



PLANNING & ZONING REPORT

Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting of January 21, 2026

File # 048-25

APPLICANTS: Allen and Shawn Cox

LOCATION: 716 Indiana Avenue

REQUESTED ACTION: A Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development for an event space for receptions, cultural events and celebrations of life in an R-4, Multi-family Residential Zoning District.

EXISTING USES: Vacant building (former Rockford Lithuanian Club)

PROPOSED USES: Event Space for receptions, cultural events and celebrations of life

DIMENSIONS: Irregular shape **SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 2.13 acres

ADJACENT ZONING AND LAND USES:

NORTH:	R-1	Single-family residences
EAST:	R-1	True Vine M.B. Church, Single-family residences
SOUTH:	C-3	Vacant Funeral Home, ComEd substation
WEST:	R-1, R-4	Single-family residences, Vacant land

YEAR 2040 PLAN: RL Light Residential

SOILS REPORT: No soils report on file.

HISTORY: **File #014-17:** A Modification of Special Use Permit #012-15 for religious assembly with parking and a Variation to reduce the building setback from 30' to 20' along Harding Street and Holland Streets and a Variation to reduce the building setback from 30' to 10' along Hopkins Court in an R-1, Single family Residential Zoning District was approved on August 9, 2017. This property is located five (5) blocks north west of the subject property.

File #012-15: Modification of Special Use Permit #012-13 to allow a religious assembly with parsonage and Variation to reduce the front yard setback from 20' to 10' along Hopkins Court in an R-1, Single family Residential Zoning District was approved on June 1, 2015. This property is located five (5) blocks north west of the subject property.

File #012-13: A Special Use Permit to allow a religious assembly in an R-1, Single family Residential Zoning District was approved on August 16, 2013. This property is located five (5) blocks north west of the subject property.

File #018-04: A Special Use Permit for a church and church related activities and a Variation in landscaping as per the submitted site plan in an R-1, Single family Residential Zoning District was approved June 1, 2004 for the property located at 2209 Clifton Ave. and 911 Michigan Ave. This is one (1) blocks south west of the subject property.

REVIEW COMMENTS: The Applicants are requesting a Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development for an event space for receptions, cultural events and celebrations of life in an R-4, Multi-family Residential Zoning District. Exhibit A shows that the subject property is located on the southwest corner of Indiana Avenue West Street. The neighborhood is a mixture of commercial and residential uses (Exhibits B and C).

The subject property was constructed in the 1953 as a social club known as the Rockford Lithuanian Club. Currently, the building is vacant. The Applicant has purchased the property and now wants to use it as an event space.

The Applicant submitted Exhibit D which is a proposed site plan of the subject property. The property was built with the majority of the parking lot occupying the property and the building has some existing green areas around the building. The subject property is zoned R-4 and parking is required in this zoning district. A special event space facility is required to provide parking at one space per 60 square feet. Exhibit D shows 84 parking spaces. Staff is unsure of the actual number of parking spaces as Exhibit D does not show the entire parking lot striped but does indicate plenty of overflow parking. However, this lot was adequate when the Rockford Lithuanian Club occupied the building so Staff feels parking should not be an issue. Exhibit D appears to still show the terrace parking in the Right-of-Way, which will need to be removed and replaced with topsoil and grass seed. A site and landscaping plan addressing the removal of the terrace parking and the replacement with topsoil and grass seed should be submitted for Staff's review and approval. Additionally, Exhibit D shows a dumpster enclosure in the parking lot, which is a suitable location. However, Staff feels the dumpster enclosure should be constructed a trex-board material or a material similar to the existing building material.

Additionally, Exhibit D is the landscaping plan. Exhibit D shows perimeter landscaping along Indiana Avenue, along a portion of West Street and along a portion west property line. Although the proposed perimeter landscaping is a vast improvement over the existing conditions there are still a few areas that will need to be improved. The perimeter landscaping will need to replace the first parking space along Indiana Avenue directly east and west of the building. These two (2) parking spaces can be added to the row of parking along West Street. Additionally, the proposed landscape island in the middle of the proposed parking spaces south and east of the eastern most access point along Indiana Avenue can be removed as it would not be necessary. Finally, Exhibit D will need provide the plant species and sizes for the required Perimeter Landscaping, Shade Trees and Interior Landscaping. A site and landscaping plan addressing the landscaping issues and striping of parking stalls should be submitted for Staff's review and approval.

Exhibit E is the interior floor plan. The main entrance is from the Indiana Avenue side of the building and there are additional exits off the sides and rear. Exhibit E shows there will be an event area, stage, bar with stools, a seating area, storage areas, kitchen area and bathrooms.

