

The 2026 Current Land Use Map and the 2040 Future Land Use Map and Plan refines Rockford's long-term development vision, aligning it with the adopted 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Prepared by City staff using GIS and current planning data, this update ensures land-use decisions support sustainable growth, economic opportunity, and continued quality of life improvements.

The revised maps provide an accurate foundation for guiding development, zoning updates, and infrastructure investments. Together, they support:

- Efficient growth within existing corridors and infrastructure
- Diverse housing and balanced neighborhood development
- Business expansion and economic resilience
- Preservation of community character and natural resources

This update provides Rockford with a clear, data-driven framework to guide coordinated land use, infrastructure investment, and future growth.

**The 2040 Future Land Use Map was adopted by Rockford City Council on Date to be Determined.**



# Land Use Map Update

## Overview

The City of Rockford's previous Future Land Use Map was developed in 2005 as part of a Comprehensive Plan update and has been amended periodically to reflect changes in development patterns and planning strategies. The most recent amendment occurred around 2011.

This current update has been prepared by City staff using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. In developing this update, staff considered multiple information sources, including the recently adopted 2040 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan (2040 Plan), the current zoning shapefile, 2024 and 2025 aerial imagery for Winnebago County, Census-based dwelling unit data, parcel ownership data, existing and planned utility infrastructure, boundary agreements and other relevant planning resources.

As part of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan update, both the Current Land Use Map and the Future Land Use Map were updated. The Future Land Use Map will serve as the first amendment to the 2040 Comp. Plan and will be formally adopted by City Council.

The development of the Current Land Use Map provided a foundation for a seamless transition into the Future Land Use Map update. The previous Future Land Use Map had not been updated since 2011, and this current revision provides an updated framework to guide future development. This updated map is intended to support strategic growth, particularly in areas that are currently undeveloped or underdeveloped, that are planned for additional development within already established corridors or infill areas.



The updated Future Land Use Map aligns with the City's strategic goals by promoting sustainable development, optimizing infrastructure investment, supporting

economic growth, and enhancing the quality of life for residents. By providing a clear vision for land use patterns and growth priorities, this map serves as a critical tool for informed decision-making, ensuring that future development is consistent with the City's long-term planning objectives and community values.

## Strategic Priorities

- **Guided Growth:** Identifies areas for future development, redevelopment, and infill to ensure orderly growth.
- **Sustainability Focus:** Supports environmentally responsible land use and efficient infrastructure utilization.
- **Economic Development:** Directs growth to areas with high potential for commercial, industrial, and mixed-use opportunities.
- **Community Character:** Preserves existing neighborhoods while providing flexibility for new development.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Reflects the goals and priorities of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, serving as a roadmap for future planning decision.

## Current Land Use Update

### What is Land Use?

Land use refers to the current way a piece of land or property is utilized, defining the primary purpose of activity taking place. Unlike land cover, which refers to the physical characteristics of a land area, land use describes how people are interacting with and using that land. Land-use planning is a key aspect of urban development, aiming to strategically allocate different uses to create functional and sustainable communities while minimizing conflicts between incompatible uses. For example, non compatible land uses adjacent to one another can result in conflicts that affect the surrounding community.

### Why It's Important

Land use changes over time due to factors such as population growth, economic shifts, urban pressure, changing commodity and timber prices, policy chang-

es, and environmental factors (e.g., droughts). While some land-use changes, such as forestry, grasslands, or croplands, may be reversible, conversions to urban or residential use are typically permanent.

Updating current land use allows communities to adapt to changing needs, including population growth, economic shifts, climate impacts, and environmental concerns. Accurate land-use information ensures land is allocated efficiently and sustainably while addressing housing affordability, transportation access, natural resource preservation, and equitable development. These goals are consistent with the 2040 Plan.

### Reasons to Update Current Land Use Information

- **Population Growth:** Adjust land use to accommodate new housing, infrastructure, and services.
- **Economic Development:** Identify areas for new businesses, mixed-use developments, and industries while providing growth incentives in key corridors.
- **Climate Change Resiliency:** Protect natural areas that act as carbon sinks, preserve and protect floodplains, and promote sustainable development patterns to reduce the urban heat island effect.
- **Environmental and Greenway Protection:** Preserve wetlands, wildlife habitats, and recreational corridors.
- **Community Equity:** Ensure equitable access to housing, amenities, and services for all.
- **Infrastructure Needs:** Plan for transportation corridors, utilities, and other infrastructure to support growth and improve safety for all users of the system.

### Future Land Use Update

Updating the Current Land Use Map is a prerequisite to creating the Future Land Use Map. Accurate current land use information provides a foundation for developing the Future Land Use Map which will primarily be used for guiding future development.

