

CITY OF ROCK ISLAND

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

OCTOBER 2025



ROCK ISLAND
ILLINOIS

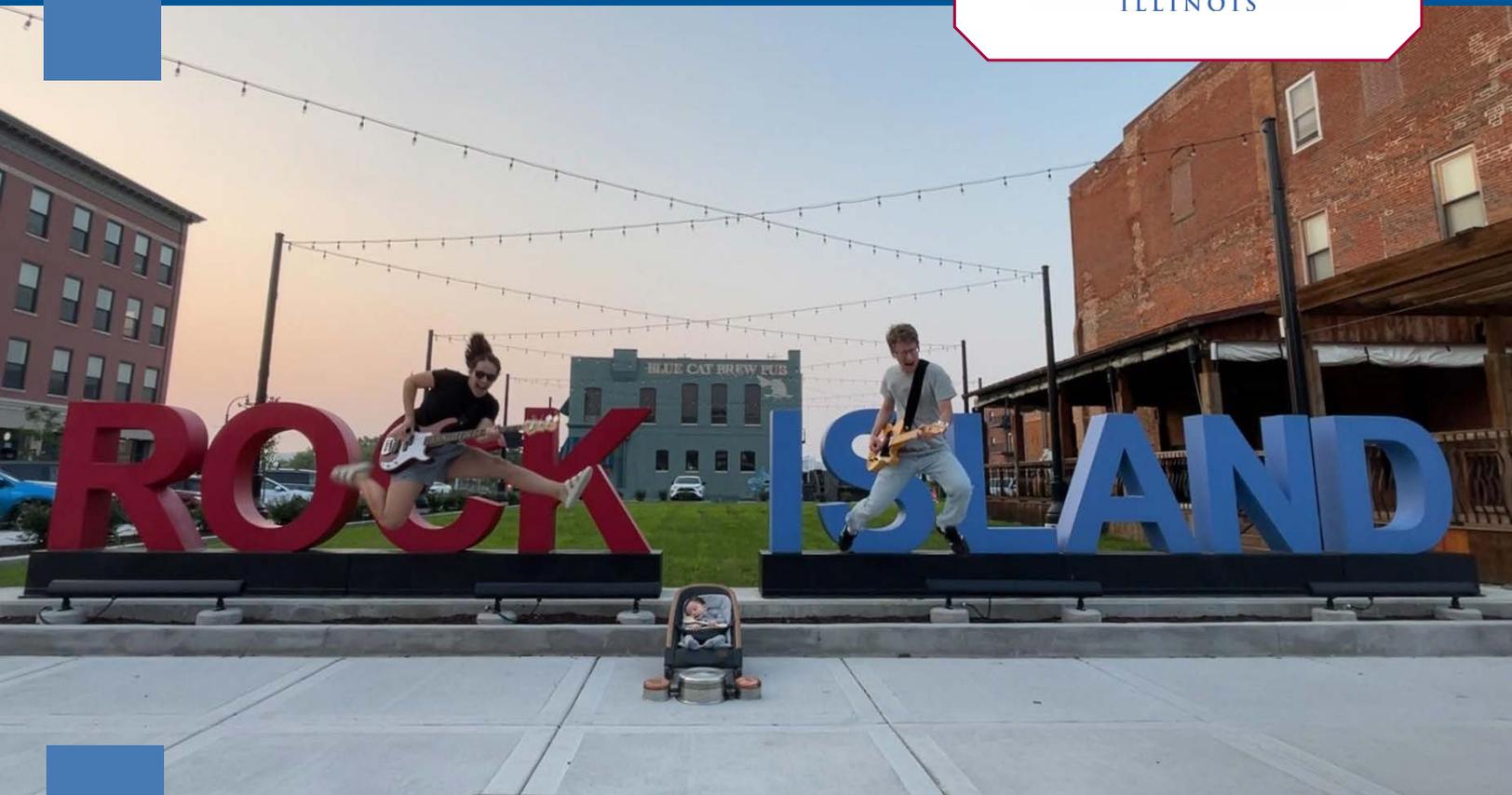


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Rock Island is investing in efforts to revitalize and strengthen its local economy. released a Request for Proposal (RFP) soliciting proposals for a professional service firm to conduct a five-year Strategic Economic Development Plan. After an evaluation process, TPMA, an Indianapolis-based consultancy, was selected to conduct the assessment. TPMA provides expert insights into workforce, education, and economic development ecosystems in communities nationwide.

The scope of work for the plan includes:

1. A comprehensive analysis of economic conditions and trends.
2. Stakeholder engagement process to establish a clear vision for the economic development team.
3. An evaluation of the working relationships between the city, the Development Association of Rock Island (DARI), Grow Quad Cities, the Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA), and other partner organizations.
4. A strategic framework and implementation plan that identifies resources, timeframes, and responsible parties.

To complete the plan, the Rock Island economic development team and TPMA coordinated and executed the following:

- **Project Launch:** The project began with a launch meeting to discuss operations and strategies to ensure success. Key objectives, project scope, roles, and communication protocols were outlined to ensure alignment and efficiency.
- **Discovery:** A review of existing economic development programs, strategic plans, and regional market conditions provided a foundation for understanding local assets and challenges. Background research identified past initiatives, strategic partners, and localized data specific to Rock Island.
- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Interviews with key stakeholders, including elected officials, local and regional economic development partners, and related organizations provided critical insights into past, current, and previous efforts in the area. Stakeholder interviews were used to validate quantitative data through lived experience and workshop potential solutions to barriers.
- **SWOT Analysis:** The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to develop a SWOT analysis for Rock Island. This analysis not only provides an overview of current systems, but also identifies prospective measures for the City of Rock Island to grow in the future.
- **Design Sprint:** A design sprint was conducted to discuss current economic development efforts, identify future goals, and refine strategies to accomplish these goals. The meetings provided a structured forum to better align operational and strategic efforts among economic development partners.
- **Goals + Strategies:** Following the conclusion of the design sprint, goals and strategies were built based on cumulative data from all phases of the project. Each goal was paired with additional information and/or best practices to contextualize how Rock Island might accomplish the proposed goals.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders reported that Rock Island possesses a rich heritage as a historic industrial hub, complemented by a vibrant arts and music scene and a strong sense of place rooted in its distinct neighborhoods. The city's cultural diversity was viewed a unique asset, with more than 30 languages spoken in the local school district and a growing immigrant population contributing to community life and entrepreneurial activity. This diversity underpins a thriving arts community and emerging placemaking initiatives that are enhancing the city's identity and appeal. When asked about key industries in the area, stakeholders mentioned that Rock Island benefits from a foundation of core industries, including logistics, general manufacturing, and a high-tech manufacturing sector.

However, stakeholders noted several challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term economic vitality. These include a declining population, rising poverty and homelessness rates, and comparatively lower incomes than surrounding communities. While many praised the city's efforts to be transparent and accessible, others expressed concern about perceived internal dynamics and a lack of visibility into decision-making processes. Additionally, Rock Island faces structural limitations in its ability to accommodate new industrial growth due to limited industrial and commercial sites ready for development. Stakeholders agreed that current initiatives could benefit from greater strategic alignment and stronger collaboration between economic development partner organizations to amplify their impact and create a cohesive vision for future economic growth.

KEY FINDINGS

- Rock Island's population has drastically decreased. Forecasting models vary on their projections for population.
- Individuals with a High School diploma increased; however, individuals receiving associate or bachelor's degrees dropped.
- Household incomes saw an overall increase, specifically those earning more than \$75,000, whereas those earning less than \$75,000 decreased. However, households earning \$10,000 or less remained relatively stagnant.
- Rock Island's workforce saw a small bump of workers aged 20 to 29 and large increase of workers aged 65 to 74.
- Rock Island's top growing industries by employment include Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, and Accommodation and Food Services, whereas the top shrinking industries include Government, Educational Services, and Management of Companies and Enterprises.
- Rock Island's (County) top industries by GRP include Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, Government, Utilities, and Health Care and Social Assistance.
- The Davenport-Moline-Rock Island MSA and County of Rock Island outperform the City of Rock Island alone in comparative labor force participation rates. But the City is closely aligned with the MSA in unemployment rates, whereas Rock Island County is 1% to 1.5% higher than the City and MSA in unemployment rate.
- Poverty rates in the City of Rock Island and Rock Island County have increased from 2019 to 2023, but decreased in the MSA. Poverty rates in the City are also substantially higher than the County and MSA.
- Few people live and work in the City of Rock Island. Most individuals are employed in the city, but live outside; or live outside, and commute in.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT Analysis utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to determine the area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strategic planning relies heavily on this analysis to determine priorities.

STRENGTHS

Local Pride

Perception of big city with a small town feel
Place of pride among residents

Diverse Population

More diverse population than surrounding areas and strong emerging talent base

Capital Improvements

Recent district designations and revitalization efforts are catalysts for growth

Localized Connectedness

Economic development partners are experienced and well-connected

Growing Industries

Strong cornerstone industries and advancements within the growing sectors

WEAKNESSES

Capacity, Clarity, & Alignment

Lack of strategic direction, disconnect in priorities, roles, responsibilities

Economic Development Infrastructure

Lack of resources, infrastructure, assets for placemaking and development-ready sites

Poverty & Flight

Difficult to retain businesses and talent with high poverty, low labor force participation.

Revenue Generation & Retention

Decreasing population and loss of businesses strains city resources and growth capacity

Institutional & Public Knowledge Gaps

Lack of public awareness and understanding undermines efforts to stabilize economy

OPPORTUNITIES

Infrastructure & Services

Capital improvements and more focused service provision can bolster success

Locations for Redevelopment

Identification of priority sites within selected areas can direct efforts

Performance Improvement

Tracking key performance indicators can provide accountability and identify gaps

Enhance Collaboration

Strong partnerships and coordination can improve services, effective approach

Site Readiness

Improving site readiness is essential for business attraction and expansion efforts

Industry & Workforce Support

More intentional efforts to support industry, workforce training and wraparound services

THREATS

Regional Perception

Poor perception of the city deters private investment and limits ability to compete

Competition & Progress of Surrounding Communities

Increasing successes of nearby communities outpaces Rock Island, difficult to compete

State Tax Environment & Resources

Competitive disadvantage due to less favorable tax environment compared to Iowa

State & Federal Funding Instability

Budget/policy changes make funding options unpredictable, can delay and limit growth

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

This strategic action plan provides a framework for Rock Island's long-term economic future, shaped by current conditions, strengths, challenges, and stakeholder input. The framework is organized by focus area, each outlining the city's approach to attaining the identified desired outcomes.

COORDINATED EFFORTS

1. **Build a collaborative economic development ecosystem of partnerships and activities to efficiently and effectively nurture Rock Island's economic vitality.**
 - 1.1. Implement efforts to improve communication efforts with economic development partners.
 - 1.2. Establish and adhere to clearly defined roles and responsibilities for ecosystem partners.
 - 1.3. Enhance business intelligence and the execution of strategic initiatives.
1. **Cultivate a diverse portfolio of resources dedicated to supporting economic advancement.**
 - 1.1. Develop a strategic investment plan.
 - 1.2. Create and leverage incentives for businesses that provide pathways to economic success for employees and the community.

THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMY

2. **Prioritize entrepreneurship and existing business by delivering robust support and resources.**
 - 2.1. Revitalize local business retention and expansion efforts.
 - 2.2. Enhance startup support and awareness of resources.
 - 2.3. Ensure small and mid-sized businesses are aware of and can access services and resources.
3. **Address development site needs and attract target industries to diversify the local economy.**
 - 3.1. Identify sites within Rock Island that have the potential for retail, commercial, industrial and residential development.
 - 3.2. Advance efforts to prepare sites for development and marketing.
4. **Create a dynamic retail marketing strategy aimed at boosting city revenues in the near term.**
 - 4.1. Coordinate business attraction and marketing strategies with RIDA to fill downtown storefront vacancies.
 - 4.2. Develop marketing strategies targeting the 11th Street and 18th Avenue retail corridors.
 - 4.3. Develop marketing materials that outline all retail development opportunities.



EMPOWERED, PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY

5. **Elevate opportunities for upward economic mobility by increasing high-quality jobs, enhancing skill development and providing supportive resources in Rock Island.**
 - 5.1. Direct business attraction and project support toward target industries that promote high-quality jobs and help raise average wages and median incomes.
 - 5.2. Increase collaboration with workforce and education partners.
 - 5.3. Engage with local businesses to better understand current and anticipated workforce needs.
6. **Support activities that improve local infrastructure that positively impact quality of life.**
 - 6.1. Focus on transit-oriented development.
 - 6.2. Align with the recent Housing Plan to bolster housing supply by implementing efforts that support the development of quality, diverse housing options.
 - 6.3. Support nonprofits and other community partners to increase the overall impact of their work within Rock Island.

VIBRANT AND ECLECTIC PLACE

7. **Promote Rock Island's attributes and tell the city's evolving story, informed by the community's vision and tailored to appeal to target industries, tourists, workers, and residents.**
 - 7.1. Develop consistent and reinforced messaging to elevate Rock Island's reputation in the region.
 - 7.2. Reinforce messaging among economic development and community partners.
8. **Invest in enhancing place-based efforts and advance Rock Island as a regional destination.**
 - 8.1. Implement focused place-based development activities that increase residential connectivity, improve the attraction to priority corridors, and create attractive, distinct places.
 - 8.2. Support and create programs that recover, sustain, and grow the arts, culture, and entertainment community.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Creating the Strategic Action Plan is just the first step—the real challenge is implementation. With limited resources and a smaller economic development budget than peer cities, Rock Island cannot achieve its goals alone. Success will require long-term collaboration, additional support, and careful consideration of capacity, skills, and coordination across multiple partners. A matrix has been provided to assist with implementation including teams to drive progress, key performance metrics, and timelines. As circumstances evolve, Rock Island must remain agile, ready to adjust strategies and refocus efforts in the future. It is recommended that Rock Island assess progress regularly to ensure strategies are progressing and to make any necessary changes.

INTRODUCTION

Located on the bend of the Mississippi River, Rock Island is a historic community with a long history of industry. Rock Island began as a strategic military outpost in the early 19th century and evolved into a key industrial and cultural hub as the county underwent modern development. The area initially thrived due to its location along the Mississippi River and the development of Fort Armstrong. Later, the city saw significant economic growth with the arrival of the railroad in 1856, which spurred industries like lumber, pottery, and farm implement manufacturing. In 1875, the relocation of Augustana College brought educational prestige and cultural diversity, adding to the city's identity alongside immigrant communities. Civic leaders in the late 19th and early 20th centuries made major improvements to infrastructure and public parks, even as figures like John Looney highlighted Rock Island's more turbulent side through organized crime.

Throughout the 20th century, Rock Island played a critical role in wartime manufacturing and housing development and later became a center for arts and entertainment. However, post-war prosperity gave way to economic challenges in the 1970s and 1980s, as aging housing stock, job losses, and disinvestment

led to urban decline. Federal programs attempted to revitalize neighborhoods with limited success. By the 1990s, the city began reinventing its downtown, cultivating a vibrant arts district and drawing crowds with cultural events, signaling ongoing efforts to revitalize and reconnect with its riverfront.

Despite these efforts, long-established factories and other major employers have shut their doors and employment opportunities have dried up. Since the 1960s, the community has experienced persistent declines in population, leading to disinvestment in industrial areas, commercial corridors, and neighborhoods.

The City of Rock Island is investing in efforts to revitalize and strengthen its local economy. released a Request for Proposal (RFP) soliciting proposals for a professional service firm to conduct a five-year Strategic Economic Development Plan. After an evaluation process, TPMA, an Indianapolis-based consultancy, was selected to conduct the assessment. TPMA provides expert insights into workforce, education, and economic development ecosystems in communities nationwide.

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TPMA provides professional consulting services and delivers insights to the complete workforce, education, and economic development ecosystem that allows them to move forward, together. TPMA envisions a world that thinks strategically, works collaboratively, and acts sustainably. TPMA's Economic Development and Community Resiliency Team provides expertise in assessing markets, identifying business sector opportunities, building entrepreneurial ecosystems, and conducting housing assessments to assist communities in developing solutions for local housing challenges consistent with community and economic development objectives. TPMA empowers organizations and communities through strategic partnerships and informed solutions that create positive, sustainable change. Visit tpma-inc.com for more information.

PROJECT PROCESS



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The strategic action plan outlines potential pathways for Rock Island's long-term economic future, informed by the context of current conditions, strengths, challenges, and the ambitions shared by key community partners.

The plan is organized by focus area with strategies and tactics that could help to attain desired outcomes. This report is intended as a guiding framework. The city and its economic development partners are responsible for determining which goals and strategies to approve, modify, and execute to achieve the outcomes envisioned.



ROCK ISLAND'S ECONOMIC VISION

The vision statement for Rock Island's Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) should represent the city's core values and economic goals. It must be both inspirational and aspirational, capturing what the city aims to become over the next 20 years. The draft vision statement below draws from the ideas, hopes, and possibilities expressed throughout the planning process.

This vision should serve as a guiding framework for future decisions, while also addressing the city's current fiscal challenges. As city leaders and partner organizations consider investments, priorities, development initiatives, and marketing, they should consider whether their actions align with and advance this vision for Rock Island. The following strategic action plan is designed to help Rock Island realize that vision.

“

Rock Island will be a dynamic city where coordinated efforts consistently drive opportunities to cultivate a thriving local economy and empower a prosperous community that takes pride in this vibrant and eclectic place.

”

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The desired outcomes also serve as the focus areas on which the strategic action plan is structured. Each focus area includes goals, strategies, and tactics. For each focus area, we provide a goal statement(s), rationale, and list of strategies and tactics to support the goal(s). The following section includes an implementation matrix that provides potential resources, recommended teams, timelines, and key performance indicators for each strategy.

COORDINATED EFFORTS

To successfully move forward, the city will need to collaborate with partner organizations and individuals across the public and private sectors of Rock Island (e.g., city staff, DARI, Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA), Grow Quad Cities, Quad Cities Chamber, Visit Quad Cities, West End Revitalization (MLK Center), Augustana College, private businesses, citizens). These collaborative partnerships will be critical to achieving a successful economic future for Rock Island.

The current economic development ecosystem in Rock Island does not function in a cohesive way. A lack of effective collaboration, unclear roles, and strained relationships have led to unnecessary duplication of efforts and service gaps left unattended. Partners agreed that roles should be clearly defined and that the team should unite around a common vision.

Strengthening the local economy requires strategic investment and a forward-thinking approach. Rock Island is committed to ensuring that policies and investments are balanced to be more fiscally sustainable and work to protect and enhance the natural environment. Achieving Rock Island's economic vision will require dedicated financial and staff resources.

New strategies may be difficult to deploy on current City budgets. Rock Island is facing significant economic challenges. Elected officials and the public need to be aware of the critical steps needed to stabilize the local economy and the potential impacts if they are not able to take those steps. Resources for economic development are limited. **In order to address shortfalls and provide impactful incentives, the city must coordinate with partners, employing both common and innovative approaches.**

The Rock Island Port District, designated in 2023, can be a significant asset to the city for improving infrastructure, supply chain access, and incentives to both attract new and expand existing businesses. Coordination with the Bi-State Regional Commission, the Rock Island Regional Port District Board, the City Council, and other local and regional partners will be critical to appropriately leveraging this asset. **The port district has the potential to be the catalyst for strategic investment and growing economic success.**

RESOURCES

The following links reference other sections of this document and other resources and case studies to assist with understanding and plan implementation.

[Next Steps for Rock Island Ecosystem Partners](#)

[Best Practices from Comparable Communities](#)

[National Coalition for Community Capital](#)

[Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund](#)

[Pew Research Incentives Evaluation Toolkit](#)

[Jump to Plan Implementation](#)

1

Build a collaborative economic development ecosystem of partnerships and activities to efficiently and effectively nurture Rock Island's economic vitality.

STRATEGIES:

1.1. Implement efforts to improve communication efforts with economic development partners.

- 1.1.1. Facilitate frequent meetings with all Rock Island economic development partners together.
- 1.1.2. Ensure meetings are productive and focused on problem-solving and plan implementation.
- 1.1.3. Consider a streamlined virtual platform for information sharing.
- 1.1.4. Identify and adapt to new or shifting challenges.
- 1.1.5. Foster strong relationships and regular communication with other local, state, and regional partners.

1.2. Establish and adhere to clearly defined roles and responsibilities for ecosystem partners.

- 1.2.1. Explore examples of different economic development ecosystem structures and consider adjustments to enhance impact.
- 1.2.2. Develop a local economic development ecosystem map.
- 1.2.3. Define roles and responsibilities.
- 1.2.4. Regularly update and evaluate a local economic development ecosystem map to identify and address gaps.
- 1.2.5. Collaborate with all ecosystem partners to create work plans for implementation.

1.3. Enhance business intelligence and the execution of strategic initiatives.

- 1.3.1. Explore the establishment of an private-sector development advisory committee to gain insights and potential resource development.
- 1.3.2. Ensure efforts across the economic development ecosystem are informed by research and analysis, including evaluation of metrics outlined in strategic planning.
- 1.3.3. Engage in professional development related to economic development.

2

Cultivate a diverse portfolio of resources dedicated to supporting economic advancement.

STRATEGIES:

2.1. Develop a strategic investment plan.

- 2.1.1. Assess current economic development expenditures compared to benchmark communities.
- 2.1.2. Adjust the city's budget and staff allocation for economic development to better equip the department with resources and capacity for implementing the strategic plan.
- 2.1.3. Encourage increased private sector investment in economic development.
- 2.1.4. Utilize both common and alternative funding mechanisms as appropriate to meet capacity for Rock Island's economic development needs.
- 2.1.5. Prioritize and advocate for infrastructure investment to priority development areas and sites.

2.2. Create and leverage incentives for businesses that provide pathways to economic success for employees and the community.

- 2.2.1. Work with economic development partners to compile and collectively utilize a robust list of existing incentives and resources.
- 2.2.2. Strategically promote and utilize River's Edge, Special Service Area, Business Improvement District, port district development, and other assets to support new investment.
- 2.2.3. Assign an administrator and identify a subject matter expert and partners for support in the implementation of River's Edge.
- 2.2.4. Develop a Port District Master Plan.

THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMY

In order to build a thriving local economy, the City of Rock Island is committed to more intensive efforts to support startups and small businesses, retain and grow existing businesses, and attract new industries. This can only be accomplished with an effective economic development ecosystem.

Business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts have long proven to be the most effective approach to economic development, and the best BRE programs extend far beyond major employers. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, small businesses and startups have the highest rate of job growth, creating over 70 percent of net new jobs since 2019 and employing 51% of the workforce.

While key partners currently provide a variety of services to assist, stakeholder input and desktop research in Rock Island indicate a gap in support for startups and small- and mid-sized businesses within the city. Working more intentionally and methodically with key partners to coordinate efforts can fill existing gaps and significantly improve awareness and service delivery.

One of the most prevalent themes throughout stakeholder engagement and local assessments was the need for development-ready sites for expansion and business attraction. Identifying and assessing sites in key development areas can accelerate speed-to-market. However, industrial properties in Rock Island require considerable financial investment to become market-ready and attract end users. Securing and deploying this capital investment will take time, meaning that revenue generation from these sites could be delayed for several years. In contrast, retail sites or buildings can secure end users much more quickly, allowing for a faster influx of sales tax revenue. This would result in a more immediate and positive financial impact for Rock Island.

STATE AND FEDERAL CHANGES

Recent changes at the state and federal levels could impact Rock Island. For this reason, Rock Island should remain connected to applicable state and federal departments and officials. These changes also highlight the increasing importance of advocacy - a role held by economic development partners. Two of the recent changes are outlined in this section.

In its 2026 budget, the State of Illinois is allocating \$200 million for site readiness programs through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). Municipalities, economic development organizations and even private entities are eligible to apply for the funds. The city and its partners can start preparations now to ensure Rock Island can effectively apply for funds.

Rock Island will be affected by changes to the federal Opportunity Zone (OZ) program, which provides tax incentives within low-income census tracts. The city has two adjacent OZs. New designation criteria has been set, and new designations will be selected by governors in July 2026 (effective January 2027). Current OZ designations are set to expire in December of 2026.

RESOURCES

The following links reference other sections of this document and other resources and case studies to assist with understanding and plan implementation.

[Best Practices from Comparable Communities](#)

[Revitalization-Ready Guide](#)

[Revitalizing America's Small Legacy Cities](#)

[Oak Forest BRE Program Website](#)

[Industrial District Revitalization in Three Cities](#)

[Emerging Solidarity Economy](#)

[Jump to Plan Implementation](#)

3

Prioritize entrepreneurship and existing businesses by delivering robust support and resources.

STRATEGIES:

3.1. Revitalize local business retention and expansion efforts.

- 3.1.1. Reorganize business retention and expansion efforts by adopting standard practices and information-sharing expectations for economic development partners.
- 3.1.2. Redistribute business retention and expansion responsibilities among primary economic development partners with division based on location, membership status, and other relevant factors.

3.2. Enhance startup support and awareness of resources.

- 3.2.1. Support the development of a business incubator and coworking space.
- 3.2.2. Promote creativity and innovation through investment in access to technology, maker spaces, and product development resources.
- 3.2.3. Collaborate with local education programs to encourage entrepreneurship and interest in STEAM curriculum.

3.3. Ensure small and mid-sized businesses are aware of and can access support services and resources.

- 3.3.1. Conduct targeted outreach to raise awareness of existing resources and access points.
- 3.3.2. Continue to develop a local business directory and marketing for local businesses.
- 3.3.3. Deliver technical assistance and business training.
- 3.3.4. Increase access to and awareness of mentorship programs, networking opportunities, business events, and other support services.
- 3.3.5. Convey the importance of and assist in business plan development, succession planning, and resiliency planning.

