



**City Council Study Session Agenda  
June 23, 2025 - 5:15 PM  
City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor,  
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL**

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- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Roll Call**
- 3. Presentations**
  - a. Conservation Easement Options for the Rock Island Wetlands
  - b. Building Code Updates
- 4. Public Comment**
- 5. Adjourn**
  - a. Motion: Motion to adjourn.  
VV Voice vote is needed.

*This agenda may be obtained in accessible formats by qualified persons with a disability by making appropriate arrangements from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday, by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (309) 732-2010 or visiting in person at: 1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL 61201.*

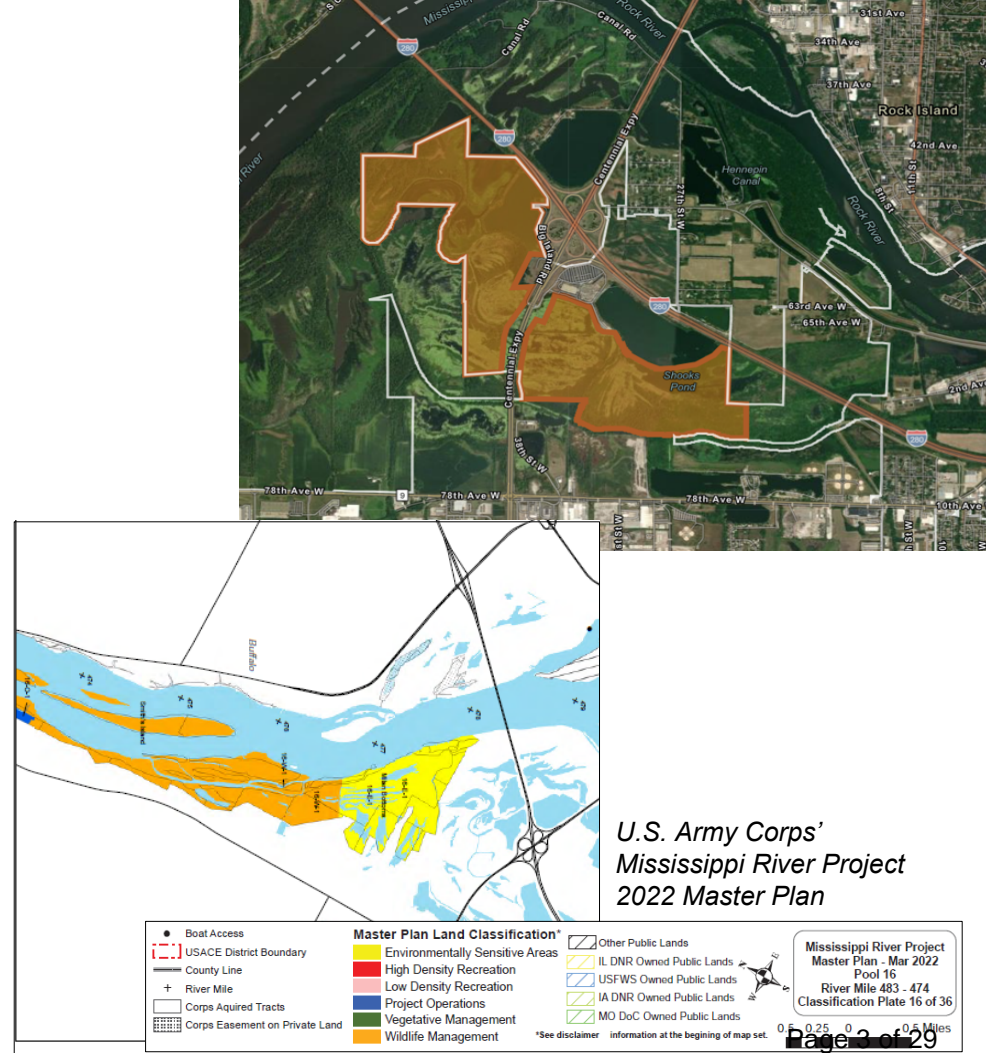


# Conservation Easement Options for the Rock Island Wetlands (Milan Bottoms)

*Nina Struss, Prairie Rivers Network  
& Wetlands Task Force*

# The Rock Island Wetlands

- >500 acres
- Significant conservation value
- Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Site (western portion)
- 87 birds, 12 mammals, 7 reptiles, 6 amphibians, 32 mussels, and 10 federally and/or Illinois-listed species (2005 survey of the entire Milan Bottoms complex)
  - Blanding's Turtle
  - Bald Eagle
  - Yellow- and black-crowned night heron
  - Northern Long-Eared Bat



# Conservation Easements as a Tool for Safeguarding Communities

- Establishing a conservation easement to permanently protect wetlands would:
  - Reduce flood risks
  - Enhance water quality
  - Protect the biodiversity of the land
  - Generate economic and community benefits
  - Build a Rock Island legacy



# Wetlands absorb floods, saving lives and money

- In Texas, a defunct golf course has been transformed into a public park that holds **half a billion gallons of stormwater** and protects 3,000 homes while providing outdoor recreation opportunities. Nearby communities **save \$300 million in flood damage** during every 500-year rain event (occurs about every 7 years).
- Urban wetlands in Chicago are the most cost-effective way to control flooding and **provide an average of \$22,000 of benefits per acre annually**. (2014 study)
- In Ohio, a 450+ acre urban watershed park in Cleveland provides **100 million gallons of floodwater storage**, while increasing nearby property values and preserving local water quality. The park also features Ohio's first urban Watershed Stewardship Center.



# Task Force Directive

- 1. Develop a recommendation for the city council on the establishment of a conservation easement in six months.**
2. Develop a wetland management plan in 12 months which will:
  - a. Involve a robust stakeholder engagement process
  - b. Propose a governance framework for establishing how the wetlands shall be managed and by whom
  - c. Include recommendations for future investments that both preserve the natural environment and further the public interest.