### Potential Benefits of Updating Future Land Use

- **Reduced Urban Sprawl:** Direct and encourage development toward existing urban areas to prevent ineffi-

cient expansion and overextension of public services.

- **Improved Housing Affordability:** Identify parcels for a mix of housing types to increase affordability, choice and to facilitate development in preferred areas.
- **Enhanced Quality of Life:** Facilitate access to parks, green spaces, and community amenities while accommodating growth.
- **Economic Resilience:** Attract new businesses and investments to support a thriving local economy.

### Update Process

For this update, the most recent 2025 aerial imagery was used. New imagery enhanced the overall accuracy and reliability of the final maps. The Future Land Use Map was updated using GIS software and analyzed at both the block and parcel level across the City of Rockford, unincorporated islands, and portions of Winnebago County adjacent to the municipal boundary within our ultimate planning boundary.

Future land use was determined by referencing the City's zoning shapefile maintained by staff, and cross-referenced with aerial imagery. Additional verification was conducted using Google Street View, City records, and U.S. Census block-level dwelling unit data. Residential density was classified as low, medium, or high, consistent with the City's Zoning Ordinance (R-1, R-2, R-3/R-4).

### Ongoing Maintenance and Updates

The Current Land Use Map will continue to be updated regularly based on development activity and land-use changes. Updates involve ongoing data collection, aerial imagery analysis, field verification, and GIS tracking by City staff. The Future Land Use Map will most likely be updated annually as determined by staff and City Council.

This ensures that both the Current and Future Land Use Maps remain accurate and relevant for planning and decision-making in accordance with the 2040 Comp. Plan.



## Future Land Use Strategic Priorities

- **Sustainable Growth:** Direct development to optimize land use, infrastructure, and natural resources.
- **Equity and Access:** Ensure equitable access to housing, amenities, and public services.
- **Economic Development:** Promote growth in commercial, industrial, and mixed-use corridors.
- **Resilient Infrastructure:** Align land-use decisions with transportation, utility, and environmental resources.
- **Quality of Life:** Preserve community character, access to green space/ recreation, and encourage smart growth.

## Future Land Use Categories and Definitions

**Agriculture** - Agricultural uses, including traditional and urban farming; discernible cultivation, horticulture, viticulture, and pasture; and related activities such as horse boarding and training, dog kennels, sod and tree farms, and associated storage areas and buildings.

**Commercial & Retail** - Restaurant, bank, mini-storage, retail, hotel, warehouse, malls, fuel service, gas stations.

**Future Urban Development, FUD** - Areas currently rural or agricultural that are anticipated for long-term urban expansion. These lands accommodate future residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional uses as infrastructure and services become available. This designation preserves planning flexibility while discouraging premature conversion until development aligns with City growth objectives and the 2040 Plan.

**Industrial & Utilities** - Industrial, manufacturing, communications & utility infrastructure, waste water treatment facilities, warehouses, and landfills.

**Institutional** - Government, education, library, religious, public facilities, public water infrastructure, hospitals, healthcare & medical facilities, police and fire stations or facilities related to such.

**Mixed Use Development** - Mixed-uses including residential, commercial, office industrial, or any combination.

**Office** - Administrative, professional, clerical services, insurance, management & relationship firms, business consultant, credit agency, secretarial services, law firms, clinics (but not hospitals) and veterinary clinics.

**Parks & Open Space** - Parks, recreational areas & sports fields, campgrounds, playgrounds, passive open space such as park preserves, wildlife refuges, natural lands & habitat areas, greenways, common spaces, and mowed fields, private & public golf courses, cemeteries, regulated flood-ways, floodplain, and open space along rivers.

**Priority Acquisition** - Land identified for future public acquisition to expand parks, recreation, greenways, and open space; preserve natural features; improve access and connectivity; and support community, recreational, and conservation goals. Designation reflects long-term intent and does not imply immediate acquisition or development.

**Low Density Residential** - Dwelling Units Per Acre = More Than Zero But Less Than Three, (>0 - <3)

**Medium Density Residential** - Dwelling Units Per Acre = More Than Four But less Than Fifteen (>4 - <15)

**High Density Residential** - Dwelling Units Per Acre = More Than Fifteen (>15)

**Technology Industry** - Development, expansion, and support of technology-related businesses and infrastructure, including research and development facilities, data centers, tech campuses, advanced electronic and digital manufacturing, and innovation hubs, with consideration for high-speed internet, transportation access, utility capacity, and proximity to educational and workforce resources.

**Transportation Facilities** - Roads, Right-of-Way (ROW), railroads and railroad ROW, transitional areas along roadways and highways.

**Water Resources** - Streams, creeks, rivers, ponds, lakes, and storm-water channels or storm-water conveyances with more than intermittent water present.