4

Address development site needs and attract target industries to diversify the local economy.

STRATEGIES:

4.1. Identify sites within Rock Island that have the potential for retail, commercial, industrial, and residential development.

- 4.1.1. Generate site options in priority redevelopment areas, such as identified corridors, districts, and industrial areas.
- 4.1.2. Explore potential properties for development and redevelopment beyond identified areas and consider annexation where appropriate.
- 4.1.3. Organize an inventory of the identified sites and set protocol for accessing the database and making regular updates.

4.2. Advance efforts to prepare sites for development and marketing.

- 4.2.1. Establish and apply a set of criteria to evaluate and prioritize identified sites by tier, enabling more effective allocation of resources for site readiness.
- 4.2.2. Develop an asset management plan to improve site readiness and responsiveness.
- 4.2.3. Build relationships with site owners and managers and obtain site control when possible and appropriate.
- 4.2.4. Ensure regulatory compliance and streamline internal processes for efficiency and increased understanding.
- 4.2.5. Work with economic development partners customize outreach and marketing to expand industry mix with businesses that have high growth potential.



5

Create a dynamic retail marketing strategy aimed at boosting city revenues in the near term.

STRATEGIES:

5.1. Coordinate business attraction and marketing strategies with Downtown Rock Island to fill downtown storefront vacancies.

- 5.1.1. Create vibrant public spaces with art, lighting, and seating to encourage foot traffic.
- 5.1.2. Host regular events like farmers markets, street festivals, and pop-up shops to activate underutilized areas.
- 5.1.3. Explore opportunities to attract non-traditional storefronts like kiosks, mobile vendors, and shared retail spaces.
- 5.1.4. Use market analysis to identify retail gaps and recruit complementary businesses.

5.2. Develop marketing strategies targeting the 11th Street and 18th Avenue retail corridors.

- 5.2.1. Use virtual tours to showcase the space's potential and highlight features like parking and flexible layouts.
- 5.2.2. Host temporary retail pop-ups, art exhibits, or community events in vacant storefronts to boost foot traffic and demonstrate the space's viability.
- 5.2.3. Market the city's "Making Cents of 11th Street" plan which highlights the corridor's potential for revitalization, especially in areas like Watch Tower Plaza.

5.3. Develop marketing for retail development opportunities.

- 5.3.1. Work with partners (and/or an independent contractor) to develop digital and print marketing materials targeted to the retail sector (and other target industries as appropriate).
- 5.3.2. Attend ICSC conferences in Las Vegas and Chicago to showcase opportunities in Rock Island.

EMPOWERED, PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY

The city aims to empower community members, not only through engagement but by fostering accessible opportunities for upward economic mobility and improving local quality of life. With high poverty rates and disinvestment in Rock Island, enhancing opportunities for upward economic mobility is essential to creating an empowered, prosperous community. Education training, and the development and recruitment of high-quality jobs are critical to this effort.

Stakeholders expressed that access to education and training opportunities in Rock Island is limited. While some key partners like Grow Quad Cities, Quad Cities Chamber, and DARI are assisting with workforce initiatives, the city of Rock Island is in many ways disconnected from collaborative workforce efforts. Many of the workforce-related strategies in this focus area can integrate well with business retention and expansion efforts, but more focused collaboration and relationship-building is linked to better overall outcomes.

Business retention and expansion efforts are likely to result in more high-quality job creation. For business attraction, tailoring outreach to target industries with high-quality jobs and high growth potential (such as specialty manufacturing) can complement existing businesses and diversify the current economic mix. This diversification not only enhances economic resilience but creates a broader range of employment opportunities, fosters innovation, and reduces dependence on any single sector, setting the foundation for long-term, sustainable growth for the community and its residents.

Stakeholders explained that Rock Island would benefit tremendously by fostering a culture of innovation, building on the creativity that already exists in the city. **Rock Island is committed to pursuing innovative solutions to complex challenges, thinking outside the box, and willingly trying new strategies and tactics that support the community's values and vision.** The City of Rock Island is encouraged to consult with and work alongside its education and workforce development partners, Illinois Innovation Network, Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center, and the Quad Cities Chamber's Manufacturing Hub to catalyze these efforts.

Part of improving economic mobility in Rock Island is providing wraparound services. By increasing access to transportation, housing, and childcare, and other services, more residents will be able to successfully enter the labor force. The city is already working with the Bi-State Regional Commission and other partners on transit-oriented development. Childcare initiatives are on the horizon. And, Rock Island's recent housing study provides a framework for addressing housing challenges in the city. Additional communication with nonprofit service providers and philanthropic organizations can further assist with these and other economic development efforts.

RESOURCES

The following links reference other sections of this document and other resources and case studies to assist with understanding and plan implementation.

[Thrive Quad Cities: Education&Workforce Analysis](#)

[Urban Institute: Upward Mobility Initiative](#)

[Illinois Innovation Network](#)

[Neighborhood Reinvestment: Lessons from Cleveland](#)

[Case Study: MAGNET's New Headquarters](#)

[Jump to Plan Implementation](#)

6

Elevate opportunities for upward economic mobility by increasing high-quality jobs, enhancing skill development, and providing supportive resources in Rock Island.

STRATEGIES:

6.1. Direct business attraction and project support toward target industries that promote high-quality jobs and help raise average wages and median incomes.

- 6.1.1. Foster relationships with developers, builders, and site selectors through conference attendance and one-on-one in person meetings.
- 6.1.2. Engage with industry leaders and networks.
- 6.1.3. Tie incentives to target industries, quality jobs, and wages as appropriate.

6.2. Increase collaboration with workforce and education partners.

- 6.2.1. Regularly participate in workforce and education collaboration opportunities.
- 6.2.2. Assist with distribution of information to employers on current efforts and programs.
- 6.2.3. Advance local childcare initiatives to expand access across income levels.
- 6.2.4. Connect employers with workforce and education partners to increase participation in work-based learning opportunities, hiring events, and other career programs.
- 6.2.5. Support efforts to catalyze meaningful engagement between Augustana College and local businesses and residents.

6.3. Engage with local businesses to better understand current and anticipated workforce needs.

- 6.3.1. Advocate for pathway alignment with the workforce needs of local businesses.
- 6.3.2. Connect businesses with potential funding for workforce development.
- 6.3.3. Promote opportunities for employers to support expanded access to childcare, housing, and transportation.

7

Support activities that improve local infrastructure and positively impact quality of life.

STRATEGIES:

7.1. Focus on transit-oriented development.

- 7.1.1. Consider public transportation access in site selection and development planning.
- 7.1.2. Increase access to public transportation connecting residents to services, amenities, and jobs.
- 7.1.3. Support the development of safe multi-modal access connecting services, amenities, business districts, and neighborhoods.
- 7.1.4. Encourage alternative modes of transportation for residents, workers, and tourists.

7.2. Align with the recent Housing Plan to bolster housing supply by implementing efforts that support the development of quality, diverse housing options.

- 7.2.1. Proactive code enforcement to increase housing development (Housing Plan)
- 7.2.2. Use economic development financing tools to support the maintenance and rehabilitation of properties (Housing Plan; focused on residential)
- 7.2.3. Identify and convey infill and larger-site redevelopment options to support residential housing development (Housing Plan)
- 7.2.4. Collaborate with housing staff to discuss proper use of annexation areas (Housing Plan)
- 7.2.5. Identify opportunities to tie economic development financing mechanisms (BIDs, TIF districts, etc.) to support housing development

7.3. Support nonprofits and other community partners to increase the overall impact of their work within Rock Island.

- 7.3.1. Attend conversations held by local and regional nonprofit organizations.
- 7.3.2. Provide opportunities for nonprofit partners to provide input on economic development efforts.
- 7.3.3. Uncover opportunities to work with philanthropic and other nonprofit organizations (e.g. foundations) on strategic funding for projects.

VIBRANT AND ECLECTIC PLACE

Thoughtful placemaking encourages social interaction, supports local businesses, and improves quality of life, making a community more livable and economically competitive. By intentionally shaping public spaces and enhancing the unique attributes of a place, communities can create destinations that are not only attractive to visitors but also foster pride and connection among residents.

Rock Island is committed to strengthening placemaking efforts, celebrating cultural assets, and sharing the community's story in ways that connect with diverse audiences. This narrative—rooted in local history, values, and voices—can be a powerful tool for community branding, tourism development, and civic engagement, ultimately shaping how Rock Island is experienced and remembered.

Proactively including diverse voices is important when understanding challenges and developing solutions. Inclusion is an ongoing effort to ensure that the city's residents, businesses, and workforce are part of the decision-making process. This engagement should be more than a one-time interaction, but rather a continuous effort of communication and feedback to help the city and its citizens better adapt to changing conditions and meet the needs of the community.

Supporting initiatives that preserve and celebrate Rock Island's history and eclectic arts, culture, and entertainment assets is essential for this effort. The city will work alongside new and existing partners to promote events and initiatives, as well as provide assistance to tourism-related businesses and other creative entrepreneurs.

RESOURCES

The following links reference other sections of this document and other resources and case studies to assist with understanding and plan implementation.

[The Role of Placemaking in Economic Development](#)

[Project for Public Spaces](#)

[Example: Jefferson Educational Society](#)

[Patronicity: Building Vibrant Communities](#)

[T-Mobile Hometown Grants](#)

[Jump to Plan Implementation](#)



8

Promote Rock Island's attributes and tell the city's evolving story, informed by the community's vision and tailored to appeal to target industries, tourists, workers,

STRATEGIES:

8.1. Develop consistent and reinforced messaging to elevate Rock Island's reputation in the region.

- 8.1.1. Combat negative perceptions of Rock Island by highlighting assets and successes.
- 8.1.2. Utilize both new and existing sources to improve Rock Island's brand and messaging guidelines.
- 8.1.3. Create a community feedback loop to increase resident engagement and remain aligned with the community's vision for Rock Island.

8.2. Reinforce messaging among economic development and community partners.

- 8.2.1. Segment messaging to appeal to different audiences, including local businesses, prospective (and target industry) businesses, tourists, and potential residents and workers.
- 8.2.2. Collaborate on co-branded and companion marketing materials and integrate with local community messaging and attraction efforts (targeted industries and sites, tourists, talent, and potential residents).
- 8.2.3. Continue to promote DARI's "RIForward" initiative and "Live-Work Rock Island" program, and integrate these and other existing efforts where possible.



THIS TOWN

9

Invest in enhancing place-based efforts and advance Rock Island as a regional destination.

STRATEGIES:**9.1. Implement focused place-based development activities that increase residential connectivity, improve the attraction to priority corridors, and create attractive, distinct places.**

- 9.1.1. Implement activities that focus on the improvement of priority corridors such as the River Edge, Special Service Area, 11th Street and 18th Avenue Corridors, and other identified areas.
- 9.1.2. Continue to support RIDA's "Clean and Safe" initiative.
- 9.1.3. Encourage creative placemaking demonstrations and public space activation.

**9.2. Support and create programs that recover, sustain, and grow the arts, culture, and entertainment community.**

- 9.2.1. Establish relationships with local and regional arts organizations such as Quad City Arts, Rock Island Art Guild.
- 9.2.2. Elevate priorities of arts organizations, dedicating efforts to disseminate information and highlight the value of arts as an economic driver.
- 9.2.3. Assist the "creative class" to implement areas for new business development.

- 9.2.4. Leverage Rock Island's historic, cultural, arts, and entertainment assets in placemaking and marketing initiatives.



PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The initial step is creating a Strategic Action Plan, but the real challenge lies in implementation. Rock Island's economic development budget is smaller than many peer cities, and it would be extremely difficult to complete all the goals and strategies without additional staff, resources, and collaborative partners. In short, the city is not equipped to handle the load alone. This ongoing process demands collaboration among numerous individuals and organizations over an extended period. Knowledge, skills, and capacity must be taken into consideration as coordination continues.

The following matrix is designed to assist Rock Island with the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan. Contained within the matrix are teams to drive progress on the strategies, key performance metrics, and a timeline for completion. It is important to note that, for simplicity, tactics are not included in this matrix.

Teams are groups of individuals and/or organizations that will advance strategic efforts. Each team is given a specified lead. Since this strategic plan is an initiative of the City of Rock Island, in most cases, city staff will lead initiatives. In some cases, co-leads may be listed. Below is a guide to acronyms used in the matrix:

- City staff: primarily the economic development department of the city with assistance from other departments and leadership as needed.
- 1EDP: PRIMARY economic development partners with contracts for economic development services with the city. In some cases, these partners may be listed individually according to the acronym listed.
 - DARI: Development Association of Rock Island
 - RIDA: Rock Island Downtown Alliance
 - GQC: Grow Quad Cities
- 2EDP: SECONDARY economic development partners without contracts for economic development services with the city. In some cases, these partners may be listed individually according to the acronym listed.
 - VQC: Visit Quad Cities
 - ACD: Augustana Community Development
 - WER: West End Revitalization
 - QCC: Quad Cities Chamber
- EWDP: Education and Workforce Development partners may include early learning, local K-12 schools, Augustana College, American Job Center/Rock Island Tri-County Consortium, Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Innovation Network, and other state and region partners
- PBP: Private business partners (individually or as a group) who seek to contribute to local economic development efforts. PBP often play a significant role in the success of public-private partnerships.
- BSRC: Bi-State Regional Commission

Timelines are broken down between short-term (ST) strategies to be implemented within 18 months, medium-term (MT) strategies that should be implemented within 3 years, and long-term (LT) strategies that should be implemented within 5 years. It is important to note that these are estimates and that the medium- and long-term strategies may have tactics that will be implemented long before the full strategy is projected to be completed.

COORDINATED EFFORTS

1. Build a collaborative economic development ecosystem of partnerships and activities to efficiently and effectively nurture Rock Island’s economic vitality.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
1.3. Implement efforts to improve communication efforts with economic development partners.	<u>Lead:</u> City <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	number of meetings with documented agendas, attendance, and notes	ST
1.4. Establish and adhere to clearly defined roles and responsibilities for ecosystem partners.	<u>Lead:</u> City <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP	amend contracts as needed; track relevant activities for reporting	ST
1.5. Enhance business intelligence and the execution of strategic initiatives.	<u>Lead:</u> City, GQC <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	Research conducted/ information gathered, reports presented, completed professional development activities, adoption of technology	MT

2. Cultivate a diverse portfolio of resources dedicated to supporting economic advancement.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
2.1. Develop a strategic investment plan.	<u>Lead:</u> City <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, PBP	Identification of PBP, meetings held, research conducted, action plan	MT
2.2. Create and leverage incentives for businesses that provide pathways to economic success for employees and the community.	<u>Lead:</u> City, GQC <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, PBP	Compile and assess existing incentives, research conducted, incentives created, incentives accessed	LT

For information about the rationale behind these strategies and tactics identified, please see the [Coordinated Efforts](#) section of the Strategic Action Plan.



THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMY

3. Prioritize entrepreneurship and existing business by delivering robust support and resources.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
3.1. Revitalize local business retention and expansion efforts.	<u>Lead:</u> City, GQC <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP	coordination with key partners, action plan created, reporting of available shared data	ST
3.2. Enhance startup support and awareness of resources.	<u>Lead:</u> DARI, QCC <u>Assist:</u> City, 1EDP, 2EDP, PBP	business starts, compilation of support efforts, marketing efforts	LT
3.3. Ensure small and mid-sized businesses are aware of and can access services and resources.	<u>Lead:</u> DARI, QCC <u>Assist:</u> City, 1EDP, 2EDP, PBP	compilation of support efforts, marketing efforts, BRE visits documented	MT

4. Address development site needs and attract target industries to diversify the local economy.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
4.1. Identify sites within Rock Island that have the potential for retail, commercial, industrial and residential development.	<u>Lead:</u> City, GQC <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, PBP	number of sites, number of inventory profiles completed	ST
4.2. Advance efforts to prepare sites for development and marketing.	<u>Lead:</u> City, GQC <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, PBP	Site readiness progress; targeted marketing efforts and stats; leads	LT

5. Create a dynamic retail marketing strategy aimed at boosting city revenues in the near term.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
5.1. Coordinate business attraction and marketing strategies with RIDA to fill downtown storefront vacancies.	<u>Lead:</u> RIDA <u>Assist:</u> City, 1EDP	storefront vacancies and new occupants, new business starts in district	MT
5.2. Develop marketing strategies targeting the 11 th Street and 18 th Avenue retail corridors.	<u>Lead:</u> City, DARI <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	vacancy inventory, new occupants, strategies created, progress updates	ST
5.3. Develop marketing materials that outline all retail development opportunities.	<u>Lead:</u> GQC <u>Assist:</u> City, 1EDP, 2EDP	materials created, distribution stats, leads	MT

For information about the rationale behind these strategies and tactics identified, please see the [Thriving Local Economy](#) section of the Strategic Action Plan.



EMPOWERED, PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY

6. Elevate opportunities for upward economic mobility by increasing high-quality jobs, enhancing skill development and providing supportive resources in Rock Island.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
6.1. Direct business attraction and project support toward target industries that promote high-quality jobs and help raise average wages and median incomes.	<u>Lead:</u> GQC <u>Assist:</u> City, 1EDP,	target industry materials, marketing, leads, job creation, wages, income	ST
6.2. Increase collaboration with workforce and education partners.	<u>Lead:</u> City, EWDP <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP	meetings attended, description of collaborative activities	MT
6.3. Engage with local businesses to better understand current and anticipated workforce needs.	<u>Lead:</u> GQC <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, ACD, WER	BRE visit feedback review and aggregate analysis, labor force data	MT

7. Support activities that improve local infrastructure and positively impact quality of life.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
7.1. Focus on transit-oriented development.	<u>Lead:</u> City, BSRC <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	improvements completed, projects and status	ST
7.2. Align with the recent Housing Plan to bolster housing supply by implementing efforts that support the development of quality, diverse housing options.	<u>Lead:</u> City <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, WER	implementation of housing plan, units created, vacancy rate	LT
7.3. Support nonprofits and other community partners to increase the overall impact of their work within Rock Island.	<u>Lead:</u> City <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	number of meetings, input collected, describe any resulting action	LT

For information about the rationale behind these strategies and tactics identified, please see the [Empowered, Prosperous Community](#) section of the Strategic Action Plan.



VIBRANT AND ECLECTIC PLACE

8. Promote Rock Island’s attributes and tell the city’s evolving story, informed by the community’s vision and tailored to appeal to target industries, tourists, workers, and residents.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
8.1. Develop consistent and reinforced messaging to elevate Rock Island’s reputation in the region.	<u>Lead:</u> City, VQC, and DARI <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	engagement with process, creation of messaging, segmented distribution and marketing stats,	ST
8.2. Reinforce messaging among economic development and community partners.	<u>Lead:</u> City, DARI <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	describe integration with partners, annual review for consistency	MT

9. Invest in enhancing place-based efforts and advance Rock Island as a regional destination.

STRATEGIES	TEAM	KPIs	TIME
9.1. Implement focused place-based development activities that increase residential connectivity, improve the attraction to priority corridors, and create attractive, distinct places.	<u>Lead:</u> City, RIDA, and WER <u>Assist:</u> 1EDP, 2EDP	meeting agendas and notes, resulting actions, project list and status	MT
9.2. Support and create programs that recover, sustain, and grow the arts, culture, and entertainment community.	<u>Lead:</u> RIDA, VQC <u>Assist:</u> City, 1EDP, 2EDP	meeting agendas and notes, resulting actions, project list and status	MT

For information about the rationale behind these strategies and tactics identified, please see the [Vibrant and Eclectic Place](#) section of the Strategic Action Plan.



PLAN ASSESSMENT

As circumstances evolve, Rock Island must remain agile and ready to adjust strategies and refocus efforts in the future. It is recommended that Rock Island assess progress each quarter during the first year of implementation and every 6-12 months following to ensure strategies are progressing and to make any necessary changes.

Tip: Structure partner meeting agendas using the strategic framework. Set review meetings in advance to stay on schedule with plan updates.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

LOCAL PRIDE

With its historic music venues, cultural diversity, and vibrant arts scene, Rock Island inspires a deep sense of pride among its residents. Although smaller than some neighboring cities, its close-knit, small-town atmosphere fosters a strong sense of community and belonging. This shared identity fuels a collective passion among residents to contribute to a successful, thriving future which is evident in their ongoing support for local initiatives, businesses, and creative expression.

DIVERSE POPULATION

Rock Island's population is more diverse than that of the broader Quad Cities region, reinforcing its identity as the area's arts and cultural hub. This diversity enriches the city's creative landscape and can support a wide range of cultural initiatives that can foster a more attractive destination. Additionally, the city benefits from a strong presence of young workers aged 15 to 34, bringing a long-term workforce potential to the local economy. This demographic mix positions Rock Island as both a cultural destination and a community with a dynamic, emerging talent base.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Several organizations have been investing heavily in capital improvement projects for Downtown Rock Island. To help fund streetscape improvements and revitalization efforts, the local businesses recently established a Business Improvement District. In addition, the City established several redevelopment zones to help facilitate targeted neighborhood improvement efforts, designed to spur economic activity. Furthering this work, in 2023, the Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA) was created in a joint effort with the Quad Cities Chamber and the City of Rock Island. This organization was created to enhance public spaces and promote private investment in the downtown area.

LOCALIZED CONNECTEDNESS

The City of Rock Island's internal team includes strong, positive working relationships. Due to the community's size, Rock Island has fostered connections among individuals who have worked in economic development for many years and have significant connection to the local community. These relationships create a foundation of knowledge and experience that can enhance strategic efforts. Though there are challenges within the ecosystem, if the team can enhance communication, streamline coordination, and facilitate faster decision-making, they could collaborate more effectively, share resources, and align around common goals—strengthening the overall impact of economic development initiatives. This level of interpersonal connectivity and experience is a distinct asset that supports a more agile and responsive approach to addressing community needs.

GROWING INDUSTRIES

An analysis of total employment, employment concentration, Gross Regional Product (GRP), and earnings reveals that Rock Island's cornerstone industries include Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, Educational Services, and Transportation and Warehousing. In addition to these industries, it was reported that Rock Island is home to a thriving arts community and specialty manufacturing. To support long-term economic growth, it will be important to ensure these sectors have continued access to critical resources, infrastructure, and capital. Equally vital is the alignment of education and workforce development efforts to cultivate a skilled and competitive local talent pipeline that meets the evolving needs of these key industries. By reinforcing both industry capacity and workforce readiness, Rock Island can strengthen its economic foundation and attract future investment.

WEAKNESSES

CAPACITY, CLARITY, & ALIGNMENT

Conversations with local and regional practitioners revealed recurring concerns about misalignment in economic development operations. Many stakeholders described confusion and overlap in roles, responsibilities, and organizational missions, leading to inefficiencies and duplicative efforts. Several organizations noted limited internal capacity, which hinders their ability to fully implement desired projects and initiatives. Underlying these operational challenges are relational tensions between some entities and a disconnect between local and regional priorities, which must be addressed in order to build trust and foster more effective collaboration across the economic development landscape.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Rock Island's economic development infrastructure faces constraints, primarily due to a limited supply of Greenfield sites and a shortage of community development amenities such as transportation infrastructure, parks, and other placemaking assets. These limitations are further compounded by a lack of available industrial development sites, insufficient site profiles, and limited organizational capacity to advance site readiness efforts. Together, these factors restrict the city's ability to effectively market itself to prospective developers and investors, posing a challenge to future growth and competitiveness.

POVERTY & FLIGHT

Within the Quad Cities, Rock Island is viewed as the most economically disparaged area. Various data points support these claims. The City of Rock Island's population and working age populations has been steadily decreasing. On top of that, the City reflects higher poverty and unemployment rates and lower labor force participation and educational attainment rates than neighboring cities. These factors can make cities less attractive to recruiting and retaining workers and businesses, thus harming the economic development ecosystem.

REVENUE GENERATION & RETENTION

The City of Rock Island is currently experiencing significant financial challenges due to a sustained decline in revenues. Contributing factors include the closure of retail businesses—many impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic—and a decreasing population. In light of these constraints, it is essential to prioritize economic development strategies that can generate revenue in the near term. While industrial development remains a critical long-term objective, such projects often require extended timelines to yield returns. In contrast, revitalizing retail is an opportunity that can more quickly restore sales tax revenue to the City. Yet, there has not been any significant, concentrated efforts for retail attraction.

INSTITUTIONAL & PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Rock Island's limited engagement in workforce development and the lack of public awareness around economic development priorities point to broader institutional and public knowledge gaps. Without strong connections to workforce development efforts, the city risks falling short in preparing a talent pipeline aligned with industry needs. Additionally, the general public and elected officials' limited understanding of economic development practices, key partners, and available resources weakens community buy-in and reduces opportunities for collaboration. These gaps in both public and private alignment undermine the effectiveness of economic development strategies and limit the city's ability to mobilize support for long-term growth.

OPPORTUNITIES

INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES

Rock Island possesses a range of assets that could serve as catalysts for regional economic development. The first set of assets includes existing infrastructure such as old rail lines and the City's Port designation that, if upgraded, could enhance shipping and logistics capacity. The city also has a vibrant downtown small business ecosystem, which could be leveraged to drive greater economic activity.

In addition to physical assets, several service-based opportunities could bolster growth, including the creation of an industrial development advisory team to restore and repurpose old industrial buildings; initiatives to help local small businesses expand into new markets; and more coordinated, systematic approaches to business retention and expansion. While some of these efforts are already underway, improving their alignment, implementation, and reach will be essential. To fully realize these opportunities, the City will need to establish a dedicated and sustainable revenue source for economic development, as failing to do so could limit its ability to compete effectively with surrounding communities.

