACS Commuter Flow

The average commute travel time for workers 16 years or older is 21 minutes (Winnebago Co). While driving alone to work is still the most common mode of transportation (78.9 percent), Rockford has seen an increase in workers traveling to work using other modes of transportation such as carpools, public transportation, walking, biking, and working from home. Carpooling and public transit saw the highest increases of workers using them as their primary mode of transportation to work between

2010 and 2019, with an increase of 20.4 percent and 19.6 percent, respectively. In 2019, an estimated 3.3 percent of workers worked from home; however, this number may see a significant increase in the coming years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

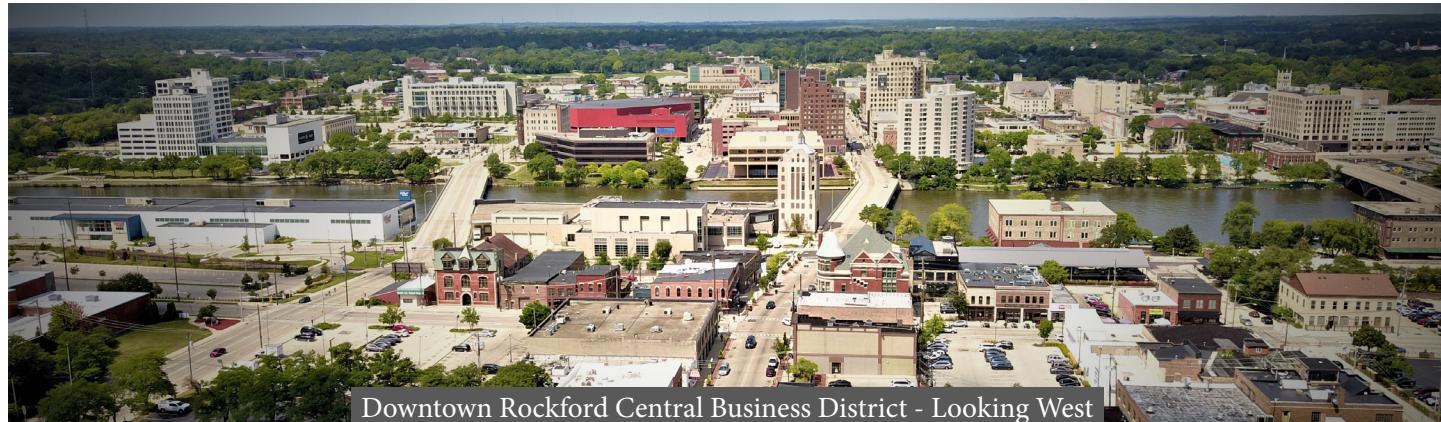
Mode	Commute to Work		2010		2019	
	Trips	Percent	Trips	Percent	Trips	Percent
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	51,250	82%	48,886	79%		
Car, truck, or van -- carpooled	6,381	10%	7,684	12%		
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	999	2%	1,195	2%		
Walked	1,230	2%	1,246	2%		
Other means	931	1%	896	1%		
Worked from home	1,818	3%	2,028	3%		
Workers 16 years and over	62,609	-	61,935	-		
Mean travel time to work (minutes)		21				21

Source: U.S. Census 2011-2015 ACS Commuter Flow

## Population & Employment Projections

Rockford's future population is anticipated to remain stable out to the year 2040 with a slight increase in its population and employment totals. These projections are important in anticipating the potential needs of the community moving forward. To study this data, three projection scenarios have been developed: a baseline scenario, a one percent growth scenario, and a one percent decline scenario. The following summaries highlight these projections which have been completed at the county-level using the Regional Economic Modeling Inc. (REMI) Software.