# Future Land Use Illustrations



AGRICULTURE



COMMERCIAL & RETAIL



INDUSTRIAL & UTILITIES



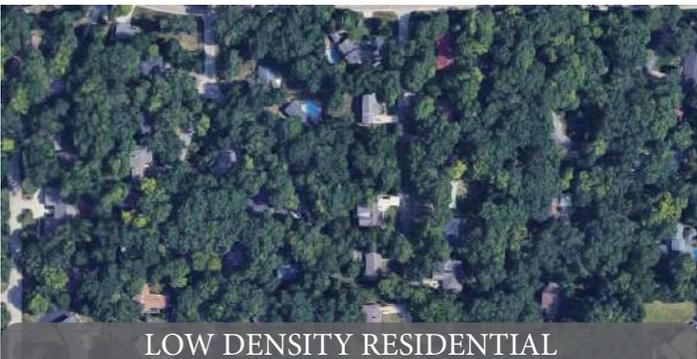
INSTITUTIONAL



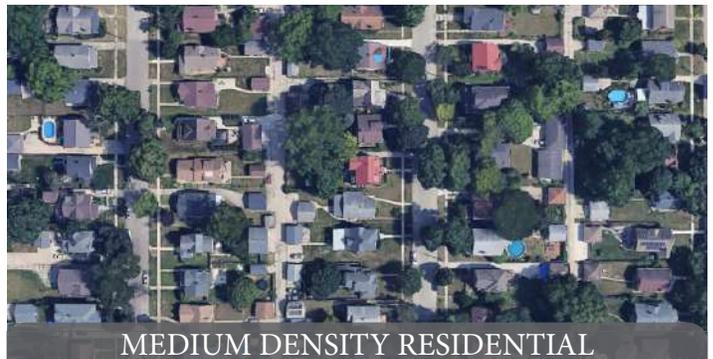
OFFICE



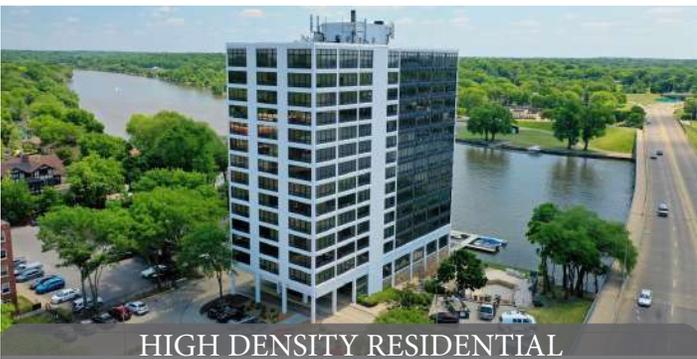
PARKS & OPEN SPACE



LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

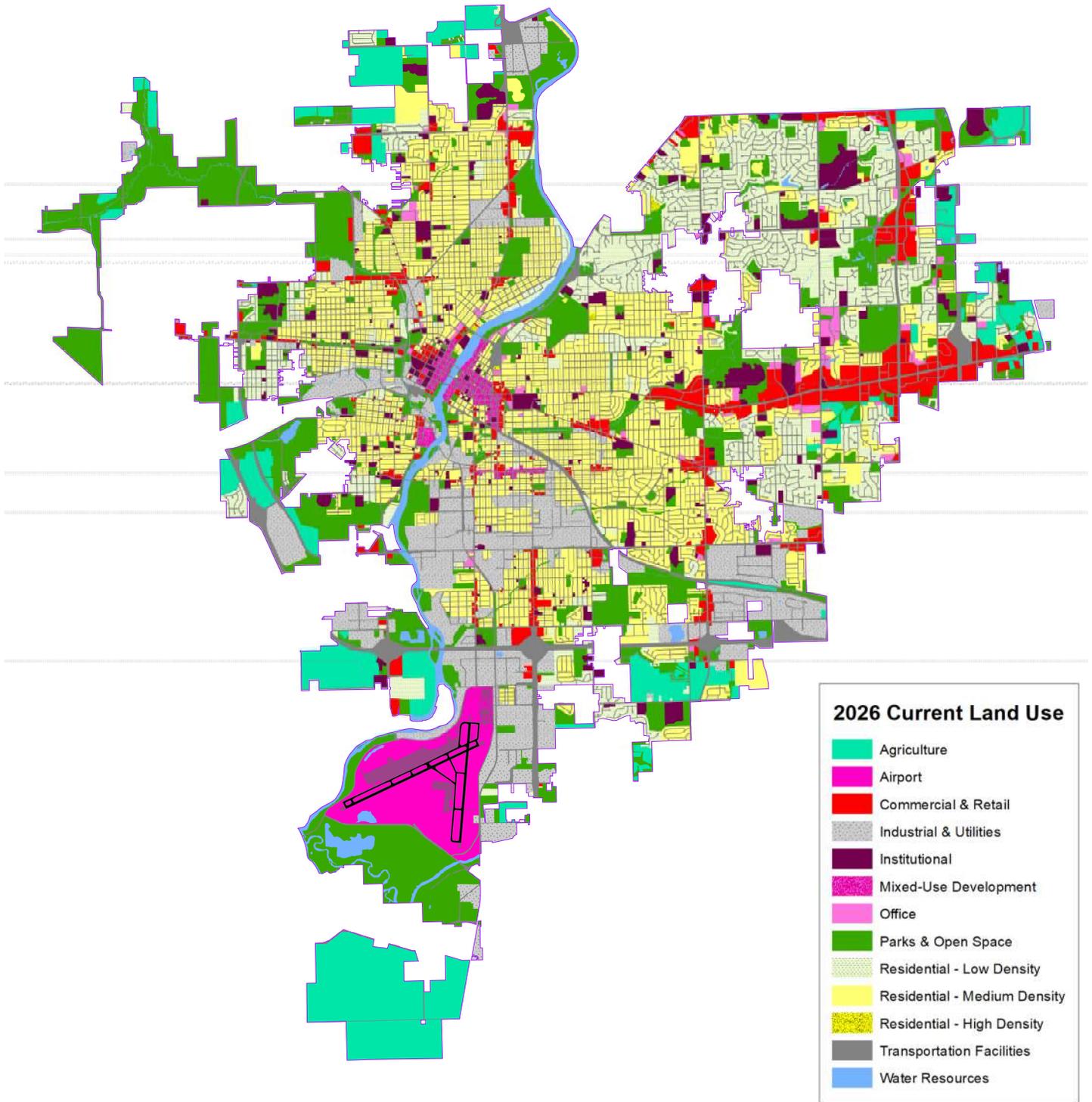


HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



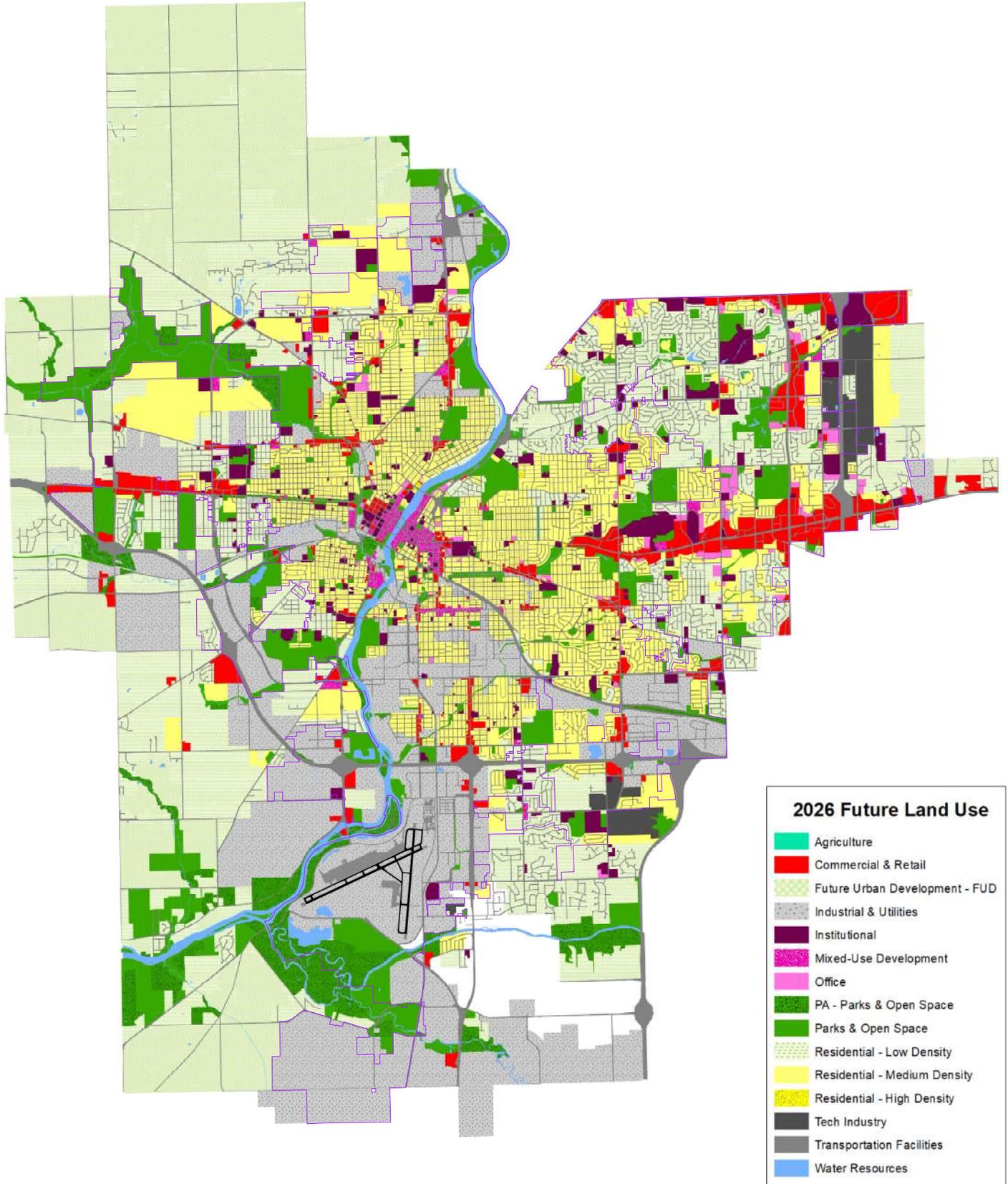
TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

