

STATE OF THE CITY

William B. Wescott, Mayor

MARCH 6, 2018

Good evening members of the City Council, City Administrator, City Clerk, Department Heads, City Attorney and you the residents of the City of Rock Falls.

I begin my remarks this evening by sharing with you my wish that we continue our collective passions to work together by collaboration, communication and cooperation. Allowing us to craft a vision that plans for not only the here and now, but for the future of our City. My colleagues on the City Council and I work alongside City Staff, government partners, educators, residents and the business community focusing on issues that have a direct effect and matter to all of us. Together we strive to do what is necessary to strengthen our community and enhance the lives of those that call Rock Falls home. In 2017, we achieved many milestones that in and of themselves are just stepping stones to a brighter future for our community. One that stands out is our Sesquicentennial and the weeklong celebration of our communities 150 years of existence here on the south bank of the Rock River.

That celebration allowed us, to not only take a look back at our history, but also look forward to what lies ahead. The countless hours of dedication from volunteers, civic groups, churches, and businesses produced a celebration that will long be remembered.

In July we dedicated the RB& W Riverfront Park, and witnessed the completion of Phase 1, 2 and 3, of the Park's design. We still need to complete the amphitheater, water feature, rest rooms and kiosk and in time the skate park. However, the work that was completed opened the door to opportunity. An opportunity for Rock Falls to create a vibrant waterfront district which combines nature, human innovation and hard work and most importantly, a community identity to serve as an active and dynamic community focal point. It would be hard for anyone to not agree, that we saw that come to fruition in the sesquicentennial events and other events that were held there last year.

And coming in 2018 even more events and opportunities for others to see what we have to offer.

The RB&W Riverfront Park in addition to the Holiday Inn & Suites, make the RB&W District now primed for mixed use redevelopment of a quality and standard that is true to the history and vision of the Uptown and its many stakeholders and partners going forward.

This revitalization has and will continue to improve the quality of life for our residents, and at the same time, increase the viability of business opportunities in and around the Uptown. Which in the end increases the quality and frequency of visits by both natives of our community, but just as importantly those from outside of our community which increase economic opportunities as well.

While taking the necessary steps to continue enhancing our overall quality of life, we maintain a vigilant focus on the City's on-going fiscal sustainability, maintained a balance budget, continued to maintain healthy reserves in accordance with our financial policies, and invested in infrastructure improvement in both electric, water, wastewater, and our roads.

We continue to maintain fiscal stability, despite continues challenges from our State government via mandates and unsustainable and unpredictable policy decisions. Even with the State finally passing a budget, municipalities are faced with continued challenges as the State looks to take more monies away from us via CPPRT and LDGF taxes, as well as, administrative fees for Non-home rule sale tax, to be able use them for their own use instead of their intended use at the municipal level.

You the residents, continue to voice concerns on our roads, and we know that you are not happy with that part of our infrastructure, things are not happening fast enough. I can tell you that no one sitting here in a position of leadership feels that we are anywhere near where we want be with our road program either, however, we are moving forward.

The monies received from the non-home rule sales tax earmarked for roads and infrastructure are being put to good use, but we have a large “to do list” that is going to take time to get done. We were behind right from the beginning.

An area of continued commitment this past year has been in our continued diligence with our Brownfields projects. This past December, City Administrator Blackert and I were honored to be asked for the second time in three years to attend the National Brownfields Training Conference and talk about our success in the area of revitalization of Brownfields. A great honor was bestowed upon the City and as such, to all of the people who have been involved in our projects over the years.

The City of Rock Falls was named the Region 5 USEPA award winner for “Outstanding Contributions to Brownfield Site Redevelopment.” It has been and remains one of the visions of the City, to open up more of the Riverfront, for development. To that end and with the rekindled support of the Illinois EPA and our ongoing collaboration with the USEPA Region 5 team it is happening. In July we were able to see the 150 year old Limestone building come down. Sad as it was for many of us, it provides for another new beginning from an economic standpoint. The City has applied for and is waiting for the awarding of two cleanup grants, each valued at \$200,000 to complete that project.

In addition, the City has learned that it is one of three (3) cities in Illinois to receive an \$800,000 Revolving Loan Fund award for further assessment and cleanup on the Parish Alford property.

The cleanup of both of these properties opens the door of unlimited potential for developments to occur, in addition to the RB&W development south of the park, and the Route 40 interchange development which are invaluable to the future development and growth of the municipality.

Lastly, starting March 19th you will begin to see movement around the city as we begin the build out of the backbone for the Rock Falls Fiber Net Project. It is coming... Rock Falls will become a gig-a-bit City. Bringing high speed fiber optic internet to the home and business community with the same reliability that we provide with our other utilities. Our marketing tools are nearing final completion, and when they become available you will be able to see the new face of internet services in Rock Falls.

This new service will provide the user greater bandwidth and speed of internet. A question that I was asked recently, was why this is so important?

Broadband is essential to innovate and thrive in the digital economy, by improving economic competitiveness, enhancing public safety, expanding educational opportunities, improving government and citizen engagement, promote skill development and job growth.

Continuing studies show that access to high-quality broadband boosts property values and contribute to economic vitality. Fiber connectivity encourages businesses to stay, helps businesses grow and become more productive, and attract new businesses, particularly high tech industries. It supports home-based start up businesses and helps a new class of workers to telecommute. It makes a community more attractive, especially for young people, which can stem the population loss that many communities are experiencing. While fiber to the home is only one component of an overall economic development strategy, it is a vitally important one.

As we dive into 2018, we remain deeply committed to meeting the needs of our community now and into the future. On the horizon, great things are coming; we have people's attention; and they are watching what we are doing; and waiting to see what is coming next.

