

# **HOPE VI**

## **Focus Area Plan**

**August 2007**

## Introduction

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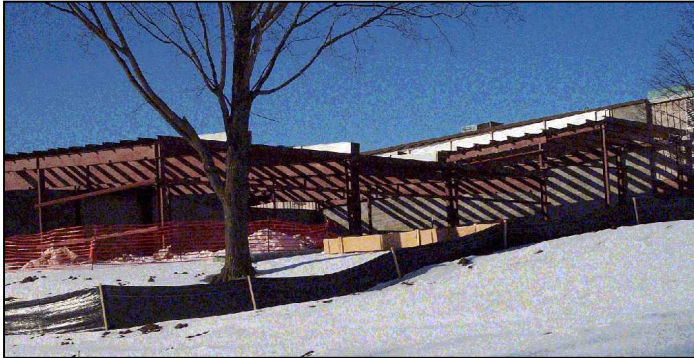
In mid-2006, the HOPE VI Focus Area was selected as one of two neighborhoods in which the City would work to create a five-year plan for neighborhood improvements. Selection was based on anticipated impacts of major projects in the area, primarily the HOPE VI project, which funded construction of over 100 homes and the demolition of the Winnebago County Housing Authority's Champion Park apartments. Other plans for the area whose implementation also impact the future planning of the Hope VI Focus Area are the redevelopment of the Rockford Housing Development Corporation's Concord Commons Apartments, the Springfield Corridor Study, and the West State Corridor Plan.



The planning process began with the appointment of a Task Force with representation from several stakeholders in the neighborhood. Public agencies participating included the Winnebago County Housing Authority, Rockford Housing Authority, Rockford Park District, Rockford Public Schools, Rockford Mass Transit District, and elected officials from the city of Rockford and the Winnebago County Board. Other task force participants represented Comprehensive Community Solutions (CCS), Star Development, Concord College, Habitat for Humanity, Northern Illinois University, United Faith Baptist Church, and Health Systems Research.

The first two Task Force meetings were actually joint meetings with a similar task force set up to prepare a neighborhood plan for the College-Seminary area in the central part of the city. The joint meeting approach was used because of the significant overlap in membership of the stakeholder groups for both areas. Each task force began to meet independently starting in December of 2006.





The Hope VI Task Force was assisted by a variety of people, including city staff and representatives of other organizations. Initial work involved city assistance in standard planning practices of reviewing current conditions. This practice included a survey of housing conditions, a review of completed and planned infrastructure projects, and the collection of statistics on demographics, housing, and crime data. The planning process also used all available avenues to gain input on what residents of the HOPE VI area were concerned about and what improvements they were seeking for the neighborhood. Community input was obtained through representation from stakeholders at task force

meetings, as well as a comprehensive survey that was sent out to hundreds of area residents. With comprehensive mapping, survey, and statistical information at hand, the task force meetings began to identify and outline specific critical issues and neighborhood assets as the foundation for formulating the future goals for improving the focus area. These goals in turn produced specific action steps that would allow for clear measures of progress as the plan goals are implemented.

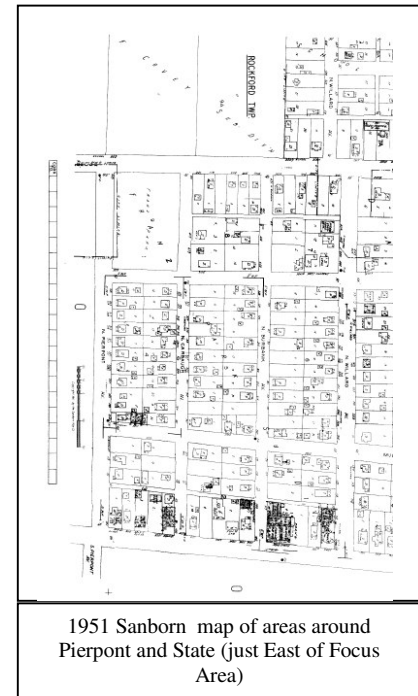
## **History of the Hope VI Focus Area**

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Historical maps and records show that the western edge of the Rockford area served as a transitory area between the urbanized area of the city and primarily rural areas heading west. The Focus Area falls in what was known as the “West End” neighborhood of the city. From the early days of the city’s development until the mid- 1950s, Rockford had grown in a concentric pattern, with annexations and development spreading in fairly equal distances away from downtown in each direction. The West End was located beyond this concentric pattern, and has had scattered and irregular development characterized by modest “farmette” style development, with long deep lots, developed on private wells and septic systems. A consistent street network and public utility system had been slow to develop, in part due to the difficult process to fully annex the area into the city. While the first parts of the focus area were brought into the city in 1959, it wasn’t until 2005 that all the land within the focus area fell within city limits.