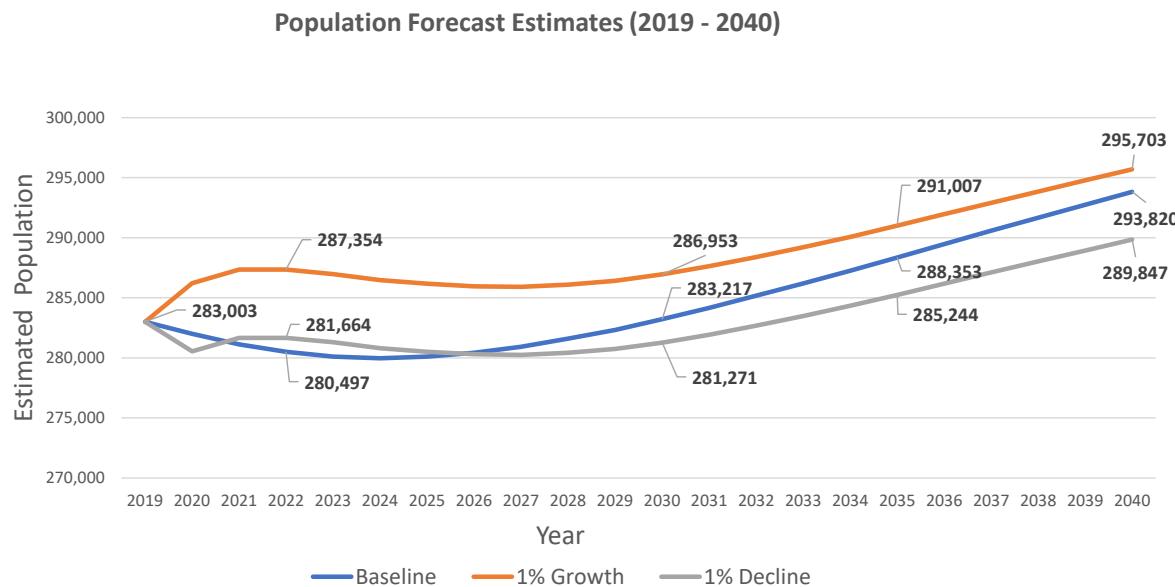
The baseline scenario shows that the population would initially dip, followed by slight increase from 283,003 to 293,820 (an increase of 10,817) by 2040; for an overall growth of 3.8 percent. If Winnebago County continued to grow at its baseline levels, by 2040 employment is estimated to increase by 4,309 employees. Looking at specific



employment growth by industry shows that manufacturing, retail and wholesale, and government sectors will likely see decreases. In contrast, the service and finance industries are predicted to see an increase in employment numbers.

Using a one percent growth projection, the population would increase within the first few years, followed by a short period of declining population, and eventually rising to 295,703 by 2040; for an overall population growth of 4.4 percent. For employment, there will be an increase of 4,691 employees by 2040; however, the industries in which employment is located will shift. The largest changes will be in the retail and wholesale and transportation, and public utilities industries, which will see a decline in their employment numbers, while the service industry is predicted to have a significant increase.

Although a one percent decline in population is used in the third scenario, the projections still show some growth over the next 20 years and follows a similar pattern as the previous scenario, just at a slower rate. In this scenario, the population would only grow to 289,847 by 2040, an increase of 2.4 percent. In this scenario, the baseline employment value starts well below the other scenarios but by 2040 it still lags behind by about a total of 1,000 individuals. Many of these jobs may shift to individuals who commute to the county for work instead. Like the other two scenarios, manufacturing, retail, and wholesale industries would experience a decline, while the service, construction, transportation and public utilities, and government industries are predicted to see the most significant increase in employment numbers.



Employment Forecasts (2019 - 2040)	Baseline		1% Growth		1% Decline	
	2019	2040	2019	2040	2019	2040
Natural Resources	317	367	320	381	319	380
Construction	5,861	5,869	6,038	6,252	5,886	6,192
Manufacturing	24,461	21,298	24,466	22,182	24,440	22,135
Retail and Wholesale	22,933	21,615	23,034	21,740	22,875	21,566
Transportation and Public Utilities	9,151	9,364	9,218	9,292	9,186	9,253
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	11,133	12,096	11,141	11,133	11,081	11,067
Services	74,446	82,591	73,907	81,674	73,458	81,106
Government	14,986	14,326	15,148	15,213	14,924	15,037
Farm	776	846	780	876	780	876
All Industries	164,065	168,374	164,052	168,743	162,949	167,611

Source: Region 1 Planning Council, R1PC Data

## Business & Industry Characteristics

Several other factors contribute to the economic health of the city. However, these factors go beyond the workforce within the city and instead focus on the business and industrial characteristics of the city. These characteristics center on industries contributing to the gross domestic product (GDP) and employment of the region.