Exhibit F is the proposed Summary Statement for Special Use Permit. The Applicants explain, "the proposed use of the property as an event venue for wedding receptions, celebrations of life, and similar private gatherings operating in a manner that protects the public health, safety, morals, comfort, and general welfare of the community" (Exhibit F). The Applicants state, "this property is owned by the Lithuanian Club, which has historically hosted similar gatherings, social events, and community activities on the premises for many years and the proposed use is therefore consistent with the long-standing character and function of the property and will not introduce new or unfamiliar impacts to the surrounding area" (Exhibit F). Finally, the Applicants explain, "a local architect has provided a detailed landscape plan, which add beauty to the Forest City and the venue will proudly accomplish this by planting shade tree such as Red Maple and River Birch and shrubbery such as Flowerwood Grasses and Hydrangea Bushes" (Exhibit F).

Exhibit G is the business plan for Copper Lantern describing how the Applicant intends to run the event space. The principal use of the property will be to host special events for life's most meaningful celebrations from elegant weddings and quinceaneras to timeless gatherings. The hours of operation will be Wednesday and Thursday 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (midnight), Friday and Saturday 12:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. (midnight) and Sunday 12:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Exhibit G further explains all employees will be Basset certified; however, liquor sales and/or consumption is prohibited until a liquor license has been approved for the subject property and business or a caterer with a current liquor license is used. The Applicants state, "through thoughtful restoration and community collaboration, we create a welcoming and diverse venue where every celebration brings positivity to our City's story" Exhibit G).

Exhibit H is a building elevation of the proposed exterior improvements that would be made.

Exhibit I is the service calls for the last two (2) years. There were three (3) calls for service at 716 Indiana Avenue.

Upon inspection of the subject property staff observed a freestanding bingo sign on the southeast corner of the building, which should be removed as bingo is not within the business plans for the applicants and the sign is nonconforming

The proposed special events are expected to enhance community engagement by providing a safe, family-friendly activities for all ages. The Applicant has provided a clear operational plan outlining events to be hosted and management will oversee events to have minimal impact on nearby properties. Staff feels that the Applicant's request is reasonable and recommends approval of the Applicant's request subject to conditions.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the requested Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development for an event space for receptions, cultural events and celebrations of life in an R-4, Multi-family Residential Zoning District subject to the following conditions:

1. Meet all Applicable Building and Fire Codes.
2. Compliance with all City of Rockford Code of Ordinances including Liquor Codes.
3. If any of the proposed uses change or additional uses are proposed, a modification of the Special Use Permit will be required.
4. The hours of operation will be Wednesday and Thursday 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Friday and Saturday 12:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. (midnight) and Sunday 12:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.
5. Submittal of an updated site plan including landscaping and striping plan for the parking lot for Staff's review and approval.
6. Submittal of a Dumpster Enclosure Permit Application and dumpster enclosure detail for Staff's review and approval.
7. The dumpster enclosure must be constructed of a trex-board material or a material similar to the existing building material.
8. Installation of approved landscaping and parking lot striping by August 1, 2026.
9. Removal of the freestanding bingo sign by August 1, 2026.
10. Any future signage must comply with the current Ordinance.
11. All security personnel must be certified.

SC: DM 1/12/26

**FINDINGS OF FACT FOR APPROVAL OF A SPECIAL USE PERMIT FOR A PLANNED
UNIT DEVELOPMENT
FOR AN EVENT SPACE FOR RECEPTIONS, CULTURAL EVENTS
AND CELEBRATIONS OF LIFE
IN A R-4, MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL ZONING DISTRICT
LOCATED AT 716 INDIANA AVENUE**

Approval of this Special Use Permit is based upon the following findings:

1. The establishment, maintenance or operation of the Special Use Permit will not be detrimental to and endanger the public health, safety, morals, comfort and general welfare of the community.
2. The Special Use Permit will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity for the purposes already permitted, and will substantially diminish and impair property values within the neighborhood.
3. The establishment of the special use will not impede the normal or orderly development and improvement of the surrounding property for uses permitted in the district.
4. Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and/or necessary facilities have been provided.
5. Adequate measures have been taken to provide ingress or egress so designed as to minimize traffic congestion in the public streets.
6. The special use does conform to the applicable regulations of the R-4 District in which it is located.