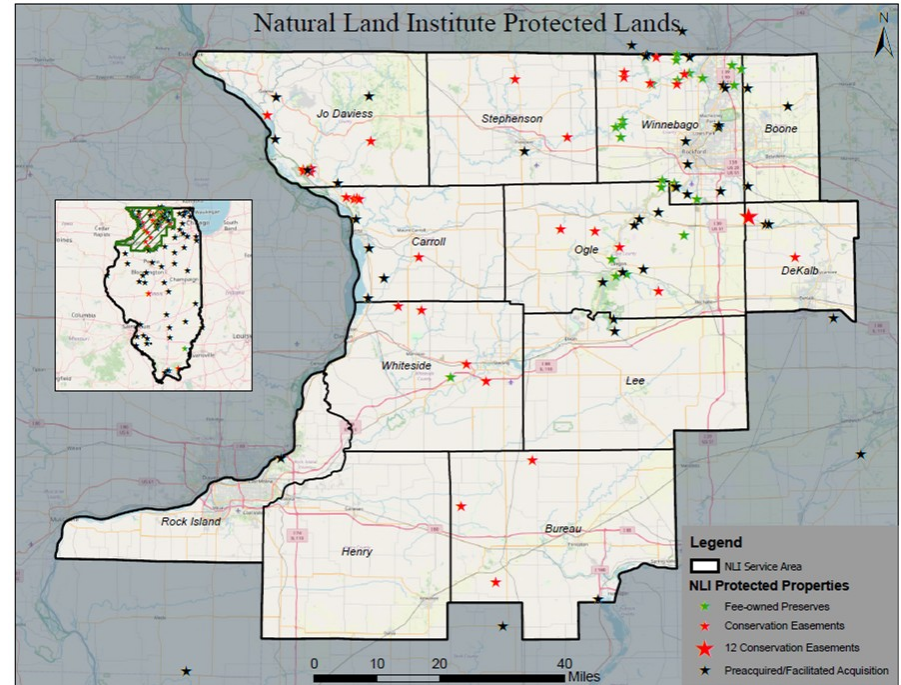
## Task Force Members

- Ashley Harris - RI Mayor
- Miles Brainard - RI Community Economic Development
- Thomas Flaherty - Assistant to RI City Manager & Economic Development Director
- Todd Thompson - RI City Manager
- Sarah Hayden - RI Community Engagement Manager
- Randy Hurt - RI Second Ward Council Member
- Tanner Osing - Planning & Zoning
- Missy Gasiorowski - General contractor with Hodge Construction
- Hannah Alexander - NTI Representative
- Mike Thoms - Resident
- Nina Struss - River Health & Resiliency Organizer with Prairie Rivers Network
- Tim Pressly - Landowner
- Jon Duyvejonck - Retired Wildlife Biologist (USFWS), Sierra Club
- Kathy Wine - Executive Director at River Action

# Option #1 - Conservation Easement with a Land Trust

## Natural Land Institute

- One of the oldest land trusts in the area
- 12-county area
- Has helped protect 18,000 acres of land since founding
- Currently owns ~4,000 acres of land mostly near Winnebago
- Has previously purchased land in the Milan Bottoms, which was sold to IDNR



# Option #1 - Conservation Easement with a Land Trust

## Natural Land Institute: Process (~9 months at minimum, potentially longer):

1. City of RI would enter into an agreement with NLI for a conservation easement.
2. NLI would conduct a baseline assessment of the property using a strict checklist.
  - a. Two appraisals on the property are needed prior to moving forward.
3. NLI hires a consultant and legal team for review and development of the conservation easement agreement.
4. City of RI would be required to make a one-time stewardship donation to NLI to cover the costs of the annual inspection as well as legal fees if NLI ever needed to defend the easement in court.
5. Once easement is secured, NLI will inspect the property annually in perpetuity to ensure compliance, but the land owner will maintain responsibility for the care and maintenance of the site.
  - a) A management plan is not an offered service through NLI, but is highly recommended.

# Option #1 - Conservation Easement with a Land Trust

## Rock Island City's Responsibility:

- One-time stewardship donation to NLI (Fees range from ~\$7,500 - \$10,000)
- Provide necessary legal documents (deed, plat, legal description, title work)