Gross Domestic Product 2019 (County)	GDP (1000s)	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	\$4,270	0%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	\$1,231	0%
Utilities	\$196,161	1%
Construction	\$515,614	3%
Manufacturing	\$3,503,334	23%
Wholesale trade	\$815,572	5%
Retail trade	\$966,115	6%
Transportation and warehousing	\$432,402	3%
Information	\$344,897	2%
Finance and insurance	\$1,340,791	9%
Real estate and rental and leasing	\$1,927,876	13%
Professional and business services	\$919,456	6%
Educational services	\$90,345	1%
Health care and social assistance	\$1,930,151	13%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	\$111,911	1%
Accommodation and food services	\$401,073	3%
Other services (except government and government enterprises)	\$366,480	2%
Government and government enterprises	\$1,346,952	9%
All Industry Total	\$15,214,631 Billion	

*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, BLS 2019*

The first factor, or measure, of the city's economic health is gross domestic product (GDP). Gross domestic product is the value of the goods and services produced in an area. Tracking how much the GDP increased or decreased over time highlights how the local economy is performing. This is measured by industry, and is generated quarterly and annually at the county-level to determine each industry's performance and its contributions to the overall economy.

In 2019, the overall GDP produced in Winnebago County was about \$15.2 billion dollars. The top industry contributing to the county's GDP was manufacturing, making up 23 percent of the overall GDP (\$3.5 billion). Healthcare and real estate came in as the second and third most impactful industries contributing to GDP at approximately

13 percent each, or approximately \$1.93 billion each. Other industries with large shares of the GDP were government and finance. In 2019, the City of Rockford's GDP was 16.7 million dollars.

Freight Dependent Sectors (2019)	Total Employment	Percent
Agriculture and Farming	147	1%
Mining	8	0%
Construction	2,753	9%
Manufacturing	13,867	48%
Wholesale Trade	1,304	4%
Retail Trade	7,291	25%
Transportation and Warehousing	3,409	12%
Utilities	352	1%
Total Employment	29,131	

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019, 5-Year ACS, S2403*

A large portion of the city's economy is based on freight-dependent sectors, including agriculture, construction, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and warehousing. When combined, these industries make up 46.1 percent of the city's total employment, meaning that nearly half of Rockford's workers are employed by a freight-dependent industry. This highlights the importance of freight in the local economy and the need to continue to support and maintain growth in these industries. This importance largely stems from the city's geographic location in the Midwest, as well as its location at the convergence of three major interstate routes, three class I railroads, and the Chicago Rockford International Airport, all of which have seen growth in recent years.

Several recently announced business expansions in freight-dependent industries will create a significant number of new employment opportunities for residents, and that will have a direct impact on the local economy. In 2019, Pinnacle Logistics announced an expansion of their cargo-related operations expecting to create an additional 500 jobs at the airport. These jobs will support ground services and supply chain management for Amazon's Prime Air cargo fleet.<sup>iii</sup>

## Workforce Development, Talent Attraction, & Retention Efforts

A well-trained workforce, and the impact it can have on the lives of those workers, is significant to economic development. As part of its economic development plan, Rockford places a strong value on working closely with and supporting local organizations and leaders in the

community to ensure that citizens are provided training opportunities. These opportunities enable residents to thrive in the workforce and continue to meet the needs of the community's employers. Workforce development not only provides educational and career training programs that prepare those entering the workforce, but may also connect employers to a skilled workforce through employment services. Providing assistance and resources for job seekers is central to Rockford's economy and ensuring that businesses and employees thrive in it.

Another strategy tied to economic and workforce development is talent attraction and retention efforts that ensure a robust talent pool within the city. These efforts aim at incentivizing and cultivating an environment in which individuals find attractive to live and then decide to seek employment in that location. In the long run, investing in retention and attraction efforts can make cities more competitive and allow them to better leverage their current or future assets. Talent and attraction efforts provide a wide range of benefits that support local businesses and the community. For example, these efforts can create a unified employee-employer network, increase innovation and entrepreneurship, and incentivize community development and advancement. Attracting and retaining a workforce is the foundation for increased business growth, a factor playing a significant role in the overall economic development. Furthermore, workforce development-related incentives and programming can not only generate increased productivity and profitability in the workforce, but also curate an environment that embraces community well-being and place-making.

