

I looked at my phone a few minutes after City Council ended and saw a tweet from Rockford Register Star reporter Kevin Haas, "Loud applause from the gallery after Ziock hotel deal approved."

On Monday, April 7, the Rockford City Council approved an agreement between the City of Rockford and Gorman & Company, developers from Madison, WI, to redevelop the former 13-story Amerock building into a 150 room hotel with an adjacent 20,000 square feet of conference space and a 500 stall parking deck.

Gorman & Company will spend \$52 million dollars to renovate the behemoth that towers over Davis Park and the Rock River in downtown Rockford. It is no small undertaking, but they are experienced with projects like this. In Milwaukee, they recently opened the Brewery Inn & Suites; once home to the Pabst Brewery, the building is now an upscale 90-room boutique hotel. At the time construction began, the former brewery was in the same shape, if not worse, than the current state of the Amerock building. They have the experience and the financial backing to bring quality development to our downtown.

Constructed as a textile manufacturing facility approximately 100 years ago, Amerock has been vacant for over 20 years. There have been talks of demolition and alternately redevelopment for years. Much work is still ahead; however, the 13-1 vote was crucial and demonstrates great potential and optimism.

As I reflect on what this may mean for tourism to our region, I think about the months from April to October when visitors are traveling as far north as Janesville and other nearby cities to find a place to stay because our hotels are full, often due to large sports tournaments. I think about the meetings and conferences we can bring to the Region year-round that otherwise might not select Rockford. And I think about how well the Amerock hotel development will complement the downtown sports complex, as well as other events taking place at BMO Harris Bank Center, the Coronado Theater and Prairie Street Brewhouse.

But bigger than the impact this will have on the tourism industry is the impact this will have on the community. Development of Amerock into a downtown hotel means 372 construction jobs along with 281 full time equivalent permanent jobs at the hotel and conference center. After all, visitors mean jobs.

Development of Amerock also means development of neighboring properties and the continued resurgence of downtown Rockford. Justin Fern of Urban Equity Properties recently acquired the 60,000 square foot Hanley Furniture building at the corner of Main and Chestnut Streets. Fern stated in the Rockford Register Star that he would not move forward on his development unless Amerock also moved forward. Fern is also renovating buildings in the 300 and 400 blocks of East State St.

We have so much opportunity in front of us. Downtown is rising. Rockford is rising.

In closing, on behalf of the RACVB, I want to be sure to thank our City of Rockford Aldermen and City staff for their diligence and support of the development agreement with Gorman and Company. And thank you to Gorman for believing and investing in Rockford.