# Current Land Use Map



The Current Land Use Map illustrates the existing use and development pattern of land throughout the City of Rockford and its planning boundary. Developed using GIS analysis, aerial imagery, zoning records, and field verification, it provides an accurate, parcel-level snapshot of how land is used today and serves as a foundation for planning, infrastructure coordination, and future land use decisions.

# Future Land Use Map



The Future Land Use Map presents the City of Rockford's long-term vision for how land may develop and evolve through 2040. It serves as a policy guide to inform planning decisions, infrastructure investment, and growth priorities, while not changing zoning, authorizing development, or affecting existing property rights.

## Implementation & Action Framework

### How to Read and Use the Future Land Use Map

The 2040 Future Land Use Map is intended to function as a long-range planning guide. It expresses the City of Rockford's vision for how land across the community may evolve over time through the year 2040.

#### Importantly, the Future Land Use Map:

- Does not represent a zoning change
- Does not alter current land use entitlements
- Does not change a property's operational status
- Does not authorize development
- Does not require redevelopment
- Does not mandate that any property transition from its current use

The map is conceptual and policy-oriented. It allows the City to consider a range of potential long-term scenarios over the 2040 planning horizon should conditions change over time — including shifts in population, market demand, infrastructure capacity, or community priorities.

Property owners may continue their existing uses consistent with current zoning regulations. Any future change in zoning, land use entitlement, or development proposal would require a separate public review process in accordance with City procedures and state law.

In this way, the Future Land Use Map serves as a strategic planning tool rather than a regulatory document. It provides direction, but it does not itself implement change.

### Purpose of the Future Land Use Map

The 2040 Future Land Use Map provides a shared picture of how Rockford can grow and develop in the years ahead, reflecting community values and long-term goals for housing, jobs, quality of life, and natural resources.

The map will guide City planning and decision-making through the following processes:

- Illustrates the intended general pattern of land uses across the city through 2040
- Helps the City, residents, and stakeholders understand broad directions for future development and conservation
- Supports thoughtful decisions about public investments, infrastructure planning, and community improvements
- Provides a foundation for discussions about community priorities and values

This map is meant to be clear, understandable, and accessible. It serves as a tool for residents and leaders alike to see where the City envisions different kinds of growth and development patterns.

### Using the Map to Guide Decisions

- Informing reviews of development proposals and infrastructure plans
- Helping guide where investments in public services and facilities may be most needed
- Encouraging efficient use of existing infrastructure and services
- Highlighting areas where environmental resources and community character can be protected

In this way, the map acts as a common point of reference for discussions about Rockford's future. This helps ensure decision making across City departments, service areas, and public conversations are coordinated and grounded in shared goals.

### Relationship to Zoning

The Future Land Use Map and the City's Zoning Ordinance serve different functions.

- The Future Land Use Map expresses long-term policy direction.
- The Zoning Ordinance regulates current land use, density, and very specific development standards.

If a property owner seeks a rezoning or development approval, the Future Land Use Map may be considered as one factor in evaluating consistency with long-term planning goals. However, no zoning change occurs unless formally adopted through a separate legislative action by the City Council following required public notice and hearings.

### Flexibility Over Time

The 2040 planning horizon recognizes that community conditions evolve. Market forces, infrastructure investments, demographic trends, environmental constraints, and economic opportunities may all influence how land is ultimately used.

- The Future Land Use Map should be interpreted with reasonable flexibility
- Designations represent general categories, not parcel-by-parcel mandates
- Amendments may be considered when circumstances warrant and when consistent with broader Comprehensive Plan goals. Amendments are only approved through City Council majority vote.

This flexibility allows the City to remain responsive while simultaneously maintaining a stable and predictable long-range vision tool.

