

APPENDIX E

EXISTING POLICIES FOR DOWNTOWN

Bullseye! An Action Plan for Downtown Rockford (1986)

The Bullseye! Plan was created in the first half of 1986 by a 13-member citizen task force appointed by then Mayor John McNamara. It is not a conventional plan to the extent that there is no land use component per se, there is no plan map. Rather, it contains a series of policies followed by specific recommended actions. These policies are listed below.

Downtown Management

The members of the Bullseye! Task Force felt that a major drawback to earlier downtown plans was that they did not realistically address the problem of implementation. If they had one single, overriding goal, it was to provide that missing framework for implementation. What was needed was one organization that, by design and by commitment, would focus on the needs of the downtown community and work to see those needs met. This led to the proposal for a Rockford Central Area Commission (RCAC). The Plan's specific recommendation in this regard was to establish a Rockford Central Area Commission to serve as the one effective economic development organization which has as its sole focus the development of downtown. The Commission will advise City Council in the administration, promotion and redevelopment of downtown; and see that all public activities initiated through Operation Bullseye! are properly coordinated.

The RCAC was created in 1987, modified in 1996 as the Rockford Central Area Corporation, then went out of business at the end of 1999 when the special service area tax that served as its primary funding base expired.

Financing Downtown Improvements

- ▶ Expand the East and West Side TIF districts, using the funds for aggressively promoting projects within the districts and taking equity positions on development projects to allow dollars to be recycled at a profit. [Both districts were expanded in 1986.] In addition, address the issue of payment-in-lieu to other taxing bodies at the appropriate time.
- ▶ Consider the Memorial Fund as a source of financing to be used with the advice of Rockford's veterans, and only in such cases where it can be used to honor the veterans in veteran-related memorials and/or structures in the Bullseye! area.
- ▶ Encourage the private sector to create secondary loan pools and equity funds. These may be formed in conjunction with interest rate subsidies from public funds or direct equity participation by public entities. The objective is to fill the gap encountered on many projects between available public funds and conventional private financing.

The Riverfront – See page F-1.

Historic Preservation

The emphasis of the Bullseye! Plan was on trying to reuse the buildings already in downtown, thereby protecting an important part of Rockford's heritage while at the same time making use of a long-neglected resource. To do this, the Task Force endorsed the Historic Preservation Plan adopted by Rockford City Council in 1985.

Design Guidelines

Design guidelines were proposed to protect the facade line of both East and West State Streets, and to provide guidelines for developers of new buildings downtown. The overall objective was to ensure a physical environment built and maintained at the human scale, a physical environment that attracts people to it and makes them comfortable while they are there. To do this, the Plan included the following policies. [New design guidelines were adopted by the City in 1988.]

- ▶ Design all new parking ramps to be “pedestrian friendly” at street level, and aesthetically acceptable by following design guidelines.
- ▶ Make downtown Rockford pedestrian friendly.

Arts & Entertainment

Arts and entertainment are addressed in depth in the Bullseye! Plan, with the ultimate objective being the development and recognition of a downtown cultural district. Major recommendations for the arts are broken down into an advocacy program for the arts, an arts/entertainment action strategy, creation of an arts resource guide, creation of a downtown cultural district, and decoration of downtown on a regular basis.

The Mall

In 1984, the West State Street leg of the downtown Mall was reopened to traffic, leaving two separate parts of the Mall on Main Street. There is a need to decide consciously what is the best use of these two remaining pieces. Left as they are, they will continue to be known simply as “what’s left of the Mall,” and may never become the integral parts of downtown they could be. To accomplish this, the Plan included a proposal to develop a conceptual plan for the Mall to serve as a guideline for development that occurs there.

New Development/Redevelopment

The usual approach to this particular segment of a downtown plan is to draw a plan map showing proposed long-range development for all of the land within the planning area. Unfortunately, this often results in plans showing planners’ ideas of the ideal downtown, such as Rockford’s plans from the Urban Renewal era showing a vast civic center complex on the east side of the river.

The approach this time has been to concentrate on things that can realistically be achieved in the next five years. Consequently, there is no plan map as such. There are instead specific recommendations for changes in the zoning process that will lead to the achievement of Bullseye! objectives, for enforcement of other codes within the Bullseye! target area, and for specific projects. Priorities for downtown development are as follows:

1. Take care of existing development, especially parking needs.
2. Take care of currently proposed developments, and assist them as needed.
3. Bring a hotel/convention center downtown.
4. New office development.
5. New market-rate housing.

Specific policies included in this portion of the Bullseye! Plan included the following:

- ▶ *Codes*
 - ▶ The City should administer building and fire codes more consistently in all projects.
 - ▶ Endorse efforts to improve the entryways into the core area (West State Street and South Main Street), continuing the focus of CDBG in that area.
- ▶ *Projects/Proposals*

- ▶ Encourage higher density residential development on the east side of Madison Street north of Jefferson Street.
- ▶ Endorse construction of the proposed Rockford Mass Transit District facility in the 500 block of West State Street.
- ▶ Endorse on a conceptual level the proposed location of the new State Office Building (Block 39), the parking deck across the street from it (north side of AMCORE Bank), and the slush plant to be located on the southeast corner of South Wyman and Chestnut Streets.