LOCATIONS FOR REDEVELOPMENT

Rock Island has several locations that have been identified as priority redevelopment areas by the State of Illinois. In 2023, areas along the Mississippi and Rock Rivers earned Rock Island the state's River Edge Redevelopment certification. This program offers tax incentives to projects for the purpose of rehabilitation of historic structures. Also in 2023, Rock Island was appointed as the 20th port district in Illinois. This designation prioritizes areas as a strategic logistical hub for state and allocates funding to improve the marine transportation system throughout Illinois. Areas are eligible for state and federal grant funding. A third location includes Downtown Rock Island's Special Services Area (SSA). This area requires property owners to pay an additional tax that helps fund improvements and services in a specific geographical area. To build momentum for these efforts, the city can pair economic development efforts within these specified areas.

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

To monitor and improve the quality of economic development efforts in the area it will be important to establish performance metrics. Currently, the city is doing little to monitor outputs and outcomes of various economic development initiatives. By establishing metrics, the city and its partners can research the causes of certain economic development barriers, then formulate strategies for working more strategically to improve economic development systems.

ENHANCE COLLABORATION

Conversations with stakeholders revealed an opportunity to strengthen collaborative efforts around economic development partners in the region. While agencies have cooperative agreements with one another, partners revealed that there is occasional misalignment among specific initiatives in the area. This can lead to inefficient and ineffective economic development initiatives, thus hindering the growth of Rock Island and the greater Quad Cities region. The region would benefit from creating a more unified vision and clearly delineated roles for economic development partners.

SITE READINESS

Site readiness is the process of documenting a site's assets and deficiencies and investing in capital improvements to increase the marketability of the property. Although the City of Rock Island has limited opportunities for Greenfield development, it possesses several Brownfield sites with potential for redevelopment. To attract developer interest, the city and its partners could develop comprehensive prospectuses for these sites and implement targeted marketing strategies to highlight their potential.

INDUSTRY & WORKFORCE SUPPORT

Industries within the city are in need of support, especially with regard to workforce. Since there are limited opportunities in Rock Island for continuing training in key industries, the city could collaborate with partners to push workforce initiatives forward. This could include increasing access to training or wraparound services such as transportation or childcare.

THREATS

REGIONAL PERCEPTION

One of Rock Island's most significant threats to talent retention and attraction is its negative regional perception. Many residents across the Quad Cities view the city as unsafe, dilapidated, and generally unappealing as a place to live. As a result, Rock Island is not widely regarded as a business-friendly environment, prompting several businesses to relocate across the river. This poor perception undermines economic development efforts, deters private investment, and limits the city's ability to compete for both workforce and industry growth.

COMPETITION AND PROGRESS OF SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Surrounding areas in the Quad Cities including Bettendorf, Davenport, Moline and other jurisdictions have had recent economic development successes including riverfront projects, data centers, recreational attractions, attracting manufacturing businesses, and more. This progress has led to compounding wins for these communities. In contrast, Rock Island has struggled to keep pace. If this trend continues, Rock Island risks falling further behind in attracting new businesses, residents, and investment. The disparity in development activity could lead to long-term challenges in remaining competitive within the regional economy, reinforcing perceptions of stagnation and limiting the city's ability to fully participate in shared regional prosperity.

STATE TAX ENVIRONMENT & RESOURCES

Because of Illinois' state tax system, Rock Island faces competitive disadvantages due to a less favorable tax environment compared to neighboring Iowa, which has led some businesses to relocate to Davenport, Bettendorf, or neighboring cities in Iowa or choose not to invest in the city. In addition, Illinois' workforce development system has been cited as less effective and flexible than Iowa's hindering local talent development. Together, these challenges create a perception of structural inefficiency, discouraging economic expansion and making it harder for the city to attract and retain both employers and skilled workers.

STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING INSTABILITY

As Rock Island looks ahead, effective long-term planning is essential to supporting growth and development. However, recent announcements regarding federal budget cuts have introduced a level of financial uncertainty that threatens to hinder these efforts. The unpredictability of future funding streams complicates the City's ability to make informed investments. Without clear and stable financial commitments from federal partners, Rock Island and its regional collaborators may be forced to delay or scale back critical projects, undermining momentum and limiting the community's ability to attract private investment and support sustained economic growth.



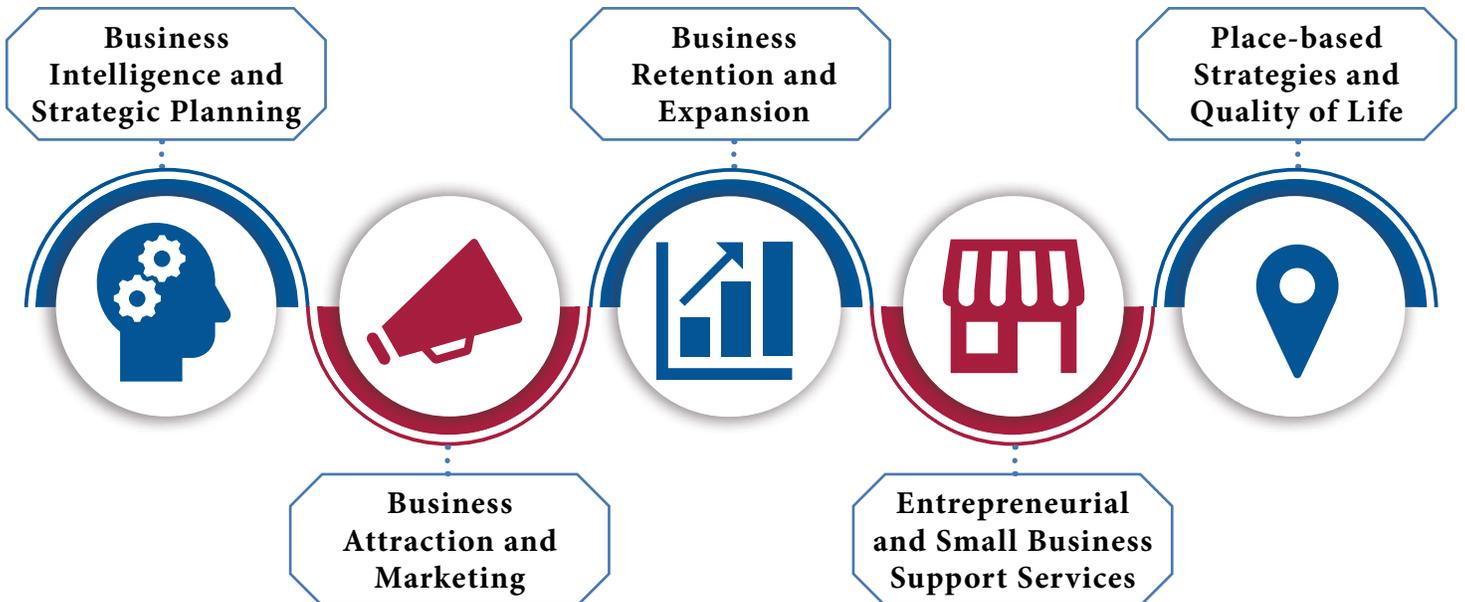
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEMS

DEFINING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) defines economic development as:

“ Creating the conditions for economic growth and improved quality of life by expanding the capacity of individuals, businesses, and communities to maximize the use of their talents and skills to support innovation, job creation, and private investment. ”

In this section, we provide an overview of the core functions of economic development. These are broken down into five categories as follows:





BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

It is critical for those in economic development to be informed about economic trends and current data. This business intelligence can help leaders take a more strategic approach to managing growth. Key activities may include:

- Market research
- Competitive analysis
- Target industry and cluster analysis
- Tracking metrics
- Surveys and feedback
- Staff training and professional development
- Strategic Planning
- Cost/benefit analysis
- Outcome analysis and impact assessments
- Reporting



BUSINESS ATTRACTION AND MARKETING

Attracting new businesses is often top of mind in discussions about economic development. This dynamic role helps drive economic growth, creating jobs, increasing the tax base, and diversifying the industry mix. Ensuring the community remains competitive and attractive to new investments is critical. Some activities involved include:

- Site inventory and search
- Site readiness and infrastructure assessment
- Marketing to target industries
- Lead generation and qualification
- Responding to requests for information (RFI)
- Site visit coordination
- Resource coordination
- Incentive packaging, deal structuring, and negotiation
- Project management
- Foreign direct investment (FDI) strategies



BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION

The Business Retention and Expansion arm of an economic development organization is essential to fostering long-term economic stability and growth within a community. Through proactive engagement with local businesses, identifying their needs and obstacles, removing barriers, and providing customized support, the BRE team helps maintain a competitive, resilient, and business-friendly environment that attracts and retains companies.

- Business outreach and relationship building
- Business expansion lead generation
- Scaling and growth strategies
- Technical assistance (e.g., regulatory processes, compliance)
- Access to resources and capital
- Market expansion
- Identifying challenges
- Advocacy and problem solving
- Workforce solutions and talent attraction
- Supply chain enhancement
- Technology and innovation support
- Resiliency Planning



ENTREPRENEURIAL AND SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

This area of economic development is centered on supporting the growth and success of small businesses and startups, promoting innovation, enhancing resilience, and empowering entrepreneurs to thrive and make meaningful contributions to the local economy. While it intersects with business attraction, retention, and expansion strategies, the emphasis here is typically on smaller enterprises and cultivating an entrepreneurial culture. Key activities may include:

- Business directory and marketing
- Business plan development
- Startup incubation and acceleration
- Scaling and growth strategies
- Technology and innovation programs
- Access to resources and capital
- Access to new markets and market research
- Technical assistance
- Business training
- Networking and business events
- Mentorships and peer business connections
- Succession and resiliency planning
- Advocacy and problem solving

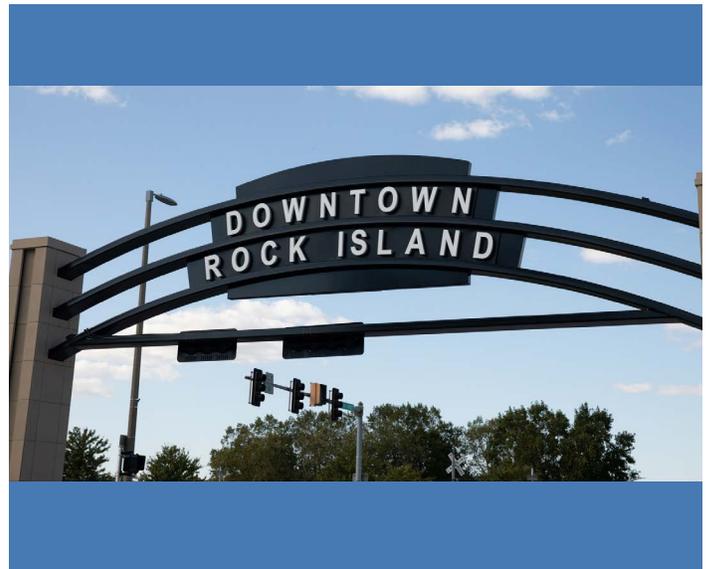
According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, small businesses and startups have the highest rate of job growth, creating over 70 percent of net new jobs since 2019. Small businesses employ 51% of the workforce.



PLACE-BASED STRATEGIES AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Place-based strategies and quality of life are inextricably linked to economic development. This area of work is committed to improving the physical, social, and cultural fabric of the community to attract residents, businesses, workers, and visitors, while elevating both the economic and overall well-being of citizens. These activities emphasize the creation of vibrant, livable environments that support economic vitality, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Because of the ever-evolving landscape of business and community needs, economic developers are often engaged in these efforts to varying extents—typically influenced by the capacity of other departments or partner organizations to address critical challenges.

- **Community engagement and visioning**
- **Workforce and education**
 - Access to quality education and training
 - Enhancing work-based learning initiatives
 - Improving childcare access and affordability
- **Placemaking and destination development**
 - Revitalization of neighborhoods and districts
 - Urban design and smart growth
 - Creative placemaking and beautification
 - Fostering arts, culture, and entertainment
 - Community events and public space activation
 - Recreation and leisure
 - Amenities and tourism infrastructure
 - Community marketing and storytelling
- **Fundamental community needs**
 - Transportation, including major distribution routes, key corridors, public transit, and multi-modal pathways
 - Water, wastewater, and solid waste disposal
 - Energy production and grid capacity
 - Sustainability and environmental stewardship
 - Public health and safety (including emergency preparedness)
 - Housing and affordable living



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS (EDOs)

COMMON EDO STRUCTURES:

PUBLIC

- Department/division of government
- Taxpayer-funding
- Clearly outlined roles

PRIVATE

- Nonprofit tax status
- Receive public and private funding
- Mission-based role

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

- Nonprofit tax status*
- Receive public and private funding
- Implementation-based role

“

“It (the EDO) builds relationships and community capacity to foster broad prosperity, and it embodies adaptability, responsiveness, and integrity. It sees and sometimes makes new opportunities. It employs its capacities and resources to the fullest, sets its goals high, and works diligently to attain them.” – International Economic Development Council (IEDC)

”

PUBLIC EDO

Public Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) are often structured as departments or divisions within local, county, or state government. In some cases, they operate as independent public agencies or quasi-governmental entities governed by appointed boards, typically selected by local elected officials. These organizations carry out a wide range of core economic development functions, including:

- Infrastructure planning and improvements
- Zoning, regulatory enforcement, and land use planning
- Construction and management of public facilities
- Control and management of public rights-of-way
- Administration of special improvement districts, such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) zones
- Management of business incentives, revolving loan funds, and grant programs

Due to their proximity to elected officials, other internal departments, and key community leaders,

public EDOs often hold both formal authority and informal influence in decision-making processes. Because they are funded by public dollars, these organizations must maintain a high level of transparency and accountability.

FUNDING SOURCES

Public EDOs are primarily funded through taxpayer-supported sources. For those embedded within government, the main funding mechanism is overwhelmingly provided by the jurisdiction’s general fund, which in many communities, can be significantly impacted by competing priorities. In addition to general fund allocations, some public EDOs may draw from special revenue funds, special assessment funds, and internal service funds. These departments often rely on interest and fees generated from revolving loan funds. Lastly, public EDOs can support operations with federal and state funding, including both formula and competitive based grants.

PRIVATE EDO

According to the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), a private Economic Development Organization (EDO) is “an organization with the express mandate of promoting economic growth, but which has no public control of governance and no formal links to government.” Private EDOs can take several organizational forms including nonprofit organizations, Chambers of Commerce, Community Development Corporations (CDCs), and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). These organizations are usually governed by a board of directors made up of representatives from the private and civic sectors, ensuring alignment with business community interests. These boards may or may not include a member of local government in an ex officio role, or in some cases, as a voting member.

While private EDOs play a critical role in the economic development ecosystem, they are typically not viewed as the primary or “lead” development entities within a community. Instead, they often operate in partnership with public agencies, offering complementary services and specialized expertise. Private EDOs typically focus their efforts on traditional economic development activities such as business retention and expansion, business attraction and recruitment, business financing and investment support, advocacy for pro-business policies, and support for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Some private EDOs also engage in lobbying efforts, allowing them to influence local and regional policy in favor of a more business-friendly regulatory environment.

FUNDING SOURCES

Private EDOs draw on a mix of public and private funding streams. Private EDOs may procure funding through a wider variety of mechanisms, such as membership dues and private-sector investments; fees for services and event sponsorships, grants from federal, state, and local governments, philanthropic contributions. Less commonly, they might receive private capital from local investors, access commercial loans and/or invest in real estate or businesses, generating returns to support operations. This financial flexibility allows private EDOs to tailor their programs and services to meet the specific needs of their communities and local business environments.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

A growing model for Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) is the public-private partnership (PPP or P3). According to the IEDC, these are “long-term shared commitments between the public and private sectors designed to pursue common goals related to the social, political, and business environment in a community.” P3s are typically structured as nonprofit corporations and governed by boards with both public and private sector representation. Board members often include elected officials, economic development professionals, relevant community organization leaders, major employers, and small business owners. There are two primary types of public-private EDO structures:

1. Policy Planning Organizations - These organizations often form as ad hoc committees appointed by a jurisdiction’s executive leadership. The impetus for this structure is to connect public and private leaders to advance strategic initiatives. Key functions include: providing technical expertise on economic development; recommending actions to address economic challenges; influencing policy agendas and priorities; supporting planning, research, and capacity building; and coordinating implementation efforts
2. Implementation Organizations - Commonly referred to as quasi-governmental entities, these organizations perform public functions but operate independently from local government. They are often authorized through local, state, or federal legislation and are governed by mixed-sector boards. Core functions typically include: financing, development, and providing information.

FUNDING SOURCES

P3s have a much more diverse and reliable mix of funding mechanisms to support their operations and initiatives. They can access public funding, private sector funding, fundraising, and other revenue-generating activities.

ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

In most communities, a lead economic development organization (EDO) champions most economic development activities but no single entity is able to perform all functions. EDOs work in concert with other entities to meet the economic needs of a community. The partners, resources, and activities make up the economic development ecosystem. Some of these ecosystem partners may include:

- Economic Development Organizations (EDOs)
- Government Staff and Elected Officials
- Regional Planning Commissions
- Business Support Organizations (BSOs), including Business Associations
- Foundations, Funding Partners, Capital Providers
- Transportation and Utilities
- Environmental Services Organizations
- Housing-related Organizations/Coalitions
- Education and Workforce Development
- Place-based Organizations
- Tourism and Destination Development

Economic development ecosystems vary widely, but some key indicators can reveal if an ecosystem is well-functioning. These success factors are:

- Relationship-driven
- Customer-oriented
- Equity-focused
- Effective Leadership
- Economic Resiliency
- Purpose and Plan
- Guided by Results
- Future-focused

ROCK ISLAND'S PRIMARY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM PARTNERS

Rock Island's primary economic development ecosystem partners include the city's economic development department, Grow Quad Cities, DARI, and RIDA. Organizational overviews for primary ecosystem partners are provided in this section. The ecosystem includes a set of closely-related secondary partner organizations such as Augustana Hilltop Community Development Corporation, West End Revitalization, Visit Quad Cities, Quad Cities Chamber, and the Bi-State Regional Commission. Other private sector partners, regional and state organizations, nonprofits, and coordinating departments connect to the ecosystem as well.



Regional

Local

CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The city's strategic direction currently comes from the priorities of the city council and mayor. The city is intent on the creation of a longer-term economic development plan to guide and drive progress that would include roles, responsibilities, timelines, and performance indicators.

FUTURE-READY MINDSET

The city staff have a future-ready mindset, necessary for developing a successful strategic framework. While the city has ideas about target industries, none have been formally identified. They see potential for future growth in breweries, distilleries, cannabis, craft production, niche manufacturing, high-tech manufacturing, and logistics. The city's port district is viewed as playing a pivotal role in future development initiatives. Additionally, city staff is looking for a variety of incentive tools (such as tax abatement) that could assist with the development and economic success of Rock Island in the long-term. Increased alignment and coordination with strategic partners on goals is a top priority of city staff.

INDIVIDUAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Mayor Ashley Harris was just sworn in on May 12, 2025. He has a focus on economic development, infrastructure, and building the local tax base.
- Todd Thompson is the city manager with over 30 years of local government experience. Todd oversees all city departments.
- Miles Brainard is the community and economic development director. He has a strong foundational understanding of economic development practices. He has three direct reports that help with tasks.
- Tom Flaherty is the assistant to the city manager and economic development director. He is well-connected to the community organizations and residents. He is skilled in business retention and expansion efforts, and has one direct report.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

When it comes to public awareness, the city is not a faceless bureaucracy, partly due to the size of the community. However, the city has limited resources to offer in terms of programs for businesses.

There is a small speculative real estate inventory accessible through their website. The city also manages a revolving loan fund and provides links to other financial resources.

PARTNERSHIPS

- The city has formal partnerships with the Quad Cities Chamber/Grow Quad Cities, Development Association of Rock Island (DARI), Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA), and Visit Quad Cities. While interaction with some of these partners is frequent, there is a disconnect. The city has a desire for a shared vision and a more focused, cooperative relationship between these partners.
- A fully executed partnership agreement exists between DARI and the city, with the goals of partnership outlined. The scope of work overlaps with what is outlined in exhibit C of the new agreement between the city and Grow Quad Cities (scheduled to be effective July 1, 2025).
- Grow Quad Cities has been in the process of reorganization, with a new agreement scheduled to be effective July 1, 2025. The scope of work outlined in exhibit C overlaps with what is outlined in the city's partnership agreement with DARI.
- An agreement also exists with Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA)—an affiliate of the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce—established under the downtown special service area (SSA). The scope is limited to the downtown SSA.
- The city's interaction with state-level entities is limited. The city's interaction with the Bi-State Regional Commission, Workforce Development Board, and other regional entities is also very limited at this time.

GROW QUAD CITIES ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Grow Quad Cities is a separate regional nonprofit under the umbrella of the Quad Cities Chamber that serves six counties. Grow Quad Cities focuses on business growth, workforce development, and quality of place development. The strategic plan for Grow Quad Cities is set to launch on July 1. Other plans utilized by the organization include the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Targeted Industry Analysis, Site Readiness Study, and Thrive QC Workforce Study.

FUTURE-READY MINDSET

Grow Quad Cities markets and conducts direct outreach to industrial, mixed use, retail, and quality of life sector targets.

- Advanced manufacturing – metals and materials manufacturing
- Aerospace & Defense
- Agricultural innovation – ag equipment manufacturing and food production
- Logistics
- Headquarters & professional services
- Entertainment & retail development
- Riverfront & mixed-use development

Annual reports from the Chamber including a variety of metrics and list of activities are readily available through the Chamber’s website.

INDIVIDUAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Grow Quad Cities Board of Directors has 21 members comprised of 12 private sector and 9 public sector members who have oversight for workplan and budget of the organization.

Grow Quad Cities has an economic development team with the experience and skills sets to support business development and marketing, workforce development, economic analysis and business intelligence, and project management. Peter Tokar, President and CEO, brings years of economic development expertise to

the organization. Julie Forsythe is the Senior VP of Business and Economic Growth. She leads the business economic growth team. Chris Caves is the VP of Business Retention and Expansion and Workforce. Tami Petsche is the VP of Business Attraction. Bill Polley is the Director of Business Intelligence and Sam Jackson is the Manager for Business & Economic Growth Services.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Grow Quad Cities provides information, regional data, and promotional materials to attract site selectors and companies to the region. The organization also meets with existing businesses about potential growth opportunities. The organization works closely with regional workforce and education partners.

The Quad Cities Chamber website links to a variety of resources including: Manufacturing Hub, RIA Defense Alliance, Illinois Business Incentives, Transportation Overview. The site also provides significant data resources for the region and quarterly economic updates. Links to additional financial resources are also provided.

Grow Quad Cities encourages and fosters foreign direct investment and exporting. The QC is a designated Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ), which can allow some businesses to defer, alter, or in some cases, eliminate duties on foreign and domestic merchandise.

PARTNERSHIPS

- Grow Quad Cities works with local municipalities on a consistent basis to facilitate a regional approach to economic development.
- Grow Quad Cities works closely with education and workforce partners.
- Grow Quad Cities has been in the process of reorganization, with a new agreement scheduled to be effective July 1, 2025. The scope of work outlined in exhibit C overlaps with what is outlined in the city’s partnership agreement with DARI.

DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION OF ROCK ISLAND ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Development Association of Rock Island (DARI) serves “as the catalyst to stimulate community and economic development in Rock Island.” It was established 40 years ago for the purpose of representing the private sector in funding redevelopment efforts. DARI focuses on business development, community development, and economic development. The organization is in the process of conducting an assessment of its structure and function.

FUTURE-READY MINDSET

DARI has demonstrated a future-ready mindset over the years through successful programs and redevelopment projects. DARI recognizes and integrates a number of plans including the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan, the Rock Island Housing Study, Targeted Industry Analysis, Site Readiness Study, and Thrive QC Workforce Study.

INDIVIDUAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All members of DARI have a seat on the board of directors (between 45-50). There is an executive committee of about 10 members, including the city manager of Rock Island. Elizabeth Tallman serves as DARI’s vice president. Stacey McIntosh is DARI’s program director.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

DARI assists the City of Rock Island with site readiness, site inventory, marketing, and project management, including responding to RFI, site selection, incentive packaging, applications, site visits, and follow-up. The organization also collects business information, maintains a local business directory, and provides business assistance and resources such as startup information, technical assistance, business connections, ribbon cuttings, and financial resources. Financial resources listed on the DARI website include the Storefront Improvement Program, DIY Creative Placemaking, Discover Rock Island Events, SEED Rock Island Programs, Rock Start, Incubate, Grow. DARI lists a number of redevelopment projects including McKesson

Lofts, Bowlby Condominiums, Renaissance Lofts, Goldman Lofts, The Establishment, and Star Block.

DARI has been actively assisting with workforce talent attraction with the Live-Work Rock Island Program, through which it facilitates downpayment assistance and real estate transactions. The program (available only to DARI members) has provided 437 new homebuyers to the city with more than \$2.57 million in downpayment assistance and generated \$47.3 million in real estate transactions. Other housing services and resources are available on the DARI website.

DARI has championed marketing campaigns like “Why Rock Island,” “Rock Island Resilience,” and “RIForward” with a series of videos highlighting Rock Island assets and attractions with the hashtag “#ThisTownRocks”. DARI also provides a scholarship to a high school senior in Rock Island each year.

DARI recently reported that they, in partnership with the city have conducted over 3,000 business engagement and managed over 500 economic development projects. Collaborative efforts have led to over \$39 million in regional and state resources and \$210 million in business investment planned or underway in Rock Island.