Highlighted below are just a few of the key partners and initiatives that are furthering the development of the city's labor force.

**Advanced Technology Center:** Rock Valley College's Advanced Technology Center (ATC) recently opened in Belvidere as a state-of-the-art advanced manufacturing learning facility. The 77,000 square foot facility will house programs aimed at meeting the educational needs of residents and the skill needs of area businesses. The ATC will offer a variety of courses, including CNC machining, industrial maintenance, mechatronics, truck driver training and welding, in an effort to serve as an economic engine and a workforce development hub the region.<sup>iv</sup>

**Rockford University's Education Pathway Program:** The RU Education Pathway program is an innovative plan designed to incentivize Rockford Public Schools (RPS) students to pursue a teaching career in Rockford. RU part-

ners with RPS to recruit students interested in pursuing a teaching degree beginning in middle school. Once in high school, students are able to join the education pathway and partake in a dual credit capstone course taught by both RU and RPS faculty. Following high school graduation, these students are able to enroll at RU and receive discounted tuition for their teaching degree. Enrolled students often pursue student-teaching at an RPS school and are better positioned for a full-time position with the Rockford public school system.

**Alignment Rockford:** Alignment Rockford is a nonprofit organization that works to support students within RPS and ensure their post-graduation success. This organization supports Rockford students with hands-on and virtual industry experience that not only assists students in determining their future careers, but also grows prospective talent for local employers.

**The Workforce Connection:** The Workforce Connection (TWC) is a partnership of employment and training programs, serving individuals and businesses in Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties. TWC provides numerous programs and initiatives that support workforce development and talent retention. TWC offers a wide range of services that give career seekers the opportunity to find employment, education, and training opportunities within the region. TWC also works with employers to find skilled workers and access other services, including education and training opportunities for their current workforce. Career services include workshops and basic skills classes, career information, job search and resume assistance, and professional training.

**Business Retention Visits by Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC):** "At the Rockford Area Economic Development Council, we systematically get out from behind our desks to visit about 150 companies per year. We do this to gain a better understanding of our customers, in our case, Rockford Region businesses.

It's really about customer service and gaining a clear understanding of what is happening in the 'real' world. Excellent customer service is a must in all occupations, and serving existing industries is also our number one priority. Existing businesses drive more than 80 percent of all job creation and capital investment.

Our goal is to bring resources to the table to help the company continue to grow in the area. These resources might be a connection to financial assistance or working through a problem with the municipality.

Business Retention visits allow the RAEDC to understand a variety of industries that are important to our region and communities. These visits are a critical aspect of economic development.<sup>v</sup>

## Economic Development Programs & Incentives

### Enterprise Zones & River Edge Zone

The purpose of state legislation allowing the creation of enterprise zones is to assist in the revitalization of distressed areas by offering financial and tax incentives to stimulate business growth and neighborhood improvement. The City of Rockford has two enterprise zones. One is along I-90 and the other is spread out along U.S. Highway 20, Harrison Ave, Springfield Ave, West State Street, Auburn Street, and Preston Street.<sup>vi</sup>

### Tax-Increment Financing (TIF)

Illinois law allows units of local governments to designate areas within their jurisdiction as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts. These districts dedicate sales tax revenues and additional property tax revenues generated within the TIF for improvements within the district to encourage new economic development and job creation. Funds may be used for costs associated with the development or redevelopment of property within the TIF, allowing blighted, declining and underperforming areas to become viable again, and allowing these areas to compete with vacant land at the edge of urban areas.

