



## Jobs, Economic Growth, Downtown Development Cited as Reasons for a Downtown Convention Center, Hotel

*Study Provides Foundation for Next Steps in Conversations with Community*

ROCKFORD, IL (January 13, 2010) — The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) today was joined by public, private and labor leaders and organizations to announce the completion and findings of a feasibility analysis for a downtown Rockford convention center and hotel development. The presentation featured key findings from the study, including a convention center's ability to spur job creation, leverage positive momentum in downtown and further establish the region as a visitor destination.

The study's findings concluded three main points concerning the development of a convention center and hotel in downtown Rockford:

- **Job creation and economic sustainability**— According to the analysis, a convention center and hotel would add \$36.6 million annually to the local economy from total visitor spending. The development of a convention center and hotel would provide immediate construction jobs as well as long-term hospitality industry jobs. The development would create new jobs, totaling 296 long-term, full-time jobs upon stabilization. The construction of the center and hotel would provide 450 jobs each year for two years.
- **Capitalize on positive momentum/development downtown**—A convention center and hotel should be considered part of an overall plan to redevelop and reposition downtown Rockford. The analysis suggested that a convention center and hotel would support existing momentum in downtown, as demonstrated by the Burpee/Discovery Center Museum expansion, MetroCentre renovations, removal of the pedestrian mall, construction of a new federal courthouse, and opening of new restaurant and retail establishments.
- **Develop New Visitor Industry Markets**— Visitors generate more than \$300 million in economic impact each year for the Rockford area, and according to the study, a convention center/hotel would increase that by more than 10 percent. The Rockford Region is known for its amateur sports facilities and the tournaments it hosts year-round; however, Rockford is at a competitive disadvantage and is losing meetings and conventions to other communities because it lacks appropriately sized facilities.

"We are missing out on opportunities to bring a significant amount of visitors and revenue to Rockford, and as a result are forfeiting the jobs that would be supported by those visitors," said Linda Heckert, RACVB Board Vice Chair. "The study found that a convention center would attract 120,000 additional visitors to Rockford every year. That would have a considerable economic impact on downtown and the entire region."

**Recommendation:** According to the study, a distinctive 58,500 square foot convention center with a 200-room “focused brand” hotel should be developed. Construction costs would be approximately \$30 - \$35 million for the convention center and \$22 million for the hotel. The convention center could be expanded at a later date in a Phase 2.

**Report provides a starting point:** According to John Groh, RACVB president/CEO, the analysis supplies the community and interested stakeholders with important information and provides a starting point to begin a discussion of whether or not a convention center should be pursued.

“A key question is, in these difficult times, how do we move forward, how do we create job for our citizens? One way could be to work together and make projects like this happen,” said Groh. “In 1983 SportsCore One opened in northwest Rockford. Today, our region is known across the country as a place where families come for sports tournaments. We have benefitted economically from sports tourism; and as a region we have continued to invest – opening Sportscore Two, Harlem Community Center’s sports complex, Road Ranger Stadium and more. Now, we need to look to the next 25 years and ask, what comes next?”

**Next Steps:** Several next steps were identified and announced: RACVB will facilitate opportunities for citizens and stakeholders to provide input and learn more about the concept. Additionally, small groups of community leaders will visit cities similar to Rockford to learn how other convention centers have been financed, are operated and what the benefits have been.

An electronic copy of the report is available at the RACVB’s website, [www.gorockford.com](http://www.gorockford.com).

The study was conducted by C.H. Johnson Consulting, Inc., a hospitality and real estate consulting firm in Chicago. The purpose of the study was to assess the demand, operating revenue and expense projections for a convention center in downtown Rockford.

RACVB is a private, non-profit organization established in 1984 to champion efforts to promote and advocate for the further development of the Rockford Region as an overnight visitor destination. The RACVB adds wealth to the region’s economy by investing in marketing, sales, advocacy and educational programs that grow tourism. For more information go to [www.gorockford.com](http://www.gorockford.com).

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## Statements of Support

**Winnebago County Board Chairman Scott Christiansen:** "This is an important opportunity to provide our community with what it needs most: jobs. This venue will bring nearly 300 permanent full-time jobs, as well as spur economic growth for the entire region. The community will see a huge return on investment from this development, and it will help increase civic pride and positive recognition in our city."

**Mayor Larry Morrissey, City of Rockford:** "I appreciate all the hard work and resources that have developed a positive feasibility report for a downtown hotel and convention center. I look forward to working with our City Council, the RACVB, and the Rock River Development Partnership, as well as other stakeholders to bring a detailed project proposal forward."

**Janyce Fadden, Rockford Area Economic Development Council President:** "It's important that we have a convention center/hotel in the Rockford area that will allow us to hold trade shows and professional meetings for 500 to 600 people that will complement industries we have here, like aerospace, machine tool and more. Right now we are not able to attract those mid-sized events and we need to. Capturing those conventions and meetings will add to the stature of our region and expand our reputation as an industry leader."

**Einar Forsman, Rockford Chamber of Commerce President and CEO:** "As an advocate for business growth, the Rockford Chamber of Commerce supports the development of a convention center and hotel development in downtown because of the immediate and long-term benefits it will bring to local businesses and the community overall. For many years we missed out on convention markets in Illinois due to limited convention space. The convention center as described will greatly enhance our market position. For the near and long term this development would directly address one of our community's greatest challenges by providing high-paying construction jobs as well as long-term hospitality industry jobs."

**Dwight Hopfauf, Rockford Area Hotel and Motel Association President:** "The development of a convention center is an important step to make sure our hospitality market is top of the line, and offers the diversity and demanded space and amenities needed to bring visitors to Rockford and keep them coming back."

**Peter Provenzano, Rock River Development Partnership Chairman:** The Rock River Development Partnership supports the development of a convention center and hotels in downtown Rockford. Our focus is to optimize the environment and create vibrancy downtown for both residents and visitors which will help ensure the success of the convention center. We look forward to participating in and perhaps facilitating discussions as to how a convention center and hotels would enhance the neighboring blocks and addresses in our center city.

**Emily Hartzog, River District Association Board President:** "We are excited to hear more about the study regarding the possibility of a convention center downtown. Our downtown already houses a variety of municipal and civic assets, and a convention center would add to that and spur growth not only for our downtown, but our entire community."

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**Darcy Bucholz, Boone/Winnebago Counties Workforce Investment Board Executive Director:** "Our community is in need of jobs and the results of this study provide real insight into how net-new jobs can be added to assist in the wealth of our citizens and our region. We're glad to see an organization such as the RACVB look at opportunities to assist in job creation and we applaud their efforts to bring the idea of a convention center to the table for further discussion."

**Linda Dennis, Rockford Art Museum Executive Director:**

"A convention center located in downtown Rockford would provide exciting benefits for area attractions, like the Rockford Art Museum. We believe the more density of people that regularly come to the area also will take the opportunity to stop in at our museums and other downtown destinations which in turn provides us with greater visibility and attendance."

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