Exhibit A
716 Indiana Avenue
SUP
#048-25

ISLAND

WEST

ILLINOIS

INDIANA

MICHIGAN

MARCHESANO

MAINE

MAINE

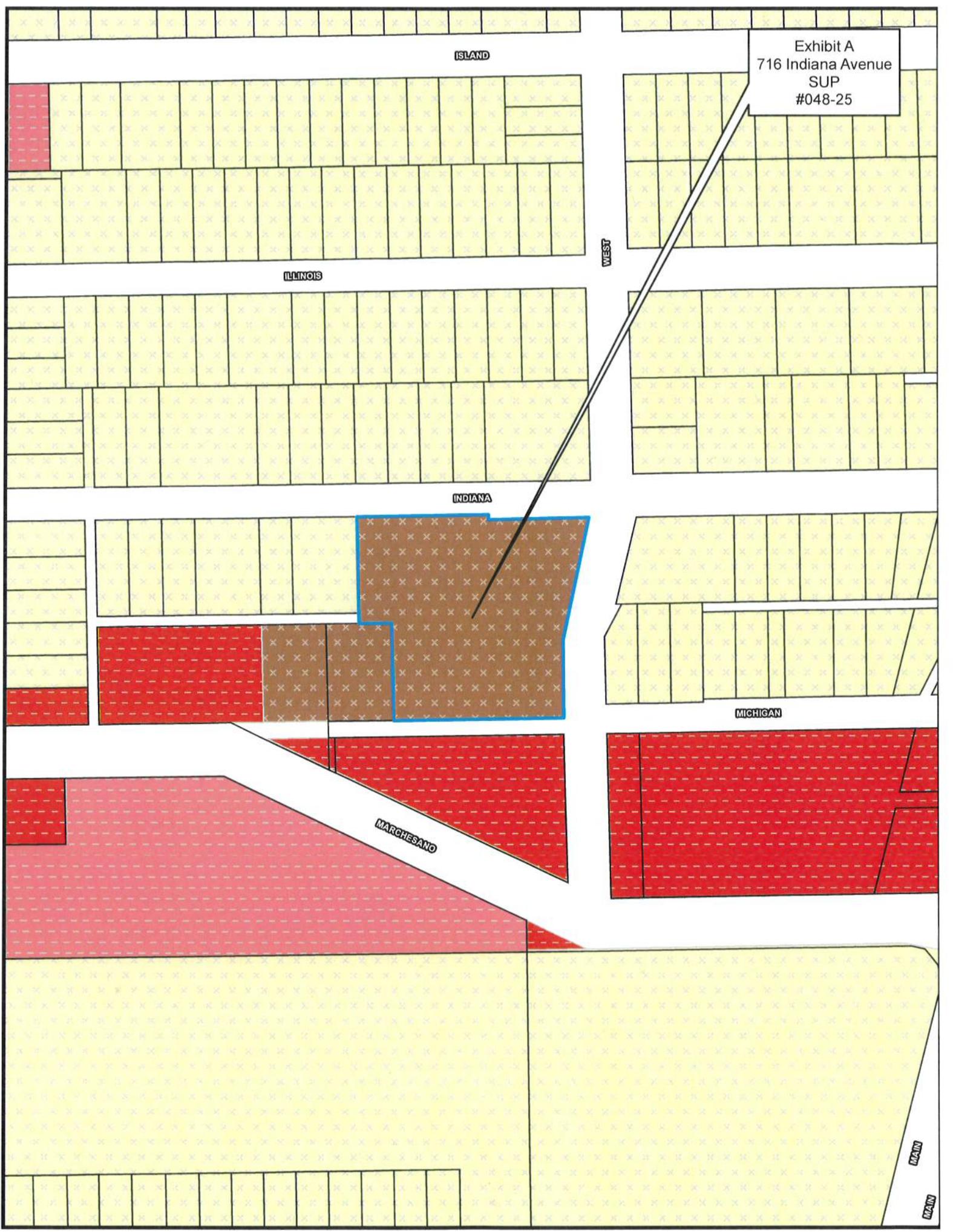


Exhibit B
716 Indiana Avenue
SUP