#### Projects in TIF districts typically include:

- Redevelopment of substandard, obsolete, or vacant buildings;
- Financing public infrastructure improvements, including streets, sewer, and water in declining areas;
- Cleaning up polluted areas;
- Improving the viability of downtown business districts; rehabilitating historic properties, and
- Providing infrastructure needed to develop a site for new industrial or commercial use.<sup>vii</sup>

The city currently has 32 TIF Districts that are scattered throughout the city which include commercial, industrial, residential, and mixed-use properties. The city utilizes TIF Districts to finance public improvements and assist private development projects within targeted neighborhoods. This works to raise property values within a target

neighborhood to create new incremental tax revenues, which the city uses to improve the overall conditions within that neighborhood. TIF Districts can only be created by designated municipal government and can only last for a total of 23 years before they must be dissolved. TIF funds usually are a small portion of the overall project costs and are meant to close the gap between conventional bank financing, the owner's funds, and the project's costs. TIF funds often make previously infeasible development projects possible.<sup>viii</sup>

Currently, the City of Rockford is researching methods to develop a more robust, efficient, equitable, and overall a more effective TIF program. There are a number of TIF Districts that are set to expire over the coming years, which has prompted an internal review and update of our TIF District process.

### Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)

The primary objective of the Community Development Block Grant Program is to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for persons of low and/or moderate income.

Eligible uses for CDGB funds include:

- Planning and capacity building,
- Acquisition and selling of real property,
- Public facilities improvements,
- Clearance, demolition and relocation of buildings,
- Public services including daycare, and fair housing,
- Emergency street repairs/advances,
- Loss of rental income due to relocation as a result of CDBG activities,
- Removal of architectural barriers which restrict disabled mobility,
- Assistance to privately owned utilities,
- Rehabilitation and preservation activities,
- Code enforcement,
- Economic development assistance by city or non-profit,
- Commercial Improvement by city or non-profit, and
- Special activities by sub-recipients.

### Brownfields Revitalization

A brownfield is a property that the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. A 2020 inventory identified 878 brownfield properties within the City of Rockford. The city recognizes that clean-up and redevelopment of these underutilized and potentially contaminated properties

is a key component in improving multiple variables that contribute to economic growth and blight reduction. The City of Rockford has been very successful in applying for and using Federal and State Brownfields Grant Funds dating back to 2000. At that time, the city was selected as one of the original United States Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfield Pilot Programs.

The city strongly recognizes that community participation and stakeholder involvement play an essential role in successful brownfields redevelopment. There are numerous success stories across the nation that can attest to this. It is the ideas and needs of our community that help prioritize the brownfields in our community, and seek out the necessary resources to transform blight into an asset that contributes to and improves our citizen's quality of life and our economic state.

## Recent Major Development Projects

### Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD)

Since 2015, the Northern Illinois Region has leveraged roughly \$7 million dollars in Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding for airport-related infrastructure and the promotion of aerospace jobs. This has led to more than \$50 million dollars of additional public and private investment being put into the regions aerospace, aviation, and logistics industries. These investments have resulted in the growth of the Chicago Rockford International Airport's (RFD) by nearly 2,000 additional jobs in 2019 alone, including temporary construction-related jobs and permanent or seasonal positions by new and existing airport tenants. EDA investments at RFD have assisted the airport in becoming a Midwest hub for e-commerce cargo freight. More than 2.3 billion pounds of cargo traveled through the airport in 2019, triple the volume of landed cargo weight recorded at the airport in 2015. Amazon's Prime Air, which has made Rockford a significant spoke in its rapidly expanding "hub and spoke" air freight network, is a large reason for this growth.

Additionally, United Parcel Service (UPS), which operates its second-largest U.S. air freight hub at RFD, has added jobs and retooled its Rockford facility to accommodate the increased volume of cargo it is routing through the airport. Construction of a 90,000-square-foot international cargo terminal at RFD began in October 2020. The airport is also developing an \$11 million terminal, which will be leased to a longtime airport tenant, Emery Air, along with other cargo companies. This is the first of two planned cargo buildings to accommodate airplane maintenance, which is expected to increase living wage jobs and bring

an estimated 600 new jobs to the airport, along with AAR adding an estimated 250 maintenance technician jobs.<sup>ix</sup>

