

## **Rockford's Spaces to Places Program**

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 specific commercial areas within the City of Rockford. The Program helps lower the financial barrier of entry for entrepreneurs while increasing foot traffic, activating underutilized space, and strengthening the overall vibrancy of Rockford.

### Program Overview

- Program goals include:
  - o Fill vacant storefronts
  - o Encourage new business openings
  - o Support small and local entrepreneurs
  - o Create more active and inviting commercial areas
- City will reimburse security deposits and 50% of rent for up to 12 months for a total funding level of up to \$20,000 per business.
  - o Security deposit will be reimbursed after business has remained in space for 3 months
  - o Monthly rent will be reimbursed at 50% upon verification of paid rent
- Eligible business must lease and occupy currently vacant ground-floor commercial spaces.
- Business will secure lease with the property owner.
- Business owner must engage with a small business resource, such as Think Big!, Small Business Development Center, or other resource or consultant.

### Eligible Businesses

- Service businesses with customer-facing activities
  - o Retail, restaurants, cafes, and experiential uses
- Identified space must be the business' first or second location
  - o Can't be previous lessee
- If a business is under a current lease agreement – they cannot terminate to move into a new space.

### Eligible Properties

- Ground-floor commercial storefront
- Current on property taxes
- Vacant for 6+ months
- Commercially zoned
- Property owners are not eligible to apply.

### Eligible Areas

- Commercial areas with an existing business district association

- Downtown / River District
- N Main / North End
- S Main / SWIFTT
- 7<sup>th</sup> St / Midtown
- E State- Midtown to Mulford / Miracle Mile
- Areas not currently covered by an existing business district association, would become eligible when a business district association is established under the BADGE Program.

### Business Owner Program Requirement

The Business Owner will enter into an agreement with the City of Rockford that stipulates their responsibilities as part of the Program. They will include at the minimum:

- Engagement with a small business resource center such as Think Big!, Small Business Development Center, business district association, or other organization or consultant pre-approved by the City.
- Adheres to lease agreement.
- Payment of costs under terms of the lease, understanding that the City will reimburse those costs when we have received verification of payment and compliance with the program guidelines

### Property Owner Requirements

- Execute lease agreement with participating business.
- Adheres to lease agreement.

### Program Funding

- The Program has \$300,000 designated for storefront activation assistance.
- Funding will be approved on a first-come, first-serve basis to eligible applicants and properties that have received pre-approval on their applications.
- The Program aims to support the activation of at least three vacant storefronts in each eligible area, and those that become eligible under the BADGE Program.
- The City intent is to fully obligate and expend all Program Funding to maximize storefront activation and economic impact.
  - Funding is not allocated or reserved by geographic area.
  - While the City seek to achieve activation across all eligible areas, funding decisions will be based on the timing and quality of approved applications rather than predetermined district allocations.
  - As a result, some eligible areas may receive more funding than others if they generate a greater number of approved applications. The City will not withhold available funding to preserve funds for areas that do not have eligible projects ready to proceed.

- The City will work closely with business district associations, property owners, and community partners to encourage participation and support activation efforts throughout all eligible areas.
- Business district associations have received advance notice of the Program to allow time for outreach, engagement, and coordination with property owners and prospective businesses to maximize participation and storefront activation opportunities.