

THRIVE 2035

A VIEW OF THE FUTURE IN THE ROCK RIVER VALLEY

Our region is blessed with abundant natural resources – woodlands, wetlands, meadows and rivers – that combined with our cityscapes, villages and farms create an exceptional visitor destination and highly livable communities.

For the past year, a team of strategists and stakeholders have been collaborating on the design of a new destination vision for our region that builds on the transformational work of the past decade to further develop our waterways, greenspaces, sports facilities, main streets and downtowns.

Imagine the Rock River as a unifying thread that draws visitors and residents to its shores. From South Beloit and Rockton, through downtown Rockford and on past Chicago Rockford International Airport, the Rock flows with untapped opportunities for entertainment and recreation. Blend in the Pecatonica River to the west, Sugar River to the north and the Kishwaukee River to the east – as well as their many tributaries and creeks – and the waterways,

conservation areas and open fields of Winnebago and Boone counties are unmatched in their abundance and beauty.

Where our rivers flow through our cities and villages, we can seek developments that give visitors and residents greater and easier access to the water. Imagine vibrant gathering places, intersecting bike trails, pedestrian walkways and docks and landings. Imagine people flocking to our rivers to relax, rejuvenate and recreate.

In this future scenario, entrepreneurs and makers breathe life into small businesses, making our downtowns and main streets bustling hubs with one-of-a-kind boutiques, restaurants, coffee shops, tasting and taprooms, galleries, shops and outfitters. Imagine that these bustling hubs are developed in our rural villages and in our more metropolitan cities such as Rockford, Belvidere and Loves Park. Imagine that these areas are made even livelier by original events and activities that are sustained year after year.

With this style of development and activation, a visit to our central hub, Downtown Rockford, becomes so much more than a family outing to Stroll on State, a concert at the historic Coronado Performing Arts Center or a lively night at an IceHogs hockey game. In fact, in 2035, along with a trip to Anderson Japanese Gardens, our riverfront museum campus and Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens, Rockford's downtown core tops the list of "places to go and things to do" in the Upper Midwest.

Attracting more visitors to our region will continue to be driven by youth sports, a market position we set in motion in the mid 1980s and a leadership position we continue to hold among tournament directors, athletes and families. In the future, we will drive our sports reputation to new heights, as visitors to Winnebago and Boone counties are treated to top-notch recreational and athletic facilities, including soccer fields, golf courses, hockey rinks, aquatics centers, adventure parks and softball and baseball complexes.

As our region's communities flourish, they do so while elevating the rich heritage and culture that make the destination unique and interesting. Residents blend the best of our urban grit and rural charm to create energy and vitality that's authentically ours. All people embrace a welcoming sense of place and pride that extends across the region, while cherishing and preserving deeply personal rituals, traditions and values.

This is just the beginning! Keep exploring this Destination Master Plan, THRIVE 2035, to discover the road map built on the ideas and strategies from residents and community leaders in our two-county region. On behalf of our Steering Committee, the board and staff at GoRockford and our partners at Belvidere Chamber of Commerce, I invite you to join us in further creating the kind of place where everyone is welcome, and everyone has a chance to thrive.



John Groh
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President & CEO
GoRockford

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