### US-20 & IL-2 (South Main Street)

The interchange at US-20 and IL-2 (South Main Street) is strategically located to the northwest of the Chicago-Rockford International Airport and is approximately 4.5 miles south of Rockford's downtown core. A major reconstruction of the interchange was completed by the Illinois Department of Transportation in 2020. To the south of the interchange there are 485 gross acres of land able to be developed. This area consists of 15 parcels owned by three different property owners. The interchange site has already seen some new investment, including a Love's Truck Stop and other retail and restaurants to support the industrial growth at the airport. The western 320 acres of the interchange site is currently being marketed as Cornerstone at Global Trade Park, but site development has yet to begin. In 2020, Region 1 Planning Council commissioned a market analysis to examine the development prospects of this interchange as a part of multi-county interchange. At full build-out, development around this interchange could generate up to \$5.3 billion in economic activity and create up to 37,300 permanent jobs.<sup>x</sup>

### I-90 & Riverside Boulevard

In the city's far northeast corner, several major developments have and will continue to spur economic development opportunities for Rockford. In 2013, SwedishAmerican's Regional Cancer Center was the first medical facility to open at the interchange, located in the southwestern corner. The nearly \$40 million facility was built in collaboration with UW Health System, out of Madison, Wisconsin, and houses services such as medical oncology, chemotherapy and infusion, advanced radiation therapy, and medical imaging. In 2019, SwedishAmerican opened their \$24 million Creekside Medical Center, adjacent to the SwedishAmerican Regional Cancer Center. The four-story, 70,000 square-foot-clinic has 100 rooms and houses 30 medical providers. In 2019, MercyHealth also opened their new hospital, located in the interchange's southeastern corner. The Riverside campus is a six-story, 563,000-square-foot facility on 263 acres.

The construction of these three medical facilities has spurred significant development for the communities surrounding the interchange. A majority of the recent commercial and retail development has occurred north of Riverside Boulevard in the City of Loves Park, including a Costco Warehouse, several national chain restaurants, a gas station, and hotel.

# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE

### Reposition former industrial properties and abandoned sites for adaptive reuse or new construction

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue environmental assessment and remediation on sites constructed prior to 1950	\$\$\$	Long	Low
Develop ranking system for pre-1950 industrial sites to determine eligibility for repurposing or demolition for site readiness to increase chances of being developed or re-purposed	\$	Medium	Low
Develop qualified site program to assist property owners in advancing their land for site development readiness	\$	Short	Low
Continue to promote and encourage the use of New Market Tax Credits and other funding programs designed for repurposing industrial sites or parcels	\$	Medium	Low
Continue to foster partnerships with developers experienced in repurposing industrial sites for adaptive reuse	\$	Medium	Medium
Currently most re-development is market rate housing. There is an extreme waiting list with the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA), resulting in a great need for market rate housing options such as PUD's	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Increase funding for home owner assistance to offer home improvement loans for qualified low income residents	\$\$	Long	Medium
Conversion of multi-unit family dwellings into affordable condo units with a focus on low-income neighborhoods	\$\$	Long	Low
Encourage more residential ownership downtown to reduce number of rental units. Need smaller, more modern units for senior citizens or single/young families (affordability is key)	\$	Medium	High

### Ensure adequate supply of development ready land zoned for industrial and commercial uses

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue pursuing voluntary annexation of property in adjoining unincorporated areas	\$	Medium	High
Develop qualified site program to assist property owners in advancing their land for site development readiness	\$	Short	Low
Create tangible offerings to attract private developers	\$\$\$	Medium	Low
Develop and update a site selector interactive web-based mapping application to provide information to potential property buyers and investors, which also helps market our region better	\$\$	Short	High
Future developable sites need water, sewer, and electric in order to be shovel-ready. Need to align utilities with locations where development of future sites is desirable. Developers need these utilities and annexation before any financial commitments are made generally	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High