#048-25

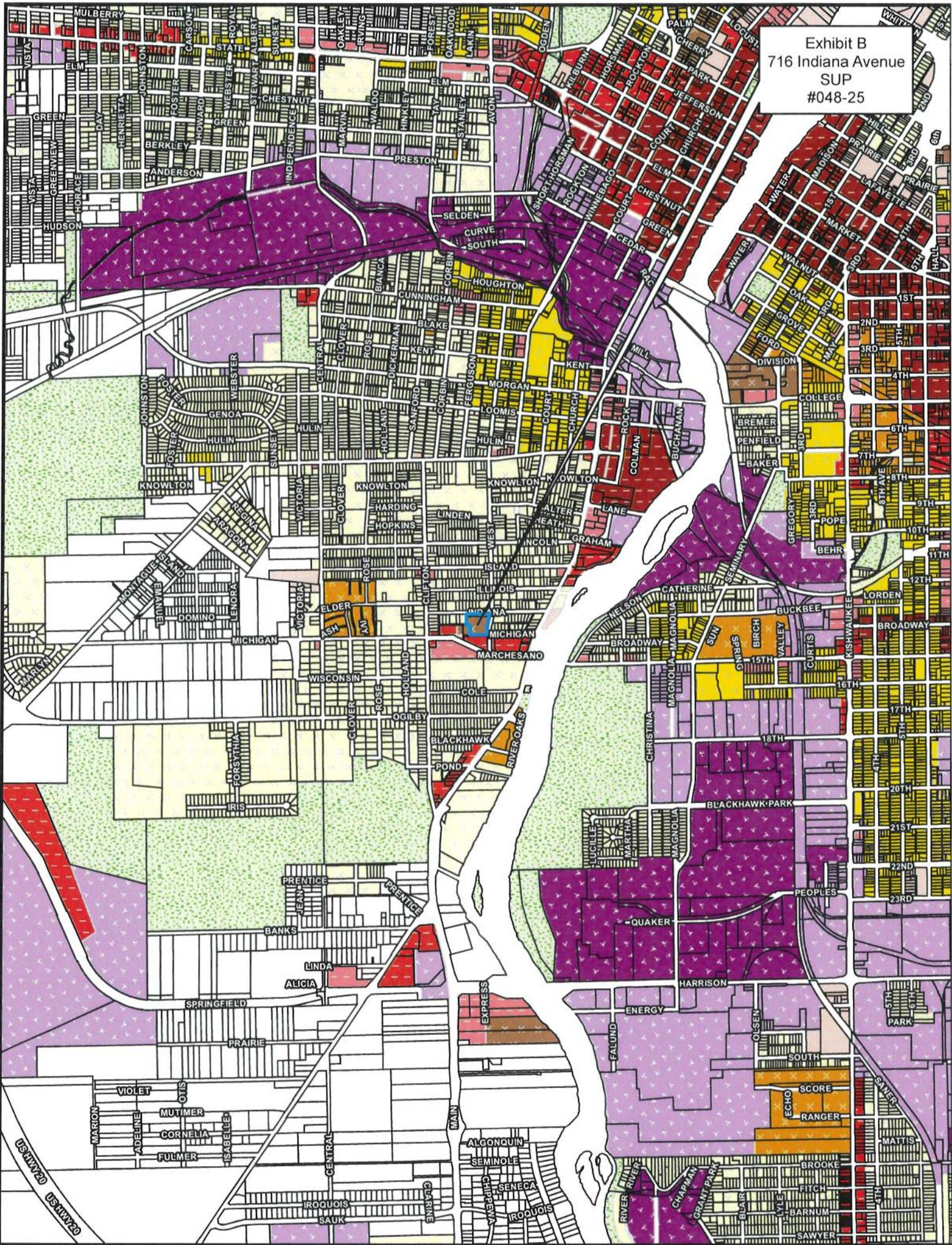
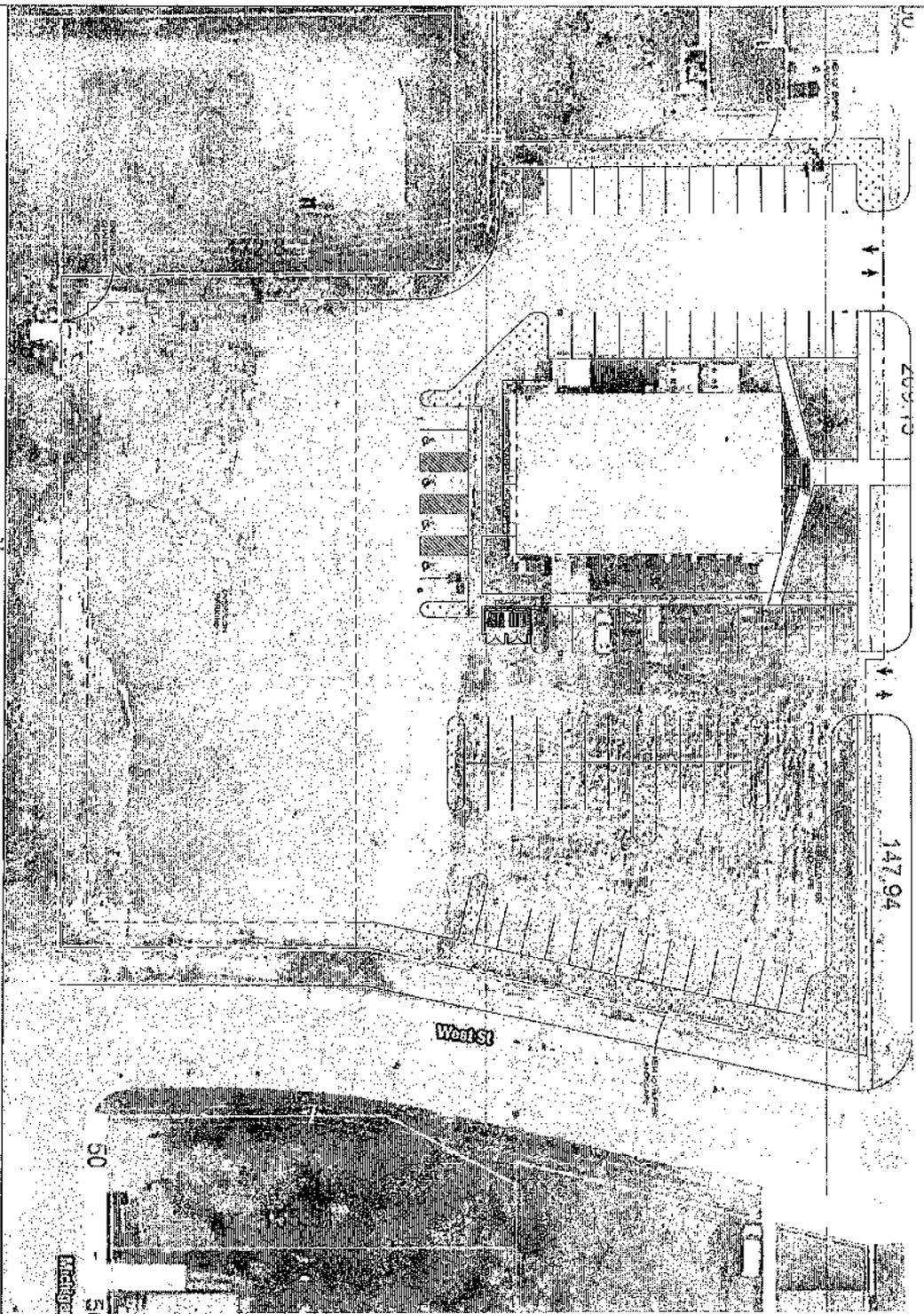