#### Adoption of the Future Land Use Map does not:

- Reduce legally established property rights
- Eliminate lawful existing uses
- Create an obligation for property owners to redevelop or make changes to their property

### No Impact on Property Rights

Property owners retain the ability to continue lawful uses of their property consistent with applicable regulations.

### Role in Infrastructure & Capital Planning

The Future Land Use Map also serves as a coordination tool for:

- Transportation planning
- Utility infrastructure investment
- Park and open space planning
- Housing strategy
- Economic development initiatives



By illustrating a long-term growth pattern, the map helps the City align public investments with anticipated future needs while remaining adaptable as conditions evolve.

### Keeping the Map Relevant

Conditions in Rockford, including population trends, housing needs, and economic opportunities, will continue to evolve over time.

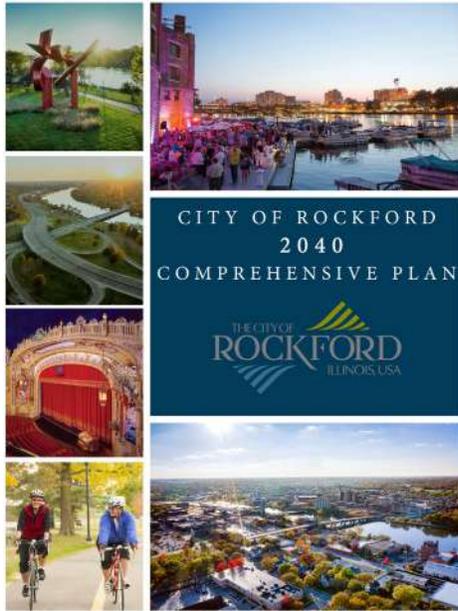
To remain a useful guide:

- The City anticipates periodically reviewing and updating the Future Land Use Map to reflect new data and community input
- Updates will be shaped by community feedback, local needs, and broader planning goals
- Future engagement opportunities will be announced so residents can help shape how Rockford grows

This approach helps ensure the map remains responsive to evolving priorities and community vision.

### Consistency with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan

The Future Land Use Map is rooted in the City of Rockford's long-range vision as expressed in the adopted 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan, officially adopted in October 2023, sets out broad goals and policies for the city's physical development and quality of life through the year 2040.



### Alignment with City Vision

The Comprehensive Plan provides a foundation that the Future Land Use Map builds upon. Together, they:

- Reflect a shared vision for how Rockford can grow while improving residents’ quality of life
- Coordinate land use planning with infrastructure, housing, transportation, natural resources, and economic opportunity
- Support a future that is equitable, resilient, and sustainable

The Future Land Use Map honors those principles by shaping a citywide pattern of land use that anticipates housing needs, embraces diverse neighborhood types, and protects natural assets.

### Supporting City Goals

1. **Balanced Growth and Quality of Life** — The Plan emphasizes growth that is sustainable and enhances livability across the city.
2. **Efficient Use of Infrastructure** — By focusing development within existing corridors and service areas, the map supports efficient use of public investments and our infrastructure systems already in place.
3. **Diverse Housing Choices and Neighborhood Strength** — The map reflects the Plan’s emphasis on a range of housing types to meet diverse needs and support strong, healthy neighborhoods.

4. **Economic Resilience** — Designations support a diverse mix of businesses and employment opportunities, advancing the Plan’s economic development goals while enabling efficient, targeted growth.

5. **Natural and Community Resources** — Areas representing parks, open space, and environmental assets that support conservation efforts and enhance the overall quality of life for residents, as identified and prioritized in the Comprehensive Plan.

## Housing Needs and Future Land Use Connection

### The Importance of Housing to Rockford’s Long-Term Vision

Providing a sufficient and diverse housing supply is central to achieving the long-range vision established by the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and supporting the continued growth and stability of the community.

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan adopted by the City of Rockford identifies housing as a foundational component of economic resilience, neighborhood vitality, and overall quality of life. Access to safe, attainable, and diverse housing options supports workforce development, strengthens neighborhoods, and enables residents to remain in the community at all stages of life.

The City’s 2024 Housing Needs Analysis and Market Study builds upon this policy framework by evaluating current market conditions and projecting future housing demand. Together, these planning efforts provide a data-driven basis for aligning long-range land use decisions with identified housing needs.

### Projected Housing Demand

The Housing Needs Analysis and Market Study identifies a substantial need for additional housing units over the coming decade. Based on projected household growth, employment trends, and market conditions, the study estimates that Rockford will require several thousand additional housing units by the early 2030s to maintain a balanced and competitive housing market.

Key findings include:

- Continued demand for both owner-occupied and rental housing
- Limited inventory across multiple price points
- Increased pressure on entry-level and workforce housing
- The need for a broader mix of housing types to accommodate changing household sizes and demographics

These findings reinforce that housing production is not solely a private market issue, but a community-wide planning priority.