West State Street, which forms the northern border of the focus area, served as a thoroughfare through all of greater Rockford and as a gateway to the smaller communities in Northwest Illinois. From 1904 to 1930 an interurban rail line traveled from Rockford west to Freeport, with stops in Winnebago, Pecatonica, and Ridott along the route. A passenger platform for “whistle stop” passenger rail service was located close to the current intersection of Springfield and West State. This time of regional commuter rail activity also was when most of the lots in the focus area had been platted. Landowners from 1910 to the late 1920s divided up land in the focus area into mid-size lots for residential development, likely to take advantage of the commuter rail service located up the street. A 1941 USGS map of Winnebago County shows scattered structures on these semi-rural lots, resulting in a housing density less than half that of areas closer to the city to the east. This area was laid out with a street grid network that was less dense and had wider blocks and fewer east/west cross streets than the areas within Rockford’s city limits to the east.

Located for much of Rockford’s history on the periphery of major growth areas, land records for the area have not been done at a scale as detailed as other parts of Rockford. Sanborn maps from 1951, while not showing details within the focus area, do highlight some institutions important to the area’s connection with the larger region and the city of Rockford. Lincoln Park Public School, constructed in 1914, was just Northwest of the focus area at the Northwest corner of Springfield and West State. It was torn down a few years ago. The County Highway Department garage complex is shown and is still located at the Southwest corner of Springfield and Kennett Avenues. Dennis School, which still stands, is directly Southwest of the Focus Area, at the southern end of Lincoln Park Boulevard.



A significant influence on the character and growth of the focus area and the city as a whole was the construction of the Illinois Tollway in 1956, several miles east of Rockford’s center. While there were earlier plans for this tollway to go through downtown, these plans were scrapped in order to expedite construction. The Tollway made it much easier to travel from Chicago to Rockford and on towards Galena. At this time, the historic town of Galena



and Northwestern Illinois' surrounding natural areas were becoming major regional tourist destinations. Many Chicagoans were now able to visit or pass through Rockford on day trips seeking fresh air, recreation, and to experience Galena's unique built history, which predated the Chicago Fire. U.S. Route 20, which became State Street within Rockford city limits, took motorists off the tollway on the city's east side and through the heart of Rockford before heading west to Galena and into Iowa through Dubuque. For about 10 years West State Street and the northern edge of the focus area became a major commercial corridor oriented towards these travelers, lined with motels, gas stations, and restaurants. In 1966, however, the U.S. 20 bypass was completed and diverted automobile activity to the city's far south and far west sides. The automobile traffic that supported the activities and businesses of West State Street could now move directly from the tollway exits and bypass most of the city and the West End neighborhood before joining up with the older route 20 in western Winnebago County. This new diverted major road network caused severe deterioration of commercial properties and disinvestment in the Hope VI Focus Area and surrounding neighborhoods. Rockford's growth pattern, which had up to this point shown steady growth in all directions from the city's center, became lopsided towards the city's eastern boundaries. Hotels, motor lodges and other tollway-oriented development boomed and East State Street grew into a major commercial strip, with residential subdivisions being developed at a steady clip to the street's northeast, east and southeast. The West End saw the opposite of this positive growth trend, as rising crime rates and abandoned or deteriorating buildings contributed to what historian Jon Lundin called a "frontier mentality" to the area.\*



Residents of the Hope VI and West End area in the late '50s and early '60s were, for the most part, families that lived in single family, low-standard housing with absentee landlords. The fragmented annexation pattern and incomplete road networks were accentuated with a common sight of abandoned trailers being used for housing, which often had little or no heat and no running water. Some families in the area were in the process of purchasing low-cost homes at high prices. While most of these households had at least one employed member, many received unemployment compensation, A.D.C., or some other financial aid. Nonetheless, in 1952, residents of the neighborhood formed



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\* Lundin, Jon W. (1996) Rockford: An Illustrated History. Tarzana, CA: American Historical Press. p. 158.

the Washington Park Improvement Committee to address the social problems and youth delinquency in the area that was causing concerns among residents and local officials. The committee (later the Washington Park Improvement Association) created their own lighting district and running water became available to a number of blocks. As more of the neighborhood became annexed into the city, many condemned homes were torn down and other eyesores were removed through spring clean-ups. In 1958, the Washington Park Community Recreation Center was dedicated, and throughout the years various expansions of the facility have made it a key center for community activity within the focus area and the larger neighborhood. The Lincolnwood Shopping Center, which served residents for general commercial needs and included a grocery store, was constructed on the northeast lots of the focus area along Concord Avenue during this decade.

Shortly after the construction of the U.S. 20 bypass, the need for adequate housing in the focus area grew as condemned homes were being demolished. This need resulted in the quick development of two publicly subsidized housing complexes.