PARTNERSHIPS

- DARI has weekly meetings with the City Manager, economic development and planning directors about project management and ongoing projects.
- A fully executed partnership agreement exists between DARI and the city, with the goals of partnership outlined. The scope of work appears to overlap with what is outlined in exhibit C of the new agreement between the city and Grow Quad Cities (scheduled to be effective July 1, 2025).
- DARI leadership wants more clarity and guidance on how best to support the city. They would like to see a local organization focused on pursuing local economic development funding opportunities, and would be interested in further assisting the city with business retention and expansion efforts.

ROCK ISLAND DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE (RIDA) ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA) was established in 2023 following the creation of the City of Rock Island's 65-block Downtown Special Service Area (SSA) and is an affiliate of the Quad Cities Chamber. RIDA's mission is to deliver place management services and placemaking programs that enhance public spaces, encourage private investment and improve quality of life in Downtown Rock Island. Beginning its third fiscal year of operations, RIDA is preparing to publicly launch a new brand and website to promote all Downtown Rock Island has to offer as a place to create, call home and explore.

While there is no strategic plan specific to RIDA, the organization creates and implements an annual work plan and references the Rebuild Downtown Rock Island Project Plan, the City of Rock Island Downtown Revitalization Plan and the City of Rock Island Arsenal Gateway Revitalization Plan..

"We promise to be a downtown that moves you: diverse, authentic, friendly and forward thinking - we guarantee you'll find the thing that moves you in the heart of our city."

FUTURE-READY MINDSET

The RIDA work plans set goals and initiatives. The organization is beginning to track metrics such as property value, sales tax revenue, and storefront occupancy rate, as well as more granular data. RIDA also has access to Chamber tools that can measure foot traffic, visitor, workforce and residential growth in the downtown.

RIDA's three primary areas of work are infrastructure and livability; business and economic growth; and advocacy and promotions.

INDIVIDUAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

RIDA is mostly driven by the private sector. It has a 13-member board of directors that includes business and property owners, residents, and the city manager.

Jack Cullen has served as RIDA's executive director since its inception in 2023. He was named to the International Downtown Association's 2023 Emerging Leader Fellowship Program and made the Quad Cities Business Journal's "Forty under 40" list in 2022. De'Andre Robinson is the operations manager. He leads RIDA's four ambassadors and coordinates with various City departments, law enforcement, public transit and human service providers. RIDA's dedicated ambassadors work seven days a week, maintaining a clean, safe and welcoming downtown district.

The Quad Cities Chamber provides payroll, human resources and marketing support for RIDA, among other services. Kyle Carter is the VP of Place Management for the Chamber and oversees RIDA.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The organization's "clean and safe" program has been particularly successful the past two years. RIDA has managed aspects of the Rebuild Downtown Rock Island Project and is now ramping up activations of public spaces and business promotions. RIDA provides a gateway for entrepreneurs and downtown businesses to find commercial space and access to financial assistance. RIDA manages the Curb Appeal Rebate Program, Safety Rebate Program, Patio Enhancement Rebate Program and soon the New Business Rental Rebate Program.

PARTNERSHIPS

- An agreement exists between the City and Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA). The scope is limited to managing the Downtown SSA and two State of Illinois grants.
- RIDA is an affiliate of the Quad Cities Chamber. As such, the organization benefits in terms of knowledge, capacity and funding.
- RIDA's leadership would like to see more collaboration among all economic development organizations serving Rock Island.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES FOR ROCK ISLAND'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

Through research, observation, and stakeholder engagement, a number of gaps were identified in Rock Island's economic development ecosystem. These gaps represent opportunities for improvement that can be addressed by effectively utilizing the strategies outlined in this plan.

DUPLICATION OF EFFORTS

Multiple organizations within the ecosystem are engaging in similar or overlapping activities, which can be either real or perceived duplication of efforts. It is important to note that some overlap and duplication might be appropriate with strong coordination and communication. Strategic redundancies can help a community to be more resilient (i.e. staff turnover, lack of capacity or knowledge, etc.). As duplication of efforts is a recurring theme for Rock Island, an in-depth communication and coordination strategy is necessary.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

One way to eliminate unnecessary duplication and develop contingencies is to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the ecosystem. Currently, and despite some claims to the contrary, Rock Island's ecosystem is experiencing a lack of understanding and agreement about what those roles and responsibilities should be. A shared understanding of the impact and potential of the nonprofit sector, nuanced understanding of nonprofit operations.....

TERRITORIALITY AND COMMUNICATION

There are interpersonal dynamics affecting collaboration, including unresolved tensions, emotional sensitivities, and territorial attitudes, which are impacting ecosystem cohesion and communication. This often stems from real or perceived duplicative efforts, competition for funding, siloed information/communication, marginalized participation, exclusion from decision-making, or even personal attacks - all of which were mentioned by ecosystem partners during engagement. The resulting distrust will continue to significantly hinder economic development efforts if not addressed. The underlying asset of this complicated challenge is that Rock Island has many experienced and passionate individuals working for the community, all with shared values and goals.

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNER DISENGAGEMENT

It has been noted that there is a serious lack of coordination and prioritization of business retention and expansion efforts. Business support and meaningful engagement with small and mid-sized business is lacking. Beyond the issues related to the alignment of BRE activities, stakeholders noted that private sector partners are often disengaged, apathetic, or dismissive of public sector efforts. Private sector funding for economic development activities is also lacking and what exists is not always accessible because resources are siloed. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of concentrated effort toward supporting and attracting retail.

CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

Rock Island lacks available funding mechanisms and resources for development. The city must dedicate time to procure more sustainable and flexible resources for talent attraction and development, marketing, expansion efforts, and service agreements. Further, capacity to find and procure resources is limited both among city staff and primary economic development partners. It is critical that the city create some of this capacity within the department both for resource development and for providing the leadership necessary to effectively collaborate with partners. These are often tasks not factored into job descriptions and labor projections.

VISION, LEADERSHIP, AND IMPACT

Stakeholders note that there is a lack of community vision for the future and that partners are not working from the same plan. Lack of measuring impact and accountability. Definition of what is/what is not economic development differs among groups/ community Lack of alignment of regional goals Lack of regional thought; visitors don't care about boundaries Site status/development

Other gaps mentioned by key stakeholders included: Workforce development and talent attraction/ retention, business attraction, a negative attitude of Illinois, a lack of priority on innovation, difficult political climate, and a lack of marketable tourism product to meet demand.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ROCK ISLAND'S ECOSYSTEM PARTNERS

RE-EVALUATE AND COORDINATE

At this critical time in Rock Island's evolution, this plan should serve as an opportunity for re-evaluation of the effectiveness of economic development activities and current collaborations. To better coordinate the economic development ecosystem among primary partners, they must unite under the same vision, goals, and strategies to maximize impact. All partners should know how crucial their activities are in implementation and be willing and ready to shift their focus to better meet the needs of the community. Redefining roles and responsibilities among partners is one step, but truly understanding the meaning of those roles and how the moving pieces should ultimately intersect is another. This will take significant intentional and consistent communication. Decisions must be made to better procure and allocate funding to enact the plan, and Rock Island can no longer avoid the difficult conversations necessary to move forward. It is critical for Rock Island to stimulate interest and build positive relationships with partners, businesses, organizations, and the community. These relationships are an integral part of curating a toolbox of resources that can be deployed for projects and initiatives.

EXPLORING POSSIBLE EDO RESTRUCTURING

Partners should explore different EDO structures that might better fit the needs of Rock Island. Changes in EDO structures are often difficult to navigate but can be worth the effort for long-term impact. TPMA recommends the city and its partners strongly consider a more unified, local public-private partnership (P3) structure and/or the creation of an additional private-sector advisory group to gain more support, resources, and flexibility in funding and coordination for the execution of this strategic plan. If the city determines that restructuring might better benefit the community, it may require bringing in a neutral third party to assist in discussions and logistics.

Below are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the three common EDO structures previously mentioned.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PUBLIC EDOS

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public EDOs have access to a variety of public funding sources from the federal and state government. Agencies like the Economic Development Administration allocate grant funds to governmental agencies. Public EDOs have the authority to implement and deploy financial incentives to support existing businesses and attract new ones. Public EDOs have direct access to relevant public resources including planning departments, code enforcement, zoning offices, municipal engineering services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public EDOs can be inhibited by politics, election cycles, and turnover which can interrupt or derail ongoing economic development initiatives. Public EDOs are bound by their political jurisdictions and struggle to effectively approach economic development work on a more geographically expansive scope. Public EDO's are particularly susceptible to public scrutiny – which can be viewed as appropriate accountability but can oftentimes inhibit progress. Public EDOs don't operate with a traditional profit motive, oftentimes inhibiting ambition, innovation, and appropriate risk-taking. Public funding for economic development may be diverted to other priorities, and public EDOs are limited in access to the diverse funding sources often utilized by private EDOs.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PRIVATE EDOs

It can be an advantage or a disadvantage that, with private EDOs, local government is less involved in certain economic development activities. Local government has less control over how those activities are performed, and businesses/developers may be more trusting of private EDOs in terms of confidentiality or politics. While private EDOs can shield local government from some amount of public criticism, there might also be concerns about transparency and accountability.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private EDOs are organized to make decisions quickly. They are nimble, agile, and have the freedom to redirect resources and efforts to meet evolving local demands. • They can perform activities beyond the scope of traditional government services and economic development activities. • Private EDOs can generate revenues in creative ways and can rely on both private and public funding sources. • Private EDOs are not directly accountable to a broad constituency and intense scrutiny, allowing for more innovation and risk-taking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected officials often want to appoint a board member(s) for private EDOs, which might be rejected or limited to an ex officio role, often leading to complications, communication breakdown, and/or political tension. • If a private EDO loses government support or does not carefully diversify its funding sources, it may risk financial solvency and become less effective in economic development activities by shifting a greater portion of their capacity to generating revenue through other activities and competing for critical public funding resources. • Private EDOs lack public powers such as taxing authority, public land management, and zoning and code enforcement jurisdictions.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (P3s)

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A P3 organization can avoid some of the excessive politicization typically associated with public economic development organizations. • A P3 has more freedom in hiring, firing, and compensation, and can take on greater risk than the public sector. • The P3 structure may allow the organization to still use public resources and powers without public limitations like bureaucratic red tape and citizen review panels. • Because of their legal structures, they can invest in non-profit and sometimes for-profit ventures, eventually becoming financially self-supporting and sustainable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because it does not have the same scrutiny as a public structure, P3s have limited accountability which can blur decision making. <p>This limited accountability can restrict or inhibit its freedom of action.</p>

BEST PRACTICES FROM COMPARABLE CITIES

To learn more about emerging and innovative practices from across the region, the project team selected three communities to research. The selected communities include

- Dubuque, Iowa
- Peoria, Illinois
- Sandusky, Ohio

These communities were selected because they have comparable population sizes and growth projections, comparable real estate markets, a comparable industry mix, and they have been recognized by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) or another national organization.¹ To gather information about these locations, the project team reviewed websites to discover organizational structure and operational information, strategic plans to uncover organizational priorities, and news publications to review emerging projects. Specific data that were examined includes population dynamics, top industries by Gross Regional Profit (GRP) and employment, as well as information related to the city economic development department's organizational structure, core functions, dedicated funding, reporting procedures, collaborative agencies, and recent strategic initiatives. It should be noted that each community exists within its own context. Initiatives that work in one of these communities may not be feasible for the City of Rock Island. The exercise is designed to identify innovative initiatives and possible considerations for the City and its strategic regional partners.

BEST PRACTICES FOR HIGH PERFORMING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

According to the International Economic Development Council, high performing Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) earn this designation when they follow internal best practices, build relationships to broaden community capacity, and are innovative and adaptable. Success factors of these EDOs include:

- Utilize customer-driven activities
- Operate with strong strategic plans
- Measure and adjust to results
- Take creative risks

¹ The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) is the leading professional association for economic developers, setting standards and providing resources to strengthen the field. Its research and best practice frameworks, such as the *Characteristics of High-Performing Economic Development Organizations*, help guide communities in building effective and impactful economic development strategies.

- Build strong networks
- Earn trust in their communities
- Maintain efficient use of funding and resources
- Invest in their staff

The case studies below showcase the selected comparable communities incorporating these factors in an array of ways to strengthen their communities.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Accessible Public Information and Reporting** - Each city's Economic Development Department maintained clear, up-to-date, and easily accessible information on their websites. Stakeholders and the public could readily access data, strategic priorities, and current initiatives, creating a transparent view of local economic development efforts. This level of accessibility supports informed engagement and promotes accountability.
- 2. Strategic Planning and Initiative Alignment** - All three cities demonstrated alignment with the International Economic Development Council's (IEDC) criteria for high-performing organizations by publishing current strategic plans. In many cases, these plans were further supplemented with progress updates, including details on completed or ongoing projects, which provided a clear sense of direction and momentum.
- 3. Strong Network of Community Partners** - Collaboration emerged as a defining feature of each city's approach. Economic development efforts were bolstered by robust networks of partners, including public, private, and nonprofit entities. These partnerships enabled resource sharing, reduced duplication of efforts, and expanded operational capacity.
- 4. Commitment to Placemaking as a Strategy** - A shared emphasis on placemaking underscored each city's dedication to fostering vibrant, livable communities. Initiatives included the revitalization of historic districts, infrastructure improvements, and, in one instance, the appointment of a dedicated staff member focused on leveraging arts and culture as an economic development tool.

DUBUQUE, IA

CITY ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

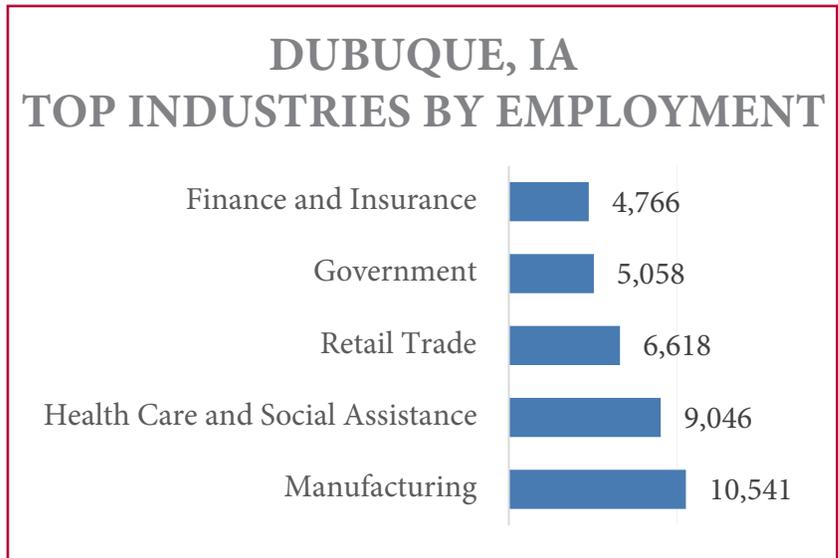
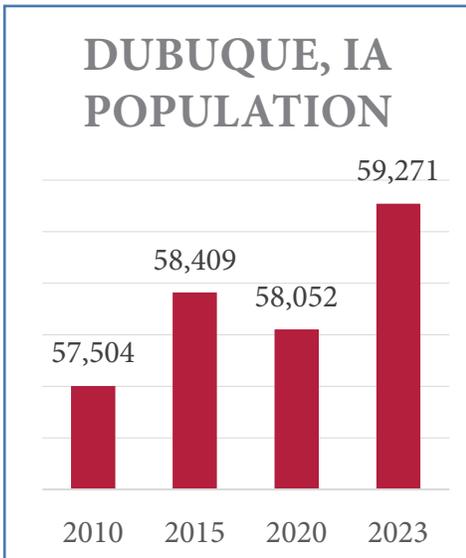
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The City of Dubuque’s Economic Development Department is led by an Economic Development Director. The rest of the department is made up of four other individuals including an Assistant Economic Director, a Confidential Account Clerk, and an Arts and Cultural Affairs Manager.

CORE FUNCTIONS

The Dubuque Economic Development Department operates several service lines including, but not limited to:

- Incentive programs such as loans, grants and tax-rebates to support businesses
- Community partnerships with public and private organizations to strengthen economic development initiatives
- Coordinated arts investment projects to educate and engage residents and improve the quality of life



FUNDING

For the 2023 fiscal year, the City of Dubuque approved a budget of \$17.74 million (4.4% of the city's operating expenses and roughly \$299.30 per capita) toward economic development-related expenses. For the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the city increased their allocation by \$1.55 to \$19.29 million. Most of the funding for this came through Tax Increment Financing (TIF) initiatives such as the City's TIF General Construction, TIF Dubuque Industrial Center, as well as the City's general revenue fund.²

When looking specifically at personnel costs, Dubuque spent \$2.51 million on personnel expenses (or \$42.35 per capita).

REPORTING PROCEDURES

The city shares information through several reporting channels, including city council agendas and proceedings, city code, ordinances, and a document and archive center. The Economic Development page also highlights programs and incentives, current initiatives, small business resources, and a dedicated section for art and culture efforts. Notably, the page features the 2039 Dubuque vision statement and goals, along with the city's near-term policy priorities.

COLLABORATIVE AGENCY FRAMEWORK

Development Partners

- Greater Dubuque Development Corporation
- Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce
- Dubuque Main Street
- Community Foundation for Greater Dubuque
- Iowa Small Business Development Center

Small Business Resources

- Center for Industrial Research and Services (CIRAS)
- Northeast Iowa Community College
- Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce
- Dubuque Main Street
- East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA)
- Empower – Cedar Rapids
- Greater Dubuque Development Corporation
- The Innovation Lab
- Iowa Department of Revenue
- Iowa Economic Development Authority
- Iowa Micro Loan
- Iowa Venture School
- Key City Creative Center
- Loras College
- U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- SCORE
- University of Dubuque

² City of Dubuque: Financial Summary - <https://dubuqueia.budget.socrata.com/#!/year/2025/operating/0/segment?vis=barChart&x-return-url=https:%2F%2Fdubuqueia.finance.socrata.com%2F%23!%2Fdashboard&x-return-description=Return%20to%20Open%20Finance>

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Dubuque has invested resources into identifying priority economic development areas and crafting strategies and master plans to ensure the effective use of public resources:

Central Avenue Corridor Initiative

The Central Avenue Corridor is a historic connection point between Dubuque and the neighboring Millwork District. This area has ample historic buildings that are open to various commercial and retail opportunities along the corridor. Based on public input and other workshops, Dubuque's city council decided to make the redevelopment of this corridor a top priority. They assembled a master plan to improve the aesthetics and mobility of this corridor and budgeted \$175,000 over two years to make aesthetic improvements, plus an additional \$665,000 for engineers to design streetscape and traffic improvements.

Chaplain Schmitt Island Development Plan

In partnership with the Dubuque Racing Association (DRA), the City of Dubuque created a master plan for the development of Chaplain Schmitt Island to research the island's natural environment, floodplain, infrastructure needs, and other items to test the cost and feasibility for development. The plan includes infrastructure priorities as well as formalized recommendations and policy considerations before proceeding with development.

Historic Millwork District Revitalization

In 2009, Dubuque adopted the Historic Millwork District Master Plan. This plan envisioned the Millwork District as a unique mixed-use neighborhood that repurposes historic industrial buildings to support downtown revitalization. The City invested over \$45 million in public infrastructure, incentives, and grants to modernize the area and support private development. Still, the community and city officials recognized that this area needed continued development. With this in mind, the 2024 Master Plan Update was created to reset priority improvements, thus focusing on built environment, economy, and culture.

Brownfields Multipurpose Grant

The City of Dubuque used \$800,000 in EPA Brownfields grant funding to assess, clean up, and plan the reuse of key industrial and underutilized sites as part of a broader downtown and neighborhood revitalization strategy. Efforts focused on priority areas such as the Historic Millwork District, North Port, South Port, and surrounding neighborhoods to support redevelopment and address environmental concerns. A key step in this effort was inventorying Brownfield properties and enrolling them in Iowa's Land Recycling Program, which allowed Dubuque to receive funding to reduce environmental risks, repurpose industrial land, and align revitalization efforts with its Imagine Dubuque 2037 comprehensive plan.

PEORIA, IL

CITY ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

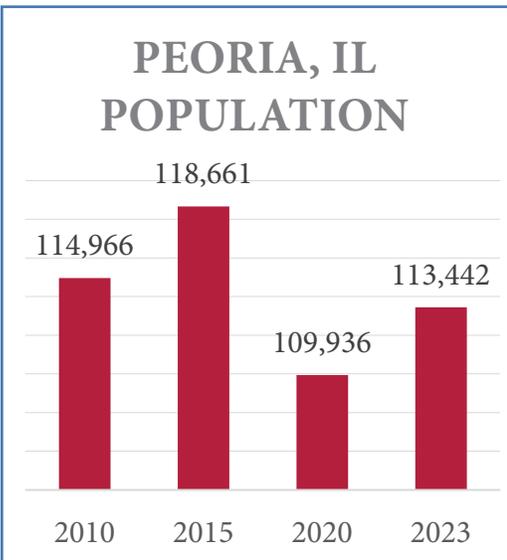
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The City of Peoria has four staff members in the Economic Development Department: one Assistant City Manager and Economic Development Director, one Economic Development Manager, and two Economic Development Specialists. The Assistant City Manager sits at the top of the department and reports to the City Manager.

CORE FUNCTIONS

Peoria’s Office of Economic Development’s website provides limited information on their day-to-day functions, but the website has information for:

- Enterprise Zones and the River Edge Redevelopment Zone
- Tax Increment Financing
- Other Business Resources
- Choose Peoria
- Community Partnerships
- Properties and Incentive Maps
- Community Statistics



FUNDING

In Peoria's budget projections, the budget for Economic Development activities is not specifically delineated as these efforts fall under the City Manager's purview. The City Manager's department, which houses economic development, was approved for \$2,177,639 for personnel expenses in 2023 (or \$19.20 per capita). This amount increased to \$2,680,839 for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.³ Budget items related to debt financing, economic development programs, and other related expenses were not found in the budget summary.

The budget summary also provided an outline of subsidies to local entities and economic development partners:

- Convention and Visitors Bureau - \$542,500
- Civic Center - \$1,200,000
- Arts Partners - \$100,000
- Springdale Cemetery Management Authority - \$250,000
- Downtown Development Corporation - \$100,000
- Greater Peoria Economic Development Council - \$75,000
- Peoria County Animal Control Services - \$282,875

COLLABORATIVE AGENCY FRAMEWORK

A community partnerships tab is available on the website's sidebar. Key partners include:

- Arts Partners
- Distillery Labs
- Downtown Development Corporation of Peoria
- Greater Peoria Economic Development Council
- Greater Peoria Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Minority Business Development Center
- The Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce
- Bradley University
- U.S. Small Business Administration
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Peoria's Economic Development website does not display ample reporting procedures and economic development strategies and plans were not detected upon review. However, every page on the City's website has a link to City Council agendas and meeting minutes.

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Properties and Incentive Maps

The City of Peoria's Economic Development website has a page focused on highlighting property and incentive maps. This page contains a Location One Information System (LOIS) that displays available properties in the community. LOIS includes an interactive GIS map of community sites and buildings and an ESRI report for each location that provide information including populations, households, incomes, and other pertinent economic and demographic data within various drive times (1 minute, 3 minutes and 5 minutes). In addition to LOIS, the properties and incentives page directs individuals to the Peoria Urban Enterprise Zone, Rivers Edge Redevelopment Zone, TIF District, and Past Redevelopment Agreement GIS maps, as well as the Peoria Area Realtor Association website.

Talent Attraction

In an effort to bolster talent attraction efforts, Peoria's Economic Development website highlights Choose Peoria, an organization that highlights key attractions, businesses, and events in the area. To supplement Choose Peoria's efforts, the City's website highlights key districts including the Riverfront, West Main Street, Warehouse District, and Central Business District. From there, potential residents are directed to Visit Downtown Peoria's website that presents key attractions and events.

Enterprise Zone and River Edge Redevelopment Zone

Peoria has made development and redevelopment a top priority for the region. The program helps individuals and entities save costs on construction through sales tax exemptions, tax abatements, state tax assistance and incentives, and state and federal tax credit programs.

