

Public Safety, Public Housing, Social Services, & Neighborhood Development

Public Safety

There is no more important issue for a city than public safety. Police and fire protection as well as access to quality fire protection and health care are absolutely essential for our city to be attractive to both residents and businesses. Unfortunately, the current outlook in this area for Rockford is poor.

Rockford has had the State's highest per capita crime rate for two straight years. A 2004 City of Rockford housing study identified roughly two-thirds of the City's housing stock as marginal or declining, with roughly 2,000 abandoned homes. Those dilapidated properties are ripe for crime and bad news for our tax base. The City has suggested tearing down 1000 homes. Instead of tearing down these homes, they can be rebuilt and restored through City tax incentives and partnerships with private lenders. **See below.**

Today, successful cities throughout the country are modeling their crime prevention and public health efforts based on community participation models. Such efforts involve police and fire departments and neighborhood groups as well as businesses and community development agencies. City and State's Attorney's offices are brought into the neighborhoods to work with the neighborhoods to push prosecutions based on community input. The goal is to use all available resources to "weed and seed". In other words, have a zero tolerance and "weed out" conditions that give rise to crime, while "seeding" opportunities for new jobs and homes.

Current Conditions

While the administration claims that it has "maintained basic services" the facts tell otherwise. The City has cut its community services police unit in half and its bicycle unit in half. The City has also cut its "crime free multi-housing" seminar this year. The City of Rockford has never followed a community based prosecution model. The current administration has suggested that the City go to the taxpayers with a new "public safety" tax. Instead of passing a new tax, however, the City must work with Winnebago County, which already passed a "public safety" tax during the current administration's term. Unfortunately, the current administration has failed to work with the County to ensure that the growing base of public safety funds coming into Winnebago County are used to support needs in the City of Rockford. It appears that the current administration has forgotten that the City of Rockford is the largest municipal unit of Winnebago County.

Under a Morrissey administration, the City and County will work together and be good stewards of your tax dollars to make this community safe and strong. We must bring our neighborhood police units to full force and work with our neighborhood groups to weed out crime and plant new opportunities.

Public Housing:

The living standards at much of Rockford's public housing are totally unacceptable. Unfortunately, public housing is not a topic that garners enough attention from the community until a problem occurs.

The City appears to have no comprehensive solution to improving its public housing stock and improving the opportunities for its public housing residents. After spending over \$180,000.00 on consultants, the City failed to submit its redevelopment application for the Brewington Oaks/Jane Adams family development. At the same time, Winnebago County moved forward on its application for the same funding source and obtained an \$18 Million grant, which will be part of a \$45 Million redevelopment program for its public housing stock. We cannot let time and money pass by. We must have an administration that aggressively pursues public housing renewal just like Mayor Daley has done in the City of Chicago, who has aggressively pursued mixed-income neighborhood development.

A recent article by the director of the Housing Authority identified that roughly 75% of crime at RHA properties is committed by non-residents. The RHA must enforce its leases. Tenants who allow non-residents to stay at their units must be evicted. Only by enforcing the rules against those who would violate a lease will RHA be able to maintain quality living conditions for the majority of law abiding citizens who live at RHA properties.

Social Services:

Social service funding is down and demand is up. We must work together to get more from what we have. The current administration supports collaboration in the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness and elsewhere, but we need more.

In my administration, we will:

- Fully utilize available Federal and State money by helping agencies apply for it more successfully;
- Challenge the Homeless Task Force to implement their ten-year plan to end chronic homelessness in Rockford;
- Lead the social service community to:
 - o Establish an effective social service information and referral system, as in other communities;
 - o Sustain focus on clients' real problems, avoiding dependency cycles;
 - o Reduce service duplication, overlap and gaps;
 - o Optimize the location of services;
 - o Streamline funding and tracking;
 - o Support Homeland Security disaster preparedness;
 - o Coordinate investment with other governments in the region;
 - o Organize community technology and coordinate agency technology;
 - o Sustain a strict, progressive privacy and confidentiality regime.

We must work to end the cycle of co-dependency between social service agencies and their clients. We must pursue efforts like that now engaged by our local United Way Agency which is attacking root problems in education and family development. We must track outcomes and coordinate resources. We must work to establish healthy, balanced neighborhoods with healthy families able to obtain the resources they need to grow and flourish.

Neighborhood Development

Following the “weed and seed” principle, it is essential that the City of Rockford encourage redevelopment of older properties and excellent urban design throughout the City. The City must raise its standards and invest in quality roads, sidewalks, and greenways. We must give families a great place to live and thrive. Rather than simply hiring a “green communities coordinator” as the Mayor is doing now, the City should pass standards for roads, boulevards, street lighting, and right-of-ways that demonstrates excellence and encourages development throughout the City.

The City of Rockford must be internally connected by having roads and pathways that are attractive and are pedestrian and bicycle friendly. This will encourage excellent land use and development along the roadways. We should not have commercial areas and corridors that do not allow pedestrians to cross the street. A person wishing to ride a bicycle to work or school should be able to do so safely. Please check out my position on **Transportation Planning** for more details.

While the City is improving the roads and pathways in the City, the City can and must use current laws and incentives to encourage the redevelopment of older housing stock. A 2004 City of Rockford housing study identified approximately 4,000 vacant housing units in Rockford with approximately 2,000 of those units comprised of abandoned buildings. The City called for demolition of 1,000 of those homes. At an average cost of \$5,000 per demolition, the City would spend \$5 Million and have no new housing at the end of the process. Rather than tearing down homes, the City can use tax incentives to encourage the private redevelopment of those homes. Tax incentives and historic preservation incentives can be part of a package to encourage redevelopment of this older housing stock that brings home owners and stability into our neighborhoods. Under a Morrissey Administration, the City will establish new Tax Increment Financing Districts (“TIF”) and Historic Districts as part of the City’s ***Home Renewal Program*** to facilitate the redevelopment and renewal of those homes and neighborhoods.