Champion Park, built in 1967, was the first family development operated by the Winnebago County Housing Authority and consisted of 75 units in 1 and 2 story multifamily structures. Next to Champion Park but operated by the Rockford Housing Development Corporation were the Concord Commons Apartments, a 216 unit complex consisting of several 3-story apartment buildings. These developments concentrated a high level of minority and low-income households in compact high-density complexes, isolated from their surrounding neighborhood of single family homes by their character and by physical barriers such as fencing,

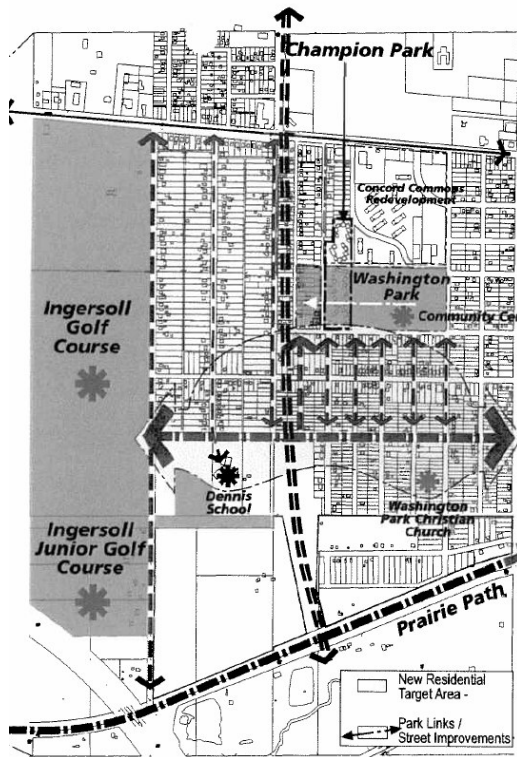
vacant land, and dense foliage. Shortly after this public housing was built, the Lincolnwood Shopping Center closed, and a large vacant lot remains at the former shopping area's site, in effect creating a large setback for the Concord Commons property. Since the center's closing, a number of efforts have been made to address the commercial needs for the area, with very limited success. The construction of a new school and City investment of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for commercial use along West State Street have had no significant impact. New commercial development at West State and Central, east of Washington Park, has failed to attract new businesses and only currently serves a specialized market for farming. Existing services in the focus area neighborhood consist of a small convenience store, a few bars, and an automotive repair shop. Without nearby services for



affordable groceries, clothing, and other goods, many residents, especially those in the housing complexes, had to rely on infrequent transit services for even the most basic of household needs.

Presently, very visible changes are happening within the focus area. The Winnebago County Housing Authority successfully applied for funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI program, and the Champion Park apartments were demolished in August of 2007. A redevelopment agreement for the Concord Commons apartments is also

being negotiated. Former residents of Champion Park have access to several new homes in the focus area that have been built with HOPE VI funds. By 2005, all of the focus area had been annexed into the city, and gradual improvements are being made to modernize and complete the street grid and utility network. Planning efforts over the past few years have laid out initiatives to make Springfield Avenue a major thoroughfare, and to recapture some of the past business activity on West State Street that made it an attractive commercial corridor over four decades ago. A neighborhood that had once been marginalized and avoided by much of Rockford's population is now experiencing new development and showing exciting promise to be a stable and attractive neighborhood that will improve the image of the city's West Side.





## Description and Analysis

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### Population

Demographics in the Hope VI focus area\* have changed due to the relocation of residents of the Champion Park Housing Development since 2000 Census figures were collected. The census block containing the Champion Park development had a population of 126 in the year 2000. Consequently, all of the following information relates to the full neighborhood, including former Champion Park residents and also predates any new construction that has occurred in the last several years.

Total Population – The 2000 Census of the Hope VI neighborhood showed a population of 2141, a slight increase (1.8%) over 1990's figures. The citywide population increase for the same period was 7.2%.

Age Breakdown - As can be seen from the table to the right, different general age groups in the focus area have had a varied range of population changes between censuses. Preschoolers under the age of 5 decreased from 336 to 295, a drop of 12.2%. Citywide there was an increase by nearly 3% in the population of the same age range. The number of school-age children (ages 5-17) showed virtually no change (564 vs. 562). Citywide there was an increase of 13%. Younger working age adults, whose ages fell between 18 and 44, increased in population by almost 9%, compared to a tiny increase of .68% for this age range citywide. Middle-aged individuals between 45 and 64 grew from 262 to 301 over 10 years, a 14.9% increase compared to a 24.1% increase among the entire city of Rockford. Seniors (65 and over) actually decreased by nearly 14% within the Focus Area while increasing by 3.6% citywide. The median age is 24.6 compared to the citywide median of 34.4.

| Population of Hope VI Focus Area |      |      |
|----------------------------------|------|------|
|                                  |      |      |
| Year                             | 2000 | 1990 |
|                                  |      |      |
| TOTAL                            | 2141 | 2104 |
|                                  |      |      |
| Under Age 5                      | 295  | 336  |
| Ages 5-17                        | 562  | 564  |
| Ages 18-44                       | 818  | 751  |
| Ages 45-64                       | 301  | 262  |
| Ages 65 and Over                 | 165  | 191  |

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\* For 2000 Census data, the Hope VI area consists of Census Tract 24, Block Groups 1 and 3. For 1990, data is for CT24, BG 4 and 5, and 65% of BG6.