### **Relationship Between Housing and the Future Land Use Map**

The Future Land Use Map plays a critical role in supporting the City's housing objectives. While the map does not authorize development or mandate rezoning, it establishes long-term guidance regarding where residential growth and mixed-use development may be appropriate over the 2040 planning horizon.

By identifying areas suitable for residential and mixed-use designations, the map:

- Supports planning for increased housing supply consistent with projected demand
- Encourages development in areas served by existing infrastructure and public services

- Promotes efficient land use patterns that strengthen neighborhoods and corridors
- Aligns future growth with transportation, utilities, and community facilities planning

This forward-looking approach allows the City to anticipate housing needs while maintaining flexibility as conditions evolve.

### **Supporting a Diversity of Housing Types**

Both the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and the Housing Needs Analysis emphasize the importance of expanding housing choice.

Meeting future demand will require a range of housing types, including:

- Single-family homes
- Town homes and small-lot development
- Multifamily housing
- Mixed-use residential development
- Workforce housing options
- Planned Unit Developments (PUD's)
- And other creative forms of housing

The Future Land Use Map reflects this need by incorporating residential categories that allow for varied densities and neighborhood contexts. This approach supports balanced growth while reinforcing community character.



### **Housing as an Economic and Community Development Strategy**

Housing availability directly influences economic competitiveness. Employers rely on access to housing for current and prospective employees, and residents benefit from the ability to find housing that aligns with income levels and lifestyle needs. It's about choices and options for all socio-economic levels.



By integrating housing demand projections into long-range land use planning, the City positions itself to:

- Support job growth and workforce attraction
- Stabilize and strengthen neighborhoods
- Encourage reinvestment and infill development
- Enhance overall quality of life

Coordinating the Future Land Use Map with housing market data ensures that long-term planning decisions are grounded in community vision, measurable need, and the ability to adapt to the changing needs of the City.

## Monitoring, Amendments, and Ongoing Updates

### Implementation Through City Processes

The Future Land Use Map will be carried out through established City procedures and decision-making processes.

While the map itself does not change zoning or authorize development, it serves as a policy guide in evaluating:

- Zoning map amendments
- Subdivision and site development proposals
- Planned development applications
- Capital improvement planning
- Infrastructure investment decisions

The map provides long-term policy direction during these processes but does not replace required public review, notice, or legislative action.

### Capital Planning and Infrastructure Coordination

Future land use designations help guide strategic public investment. Aligning infrastructure planning with long-range land use ensures efficient use of public resources and supports orderly growth.

The Future Land Use Map will help inform:

- Transportation improvements
- Water and sanitary sewer system planning
- Storm-water management investments
- Park and open space planning
- Public facility siting

Coordinating land use and infrastructure supports fiscal responsibility and reduces the likelihood of premature or inefficient extension of public services.

### Monitoring Housing and Market Conditions

Because housing demand is a key driver of future land use decisions, the City will periodically evaluate relevant data to ensure that the Future Land Use Map remains aligned with community needs.

Monitoring may include review of:

- Housing production levels
- Vacancy and affordability trends
- Population and household growth
- Employment trends and economic conditions
- Available land supply within residential designations



This data-driven approach allows the City to respond thoughtfully to changing conditions while maintaining long-term stability.

### **Amendment Process**

The Future Land Use Map may be amended when circumstances warrant adjustment to reflect changing conditions or community priorities.

Amendments may be considered when:

- Market conditions materially shift
- Infrastructure investments alter growth patterns
- New planning studies provide updated data
- A property-specific request demonstrates consistency with broader Comprehensive Plan goals

All amendments will follow required public review procedures and formal consideration by the City Council. This ensures transparency, accountability, and alignment with the City’s long-term vision.

## **Public Engagement Summary**

The City of Rockford invited residents, businesses, and community stakeholders to share their thoughts on the proposed update to the 2040 Future Land Use Map through a 30-day public comment period announced on January 30, 2026.