3 City of Peoria: Financial Budget - <https://il-peoria.civicplus.com/278/City-Budget>

SANDUSKY, OH

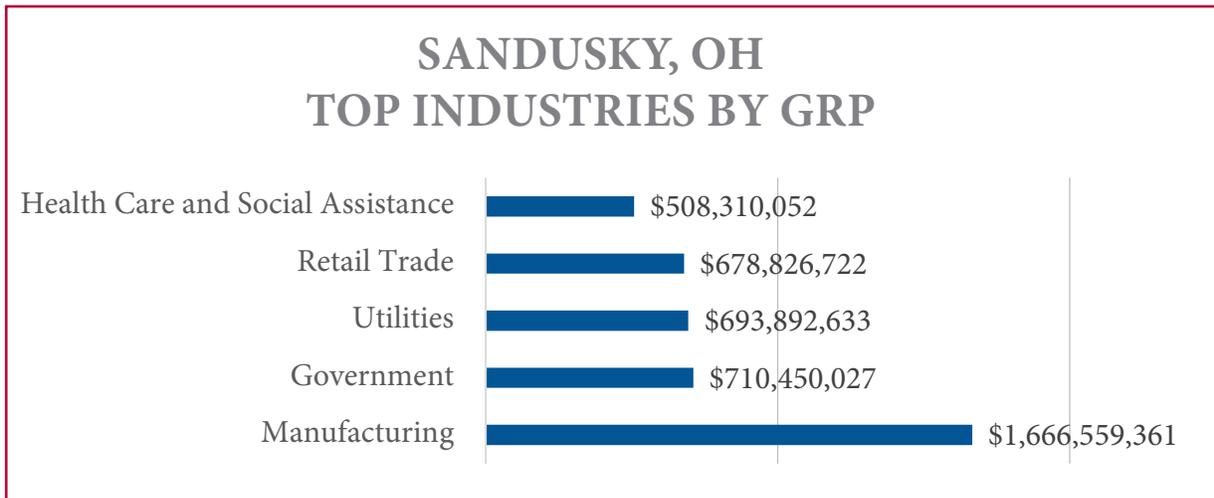
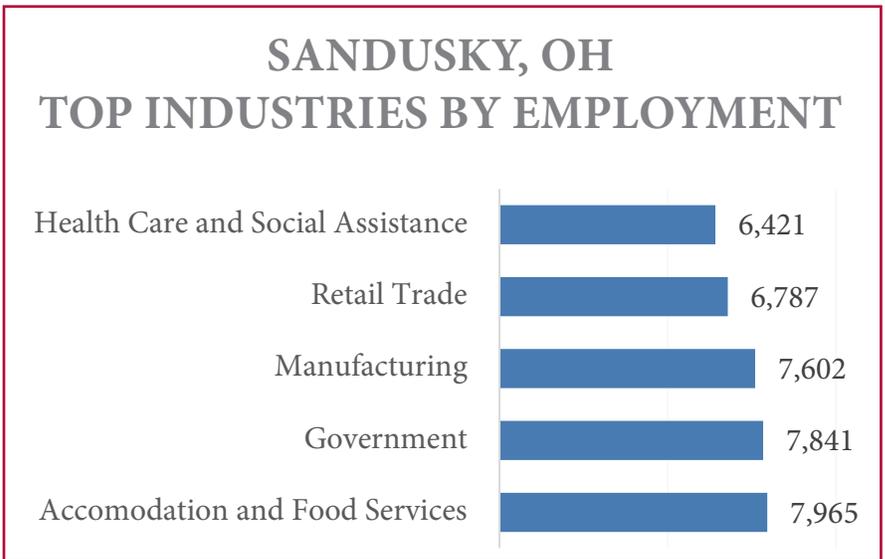
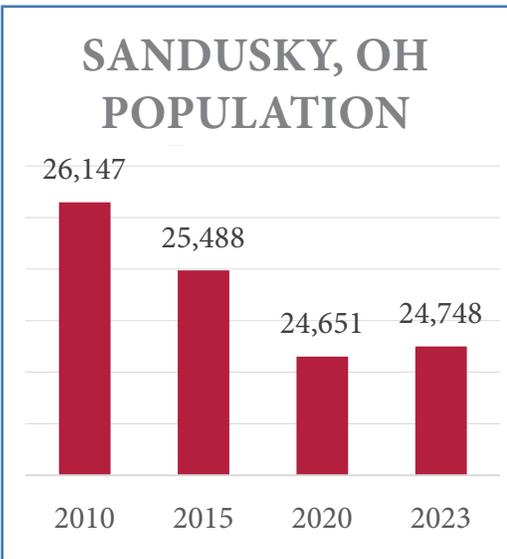
CITY ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The City of Sandusky has a smaller organizational structure featuring one Director of Economic Development. This individual reports to the Director of Community Development who also oversees other various departments including Planning and Zoning, Housing and Neighborhood Development, Transit, and Parks and Recreation.

CORE FUNCTIONS

The Economic Development department coordinates programs to support new and expanding businesses in the area. The two programs the City has at its disposal include an Enterprise Zone Tax Abatement for certain new construction and renovation projects to help offset the tax liability for the project and an Economic Development Assistance Program that provides financial assistance to new and expanding businesses.



FUNDING

In 2023, the City of Sandusky budgeted \$3,850,929 for economic development activities (roughly \$155.62 per capita).⁴ Personnel expenses for the City of Sandusky were not evident from the budget upon review.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

The City of Sandusky does not have clear reporting procedures for economic development related activities and news articles. However, at the bottom of each page is a Popular Links navigation pane with a link to City Publications. This page hosts links to various reports including the City's strategic plan for 2025 through 2030.

COLLABORATIVE AGENCY FRAMEWORK

The City's Economic Development page does not have any clear links to economic development partners. However, economic development organizations in the region include

- The Greater Sandusky Partnership
- Shores and Islands Ohio
- Erie Regional Planning Commission

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Regional EDO Mergers

In 2023, the Greater Sandusky Partnership (GSP), formerly known as the Erie County Chamber of Commerce, and the Erie County Economic Development Corporation announced a merger. This merger began an effort to consolidate economic development efforts and streamline collaboration. The following spring, a neighboring city, Huron, announced plans to integrate with GSP. This announcement reinforces the comprehensive approach to economic development announced by GSP the preceding year. Thus, businesses in the City of Huron will benefit from the expansive services offered by the regional collaborative.

City of Sandusky Strategic Plan

Given its post-industrial status, Sandusky has been forced to reconsider its local economy. The City's new strategic plan prioritized two main goals to bolster economic development efforts: 1.) Support existing businesses through programming, grants, and more, and 2.) Promote the Sandusky region to attract business investments and job creation. To fulfill the first goal, the plan recommends that Sandusky focuses on coordinated communication efforts with local businesses, bolstering employment pipelines through vocational education, promoting small business resources, and elevating neighborhood businesses. To support the second goal, it is recommended that the city creates a developer/investor portal on the City's website to outline the development process, partner with real estate experts to market opportunities, report economic development results, and improve the transparency of market impacts by qualifying results.

⁴ City of Sandusky – Finance Reports: https://www.cityofsandusky.com/government/department/finance/finance_reports.php

APPENDIX I: DATA REPORT

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

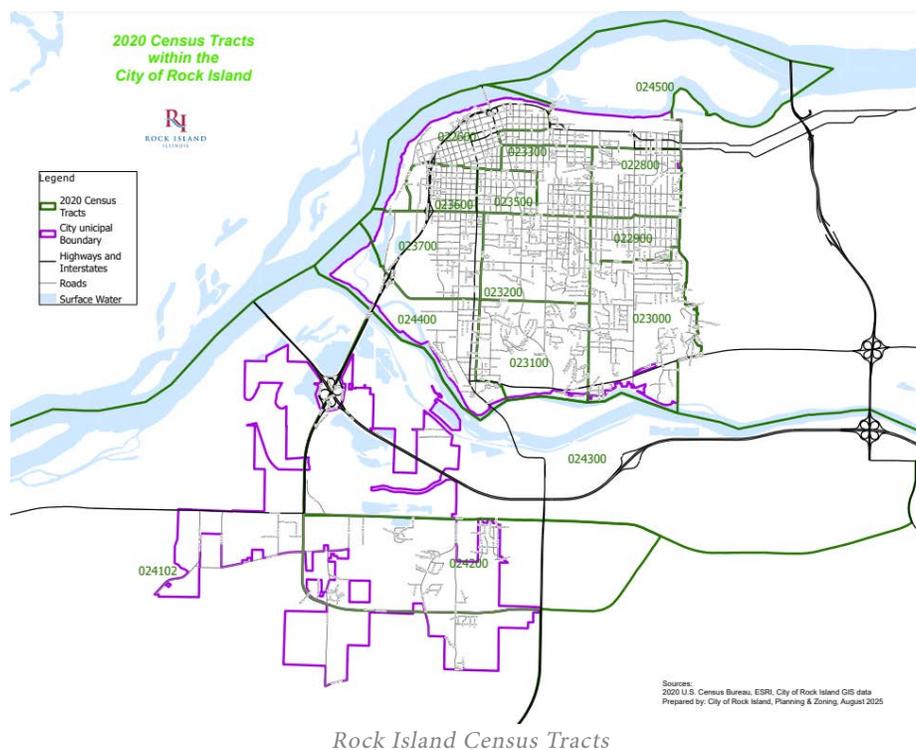
To develop a comprehensive understanding of the economic landscape in the City of Rock Island and its surrounding areas, the project team conducted a detailed review of relevant data. This analysis included population trends, socioeconomic indicators, business activity, and workforce characteristics. Understanding economic and labor market data can help the City of Rock Island understand where it has assets that can be leveraged and deficiencies to overcome and improve the economic environment of the community.

Census data, while comprehensive, is not always available at the level of geographic detail needed for localized analysis, such as individual cities or neighborhoods. While much of the data focused on the City of Rock Island's jurisdictional boundaries, there were instances where data were not available at that level. In such cases, data were pulled at the county-level or using census tracts that incorporate the city's jurisdictional boundaries.⁵

A breakdown of sources and the criteria used are included below:

- U.S. Census Data: Place – City of Rock Island
- Lightcast: Census Tracts – Census tracts include: 245, 226, 233, 228, 236, 235, 237, 232, 229, 244, 231, 230, 243, 242 241.02 as identified from ArcGIS
- Stats America: County – Rock Island County
- On the Map: County – Rock Island County
- Walkscore.com: City – City of Rock Island

The parameters for which census tracts were selected can be viewed here:



⁵ Census tracts include: 245, 226, 233, 228, 236, 235, 237, 232, 229, 244, 231, 230, 243, 242 241.02 as identified at <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/PublicInformation/index.html?appid=e6994330f6664dde9904e7367391d055>

Census tracts 226, 228, 229, 233, 235, 236, 237, 244, 243, 241.02

In other instances, city-level data were compared against the county and MSA to understand how Rock Island fits into the context of the greater region. Several data sources were used throughout this analysis to capture various demographic data, labor market information, and economic trends. These sources include U.S. Census Data, Lightcast, Stats America, On the Map, and Walkscore.com. Additionally, the data are collected on a set schedule, typically every ten years for the decennial census and annually for the American Community Survey, so it may not reflect the most current conditions. This report includes the most current information available as of June 2025.

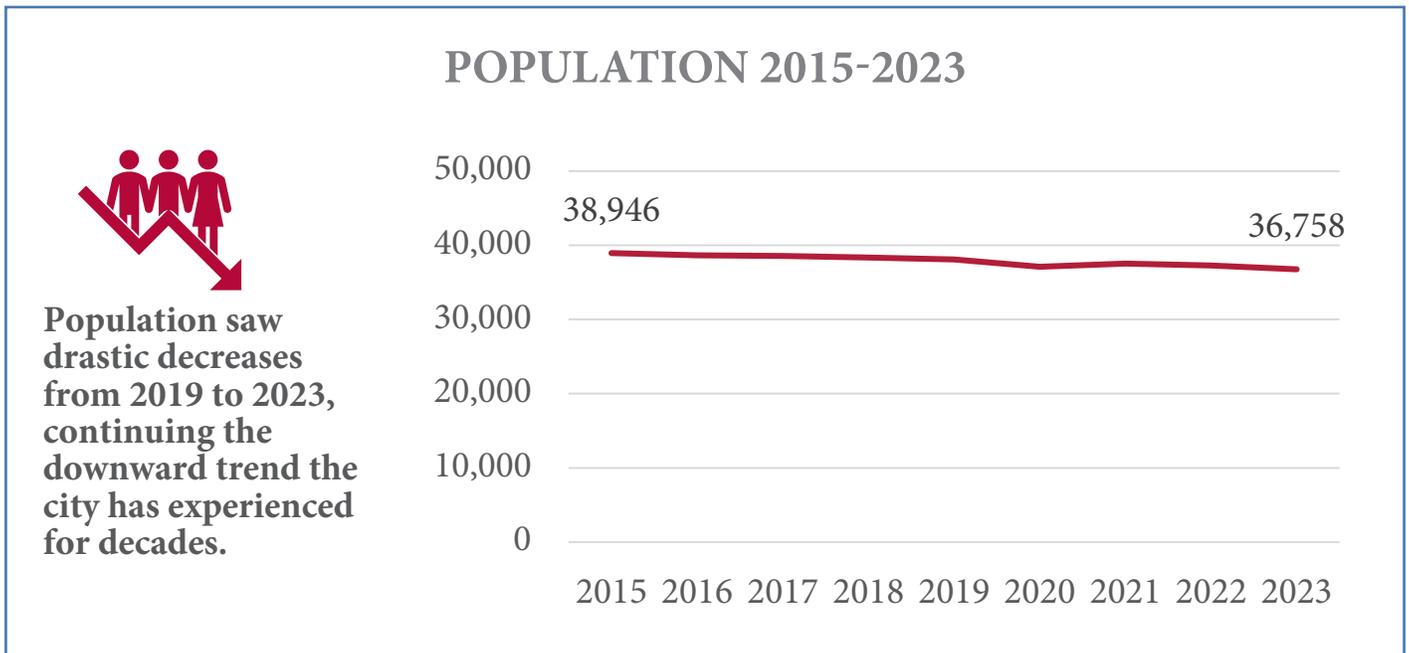
KEY FINDINGS

- Population saw drastic decreases from 2019 to 2023. Forecasting models are inconsistent on their projections.
- Individuals with a High School diploma increased; however, individuals receiving associate or bachelor's degrees dropped.
- Household incomes saw an overall increase, specifically those earning more than \$75,000, whereas those earning less than \$75,000 decreased. However, households earning \$10,000 or less remained relatively stagnant.
- Rock Island's workforce saw a small bump of workers aged 20 to 29 and large increase of workers aged 65 to 74.
- Rock Island's top growing industries by employment include Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, and Accommodation and Food Services; whereas the top shrinking industries include Government, Educational Services, and Management of Companies and Enterprises.
- Rock Island's (County) top industries by GRP include Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, Government, Utilities, and Health Care and Social Assistance.
- The Davenport-Moline-Rock Island MSA and County of Rock Island outperform the City of Rock Island alone in comparative labor force participation rates. But the City is closely aligned with the MSA in unemployment rates, whereas Rock Island County is 1% to 1.5% higher than the City and MSA in unemployment rate.
- Poverty rates in the City of Rock Island and Rock Island County have increased from 2019 to 2023, but decreased in the MSA. Poverty rates in the City are also substantially higher than the County and MSA.
- Few people live and work in the City of Rock Island. Most individuals are employed in the city, but live outside; or live outside, and commute in.

POPULATION AND SOCIOECONOMIC ANALYSIS

POPULATION

Two data sources were consulted for population. Lightcast and Census. The Lightcast data uses census tracts that incorporate the boundaries for the City of Rock Island, though the platform does not have an option to narrow to the specific city limits. Some of these census tracts also include area outside of the city’s jurisdictional boundaries (see Figure X: Rock Island Census Tracts above). Census data show similar trends from 2015 to 2023, which is expected considering Lightcast draws its data from the U.S. Census when feasible. However, there is a discrepancy between the data in total population numbers because Census tables, unlike Lightcast, have a geographic option for the city. **Census data for the City of Rock Island population is displayed below, showing drastic decreases from 2019 to 2023. This is a continuation of the downward population trend the city has experienced for decades.**



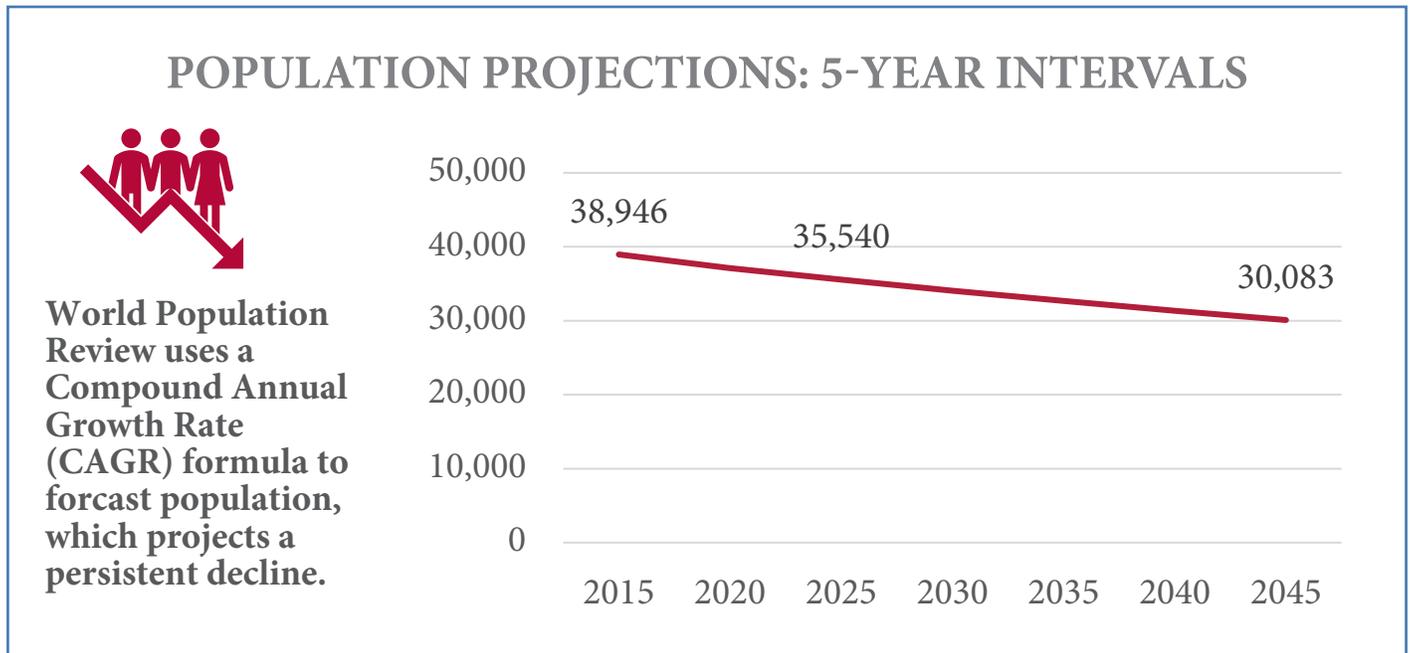
American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (Census Tract) – Demographic and Housing Estimates

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Projecting future trends can be difficult and inaccurate as both micro- and macro-economic trends can impact local and regional growth patterns. Two different methodologies were used to estimate and project population trends through Lightcast and World Population Review. Forecasting in these models are inconsistent on their projections. World Population Review uses a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) formula to forecast population in 2025, 2030, and 2035 using trends from previous years. Lightcast uses proprietary methodologies to forecast trends. It is often the case that these data are optimistic about projected growth patterns. **Both models have been included below to reflect an optimistic growth pattern if economic factors improve and a pessimistic perspective if previous trends continue.**

WORLD POPULATION REVIEW MODEL

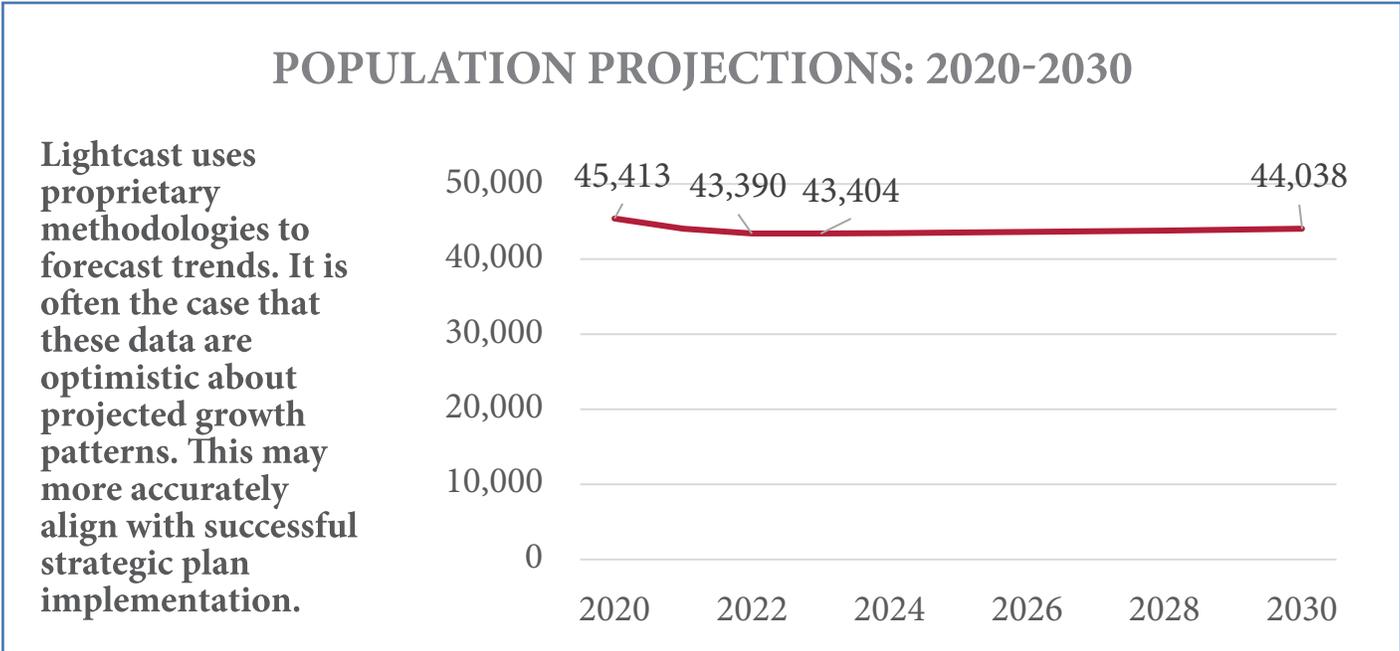
World Population Review uses a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) formula to forecast population in 2025, 2030, and 2035 using trends from previous years. Because Rock Island saw declining population rates from 2019 to 2023, this model projects that population will decrease at a slowing rate. When examining population projections over the next 10 years from the World Population Review Model, trends are more pessimistic, showing persistent population decline.



*American Communities Survey (ACS)
5-Year Estimates Subject Tables –
Demographic and Housing Estimates +
World Population Review Projections*

LIGHTCAST MODEL

As mentioned previously, the Lightcast model was created using census tracts that incorporate the boundaries for the City of Rock Island but also include some census tracts outside of the city’s jurisdictional boundaries (see Figure X: Rock Island Census Tracts). Thus, there is some discrepancy between the overall population numbers. For example, in 2020, census data estimated the City of Rock Island’s population to be 37,519, but the population for the selected Census tracts in 2020 is 45,413. This model was incorporated in part because industry and economic data in the analysis were only available at the census tract level, as Lightcast does not provide this information specifically for the City of Rock Island. Since 2020, the City of Rock Island’s (census tracts) population has seen sharp declines, dropping from 45,413 to 43,390 residents. In other words, losing over 2,000 residents over the course of two years. However, in 2023, that trend changed as the number of residents climbed to 43,404. The Lightcast population projection model predicts that this growth trend will continue throughout the rest of the decade but will not eclipse the number of residents from 2020.

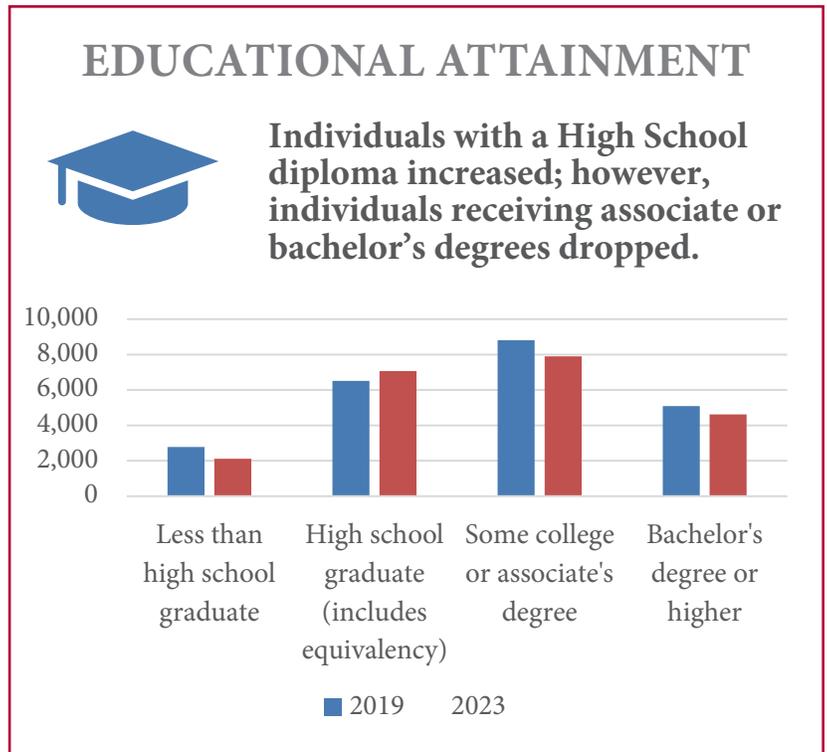


Population 2020-2030 Rock Island Identified Census Tracts Lightcast Q4 Data Set December 2024

Educational Attainment

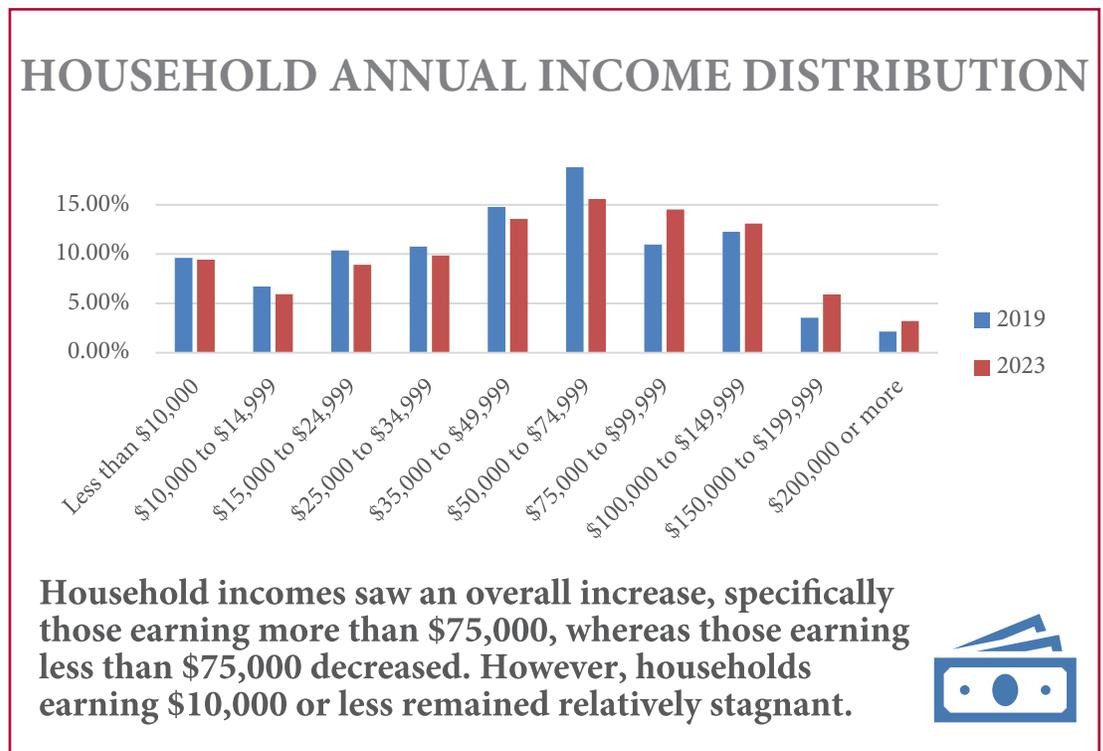
From 2019 to 2023, the City of Rock Island saw an overall decrease in residents with less than a high school degree and an increase in high school graduates. The reduction of individuals not receiving a high school degree was similar to the rise in those who did receive a high school degree (566 and 645, respectively). However, the area saw a decrease in residents with advanced degrees, including Associate's, Bachelor's, and advanced degrees.