<b>Identify, develop, and expand emerging economic clusters</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Target craft manufacturers to locate within designated Enterprise and River Edge Redevelopment Zones	\$	Long	Low
Continue to seek and host national and international sports and entertainment events	\$	Short	Medium
Develop and encourage businesses to utilize apprenticeship programs in recent growth industries and sectors	\$	Long	Medium
Identify, create and promote programs, activities, and policies fostering innovation in emerging and existing businesses, aiding in the development of more new/startup businesses and ultimately increasing economic development within the small business community	\$	Short	High
Foster new training programs and opportunities to support job growth demands in emerging industries	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue investments in roadway construction and access improvements, along transportation corridors to the airport where new development and economic growth is concentrated	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High
Residents on 2nd and 3rd shift (night jobs) at UPS, Amazon, etc., have challenges getting to and from work due to lack of late night transportation options leaving the need for increased public transportation investment	\$	Long	Low
<b>Encourage the growth and development of existing and new primary employment centers</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to encourage airport related development and supportive services to aid the growth of the Chicago-Rockford International Airport as a major air cargo transfer center (especially 1st and last mile)	\$\$\$	Medium	High
Continue encouraging development of hotels and retail services to support primary employment clusters and corridors especially along our major interstates and expressways, to capture through traffic overnight stays	\$\$	Short	High
Improve branding, wayfinding, and signage within industrial and commercial business parks for better marketing	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Determine more ways to get people to and from downtown from Embassy Suites, and to the venue they are in town for such as sporting events, weddings, tourism, and entertainment	\$\$	Short	High
<b>Continue to pursue objective to revitalize Downtown Rockford on both the east and west side of the Rock River</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to encourage the development, amount, variety, and types of downtown living and housing options especially through adaptive reuse of unused buildings	\$\$	Short	High

Continue to expand the number, and variety, of destinations in downtown such as art, restaurants, shopping, leisure, sports, walking, exercise and entertainment venues	\$	Short	Medium
Utilize the special features downtown has to offer, such as the river, architecture, history	\$	Short	Medium
Provide safe, efficient, and attractive options for travel	\$\$	Short	High
Improve the state of neighborhoods in surrounding downtown areas	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Enhance the role of the Rock River and the riverfront especially through the redevelopment of abandoned/vacant buildings or structures	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Create more options for homeownership in downtown Rockford, condos, town homes, etc.- could be encouraged through reduced hookup fees, reduced building fees, taxes, etc.	\$	Long	Low

### Encourage the growth of existing and emerging commerce retail corridors

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to identify and prioritize land use through economic incentives to continue implementation of city council approved corridor plans, and future corridor planning studies	\$\$	Short	High
Support new pop-up retail locations	\$	Short	Low
Target destination retail uses	\$	Long	Low
Continue to conduct corridor studies and align funding opportunities for redevelopment of under served corridors, bringing them back to viable shopping options and destinations for retail and food locations	\$\$\$	Medium	High

### Attract more essential services to currently under served areas of the city

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Work to target public investment that encourages private development within neighborhood centers and commercial corridors	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to work with businesses to locate groceries, laundry/dry cleaning facilities and pharmacies within neighborhood centers and commercial corridors especially areas that are food deserts	\$	Short	High
Establish business incentive programs near neighborhood in transportation corridor areas	\$\$	Medium	Low
Continue to implement Business First programs in low-income/under served communities	\$	Short	High
Work to create a city with no food deserts or regions with low to no access to healthy and affordable food options	\$\$	Short	High

<b>Align local startup and expansion capital to encourage and accelerate entrepreneurial growth</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Encourage participation in self-employment training classes with Rock Valley College (RVC) and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC)	\$	Medium	Low
Promote the use of start-up business funding platforms	\$	Medium	Low
Develop and link entrepreneur networks with existing micro financing programs to fund and expand small business opportunities for new or emerging businesses	\$	Medium	Low
Continue, and possibly expand City's Business First Program	\$	Short	High
Improve awareness among all residents of existing small business and entrepreneur support programs to start or expand a small business	\$	Short	High
Align small businesses looking to expand with available resources to support growth and expansion, especially through grants/other funding	\$\$	Short	High
<b>Collaborate with local businesses to minimize the barriers to employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals currently residing in the city</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to partner with non-profit and private sector entities to expand prison reentry workforce training through local entrepreneurship programs	\$\$	Short	Medium
<b>Support regional efforts facilitating retention and attraction of young professionals</b>			
Create an annual city tour for residents, business owners, and prospective community members to showcase planned and currently underway projects	\$\$	Short	Low
Target positive promotions of Rockford to non-Rockford area markets through tourism and visitors bureau	\$\$	Short	High
Possible partnership with Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (RACVB) to promote region to younger couples and families as a great place to live and grow a family	\$\$	Short	Medium
Improve commuting options for younger professionals	\$	Medium	Medium
Offer more scholarships and internship opportunities for entry level jobs in our region to retain younger talent giving them an opportunity to stay	\$\$	Short	Medium
Public service announcement campaign geared toward young professionals. Focus on those who have never left Rockford, or decided to move back after living/working elsewhere using local testimonies as examples	\$\$	Short	Low
Create outreach programs for specific minority groups that are already moving to the region	\$	Medium	Low
Connect with Transform Rockford/Great Neighborhoods on attraction and retention effort alignment	\$	Short	Low