Parking, Transportation & Access

One subject which has been covered in depth throughout all 40 years of downtown planning in Rockford is parking. All of the pre-1950 reports uncovered in the preparation of [the Bullseye! Plan] dealt primarily with parking. A 1949 study by the Planning Commission indicates how little some perceptions of downtown have changed during that time. It is entitled, *Park My Car! Where?*

- ▶ *Transportation Access* In the area of transportation and access, Bullseye! relied heavily on existing transportation plans and studies, including the 1984 *Downtown Circulation Study*. Primary emphasis of the Task Force in this area was to make it as easy as possible for people to get downtown, and to make it easier for them to get around in downtown once they got there.

Policy: Endorse the recommendations of the 1984 *Downtown Circulation Study*, including the functional ring road system. Full development of the system would include the extension of South Central Avenue, construction of left turn lanes on Whitman Street at intersections with Kilburn Avenue and Rockton Avenue, removal of the underpass at 9th Street on Railroad Avenue, and realignment of the 5th Avenue/College Avenue intersection at Kishwaukee Street to eliminate the offset.

- ▶ *Parking* Time and staffing constraints precluded any exhaustive study of how to solve downtown's parking problems. Recommendations included [in Bullseye!] are designed to meet existing, short-term needs and to lay the necessary groundwork for a more systematic approach for dealing with long-term needs based on existing and anticipated development. They also include guidelines for the use of on-street parking.

Desirability of types of parking (in order):

- ▶ Underground
- ▶ Deck
- ▶ Surface

Housing & Adjacent Neighborhoods

Housing generally did not receive much attention in earlier downtown plans. However, the Bullseye! Task Force considered it important from two perspectives – the development of new market-rate housing in downtown, and the strengthening of adjoining residential neighborhoods.

Policies designed to accomplish this included:

- ▶ Encourage middle-income and above housing.
- ▶ Endorse public support of a large residential development project in the downtown area, to include at least partial support of a feasibility study for such development.
- ▶ Maintain improvements that have been made in residential areas surrounding downtown.

A Strategic Plan

[Destination: River Center was prepared as a strategic plan for the Rockford Central Area Commission in 1993. While the RCAC no longer exists, many of the goals and strategies included in this plan still have value.]

Vision statement: River Center Rockford is a collection of neighborhoods which is

- ▶ A mix of business, retail, and residential: A 24-hour people place.
- ▶ A safe place, perceived and real.
- ▶ A celebration of the river and riverfront.
- ▶ An entertainment and cultural center.
- ▶ A busy, vibrant and alive place with light and color.

Mission statement: To persuade potential and existing stakeholders to play an active, positive, starring role in our new hit: River Center!!

Goals, objectives and strategies

- ▶ Develop, in people, the understanding that it is advantageous to “invest” in River Center.
 - ▶ RCAC to develop an active presence as the champion of River Center.
 - ▶ Inform stakeholders about the investment opportunities that exist for people in River Center.
 - ▶ Improve the appeal of River Center as a thriving people place.
 - ▶ Recommend that City Council adopt ordinances that will require owners to maintain their property.
 - ▶ Actively attend to the quality of the River Center environment, particularly in terms of cleanliness, signage, improved storefronts, lighting, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities.
 - ▶ Encourage new and expanded business locations in River Center through incentives, active participation of local financial institutions, and volunteer support.
 - ▶ Actively pursue the development of convention and meeting facilities in River Center.
- ▶ Make River Center a vibrant, glowing 24-hour people place.
 - ▶ Develop an overall graphic master plan for revitalization of River Center Rockford which is accessible to the general public, and that recognizes and builds on trends that are already happening and provides for a universal common vision.
 - ▶ Focus on market-rate housing and residential neighborhoods as the core/key to the process.
 - ▶ Recognize that public and quasi-public institutions strengthen and stabilize geographic areas and work to maintain those that exist in River Center and expedite expansions.
 - ▶ Facilitate continuous pedestrian friendly development of the river corridor (including two blocks on either side of the river itself) as the community’s common bonds.
 - ▶ Support the continuation of River Center cultural events, celebrations and festivals, especially those which highlight Rockford’s history and diversity and those which attract a full range of age groups.
 - ▶ Establish governmental policies and procedures that facilitate development in River Center.
 - ▶ City establish a well-trained River Center inspector team which facilitates redevelopment of older buildings and is consistent in enforcement.
 - ▶ Investigate possible state legislative options that would facilitate redevelopment.
- ▶ Make River Center everyone’s neighborhood.
 - ▶ Insure excellent access to, in, around and through River Center.
 - ▶ Pursue systematic implementation of adequate visually attractive vehicular access from all four directions.
 - ▶ Aggressively pursue a high-speed rail connection into downtown from Rockford Airport.
 - ▶ Review all on- and off-street parking policies, roadway directions, signage and traffic signalization to maximize traffic flow, but also to insure pedestrian safety and attractiveness.
 - ▶ Preserve, restore, repair and promote the historic resources of River Center.

- ▶ Strengthen economic viability of existing sites by creating informational packages and by assisting owners in marketing to the investment community.
- ▶ Support the grassroots efforts of neighborhood organizations representing and celebrating the diversity of River Center.
- ▶ Design and implement a marketing strategy to capitalize on the uniqueness of existing buildings and places in River Center.