American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Employment and Labor Force Status



Income and Earnings

The area has seen varying degrees of increases and decreases across household annual incomes. Households earning \$75,000 or more saw relatively substantial increases, particularly among those earning \$75,000 to \$99,000. Conversely, households in lower income brackets earning \$74,999 or less all shrunk, particularly those earning \$50,000 to \$74,999. These trends indicate an overall growth in household income. This is reflected in median household incomes which rose 17.69% from 2019 to 2023. However, it should be noted that while households that are among the lowest earners, earning \$10,000 or less shrunk by the smallest margin (.16%).



American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Economic Characteristics

HOUSEHOLD MEDIAN INCOME 2019-2023



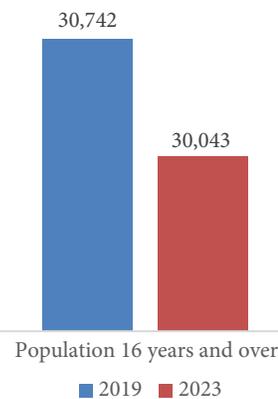
American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Income in the Past 12 Months

Employment Rates

Overall, the working population in the City of Rock Island has decreased. In 2019, the City had a worker population of 30,742, but by 2023, this number dropped by 699 individuals to 30,043. When breaking these individuals up by age group, Rock Island did see an increase among younger demographic groups, specifically workers aged 20 to 24 years old and 25 to 29 years old. However, the region saw a drop across most other groups, except for individuals aged 65 to 74, which saw the largest increase of 676 individuals. This is indicative of a national trend, where individuals of retirement age tend to be working longer, making worker markets susceptible to a sharp decline in workers due to retirement.

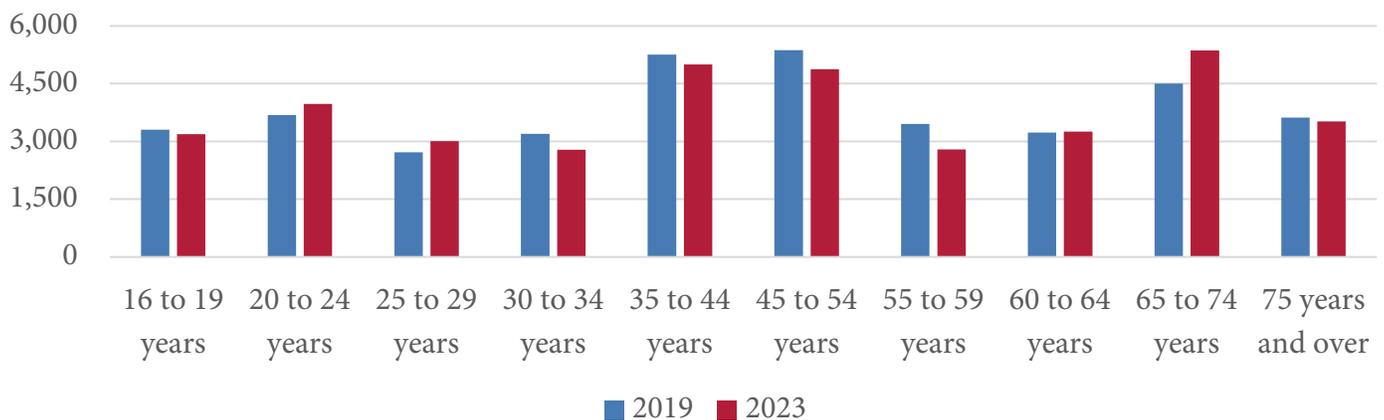
American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Employment and Labor Force Status

WORKING AGE POPULATION



In 2019, the City had a worker population of 30,742, but by 2023, this number dropped by 699 workers to 30,043.

WORKING AGE POPULATION BY AGE



American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Employment and Labor Force Status

BUSINESS AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

Largest Industries / Growing Industries

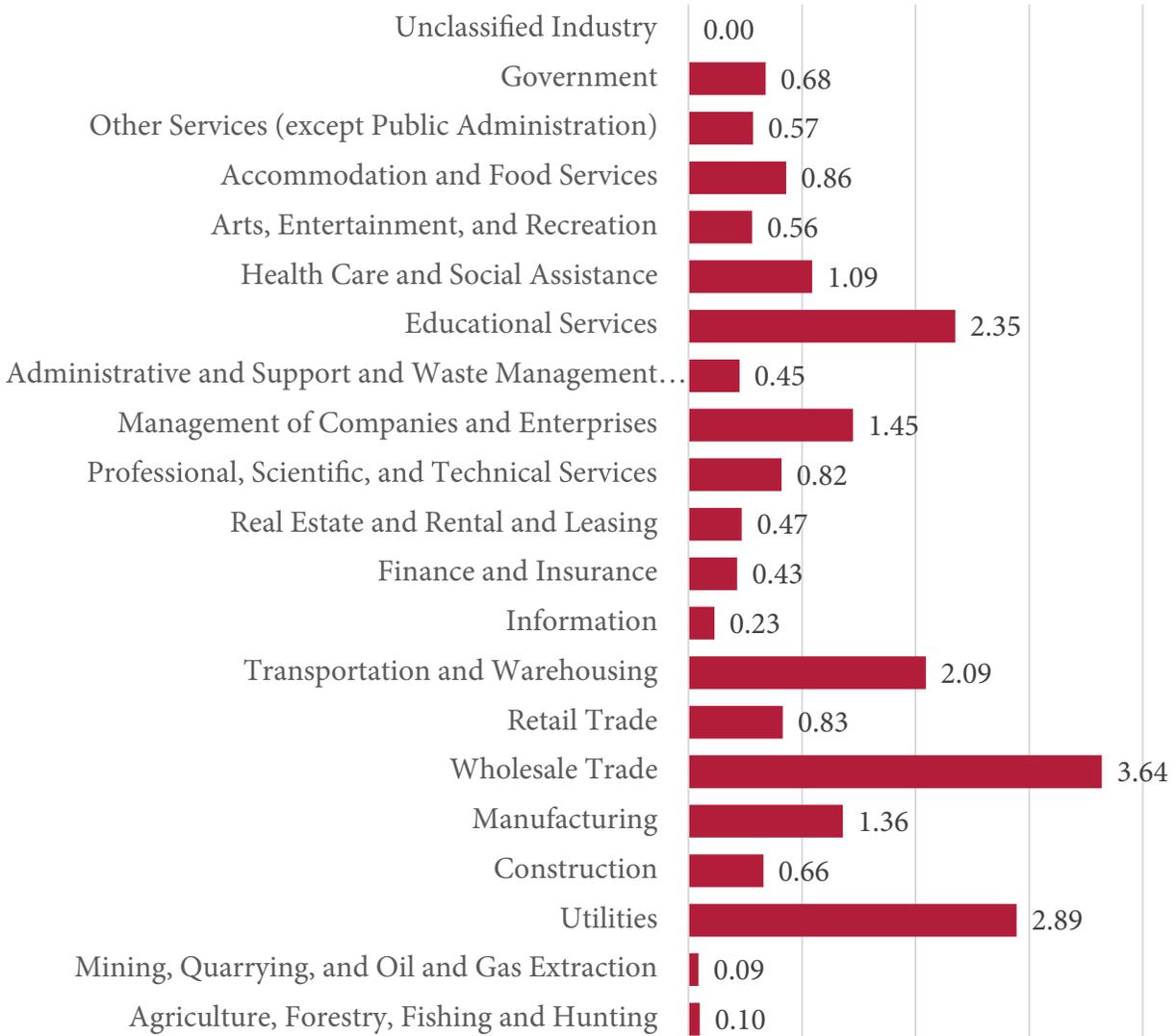
From 2020 to 2025, the City of Rock Island has seen a decrease across most industries, losing 3,485 jobs over the 5-year span and is expected to lose another 617 jobs by 2030. The industries that saw the greatest decline include Management of Companies and Enterprises and Government industries, losing 2,112 jobs and 1823 jobs, respectively. Other industries experiencing job losses were more marginal. The industries that saw the most significant gains include Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, and gaining 1,715 and 284.

NAICS	Description	2020 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2030 Jobs
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	28	24	29
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	17	<10	<10
22	Utilities	240	213	203
23	Construction	925	812	794
31	Manufacturing	1,931	2,215	2,211
42	Wholesale Trade	1,083	2,798	3,411
44	Retail Trade	1,690	1,640	1,524
48	Transportation and Warehousing	1,932	1,960	1,910
51	Information	159	90	83
52	Finance and Insurance	526	370	320
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	149	178	180
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,359	1,239	1,165
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	2,578	466	185
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	679	570	562
61	Educational Services	1,678	1,284	1,151
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	3,413	3,100	3,189
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	188	217	213
72	Accommodation and Food Services	1,375	1,535	1,511
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,028	602	491
90	Government	3,917	2,094	1,654
99	Unclassified Industry	<10	-	<10
		24,897	21,412	20,795

Industry Tables 2020-2030 Rock Island Identified Census Tracts Lightcast Q4 Data Set December 2024

The following exhibit reflects employment concentration for various industries in the City of Rock Island. Employment concentration displays the level of employment in a specific industry compared to the national average. The closer an employment concentration is to 1, the closer it is to the national average. The industries in Rock Island with the highest employment concentration include Wholesale Trade (3.64), Utilities (2.89), Educational Services (2.35), and Transportation and Warehousing (2.09). Industries that are not prevalent in the City include Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (.09), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting (.10), and Information (.23).

2025 EMPLOYMENT CONCENTRATION



Industry Tables 2020-2030 Rock Island Identified Census Tracts Lightcast Q4 Data Set December 2024

Gross Regional Product (GRP) measures the total value of goods and services produced within a specific region over a set period of time, typically a year. GRP reflects the economic activity and health of a region, and it helps assess economic strength, track growth or decline, and compare performance against other areas. Consistent with data that examine top industries by employment, top industries by GRP include Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, Government, and Utilities sectors. These theme stays consistent when examining top industries by earnings, which includes wages, salaries, supplements, and proprietor income.

TOP INDUSTRIES BY GRP (COUNTY)

Industry	2024 GRP
Wholesale Trade	\$2,464,168,253
Manufacturing	\$1,761,206,623
Government	\$1,644,915,948
Utilities	\$832,311,033
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$785,063,703
Retail Trade	\$689,754,464
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	\$458,789,642
Finance and Insurance	\$440,149,109
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$414,890,498
Construction	\$375,177,721

TOP INDUSTRIES BY EARNINGS (COUNTY)

Industry	2024 Earnings
Wholesale Trade	\$1,386,260,216
Government	\$1,251,748,874
Manufacturing	\$900,077,755
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$690,833,912
Retail Trade	\$349,935,580
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	\$342,513,857
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$334,741,178
Construction	\$288,127,928
Finance and Insurance	\$236,014,106
Transportation and Warehousing	\$233,346,770

Growing Occupations / In-Demand Occupations

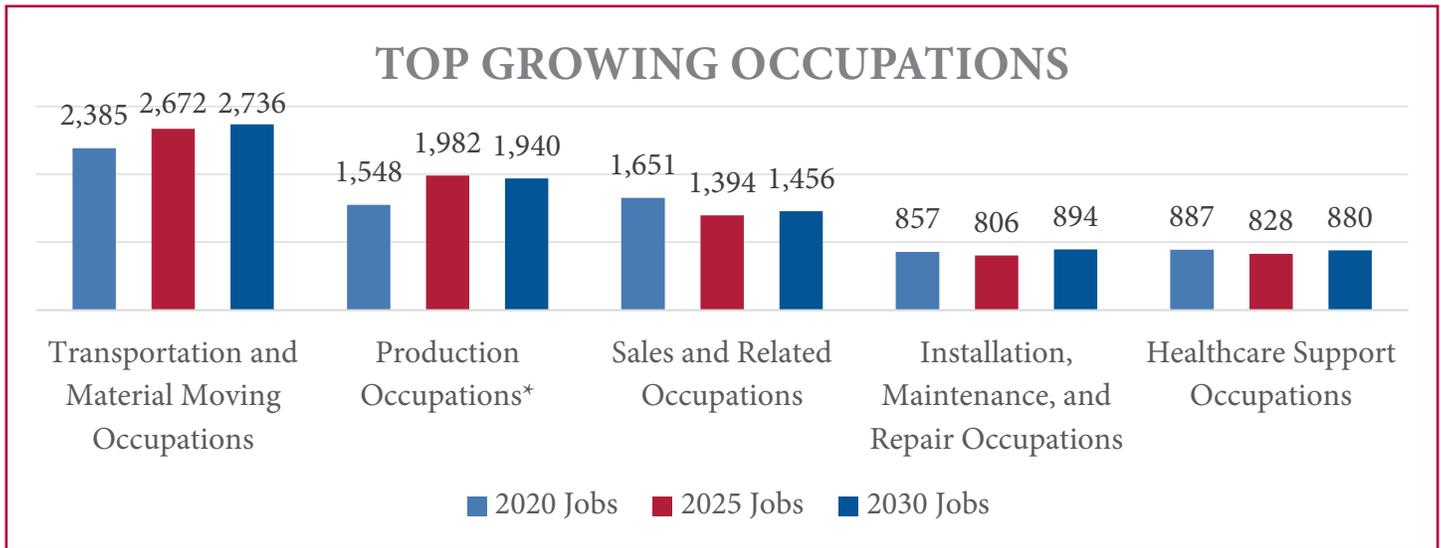
JOBS 2025 BY OCCUPATION



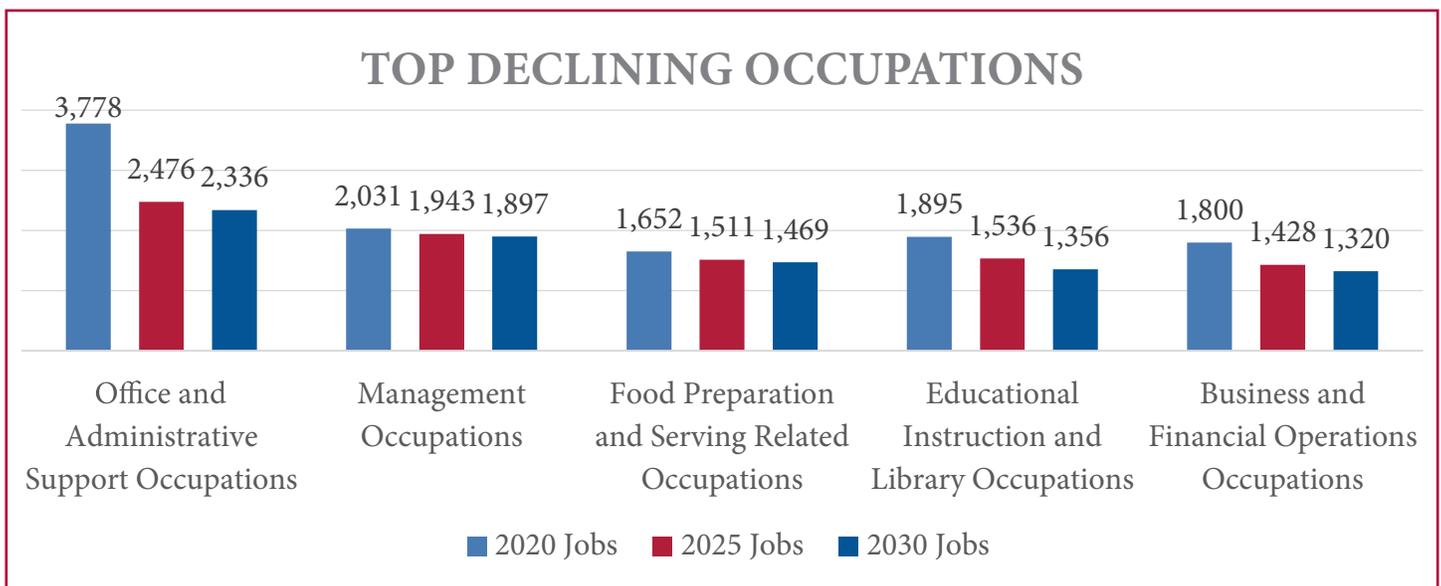
Occupation Tables 2020-2030 Rock Island Identified Census Tracts Lightcast Q4 Data Set December 2024

The tables below display the top five growing and declining occupations in the City. The tables are representative of data captured in 2020 and projected in 2025 and 2030, using Lightcast’s proprietary data projection model. Occupations projected to see the largest increase from 2020 to 2025 include Transportation and Materials Moving and Production occupations. The other three, Sales and Related, Installation, Maintenance, and Repair, and Healthcare and Support occupations are projected to decrease from 2020 to 2025 but are expected to reverse that trend by 2030.

Occupations expected to see the largest degree of decline include Office and Administrative Support, Educational Instruction and Library, and Business and Financial Operations occupations. Office and Administrative Support jobs are anticipated to have the greatest decline, losing 1,442 jobs from 2020 to 2030. Other jobs expected to decline include Management, and Food Preparation and Serving Related occupations. It should be noted that Healthcare Practitioners and Technical occupations were also projected to decline; however, by a marginal amount (21 jobs from 2020 to 2030), thus this occupation was not included in the chart.



Occupation Tables 2020-2030 Rock Island Identified Census Tracts Lightcast Q4 Data Set December 2024



Occupation Tables 2020-2030 Rock Island Identified Census Tracts Lightcast Q4 Data Set December 2024

Regional Requirements

Regional requirements examine the goods and services for specific industries that are produced or imported within a specific region. For example, if 80% of a region's Manufacturing demand is met by imports, 20% of the local demand is met by businesses existing within that identified region. Industries that have a high degree of demand met by imports may be ripe for expansion, as there is unmet demand locally. Industries where the most demand is met by imports include Manufacturing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Wholesale Trade; Finance and Insurance; Agriculture; and Forestry, Fishing and Hunting. When looking at more granular 4-digit industries, the primary industries meeting demand by imports include Animal Production; Computer Systems Design and Related Services; Scientific Research and Development Services; Petroleum and Coal Products Manufacturing; Basic Chemical Manufacturing.

Industry	Demand met In-region	Demand met by Imports	Total Demand
Manufacturing	\$419,779,811	\$2,603,760,311	\$3,023,540,123
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$407,071,497	\$1,047,040,734	\$1,454,112,231
Wholesale Trade	\$284,745,112	\$874,594,940	\$1,159,340,052
Finance and Insurance	\$495,847,321	\$803,578,438	\$1,299,425,759
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	\$75,670,063	\$682,042,004	\$757,712,067
Information	\$199,732,694	\$672,633,469	\$872,366,163
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	\$421,049,342	\$660,763,143	\$1,081,812,485
Transportation and Warehousing	\$250,179,715	\$611,461,834	\$861,641,550
Retail Trade	\$370,229,254	\$603,078,961	\$973,308,215
Construction	\$488,426,741	\$446,387,384	\$934,814,125
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	\$248,921,130	\$293,355,210	\$542,276,340
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$986,956,788	\$190,158,873	\$1,177,115,662
Utilities	\$108,685,751	\$181,376,455	\$290,062,206
Accommodation and Food Services	\$404,928,051	\$160,930,022	\$565,858,073
Management of Companies and Enterprises	\$239,435,394	\$156,145,359	\$395,580,753
Other Services (except Public Administration)	\$272,728,303	\$134,342,586	\$407,070,889
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	\$3,900,382	\$121,399,519	\$125,299,902
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	\$57,562,857	\$113,338,948	\$170,901,805
Educational Services	\$104,875,871	\$72,575,945	\$177,451,817

Regional Requirements (2-Digit NAICS) Rock Island County (Except Government Services) Lightcast Q2 Data Set July 2025

Industry	Demand met In-region	Demand met by Imports	Total Demand
Animal Production	\$45,945,069	\$592,528,054	\$638,473,123
Computer Systems Design and Related Services	\$65,670,987	\$261,967,541	\$327,638,528
Scientific Research and Development Services	\$13,801,333	\$250,180,498	\$263,981,831
Petroleum and Coal Products Manufacturing	\$7,904,481	\$223,513,041	\$231,417,523
Basic Chemical Manufacturing	\$0	\$221,165,196	\$221,165,196
Lessors of Real Estate	\$218,515,855	\$208,419,112	\$426,934,967
Insurance Carriers	\$105,942,420	\$202,698,288	\$308,640,708
Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution	\$51,068,001	\$201,413,680	\$252,481,681
Software Publishers	\$295,691	\$198,736,293	\$199,031,984
Activities Related to Real Estate	\$52,082,321	\$192,004,805	\$244,087,126
Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services	\$42,270,289	\$177,820,192	\$220,090,481
Iron and Steel Mills and Ferroalloy Manufacturing	\$0	\$167,094,496	\$167,094,496
Other Financial Investment Activities	\$77,601,524	\$162,462,632	\$240,064,156
Computing Infrastructure Providers, Data Processing, Web Hosting, and Related Services	\$6,449,921	\$159,831,104	\$166,281,025
Management of Companies and Enterprises	\$259,153,214	\$154,680,411	\$413,833,625
Animal Slaughtering and Processing	\$92,301,433	\$146,770,942	\$239,072,375
Motor Vehicle Manufacturing	\$0	\$144,943,581	\$144,943,581
Offices of Real Estate Agents and Brokers	\$35,398,888	\$134,832,987	\$170,231,875
Drugs and Druggists' Sundries Merchant Wholesalers	\$0	\$127,126,284	\$127,126,284
Motor Vehicle Parts Manufacturing	\$0	\$123,253,869	\$123,253,869

Regional Requirements (4-Digit NAICS) Rock Island County (Except Government Services) Lightcast Q2 Data Set July 2025

Industry Purchases

As its name indicates, Industry Purchases measures the amount an industry spends on purchases within a specific region. It also measures how much is spent outside of the region, indicating there might be demand for local businesses to expand into industries that see a high volume of imports, though it is important to consider other factors including wages, regional competition, and more. Rock Island County sees a high number of purchases from Manufacturing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting; Real Estate and Rental and Leasing; and Wholesale Trade.