Promote the region's sustainability efforts, bike trails, parks, recreational opportunities, nightlife, and proximity to other major cities, with comparably lower cost of living. Promote affordability of home ownership	\$\$	Short	Medium
Promote Quality of Life- the region has one of the top park district in the nation-facilities, activities, and sports	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Use our location to other major cities but lower cost of living as a selling point	\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to protect the regions water quality and water resources for consumption, recreation opportunities, and intrinsic values	\$\$\$	Medium	High

### Preserve culturally, historically, and architecturally significant sites, buildings, and districts

Continue to promote the rehabilitation and reuse of locally designated resources within neighborhoods and commercial and industrial corridors	\$	Medium	High
Continue to ensure new development is compatible with historic districts	\$	Short	High
Continue to encourage new mixed-use developments especially on underutilized sites or through rehabilitation and adaptive reuse	\$	Short	Medium
Continue to encourage Historic Preservation and adaptive reuse of Commercial and Industrial buildings	\$	Short	Medium
Implement the newly adopted Historic Preservation Plan, 2022	\$	Short	Medium
When buildings are identified as historically, culturally, or architecturally significant, what are the next steps? Who should facilitate the redevelopment? Should a unit of government, or nonprofit be designated to protect some of these structures?	\$	Long	Low

### Align resources to support cultural and recreational institutions for increased economic development opportunities

Formalize a new culinary tourism program highlighting the local food and beverage market destinations throughout the city	\$\$	Medium	Low
Continue to support the expansion of neighborhood-based public art programming	\$\$	Short	High

## Chapter Endnotes

- i. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; “Labor force data by county”, 2000-2017 annual averages; <<https://www.bls.gov/lau/>>
- ii. “Employment Data.” Rockford Area Economic Development Council. Last modified March 2020. <https://rockfordil.com/doing-business-here/demographics/employment-data/>.
- iii. Guerrero, Isaac. “Rockford Airport to Add 500 Jobs.” Rockford Register Star, May 16, 2019. <https://www.rrstar.com/news/20190515/rockford-airport-to-add-500-jobs>
- iv. Information for Rock Valley College Found at: <https://www.rockvalleycollege.edu/Academics/ATC/>
- v <https://rockfordil.com/2022/05/04/why-economic-development-matters-business-retention/>
- vi. <https://rockfordil.gov/city-departments/community-and-economic-development/economic-development/enterprise-zone/>
- vii. <https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ExpandRelocate/Incentives/Pages/TaxIncrementFinancing.aspx>
- viii. <https://rockfordil.gov/city-departments/community-and-economic-development/economic-development/tax-increment-financing/>
- ix. Kolkey, Jeff. 2021. Rockford airport expansion will mean hundreds of new jobs, officials say. Rockford Register Star. <https://www.rrstar.com/story/news/2021/06/01/rockford-airport-expansion-bring-hundreds-new-jobs/7494094002>
- x. Region 1 Interchange Study. Region 1 Planning Council, 2021. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54f7d1eee4b056cf8def292a/t/61128bd3257ef249e27fd7ff/1628605399986/Region+1+Interchange+Feasibility+Study+BriefingBook\\_2021-04-30.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54f7d1eee4b056cf8def292a/t/61128bd3257ef249e27fd7ff/1628605399986/Region+1+Interchange+Feasibility+Study+BriefingBook_2021-04-30.pdf)