

**RESOLUTION NO. 2026-\_\_\_\_-R**  
**RESOLUTION APPROVING THE CREATION OF THE**  
**SPACES TO PLACES PROGRAM**  
**TO SUPPORT VACANT STOREFRONT ACTIVATION**

**WHEREAS**, the City of Rockford (the "City") seeks to reduce commercial vacancies, encourage new business openings, support small and local entrepreneurs, increase foot traffic, activate underutilized commercial space, and strengthen the overall vibrancy of commercial areas within the City of Rockford; and

**WHEREAS**, the City desires to create the Spaces to Places Program (the "Program") to provide temporary rent assistance to eligible new or expanding businesses locating in currently vacant storefronts in specified commercial areas of the City; and

**WHEREAS**, under the Program, eligible businesses may receive reimbursement of security deposits and fifty percent (50%) of rent for up to twelve (12) months, not to exceed a total funding level of Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000.00) per business, subject to the Program requirements and availability of funds; and

**WHEREAS**, eligible businesses must lease and occupy currently vacant ground-floor commercial storefronts, secure a lease with the property owner, and engage with a small business resource such as Think Big!, the Small Business Development Center, a business district association, or another City-approved organization or consultant, and the identified storefront must be the business's first or second location, must not have been previously leased by the applicant, and must not be used as a replacement location for a business that terminates an existing lease to participate in the program; and

**WHEREAS**, eligible properties must be ground-floor commercial storefronts that are commercially zoned, current on property taxes, and vacant for at least six (6) months; and

**WHEREAS**, the Program will initially be available in commercial areas covered by an existing business district association, including the Downtown/River District, North Main/North End, South Main/SWIFTT, 7th Street/Midtown, and East State Street from Midtown to Mulford/Miracle Mile, with additional areas eligible upon establishment of a business association under the Business Association Development Grant Engagement Program (BADGE); and

**WHEREAS**, Three Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$300,000.00) from 2026 and 2027 Casino Funds has been designated for storefront activation assistance, with funding to be approved on a first-come, first-served basis for eligible applicants and properties that receive City pre-approval; and

**WHEREAS**, Three Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$300,000.00) from 2026 and 2027 Casino Funds has been designated for storefront activation assistance, with funding to be approved on a first-come, first-served basis for eligible applicants and properties that receive City pre-approval; and

**WHEREAS**, the City intends to obligate and expend available Program funding in a manner that maximizes storefront activation and economic impact, without reserving or allocating funding by geographic area, while working with business district associations, property owners, and community partners to encourage participation throughout eligible areas; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Council finds that creation of the Program will serve a public purpose by encouraging economic development, business attraction and retention, and the productive use of vacant commercial property within the City of Rockford.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of Rockford, Illinois, that the Spaces to Places Program is hereby created and approved in substantially the form described in Exhibit A attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Director of Community and Economic Development, or the Director's designee, is authorized to administer the Program, establish and revise program guidelines and application procedures consistent with this Resolution, approve eligible applications subject to available funding, and execute agreements and other documents necessary to implement the Program.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this Resolution shall be in full force and effect immediately upon its adoption and approval as provided by law.

ADOPTED by the City Council of the City of Rockford, Illinois this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.

APPROVED by the Mayor of the City of Rockford, Illinois this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor Thomas P. McNamara  
City of Rockford, Illinois

**ATTEST:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Legal Director  
Ex Officio Keeper of the Records and  
Seal of the City of Rockford, Illinois

**EXHIBIT A**  
**SPACES TO PLACES PROGRAM SUMMARY**

The Spaces to Places Program is designed to reduce commercial vacancies and support small business growth by providing temporary rent assistance for new or expanding businesses locating in currently vacant storefronts in eligible commercial areas within the City of Rockford.

<b>Program Element</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Fill vacant storefronts; encourage new business openings; support small and local entrepreneurs; and create more active, inviting commercial areas.
<b>Assistance</b>	Reimbursement of security deposits and 50% of rent for up to 12 months, not to exceed \$20,000 per business. Security deposits are reimbursable after the business has remained in the space for 3 months. Monthly rent is reimbursable at 50% upon verification of paid rent and compliance.
<b>Business Eligibility</b>	Customer-facing service businesses, including retail, restaurants, cafes, and experiential uses. The storefront must be the business' first or second location. A prior lessee of the identified space is not eligible, and a business under a current lease may not terminate that lease to move into a new assisted space.
<b>Property Eligibility</b>	Ground-floor commercial storefronts that are commercially zoned, current on property taxes, and vacant for at least 6 months. Property owners are not eligible to apply.
<b>Eligible Areas</b>	Existing business district association areas: Downtown/River District; North Main/North End; South Main/SWIFTT; 7th Street/Midtown; and East State Street from Midtown to Mulford/Miracle Mile. Additional areas may become eligible through BADGE.
<b>Business Requirements</b>	The business owner must enter into an agreement with the City, comply with the lease, pay costs under the lease, submit payment and compliance verification before reimbursement, and engage with Think Big!, the Small Business Development Center, a business district association, or another City-approved resource.
<b>Property Owner Requirements</b>	The property owner must execute and comply with the lease agreement with the participating business.
<b>Funding Administration</b>	Total Program funding is \$300,000, Initially to each District identified in the Resolution and other City economic development funds. Awards are first-come, first-served for eligible applicants and properties receiving City pre-approval. Funding is not allocated or reserved by geographic area.
<b>Program Goal</b>	Activate at least three vacant storefronts in each eligible area and in areas that become eligible through BADGE, subject to eligible applications and available funding.