Industry	In-region Purchases	Imported Purchases	Total Purchases
Manufacturing	\$340,079,630	\$1,722,808,100	\$2,062,887,730
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$283,882,249	\$700,759,231	\$984,641,480
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	\$65,005,812	\$625,374,565	\$690,380,377
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	\$365,626,738	\$590,701,362	\$956,328,100
Wholesale Trade	\$184,484,744	\$525,666,542	\$710,151,286
Transportation and Warehousing	\$201,172,478	\$459,247,224	\$660,419,702
Finance and Insurance	\$270,103,239	\$369,585,943	\$639,689,183
Information	\$79,080,308	\$350,497,722	\$429,578,030
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	\$219,353,619	\$259,406,855	\$478,760,473
Management of Companies and Enterprises	\$255,806,977	\$152,664,246	\$408,471,223
Utilities	\$48,217,336	\$137,672,451	\$185,889,788
Construction	\$126,411,886	\$112,549,602	\$238,961,488
Retail Trade	\$45,366,751	\$65,264,121	\$110,630,873
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	\$2,936,836	\$60,030,314	\$62,967,149
Accommodation and Food Services	\$90,788,260	\$48,384,382	\$139,172,641
Other Services (except Public Administration)	\$101,932,074	\$41,362,539	\$143,294,613
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	\$12,262,311	\$38,044,944	\$50,307,254
Educational Services	\$21,234,516	\$10,556,386	\$31,790,902
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$20,153,922	\$10,550,738	\$30,704,661

Industry Imports (2-Digit NAICS) Rock Island County (Except Government Services) Lightcast Q2 Data Set July 2025

Labor Force Participation (Employment/Unemployment)

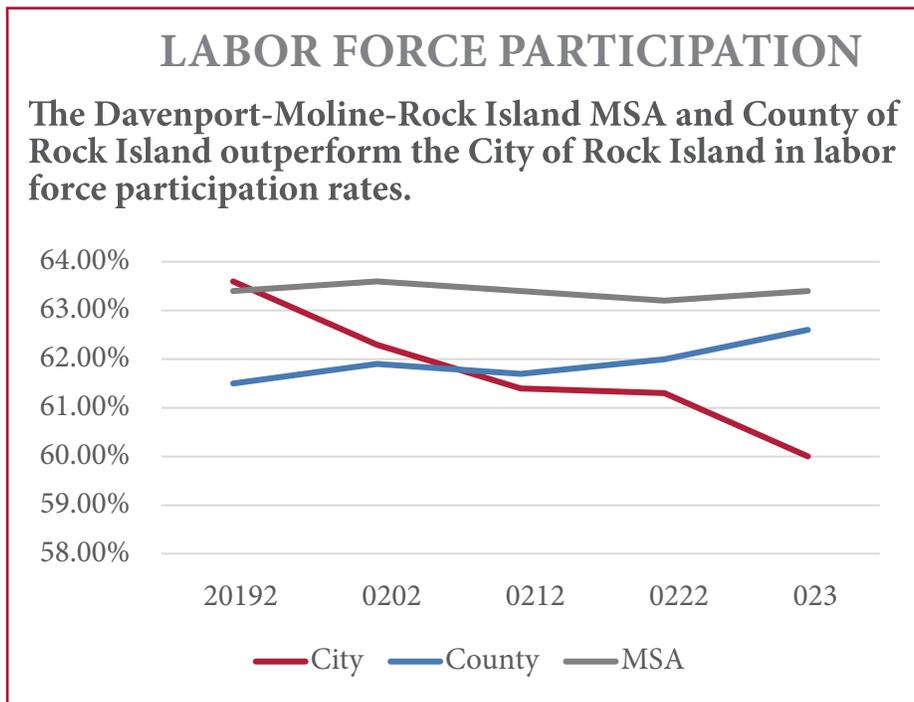
The following tables highlight the employment characteristics for the census tracts that make up the City of Rock Island compared to Rock Island County and the Davenport, Moline, Rock Island MSA.

When examining the labor force participation of just the city, we see three decreases in three categories: the working population (16 years and older), the number of workers in the labor force, and the number of individuals unemployed. Meanwhile, the number of individuals not in the labor force has mostly increased since 2019, with a dip in 2022, but a large jump from 2022 to 2023. Ultimately, this indicates a shrinking worker pool for employers.

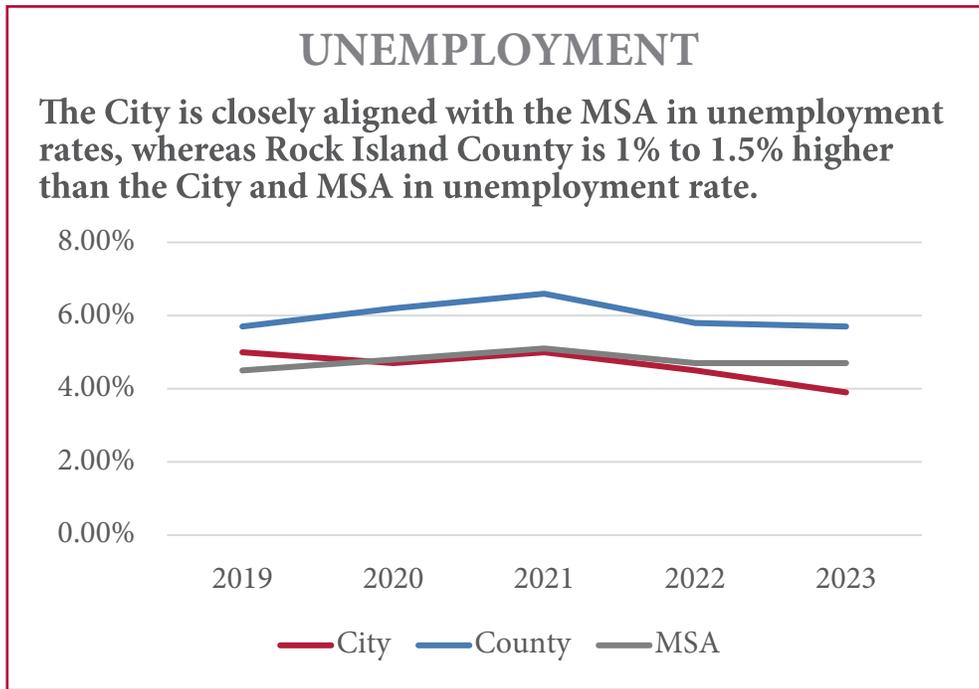
When comparing two key metrics – labor force participation and unemployment rates – we see significant differences among the three selected areas. Notably, while the MSA’s labor force participation has been relatively stagnant and the County’s participation has increased, the City’s has drastically decreased. When looking at unemployment rates for these areas, the MSA presents the lowest unemployment rate, followed by the County and then the City. In 2021, the City of Rock Island saw a peak in unemployment rate of 9.15%. Several census tract outliers are increasing this rate, including tracts 226, 231, 236, and 244.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Population 16 years and over	30,742	30,329	30,096	29,832	30,043
In labor force	19,538	18,905	18,464	18,301	18,035
Unemployed	1,539	1,440	1,499	1,343	1,177
Not in labor force	11,204	11,424	11,632	11,531	12,008

American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Economic Characteristics



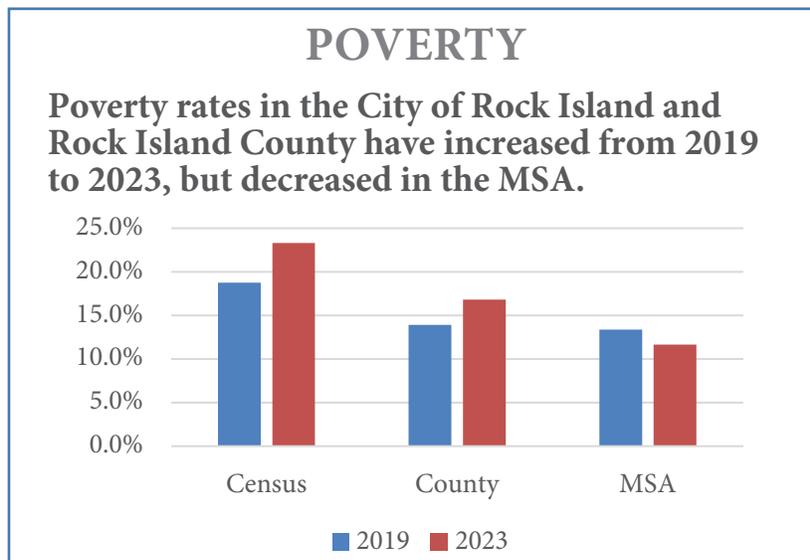
American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Economic Characteristics



American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Economic Characteristics

Poverty Rates

Aligned with the previous theme of lower employment participation rates and higher unemployment rates, the City of Rock Island also reflects higher concentrations of poverty. Adding to this, poverty rates increased from 2019 to 2023 in both the City and the County. Conversely, poverty rates in the MSA have decreased.



American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Employment and Labor Force Status

In Demand Skills

The project team analyzed Job Postings provided by Lightcast from December 2018 to December 2024, looking at all 24 2-digit SOC Codes. The search reviews 120,744 unique postings from 5,907 employers across Rock Island County. The following tables highlight the top 15 Specialized Skills, Common Skills, and Software Skills.

Specialized skills, otherwise known as technical or hard skills, tend to be more specific to an occupation, equipping individuals with knowledge to accomplish a specific task. **Common skills**, otherwise known as soft skills, consist of attributes individuals can apply across an array of tasks or job responsibilities. **Software skills** are any skill involved with executing functions involving computers or technology. These commonly include software coding languages.

Top 15 <u>Specialized</u> Skills	Postings	% of Total Postings
Nursing	7,340	6%
Merchandising	6,587	5%
Auditing	6,055	5%
Warehousing	5,828	5%
Marketing	5,640	5%
SAP Applications	4,828	4%
Project Management	4,827	4%
Agile Methodology	4,743	4%
Accounting	4,674	4%
Data Entry	4,353	4%
Continuous Improvement Process	4,113	3%
Computer Science	4,069	3%
Cash Register	3,648	3%
Forklift Truck	3,438	3%
Workflow Management	3,416	3%

Top 15 <u>Common</u> Skills	Postings	% of Total Postings
Communication	36,506	30%
Customer Service	30,198	25%
Management	22,637	19%
Operations	18,561	15%
Sales	15,734	13%
Leadership	12,714	11%
Detail Oriented	12,204	10%
Problem Solving	12,172	10%
Writing	11,394	9%
Planning	10,809	9%
Microsoft Office	10,571	9%
Interpersonal Communications	10,305	9%
Lifting Ability	9,277	8%
Troubleshooting (Problem Solving)	8,236	7%
English Language	8,086	7%

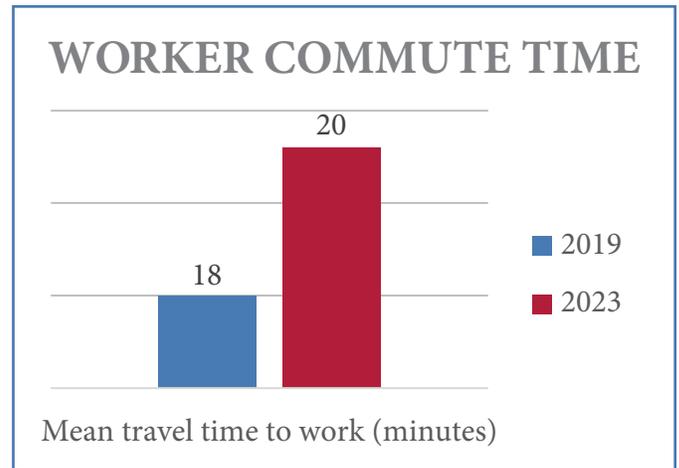
Top 15 <u>Software</u> Skills	Postings	% of Total Postings
Microsoft Office	10,571	9%
Microsoft Excel	7,655	6%
SAP Applications	4,828	4%
Microsoft Outlook	4,217	3%
Microsoft PowerPoint	3,373	3%
Amazon Web Services	3,083	3%
Java (Programming Language)	2,860	2%
SQL (Programming Language)	2,860	2%
JavaScript (Programming Language)	2,458	2%
Application Programming Interface (API)	2,188	2%
Microsoft Word	2,173	2%
Operating Systems	1,968	2%
Python (Programming Language)	1,947	2%
Microsoft Azure	1,575	1%
Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)	1,527	1%

Job Posting Intensity

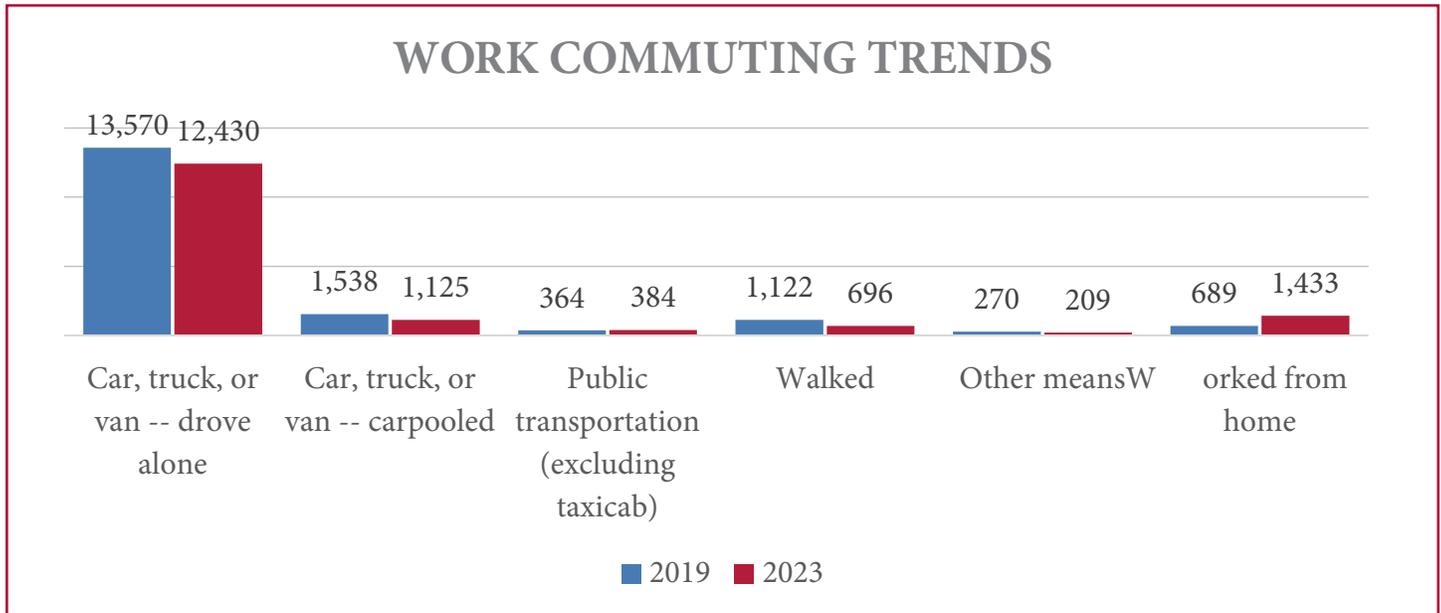
Job Title	Posting Intensity
Registered Nurses	5:1
Security Officers	5:1
Pharmacy Technicians	4:1
Retail Merchandisers	4:1
Crew Members	4:1
Software Engineers	3:1
CDL-A Truck Drivers	3:1
Customer Service Representatives	3:1
Maintenance Technicians	3:1
Licensed Practical Nurses	3:1

Remote Worker/Commuter Trends

Though there are less workers in the City of Rock Island in 2023 than there were in 2019, the city has seen an overall decrease in number of commuters who walk, drive, or use other means of transportation, and an increase in individuals working from home. On trend, the city has also seen a two-minute drop in commute time. Still, a vast majority of workers, nearly 3 out of 4, commuted to and from work alone.



American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Selected Economic Characteristics



American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (City) – Selected Economic Characteristics

STATS AMERICA

INNOVATION INTELLIGENCE INDEX

The Innovation Intelligence Index (II3) offers a comprehensive tool for examining regional innovation and entrepreneurial characteristics to support economic development strategies. Built on a hierarchical, pyramid-like structure, the Innovation Intelligence Index is derived from five core thematic indexes, each contributing equally to the overall score. These core indexes are further composed of sub-indexes and specific measures that capture both innovation inputs and outputs. Although the composite nature of the headline index means it aggregates contrasting factors that may not always move in tandem, the theoretical and statistical link between inputs and outputs justifies their combined use. Overall, the index serves as a strategic analytical tool that helps regional leaders assess strengths, identify weaknesses, and guide decision-making by benchmarking regions against national standards.

The charts below outline scores for Rock Island County and the Davenport-Moline-Rock Island MSA. This offers a comparative analysis of how the County compares to the region as a whole.

It should be noted that generally speaking cities and counties tend to be structurally different and disparities among these results should consider the status of each area. For example, Rock Island County, which includes the City of Rock Island surrounding jurisdictions which include suburban areas and rural areas, may see lower degrees of broadband adoption as infrastructure and adoption typically falls short in rural areas.

	MSA	County
Innovation Intelligence	111.9	109.3

HUMAN CAPITAL AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION INDEX

When comparing Human Capital and Knowledge Creation, the County scored slightly lower than the MSA. While the County did outperform the MSA in overall educational attainment, this was mostly in attainment of High School degrees, some college, and graduate degrees. The County lagged in Associate's and Bachelor degree attainment. Furthermore, compared to the MSA, the County greatly underperformed in University-Based Knowledge Spillovers, in other words, proximity to universities with a high degree of R&D spending in engineering, geosciences, life sciences, math and computer science, and physical science.

	MSA	County
Human Capital and Knowledge Creation	117.1	110.3
Educational Attainment	128.9	148.3
High School Attainment	120.9	161.9
Some College Attainment	133.6	174.6
Associate's Degree Attainment	151.6	147.4
Bachelor's Degree Attainment	127.9	127.3
Graduate Degree Attainment	110.7	130.3
Knowledge Creation and Technology Diffusion	100.4	50
University-Based Knowledge Spillovers	100.4	50
STEM Education and Occupations	155.5	158.1
Technology-Based Knowledge Occupation Clusters	169.9	161.8
Average High-Tech Industry Employment Share	183.4	198.7
Average Prime Working-Age Population Growth	83.8	84.6

BUSINESS DYNAMICS INDEX

When examining the Business Dynamics Index, the County and MSA were comparable across the board; however, the County outperformed the MSA slightly in Trade Sector establishments, ratio of establishment births to all establishments, and early life cycle establishments in high-tech.

	MSA	County
Business Dynamics	112.8	115.5
Establishment Formation	117.1	122.8
Establishment Births to All Establishments Ratio	109	106.5
Traded Sector Establishment Births to All Establishment Ratio	113.6	120.3
Jobs Attributed to Establishment Births to Total Employment Ratio	126.8	112.5
Change in Establishment Births to All Establishment Ratio	170.9	181
Average High-Tech, Early-in-Life-Cycle Establishment Ratio	111.8	121.6
Establishment Dynamics	108.4	108.2
Establishment Expansions to Contractions Ratio	111.9	109.5
Establishment Births to Deaths Ratio	109.5	102.8
Traded Sector Births and Expansions to Deaths and Contractions Ratio	104	112.1

BUSINESS PROFILE INDEX

The County mostly underperformed in comparison to the MSA when examining the Business Profile Index which measures local business conditions and resources available to entrepreneurs and businesses. This was most prevalent in Venture Capital Dollar Measures, Venture Capital Count Measures, and the Change in Average Venture Capital Deals. The only areas where the County outperformed the MSA was in the number of farm operations with access to internet and increased proprietorship.

	MSA	County
Business Profile	92.9	79.4
Venture Capital Dollar Measures	82.7	67.6
Change in Average Venture Capital	50	50
Venture Capital Count Measures	110	70.6
Change in Average Venture Capital Deals	179.1	50
Foreign Direct Investment Attractiveness	71.8	70
FDI Employment Ratio, Foreign Source	50	50
FDI Investment Ratio, Foreign Source	50	50
FDI Employment Ratio, Domestic Source	115.4	110.1
FDI Investment Ratio, Domestic Source	117.2	50
Proprietorship	106.9	109.5
Farm Operators with Internet Access	75.2	88.9
Proprietorship Rate	98.3	90.8
Change in Proprietorship Rate	145.1	158.9
Proprietor Income to Total Wages and Salaries Ratio	109	99.4

EMPLOYMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY INDEX

The County of Rock Island slightly outperformed the MSA in Employment and Productivity. The highest areas of achievement were in Latent Innovation, which considers both the spatial proximity of firms and the flows of information that accompany exchanges of goods, services and funds among industries, and the Industry Cluster Growth Factor which measures the percent of employment growth in a region that can be attributed to strong industry clusters.

	MSA	County
Employment and Productivity	115.7	122.8
Industry Performance	166.9	170.4
Latent Innovation	150.4	160.1
Industry Diversity	183.4	180.8
Industry Cluster Performance	52.7	84.7
Industry Cluster Growth Factor	50	116.5
Industry Cluster Strength	55.4	53
GDP	136.1	131.3
Patents	109.3	114.4
Change in Average Patenting Rate	109.3	114.4
Job Growth to Population Growth Ratio	108.1	114.5
Change in Share of High-Tech Industry Employment	121.3	121.6

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING INDEX

The Economic Well-Being index monitors standard of living in certain areas. Why the County and MSA were comparable in their overall scores, the subcategories tell a different story. The MSA primarily scored well in the Residential Internet Connectivity categories which track broadband adoption and infrastructure, whereas the County scored better in Compensation. Within the Compensation category are a number of variables such as poverty rate, unemployment rate, and income growth.

	MSA	County
Economic Well-Being	120.9	118.7
Residential Internet Connectivity	193.7	161.2
Broadband Infrastructure and Adoption	193.8	172.9
Broadband Adoption Barriers	193	140.8
Compensation	95.1	107.9
Change in Annual Wage and Salary Earnings per Worker	124.2	122.5
Per Capita Personal Income Growth	98.9	108.8
Average Poverty Rate	144.9	111.5
Average Unemployment Rate	97.8	72.5
Government Transfers to Total Personal Income Ratio	148.4	140.9
Average Net Migration	75.5	101.1

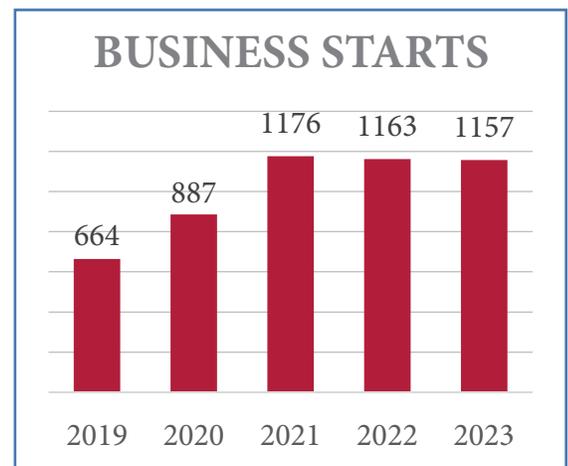
The County scored better in Per Capita Personal Income Growth and Average Net Migration, but the MSA had significantly better results for Average Poverty Rate and Average Unemployment Rate.

Business Starts and Applications

From 2019 to 2020, Rock Island County seen an increase in business applications, nearly doubling the number of applications over a two-year period. From 2021 to 2023, the number of applications remained relatively consistent. This volume may be attributed to COVID-19 recovery efforts as many small businesses faced hardship from the fallout.

Note: Business start and application data are not available at the city level; county-level data represent the most localized information accessible.

American Communities Survey Business Formation Statistics – Annual County Data (County Level)



INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLACEMAKING

NEIGHBORHOOD WALKABILITY

Walkscore is available for over 2,800 cities across the US. In addition to walkability, the platform also measures accessibility of public transit and bike systems in an area. Scores range anywhere from 0 to 100 based on various measurements:

- Walk score grades walkability to desirable destinations including schools, parks, restaurants, grocery stores, and more.
- Bike score grades accessibility and availability of bike infrastructure such as bike lanes and topography of an area
- Transit score grades distances to nearest stops, route frequency, and overall seamlessness of travel

City	Walk Score	Bike Score	Transit Score
Rock Island, Illinois	44	42	N/A
Sandusky, Ohio	50	43	N/A
Burlington, Iowa	41	37	15
La Crosse, Wisconsin	54	66	27
Peoria, Illinois	41	44	N/A
Paducah, Kentucky	38	38	N/A
Kokomo, Indiana	40	47	N/A

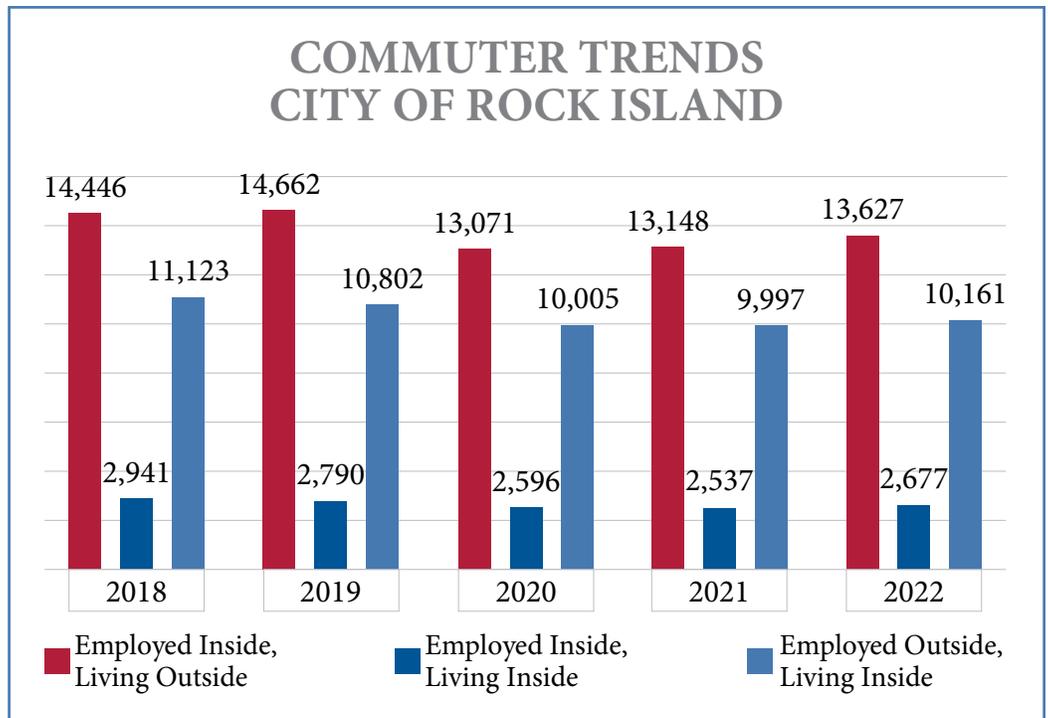
Walkscore.com – https://www.walkscore.com/IL/Rock_Island

The City of Rock Island was graded against the comparable cities listed below. Comparably speaking, Rock Island scored among the middle of the pack and did not score notably high or low compared to the other cities as it relates to walk score or bike score.