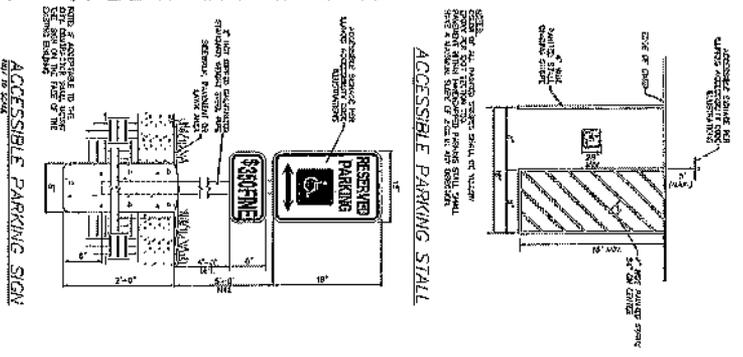
Exhibit C
716 Indiana Avenue
SUP
#048-25





ARCHITECTURAL SITE PLAN
SCALE: 1" = 20'-0"

200 SQUARE FEET LOCATED IN AREA AROUND TOTAL OF 34 SQUARE FEET INDICATED INCLUDED



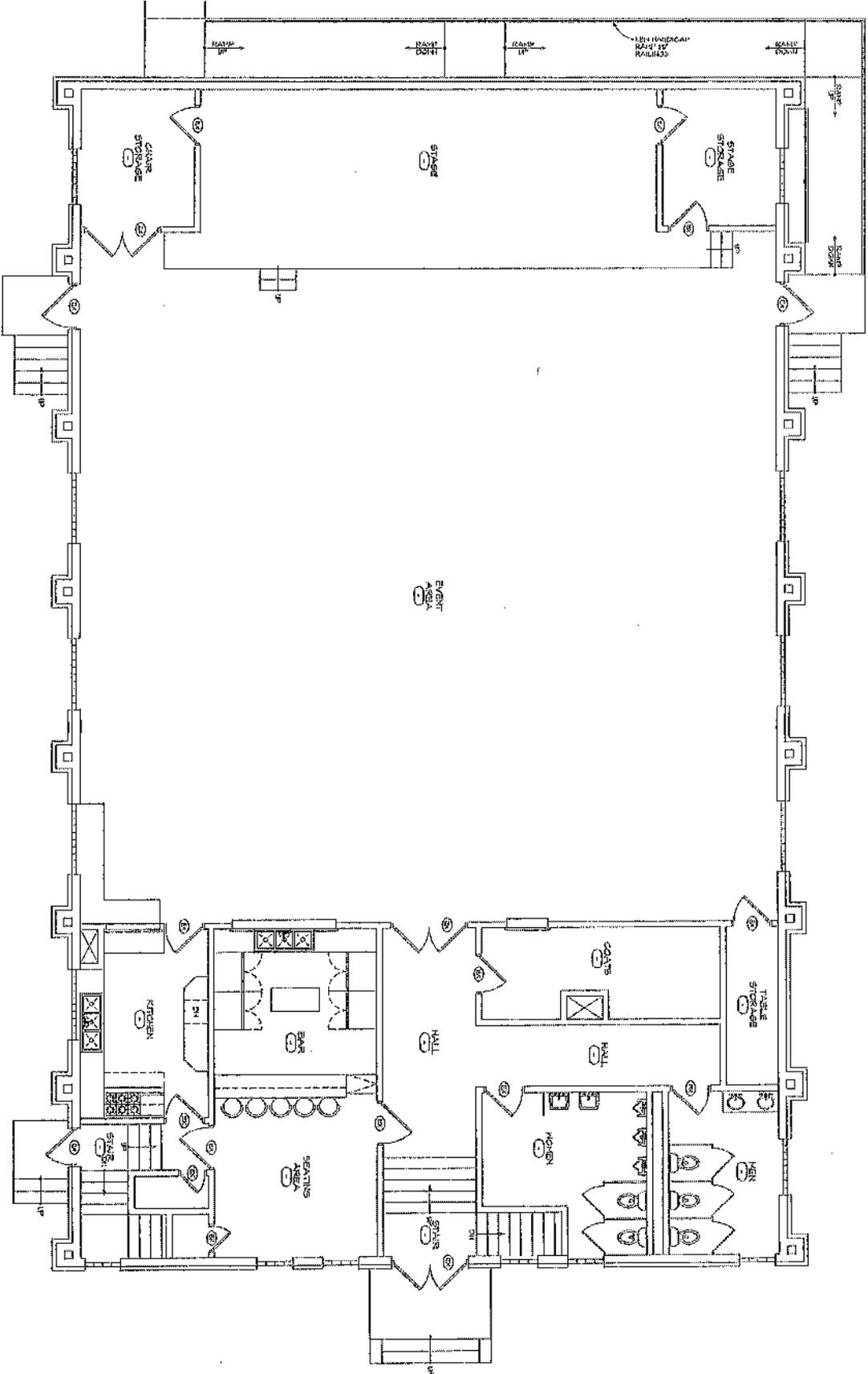
Renovations for:
EVENT HALL

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:

ARCHITECT:
JEFFREY A. MYERS, P.C.
10395 GLEN ABBEY CLOSE

DATE: 12/10/25
REVISIONS:

PROJEC



FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

Renovations for:
EVENT HALL

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:

ARCHITECT:
JEFFREY A. MYERS, P.C.
10395 GLEN ABBEY CLOSE

DATE: 12/01/25
REVISIONS:

PROJECT #



Proposed Summary Statement for Special Use Permit

With the procurement of a special use permit, we seek the continuance of operation at 716 Indiana Ave Rockford, IL 61102. The proposed use of the property as an event venue for wedding receptions, celebrations of life, and similar private gatherings operating in a manner that protects the public health, safety, morals, comfort, and general welfare of the community. Events will be managed responsibly to ensure that noise, lighting, traffic, and other operational factors do not create adverse impacts.

This property is owned by the Lithuanian Club, which has historically hosted similar gatherings, social events, and community activities on the premises for many years. The proposed use is therefore consistent with the long-standing character and function of the property and will not introduce new or unfamiliar impacts to the surrounding area.

The special use will not be injurious to neighboring properties or diminish property values. Events will be conducted indoors or within designated outdoor areas using appropriate sound and site-management measures to maintain the peaceful enjoyment of nearby properties. All activities will be scheduled and supervised to avoid disruption within the neighborhood.