- Provide boundary information, if available
- Hiring a consultant and funding for a Wetland Management Plan (not required, but strongly recommended)

## NLI's Responsibility:

- The entire administrative and legal process to establish a CE
- Annual inspection of the property to ensure compliance of the CE

# Option #2 - Registration as an Illinois Land & Water Reserve with IDNR

## Illinois Nature Preserves Commission:

- Field staff consists of ten biologists located throughout the state
- Work with landowners to tailor a conservation agreement that protects the natural features of the land while addressing the landowners' use of the property
- Three programs: Illinois Nature Preserves, Land & Water Reserve, and Natural Heritage Landmark



## Land & Water Reserve (the second highest level of protection, but offers flexibility):

“Lands and waters of Illinois that support significant natural heritage or archaeological resources qualify for this land protection tool. **The agreement to register an area as a Land and Water Reserve determines allowable uses and stipulates management objectives.** Registered Reserves may be in public or private ownership. **The agreement may be** for a term of years or **permanent.** The property can be sold or passed on to heirs subject to the agreement. Land and waters permanently registered may qualify for reduced tax benefits in the form of a local property tax reduction and possibly a charitable contribution deduction on federal income taxes.”

# Option #2 - Registration as an Illinois Land & Water Reserve with IDNR

## Land & Water Reserve: Process (~1-2 years):

1. The City would enter into an agreement with Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC). Lorraine Foelske is the regional biologist for the QC region.
2. Lorraine prepares two written documents to present to the INPC.
  - a. Site Proposal
  - b. Management Plan
3. Lorraine presents a summary of the management plan and site proposal to INPC at a meeting in either January, March or September for approval.
4. Once approved, Lorraine will begin implementation of the management plan.
5. IDNR will inspect the area at least annually for compliance. INPC is also able to help with some site maintenance through staff or internal grants (i.e., invasive species removal, prescribed burns, etc.)