Commuting and Traffic Patterns

Commuter trends indicate an overall decrease of individuals coming into the city for work, likely as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The number of residents employed in the area, but living outside peaked in 2019, but dropped to a low of 32,916 individuals in 2021.

However, 2022 showed a slight bump signaling some recovery. Similarly, the number of individuals living and employed in the City of Rock Island have steadily decreased, which is likely reflected of population decline in the area. Last, those living in the City but commuting to a job outside of the area dropped from 2018 to 2020, but has remained mostly stagnant since then.



On the Map: Commuter Trends for the City of Rock Island

APPENDIX II: ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ROCK ISLAND'S ECONOMY

Stakeholders reported that Rock Island possesses a rich heritage as a historic industrial hub, complemented by a vibrant arts and music scene and a strong sense of place rooted in its distinct neighborhoods. The city's cultural diversity was viewed a unique asset, with more than 30 languages spoken in the local school district and a growing immigrant population contributing to community life and entrepreneurial activity. This diversity underpins a thriving arts community and emerging placemaking initiatives that are enhancing the city's identity and appeal. When asked about key industries in the area, stakeholders mentioned that Rock Island benefits from a foundation of core industries, including logistics, general manufacturing, and a high-tech manufacturing sector.

However, stakeholders noted several challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term economic vitality. These include a declining population, rising poverty and homelessness rates, and comparatively lower incomes than surrounding communities. While many praised the city's efforts to be transparent and accessible, others expressed concern about perceived internal dynamics and a lack of visibility into decision-making processes. Additionally, Rock Island faces structural limitations in its ability to accommodate new industrial growth due to limited industrial and commercial sites ready for development. Stakeholders agreed that current initiatives could benefit from greater strategic alignment and stronger collaboration between economic development partner organizations to amplify their impact and create a cohesive vision for future economic growth.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES

In addition to internal and organizational barriers, Rock Island faces several regional challenges that complicate its economic development efforts. The city has little control over some challenges but may be able to focus efforts on overcoming them. A key concern is the disparity in state tax policy—Illinois is widely viewed as less business-friendly than neighboring Iowa, which creates a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining businesses within the region. Stakeholders have mentioned that several businesses have moved their operations to the Iowa side of the Quad Cities.

Individuals also expressed concern over the effectiveness of the local workforce development system, noting gaps in alignment between education providers, training programs, and institutional support of workforce development initiatives. These weaknesses hinder the city's ability to support talent pipelines for existing industries and future economic growth. However, some stakeholders acknowledge

these shortcomings and have discussed future endeavors to equip the K-12 system to broach these topics.

Geographically, Rock Island's landlocked nature limits opportunities for large-scale expansion or new Greenfield development, requiring more creative and strategic reuse of existing properties. Meanwhile, public perceptions of the city—including higher rates of poverty, crime, and economic disenfranchisement compared to surrounding areas—create additional image and reputational challenges that can deter investment and development.

Finally, regional economic development efforts are often marked by competition rather than collaboration. Jurisdictional divides have limited the potential for coordinated strategies that could benefit the broader region. Greater cross-border cooperation and a more unified vision could help reduce duplication of efforts and strengthen Rock Island's position within the Quad Cities and beyond.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Stakeholders identified a range of growth opportunities that, if pursued strategically, could position Rock Island for renewed economic vitality and inclusive development. A central theme that emerged was the need for a clearer, more unified vision from elected leaders and local economic development leaders—one that outlines priorities, aligns resources, and communicates direction with both internal stakeholders and the broader community. Some participants emphasized that providing economic development professionals and elected officials with continued professional development opportunities would help equip the community with emerging practices from across the country.

Improving trust and collaboration among local and regional partners also emerged as a priority. While partnerships exist, greater strategic coordination and more open communication are needed to overcome underlying tensions and strengthen collective impact. At the neighborhood level, there is significant potential to elevate and formalize smaller community-based organizations. These grassroots efforts, while powerful in their localized engagement, should be linked back to broader citywide goals to ensure they contribute to a coherent development strategy.

From a more technical standpoint, many stakeholders alluded to challenges Rock Island has faced with business retention and expansion, as well as business attraction efforts. Some opportunities that were mentioned include leveraging Rock Island's port district designation and identifying shovel-ready sites to attract new investment. Furthermore, developing site profiles and streamlining site preparation practices were identified as options to enhance the city's competitiveness for industrial and commercial growth. Additionally, activating underutilized properties—through better engagement with property owners—can unlock redevelopment potential and accelerate revitalization.

Investments in public spaces were also cited as a key strategy to boost tourism and local vibrancy by drawing foot traffic and enhancing the city's aesthetic appeal. Coupled with this, stakeholders underscored the need for stronger workforce development partnerships, particularly with workforce boards, K-12 institutions, and community colleges. A more robust talent pipeline might not only support existing industries but also shift community perceptions by creating clear pathways out of poverty. Some individuals mentioned these efforts could have stronger impact if economic development practitioners were more heavily involved.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

Stakeholders identified several internal organizational challenges that are limiting the effectiveness and cohesion of Rock Island's economic development efforts. A recurring theme was the absence of a clearly articulated vision to guide the city's economic development strategy. Without a shared roadmap, efforts appear fragmented and reactive, making it difficult to prioritize initiatives or align resources effectively.

Engagement with the private sector was also described as inconsistent and underdeveloped. Stakeholders noted that more intentional outreach and relationship-building are needed to foster stronger collaboration with the private sector. Among economic development entities, there is a call for more formalized policies and procedures to govern how economic development work is executed—particularly around the use of funding mechanisms, negotiation of development agreements, and the conditions under which assistance is provided.

The city's relationship with regional organizations presented mixed perspectives. While some stakeholders view regional partnerships as a means to expand capacity and access specialized expertise, others feel that these arrangements often overlook Rock Island's unique assets, challenges, and priorities and that there was room to improve how regional entities, and the City work together to alignment with place-based strategies.

Last, stakeholders mentioned a noticeable gap in performance measurement and accountability. There seems to be limited systems for tracking the impact of partnerships or assessing progress toward economic goals. Some stakeholders advocated for greater use of outcome-based service agreements, which could help shift the focus toward measurable results and continuous improvement.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNER COLLABORATIVE WORK SESSION

The project team convened economic development partners from multiple organizations across the city to participate in a collaborative session. Using the principles of design thinking and a set of activities customized for Rock Island, the group worked together to help create a shared vision, goals, strategies, and tactics. The session discussed the activities involved in economic development and roles each partner plays within the ecosystem. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to express and begin to address underlying challenges that are holding them back from performing as a coordinated and effective group.

To ensure authentic contributions to activities, participants were assured that their feedback would be presented without attribution. Feedback of a more personal or sensitive nature was given only to the consultants and kept confidential. The following are the public-facing results of the session.

THE SAILBOAT: An activity that uses the visual representation of a sailboat to help participants to identify the community's assets, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

THE WIND IN OUR SAILS - ASSETS

- Cultivated interest in leveraging community heritage and investing in historic preservation as both an economic tool and a source of civic pride
- Culturally significant – historic, diverse population, pride, Colorful Lore/history
- Community pride
- Work ethic
- Education system (Augustana, BHC)
- Job training
- Location/riverfront, Central location midway between many larger cities
- Collaborative desire, passion, Desire to be better loyal stakeholders, growth in collaboration
- Transportation network
- Momentum being built by RIDA, downtown revitalization
- Talented people
- Ideas, appetite for innovation
- Willingness
- West End Revitalization
- Business Development
- Appetite for engagement from community, burgeoning civic engagement
- Existing investment
- Unique character
- focused city administration

THE ANCHORS - WEAKNESSES

- Lack of disposable income
- Negative perceptions, Perception of or real crime/unsafe areas, Pervasive negative perception
- Disregarded, Reputation
- Apathetic community, “Eeyore” syndrome
- Folks are disconnecting and distancing themselves in an angry online world where differences are seen as threats
- Resistance to change
- Education – public
- Public mistrust
- Friends and partners see themselves as rivals in a resource-poor environment
- Lack of coordination
- Under resourced, Lack of resources to improve neighborhoods and grow population
- Financial resources, Financial resources, Investment and budget for economic development
- lack of shovel-ready sites, Lack of large-acre developable property
- Ownership – options on sites
- Lack of past investments, disinvestment, how far behind are we to comparable communities – cost of catching up
- Lack of business growth, quality jobs, things to do, housing, Lack of investment, stagnant growth
- Lack of leadership, Lack of plan

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON - OPPORTUNITIES

- State and local funding mechanisms to enhance neighborhood services, business, and residential growth
- As the world keeps changing both culturally and economically, Rock Island can position itself as a really nice place to call home and work from home
- Downtown revitalization, Downtown revitalization
- New developments in industrial area
- Growth around Bally's including new dispensary
- Ongoing efforts to improve West End and Hilltop neighborhoods
- New housing
- Small business growth
- Job creation
- Vibrant neighborhoods
- Engaged community leadership
- Creative Community
- Growth
- Increased prosperity
- Community pride
- Depth of property conditions
- Tourism
- Increased prosperity for all
- Increase retail
- Incentives
- Vacant properties
- Port
- Expanding businesses on riverfront industrial investment
- River's Edge, Embrace the river

THE ROCKS AHEAD - THREATS

- National economy, Federal environment
- Uncertain funding for new housing and job development
- Outside policy changes (federal, international, state)
- Lack of state and federal resources
- Declining population
- Perceptions of community
- Lack of resources
- Lack of Vision
- Future of (not legible)
- Fighting (not legible)
- Small pie
- Poverty, Poverty
- School system (underperforming)
- Financial obligations
- Lack of funds
- Pension obligations
- Lack of shovel-ready sites or control of sites
- Development unfriendly groups
- Politics
- Low grade (not legible)
- Land-locked
- Rising costs
- Random or quick changes to the economy
- AI
- IL strategy difficult on business
- State of IL problems grow

HOW MIGHT WE: An activity that helps to narrow down focus areas and goals for strategy development. Results are presented below with recurring themes in bold.

Workforce/Education:

- Address challenges (real or perceived) of schools, Affect improvement in our school system (in our way), Utilize our strong educational system, job training to spur development
- Build on the community's strong work ethic and blue collar values

Assets and Advocacy:

- Better promote RI assets, Amplify the historic and cultural significance of RI
- Creative Class, Promote/engage creative class, Grow our creative class, Assist the creative class to implement areas for new business development
- Make IL a better place to do business, Advocate in state of IL, problem with state

Attract new investment

- Shovel-ready Sites: Increase the number of shovel ready sites, Address lack of shovel-ready sites, Secure site-ready, large-acre properties, Produce shovel-ready ground, Support and fund site readiness/developments, Make more sites shovel-ready

Neighborhood Revitalization:

- Buy property in West End and Industrial Center for Investment, Improve the West End, Continue to celebrate West End revitalization
- Continue to support RIDA
- Take full advantage of the riverfront
- Leverage the area around Bally's to create opportunities for all.

Population:

- Address a declining population, Attract more residents

Resources:

- Solve the pension obligation
- Offer more incentives for distressed tracts
- Increase and diversify resources for economic development, Grow our financial resources, Gain financial resources, Establish sustainable funding sources for enhancing quality of life, Invest more in economic development

Perception:

- Change perception, Increase community collaboration to combat negative perceptions, Improve our reputations, Help change the negative perception of Rock Island to a positive growth message, Defeat Eeyore syndrome
- Better engage community members, Foster hope and strengthen civic pride,

Collaboration:

- Collaborate better, Build private/public partnerships, End duplication of efforts, Coordinate limited resources, Plan and coordinate our efforts
- Deliver/execute plan

SOLUTION JAM: An activity to develop customized strategies for Rock Island based on prioritized themes from the “How Might We” activity. Results are presented below.

Collaboration:	Increase/Diversify Resources:	Increase Shovel-Ready Sites:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host Roundtable • Develop shared brand and strengthen alignment through joint MOU and consistent communication channels • Facilitate goal alignment among stakeholders • Take stock, assign, and focus • Focus on effective communication • Have regular coordination meetings • Reorganize for better coordination • Delineate specific roles, responsibilities, and core competencies for better coordination • Leverage strengths of partners better through greater and more open dialogue • Group of specialized economic development activities vs. one more economic development entity • Fund programs and services vs organizations • Take and define available resources and get themselves in the same direction • Better coordinate at county/ state levels • Focus on IL side coordination • Collaborate: state, IA inter-state, private sector, public sector, county, MEC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective team that is specifically focused on attracting new business • Create regional think tank to identify new funding models to support resource development • Raise the alarm about a community facing an existential crisis • Seek and embrace innovative ways/ideas for development • Increase funding for development • Push for more local resources from local private sector folks, Increase business investment in economic development • Maximize River’s Edge • Explore SSA/BID/TID legislation for different commercial neighborhoods/ districts • State provide better incentives and assistance • Leverage non-traditional funding sources • Can we do a fundraising campaign like a “go fund me” for economic development • Grants for businesses • Decrease the number of non-tax-paying entities in Rock Island 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop certification standards – invest money to meet • Annex unincorporated areas, work together to negotiate aggressive annexation • Public private team to identify and option sites • Purchase or option sites • Can we find money to buy options or buy land • Aggressive effort to gain site control • SRS – can we get/confirm site control • Can we get funding to start moving up on readiness for each site? • Look at greyfield sites, leverage available resources including TIF, RERZ, CDBG, etc. appropriately and strategically • Create more distressed tracts incentives • Be bold and risky with infrastructure investments

ACTION BOARD: An activity to categorize the impact and effort of the top strategic approaches identified in the Solution Jam activity. The results are presented below.

High Impact, High Effort:	High-Impact, Low Effort:	Moderate Impact and Effort:
Take stock, assign, and focus	Raise the alarm about a community facing an existential crisis	Maximize River’s Edge
Collaborate: State, IA Inter-state, Private Sector, Public Sector	Delineate specific roles, responsibilities, and core competencies for better coordination	Work together to negotiate aggressive annexation
Pass a regional tax/fee for economic development		
Create a private partnership that helps with the property purchase, land bank/trust	Define roles between agencies	

ED ACTIVITIES: An activity in which participants listed the responsibilities included within the economic development ecosystem. The results are listed below.

- Business Retention
- Business Expansion
- Business Attraction
- Business Creation
- Entrepreneurial Services
- Business Support Services
- Networking
- Ribbon Cutting
- Business Events
- Business Training and Development
- Business Planning
- Access to Capital
- Marketing/Storytelling
- Community
- Destination Marketing and Promotion
- Talent Attraction
- Site-specific
- Collateral
- Website
- Brochure
- Prospectus
- Lead Generation
- Site Inventory/ Site Search
- Site and Inventory Development
- Respond to state RFI
- Supply Chain
- Placemaking
- Space Activation
- Neighborhood Development/ Revitalization
- Downtown Development
- Riverfront Development
- Destination Development
- Workforce Development
- State Workforce Services
- Work-based learning
- Education
- Training
- Childcare
- Corridor Development
- Quality of Life/ Fundamental Community Needs:
- Housing
- Healthcare
- Education
- Childcare
- Public Transit
- Project Management
- Site Visits
- Financial Tools
- Grants and Grant Writing
- TIF
- Incentives
- Incentive Stacking
- Regulatory & Compliance
- Planning
- Zoning
- Code Enforcement
- Public Safety
- Relationship Management
- Facilitate conversations
- Community Engagement
- Realtor-Broker relationships
- Developer relationships
- Business relationships
- Partner Relationships
- Site Selector Conferences
- Site Selector Hosts
- Resource Sharing
- Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Roads
- Railroad
- Port
- Public Transit
- Multimodal
- Utilities
- Business Intelligence
- Research
- Economic Impact Studies
- Economic Forecast
- Market Studies
- Data Systems Analysis
- Policy Advocacy

Rationale, Tactic Brainstorm, and Momentum Mapping: These activities built the beginning strategic framework based on identified goals and strategies. Participants developed a rationale, determined desired outcomes, identified potential action items, and explored options for partnerships/coordination, alignment, KPIs, timelines, and catalysts. Groups took different approaches to these activities. Results are listed below:

GOAL: INCREASE/DIVERSIFY RESOURCES

Rationale:

- Raise the alarm about a community facing an existential crisis.
- We don't have the funds needed to grow, meet pension obligations
- Need funding to implement plan. This will bring talent, innovation, and broader impact

Outcome:

- Catalysts for change, empowering the community.
- Increase tax base, increase revenue
- More businesses
- Stronger tax base
- Increase development opportunities

Alignment:

- Shared vision and understanding
- Aligns with regional goals
- RIDA
- West End Development
- Bally West

Objectives

- Regional tax for each development

Tactics

- Regional tax
- Community campaign to create strong buy-in
- Define regional because we are bistrate

Catalysts

- RI county 1 cent sales tax (current)
- Past practice
- Grow
- Timing in good

Requisites

- Legislation on state level
- Define the region (states? County?)
- Interstate agreement

Barriers:

- Two states = two ways of doing things
- Community resistance
- Political support

Mitigation

- Communication campaign
- Education

Metrics

- Legislation approved
- Funds collected

Coordination:

- Define region
- Create a coalition

Impact: 10

Timeline: 1-2 years

Checkpoint: Monthly

GOAL: RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Basis: Campaign, Education, Grassroots

Strategy: Maximize River’s Edge

Impact: RE is a significant incentive that will support new investment in RI

Tactics: Market the program to realtors, developers, bankers, property owners

Catalysts: Waiting for state approval

Assets: Primed downtown

Requisites: Communication and marketing plan

Barriers: State approval of aggressive plan

Mitigations: Lobbying and Money

Metrics: Investment dollars, Added units, Rehabbed buildings

Timeline: 6-month approval, 1 year of communication

Checkpoint: Constant

Coordination:

- City staff application
- Marketing and communication: RIDA, DARI, Chamber
- Kickoff event
- Negotiations with taxing bodies – city
- Advocacy – RIDA, DARI, Chamber

Strategy: Raise the alarm about a community facing an existential crisis.

Impact: Hard truth, hurt feelings, paves the way for fresh start, progress.

Tactic: Shared visioning/messaging – united across public and private partners

Catalysts: Strategic planning, Decreased population, Decreased wealth, Perception of Rock Island

Assets: Right people at the table, Bones and foundation, Shared desire for success

Requisites: Clearly defined vision and plan with community buy-in

Barriers: Pride, Political Climate, Resources

Mitigations: Demonstrating vulnerabilities, Shared messaging

Metrics: Is the plan adopted, accepted, and activated

Timeline: Short-term

Checkpoint: On-going

Coordination: [empty]

GOAL: INCREASE COLLABORATION/COORDINATION**Basis:**

- Delineate specific roles, responsibilities, and core competencies for better coordination
- To achieve maximum results
- Get the most out of resources
- Eliminate redundancy
- Stop being “competamates”
- Limited resources
- Keep from duplicating efforts

Outcome:

- Build a dream team!
- Create a high-performance ED team
- Build a thriving community
- Better use of resources
- Better use of different strengths, synergy
- Better results
- Efficiency
- Results
- Go further, faster

Assets:

- People
- Professional expertise
- Funding mechanisms
- Plans
- All the agencies attending this event
- Collective ED partners

Requisites:

- Cultivating relationships
- Structural and now – structured touchpoints
- Shared coal and common plan
- Planning, organizing, executing

Barriers:

- Volunteer boards
- Scarcity mindset
- Competing priorities
- Personalities and egos
- Competing priorities

Mitigations:

- Strengthened culture and team mindset
- Stay mission-driven
- Strong leadership

Alignment:

- Everything is about creating opportunity and prosperity
- Bring different groups together & focus efforts
- Bring together and define commonality
- West End Revitalization, RIDA, DARI, QCC
- Coordination: Delineation specific tasks, take stock, assign, and focus

Impact:

- Empowerment and improved focus
- Get results
- Implement plans
- Free up resources to tackle more problems in a timely manner
- Improve daily life for residents, businesses

Catalysts:

- Planning process
- Budgeting process
- Overlapped efforts
- Lack of clarity
- City hired TPMA

Tactics:

- Improve communication and better understand one another to prioritize limited resources, plus optimize
- Bring together to meet
- Focus on priorities (define first)
- Build in performance measures
- Work meeting vs. reporting
- Assign a team to access current endeavors
- Try to eliminate overlap
- Redirect

Metrics:

- Enhanced communication
- Decreasing duplicative efforts
- Determination of who has the right skill set
- Survey of people and process
- Moves faster
- More projects are identified and completed

Timeline: Aligned with plan, 1-2 years, Ongoing

Checkpoint: Ongoing, Monthly, Quarterly

GOAL: INCREASE COLLABORATION/COORDINATION

Coordination:

- Meeting facilitator -> work groups
- Collaborate with state, IA interstate, private sector, public sector
- Taskforce
- MAE
- City
- DARI
- Grow Quad Cities
- Chamber
- IA IRR?
- County

Impact: Significant and meaningful

Tactics:

- Bring together partners
- Understand who has what available
- Present succinct plan

Catalysts:

- DCEO – NOFO money is coming
- Renewed focus on lack of sites

Assets: TIF, BID, Infill sites – utilities in place

Requisites: Funding

Barriers:

- Funding
- Environmental issues
- Lack of desire/owner participation/site control

Mitigation: Funding

Metrics:

- Acreage developed
- CAPEX?
- Completed transactions
- Property tax

Timeline: Less than 5 years

GOAL: INCREASE SHOVEL-READY SITES**Basis:**

- Work together to negotiate aggressive annexation
- Attract more business
- Bring jobs
- More inventory to attract more investment
- Can't land companies without sites
- More companies increases tax base

Outcome:

- More shovel-ready sites
- Housing
- Population
- Revenue for city government
- Growth
- Increased funds

Objectives: Work together to negotiate aggressive annexations.

Impact: Increase shovel-ready sites

Strategy: Landbank/trust-group of people buy land

Impact: 10

Tactics:

- Landowner conversation
- Grants for utilities
- Tax incentives
- Willing owners
- Buy options on property
- Organization to manage
- Review Hicky-Global Site Readiness Report

Assets:

- Strong business, leaders, owners in RI to approach as investors
- Nonprofit leadership
- Knowledge base and network

Requisites:

- Would need city, DARI organize outreach to possible investors
- Need a common vision for investors

Alignment:

- No locations
- No projects
- No portfolio
- Strong alignment = START
- Frees up money for other economic development opportunities

Tactic Brainstorm: Team approach, Identify, prioritize, assess, and assemble

Catalysts: Inability to respond to site selectors, Limited or no opportunities for growth or expansion

Assets: Expedited city council process.

Requisites: A meaningful game plan.

Barriers: Risk aversion

Mitigations: Relationships & Communication

Metrics: Parcels annexed, New/expanded tax base

Barriers:

- Lack of prioritization
- Under resourcing
- Mitigations
- Compelling case statement
- Educate on the issue
- Seek resources (grants) outside community

Metrics: Create jobs, Buildings built

Timeline: 2-3 years

Checkpoint: Monthly

Coordination: Committee, City hosts meeting with city, DARI, investment group

Long-term Visioning: An activity in which participants worked individually and in teams to develop an economic development vision statement for Rock Island and explore scenarios for success or failure.

Vision #1: A thriving prosperous community that provides opportunity for increased growth, retail, industry, and empowerment

Vision #2: Rock Island should be a sustainable and dynamic community offering an eclectic, enjoyable lifestyle for a diverse and prosperous citizenry who are committed to the place they call home.

Vision #3: Vibrant community with an expanded tax base

ROCK ISLAND'S ECONOMIC VISION

The vision statement for Rock Island's Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) should represent the city's core values and economic goals. It must be both inspirational and aspirational, capturing what the city aims to become over the next 20 years. The draft vision statement draws from the ideas, hopes, and possibilities expressed throughout the planning process.

This vision should serve as a guiding framework for future decisions, while also addressing the city's current fiscal challenges. As city leaders and partner organizations consider investments, priorities, development initiatives, and marketing, they should consider whether their actions align with and advance this vision for Rock Island. The following strategic action plan is designed to help Rock Island realize that vision.

“

Rock Island will be a dynamic city where coordinated efforts consistently drive opportunities to cultivate a thriving local economy and empower a prosperous community that takes pride in this vibrant and eclectic place.

”

Other activities included in the session:

- **Lightning Discovery Dive:** An activity that allowed participants to review research conducted by the project team, then list and discuss things they found interesting.
- **Program Mapping** An activity which participants described what their organization does within the economic development ecosystem, their challenges, and what they would like to do moving forward.
- **The Fours Approach:** In this activity, participants sketched or described up to 4 different ways in which partner roles and responsibilities could potentially be streamlined to assist with implementation.

APPENDIX III.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development of this strategic plan would not have been possible without the valuable input, collaboration, and support of the community. We extend our deepest gratitude to the organizations and leaders contributing to Rock Island's economic future and lending their time, expertise, and perspectives. Their insights have been critical in identifying opportunities, challenges, and innovative solutions that will help drive the city forward.

We also want to recognize the members of the City Council for their leadership and guidance throughout this process. Their commitment to shaping a vision for the city has been instrumental in ensuring this plan reflects the needs and aspirations of the community.

Together, these entities have created a plan that will serve as a foundation for growth, opportunity, and more effective collaboration as they work to bring Rock Island's vision to life.

City of Rock Island

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 Rock Island City Council
 Todd Thompson, City Manager
 Tom Flaherty, Assistant to City Manager/Economic Development
 Miles Brainard, Community & Economic Development Director

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