The establishment of this use will not impede the normal or orderly development of adjacent properties. Instead, the venue will continue to fit within the character of the district and remain compatible with existing and future permitted uses.

Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, parking, and related facilities are already in place and have long supported similar activities. These facilities will continue to be maintained to accommodate the expected occupancy. Traffic flow will be responsibly managed with designated ingress and egress and, when necessary, on-site staffing to ensure minimal congestion on public streets. A local architect has provided a detailed landscape plan which add beauty to the Forest City. The venue will proudly accomplish this by planting shade tree such as Red Maple and River Birch and shrubbery such as Flowerwood Grasses and Hydrangea Bushes.

In all other respects, the venue will conform to the applicable regulations of the district. The proposed use maintains continuity with the property's historic operations and will meet or exceed all standards required for issuance of a Special Use Permit

Exhibit G
716 Indiana Avenue
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Copper Lantern Business Plan

716 Indiana Ave Rockford, IL 61102

Weddings · Quinceañeras · Celebrations of Life



A Legacy Reimagined

Built in 1953, this historic Rockford Building has stood as a testament to craftsmanship, endurance, and community. Now, under the vision of a fifth-generation Rockford real estate family, the building is being thoughtfully restored and reborn as a modern event center — blending mid-century character with contemporary design. Every beam, brick, and copper accent tells the story of five generations dedicated to shaping Rockford's landscape. Today, that legacy continues in a new form: a venue designed to host life's most meaningful celebrations — from elegant weddings and quinceañeras to timeless gatherings — where history and modern elegance meet under one roof.

- ▶ Visitor spending in Rockford/ Winnebago county hit a record 515.4 M in 2023 following three straight years of growth according to Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- ▶ 32.4 million in additional spending over pre- pandemic levels. The bureau estimates continued growth with more attractions and events in 2025.
- ▶ Rockford continues to drive tourism with Thrive 2035, Destination Master Plan. Thrive 2035 vision states; Energized by our rivers, our communities welcome those who seek a bigger life enriched by active adventures and vibrant downtown experiences. Data reveals a healthy, growing local hospitality market.

Rockford 2024 city population estimate is 147,486, anchoring a metro of 337,000 which would provide ample local demand: [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

Weddings- According to [Wedding Report](#) the average Rockford wedding cost in 2024 was \$34,600, median cost of 14,700 with a total spending metro spending of 57.1M.

Quinceaneras- A deeply rooted cultural celebration that could bring in 4-6K an event. Due to the cultural significance these events are not trends but as important and lucrative as a marriage. Reported by DataUSA Rockford is roughly 20% Hispanic; a major demand driver in Quince events.

Codes, Permits and Licenses

- ▶ ADA upgrades that comply with City of Rockford, 2018 Illinois Accessibility Code and ADA 2010 Standards.
- ▶ Fire Safety Upgrades that comply with the City of Rockford and The National Fire protection Association.
- ▶ Electrical upgrades that comply with the City of Rockford and local ordinances.
- ▶ Green space upgrades that comply with the City of Rockford codes and standards.
- ▶ Building permits, special use permit and site plan review.
- ▶ Health inspections
- ▶ Liquor license with BASSET compliance for in-house bar services.



Hours of operation

Monday	Closed	maintenance/ private use only
Tuesday	Closed	Maintenance/ private use only
Wednesday	2:00pm-9:00pm	Celebration of life/ private events
Thursday	2:00PM-9:00PM	Celebration of life/ private events
Friday	12:00pm-12:am	Receptions/ Quinceañeras/Celebrations
Saturday	12:00pm-12:am	Receptions/ Quinceañeras/Celebrations
Sunday	12:00pm-10:pm	Receptions/ Quinceañeras/Celebrations

Taxes and Fees

- ▶ Register to pay @ Rockfordil.gov
Tax.Illinois.gov
- ▶ Illinois state 6.25% (Rockford 1% infrastructure improvements tax)
- ▶ 1.5% Winnebago county
- ▶ 1% Rockford Redevelopment Tax (Food and beverage)