### **Purpose of Engagement**

- Learn about the updated Future Land Use Map and its purpose
- Provide feedback on the map’s design and categories
- Offer ideas and insights that can help refine planning and future updates

### **How Residents Could Participate**

The updated interactive Future Land Use Map was made accessible online

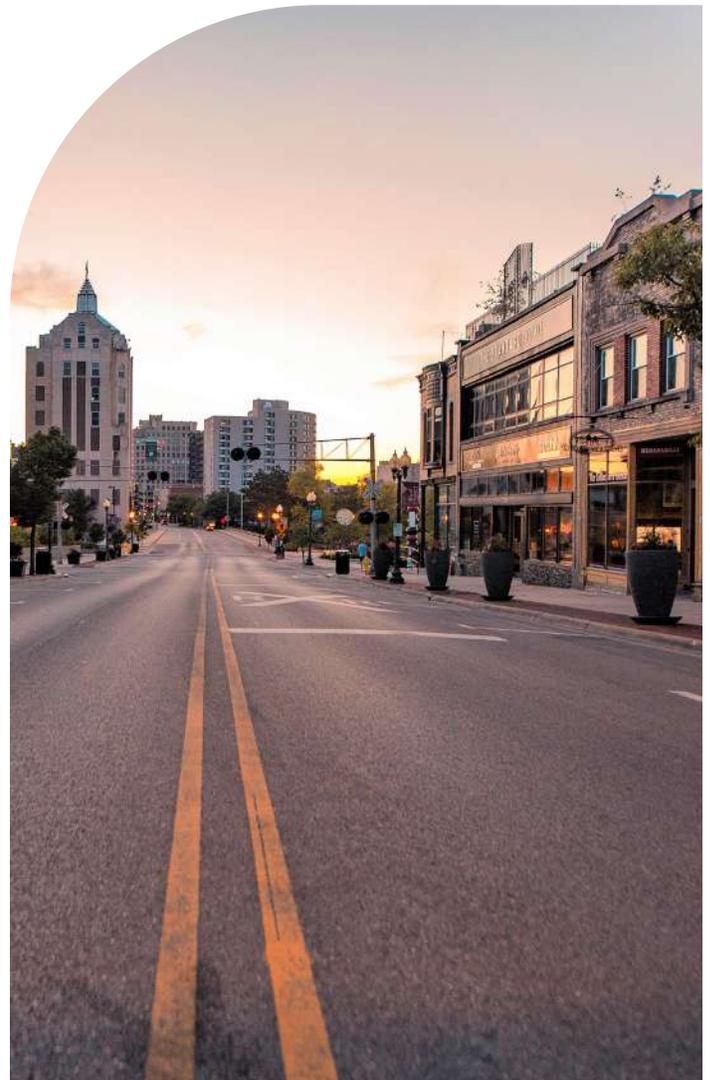
- Residents were encouraged to review the map
- Comments and feedback were accepted by email
- The City provided clear instructions on how to sub-

mit comments, including an email contact for submissions

### **Value of Public Input**

- Ensure the Future Land Use Map reflects local priorities
- Highlight community concerns and opportunities that might not appear in data alone
- Strengthen transparency and trust in the planning process

**All input received during the public comment period was reviewed and carefully considered. Based on the comments received, staff made minor modifications to the symbology of several land use designations, as well as limited adjustments to specific land use classifications following careful staff review.**



## Executive Summary

### Future Land Use Map Update

The City of Rockford has updated its Current and Future Land Use Maps to reflect present conditions and provide clear, long-range guidance for growth and development through the year 2040. The previous Future Land Use Map, last significantly updated in 2011, has been revised using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), recent aerial imagery, zoning data, housing and demographic analysis, infrastructure information, and the adopted 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

The 2040 Future Land Use Map is a long-range planning and policy guide that illustrates the City's vision for how land may evolve over time. **It does not change zoning, authorize development, alter existing land use entitlements, or affect property rights.** Any future zoning changes or development proposals must continue to follow the City's established public review, notice, and approval processes. Instead, the map serves as a framework to guide planning decisions, infrastructure investments, and private development in alignment with community goals and long-term planning objectives.

### Key Objectives of the update include:

- **Guiding orderly growth** by directing development toward appropriate corridors, infill areas, and locations served by existing infrastructure
- **Supporting housing needs** by identifying areas suitable for a mix of housing types to accommodate projected demand
- **Promoting economic development** by reinforcing commercial, industrial, and mixed-use corridors and supporting job growth
- **Preserving community character and natural resources** while encouraging reinvestment and sustainable development
- **Coordinating infrastructure investment** to ensure efficient, fiscally responsible use of public resources
- **Maintaining flexibility** to respond to changing market conditions, population trends, and community priorities

Informed by the **2040 Comprehensive Plan** and the **2023 Housing Needs Assessment and Market Study**, the **2040 Future Land Use Map** establishes a coordinated, data-driven framework to guide Rockford's future growth, investment, and development. The map provides a clear vision that supports a resilient economy, diverse housing opportunities, efficient infrastructure planning, and a high quality of life for residents through 2040, while maintaining existing zoning regulations and property rights.

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“Rockford is seeing major economic momentum — more projects, more jobs, and more opportunities for Rockford residents.”

“We are making historic investment in our physical infrastructure... You're going to continue to see us invest in infrastructure throughout the entire city of Rockford and invest in our people.”

**Mayor Thomas McNamara** - Rock River Current, 2025