# Option #2 - Registration as an Illinois Land & Water Reserve with IDNR

## Land & Water Reserve: Process (~1-2 years):

- Lorraine prepares two written documents to present to the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission(INPC).
  - **Site Proposal**
    - Includes species reports, bird counts and other pertinent reports to describe the biodiversity of the area and why it should be protected.
  - **Management Plan**
    - i. Renewed every 5 years. Lorraine works with landowners to keep updated.
    - ii. Everything in the management plan are recommendations. Lorraine can apply for internal grants to help with maintenance on-site.
    - iii. Must be completed before INPC approves the L&WR designation.
    - iv. Includes an activity schedule to determine what needs to be done on the site annually (i.e., prescribed burns, defending boundaries, invasive species, protection of rare species, etc.) and the responsible entity for the outlined activities.

# Option #2 - Registration as an Illinois Land & Water Reserve with IDNR

## Rock Island City's Responsibility:

- Provide necessary legal documents (deed, plat, legal description, title work)
- Provide boundary information, if available
- Work collaboratively with IDNR to develop the proposal and management plan

## IDNR's Responsibility:

- Prepares written documents for presentation to Illinois Nature Preserve Commission (Proposal & Management Plan)
- Presents proposal to Illinois Nature Preserve Commission
- Annual inspection of the property to ensure compliance of the CE
- Fees (surveys, title search fee)
- Staff assistance and internal grant funding for special projects (i.e., invasive species removal)

# Estimated Budget For Establishing a Conservation Easement

## Option #1: Land Trust

- The city is responsible for a stewardship fee and title and survey work
- ~\$7,500 - \$10,000 - One-time donation to land trust stewardship fund
- Not included: Wetland Management Plan (would be separately funded under this scenario)

## Option #2: Land & Water Reserve Designation

- No upfront cost from the city; the state will provide funding for the following activities:
  - Boundary survey
  - Title work
  - Wetland management plan, which can inform a more accurate future budget, including maintenance costs
- To expedite the process and have more control over the vendor, the city can pay for costs related to boundary surveys and title work, but will not receive reimbursement. Some landowners select this option as a show of financial investment in the process.

# Task Force Recommendation

- Register the wetlands as a Land & Water Reserve through the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission
- The LWR route includes a wetland management plan funded by IDNR
- Fulfills City Task Force Directive to develop a CE recommendation while offering enough time to meaningfully craft a management plan with stakeholder engagement and consider entities for future management responsibilities

## Why the Land & Water Reserve?

- ✓ **No upfront cost to the city**
- ✓ **Flexibility to draft terms tailored to the site**
- ✓ **Wetland management plan that can inform annual maintenance and stewardship costs**
- ✓ **In-house expertise**

# Tentative Timeline

- April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025: Inaugural Task Force meeting; meetings set for every two weeks
- June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025: Study Session presenting Task Force findings and recommendations
- July/August 2025: City council votes
- August 2025 through September 2026: Develop management plan and draft conservation easement terms
- Suggested to complete the Wetland Management Plan by TIF District Closing in 2027 to inform budget needs

# Building Code Update

Preserving a Safe Built Environment



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# Purpose of Building Codes

- Rock Island adopted building codes as early as the 1950s to ensure a safe/sanitary built environment.
- Codes establish minimum standards for construction, renovation, maintenance, and sanitation.
- The International Code Council (ICC) develops model codes for use by communities around the world. It is standardized so the same minimum standards are used everywhere.
- Amendments are often adopted as well to better reflect specific local concerns.
- Model codes are released in three-year cycles and the City is presently using the 2015 cycle.