Vision

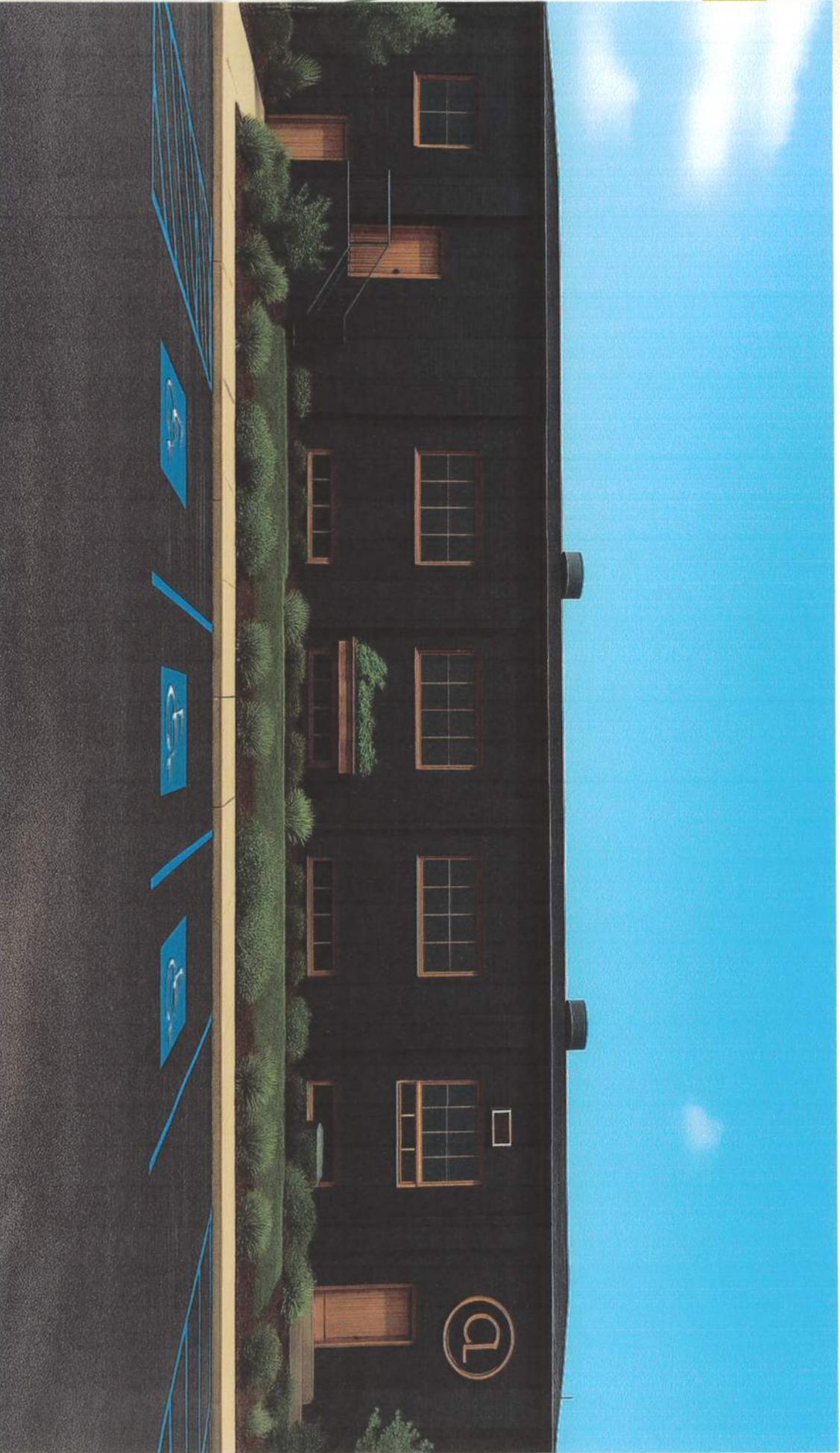
- ▶ Create a modern, design-forward venue on Rockford's southwest side built for weddings, quinceañeras, and celebrations of life.
- ▶ Photographer-friendly aesthetic
- ▶ Bilingual and culturally flexible programming; weekday value for memorials

Mission

- ▶ Through thoughtful restoration and community collaboration, we create a welcoming and diverse venue where every celebration brings positivity to our City's story.



Exhibit H
716 Indiana Avenue
SUP
#048-25



Call Number	Event Date	Location	Situation Reported	Call Disposition	Age
25-252923	11/19/2025 05:58:11 PM	716 Indiana Ave	911 CELLULAR HANG UP	911 CLOSE W/O SEND TO PENDING	Rockford Police Department
25-249492	11/15/2025 07:27:33 AM	716 Indiana Ave	SUSPICIOUS VEHICLE	CALLER CANCELLED	Rockford Police Department
24-119405	06/02/2024 08:17:22 PM	716 Indiana Ave	SUSPICIOUS VEHICLE	ADV - ADVISED	Rockford Police Department