# Adopted Codes

1. Building Code (IBC)
2. Residential Code (IRC)
3. Existing Building Code (IEBC)
4. Energy Conservation Code(IECC)
5. Property Maintenance Code (IPMC)
6. Mechanical (IMC)
7. Fuel Gas Code (IFGC)
8. Plumbing Code (IPC)
9. Swimming Pool and Spa (ISPSC)
10. National Electrical Code (NEC)

# Why Update the Codes?

- FEMA has indicated they will not continue to provide aid in communities with outdated or nonexistent building code requirements.
- Public Act 103-0510, effective January 1, 2025, requires municipalities with building codes on the books to remain within three code cycles of the current ICC editions.
- Also, building methods and materials change over time so codes need to reflect that.

# Code Changes Proposed

- Neighboring communities have already made the update to the 2021 code cycle and staff recommend doing the same for consistency. It is very similar to the 2015 and 2018 cycles.
- In addition to previously adopted local amendments, staff propose two new ones.
  - Make it so structures shall be considered unfit for human occupancy if municipal water service is inactive or disconnected.
  - Adopt the ICC appendix for tiny houses and 3D-printed houses.

# Contractor Registration Update

- Contractor registration is also updated to make it easier to understand and consistent.
- Registration revocation process is clarified, based on severity of citations, failure to pull permits, and failure to not have work inspected.
- Owner-occupants are exempt from registering to perform work on the house they live in.
- Owners of building not classified as a single family dwelling may perform non-structural or cosmetic work without registering as determined by the Building Official.

# Other Changes

- Staff proposes consolidating language from different parts of the municipal code into a single new *Chapter 4: Building Regulations*.
- The health code, which includes food and beverage regulations, would be moved there.
- Other sections of *Chapter 7: Health* are eliminated, like carrier pigeon regulations, or moved to other chapters. Animal control rules to *Chapter 12: Police*, for example.

# *Chapter 4: Building Regulations*

1. The Building Official & the Codes
2. The Inspections Commission
3. Contractor Registration
4. Permits & Inspections
5. Fees & Fines
6. Rental Properties
7. Foreclosed, Vacant, & Abandoned Properties
8. Nuisances Properties
9. Dangerous Properties
10. Health Code

# The Sprinkler Question

*“Rock Island has sought to be a leader in the Quad Cities when it comes to building and life safety. One of the ways in which they have pursued this has been through the City’s decision, effective in 2018, not to amend the requirement within the [IRC] that all new one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses be built with fire sprinkler systems. The choice to keep the fire suppression system requirement in place has also been made by some other states and cities as they have adopted more recent editions of the IRC as part of their building codes; however, it has been far more common for communities to amend this requirement out of the code.”*

Strategic Housing Development Plan, Adopted April 2025

# The Sprinkler Question

- New strategic housing development plan recommends that the City reevaluate the requirement in single- and two-family houses.
- Staff have identified four alternatives.
  1. Keep the requirement the same.
  2. Keep the requirement the same but develop an incentive program to help folks pay for it.
  3. Adopt the Rock Island County sprinkler exemption/alternate (see next slide).
  4. Eliminate the requirement.

# The Sprinkler Question

- With one exception, all other neighboring communities have amended out the sprinkler requirement for one- and two-family houses.
- Rock Island County Sprinkler Exemption:  
*“An automatic residential fire sprinkler system is not required when floor assemblies, which are not otherwise required to be fire-rated by this code, are provided with a continuous horizontal separation, achieved through the installation of a half-inch gypsum membrane, five-eighths wood structural panel membrane, or an equivalent material on the underside of all floor framing members, stairs, and soffits.”*

# Conclusion

- Adoption of the 2021 building code cycle will bring the City into compliance with State law and add sensible, if relatively minor, updates.
- Staff are seeking feedback from the City Council regarding the sprinkler question.
- If the draft ordinance is agreeable, staff will present it to the Inspections Commission on July 16 and then the Council on July 28.

Questions?