**Ethnicity** – The ethnic composition of the focus area remained stable relative to the city as a whole. White population decreased by close to 2 percentage points from 26.2% to 22.4% from 1990 to 2000, compared to a citywide decrease of 8 percent. The African-American population decreased slightly from 1528 to 1497. While the percentage of African-Americans in the focus area decreased, they still composed 70% of the total population and were the area's largest ethnic group. Hispanics (of any race) increased their share of the population from 2.8% in 1990 to 6.4% in 2000, while there were 54 individuals who declared themselves of mixed race in 2000, approximately 2.5% of the total Hope VI Focus Area Population.

**Households & Families** – Of the 725 households in the Hope VI Focus Area in 2000, 73.9% were family households and 11% were married couples with children under 18. In the city of Rockford as a whole, 63.1% of households consisted of family households, and 19.3% of total households had married couples with children under 18. Among family households with children, 23% had a single mother as their head of households. Overall households in the Hope VI Focus Area grew by 4.6% from 1990 to 2000 (compared to 7.9% for the entire city) and families with children declined by 15.9% during the same period (compared to a 1.8% decrease among the same types of households for the city of Rockford).

**Income** – Median household income in the neighborhood was \$21,712 in 2000. This figure is 57.6% of the citywide median of \$37,667. 31.2% of the population in this area were living below the poverty level in 2000, compared with 14% citywide. While the percentage of households receiving public assistance was down in 2000 from 1990 (12% vs. 31%), it was still significantly higher than the citywide percentage of 4.5%.

**Educational Attainment** – 47.4% of the 991 people in the focus area aged 25 and over did not receive a high school diploma, compared with 22.3% citywide. Only 5.5 % had received a bachelor's or graduate degree, compared with 19.8% citywide.

**Employment** – The unemployment rate in this area was 23.3% compared to 4.5% citywide. Of the 577 individuals with jobs, 78.3% drove to work alone; only 4.5% used public transportation.

## **Housing**

Ownership – 55% of all households are rental, compared to 39% citywide.

Vacancy Rate – The area's vacancy rate increased between 1990 and 2000, going from 12.8% to 17.0%. The city of Rockford's vacancy rate increased from 5.7% to 6.9% during the same time

Housing Condition – A windshield survey conducted by city staff in the fall of 2006 found that 53.4% of the 148 structures (79 total) in the area were considered to be in good condition. 41.2% of structures were found to be in deteriorated condition, i.e. needing minor repair or cleanup. 8 remaining homes were considered dilapidated and needed major rehabilitation. Among all of these structures, 12 were unoccupied, and 4 were boarded up.

Age of Housing – Based on the Census, 688 (91%) of the 755 housing units in the Focus Area were built before 1980, with the median year for construction being 1956. Citywide, 83% of housing units were built before 1980.

Housing Costs – Median rent in the Focus Area was \$447 in 2000 compared with \$498 citywide. 38% of renters pay 30% or more for housing, slightly lower than the citywide figure of 34.4%. Median value of owner-occupied homes in the Focus Area was \$38,355, less than half the citywide median of \$79,400. This has undoubtedly changed with the construction of new homes in the Focus Area since 2000. 21.6% of homeowners pay 30% or more of their income for housing, compared with 19% citywide.

Subsidized Housing – In 2000, two subsidized housing complexes existed within the focus area. Champion Park, which housed 126 residents at the time, has recently been demolished with HOPE VI program funds. The other remaining housing complex, Concord Commons, made up most of a 2000 census block that had 688 residents in 2000. In February of 2006, the occupancy rate for the 216-unit Concord Commons complex was 78%.

## **Crime Data**

Crime data was collected for the years 2004 and 2005 for the specific subbeats that covered the Hope VI Focus Area. Most of the population of the northern side of the Hope VI Focus Area (which includes Concord Commons) is covered by subbeat 54, while subbeat 55 covers southern parts of the Focus Area which are in Rockford city limits. Recent annexations over the past year which have incorporated all of the Hope VI Focus Area into the city of Rockford has changed the region where crime statistics are collected, making cross-year comparisons since 2005 problematic. The Rockford Police Department, since June of 2006 has also changed its crime reporting format and system.

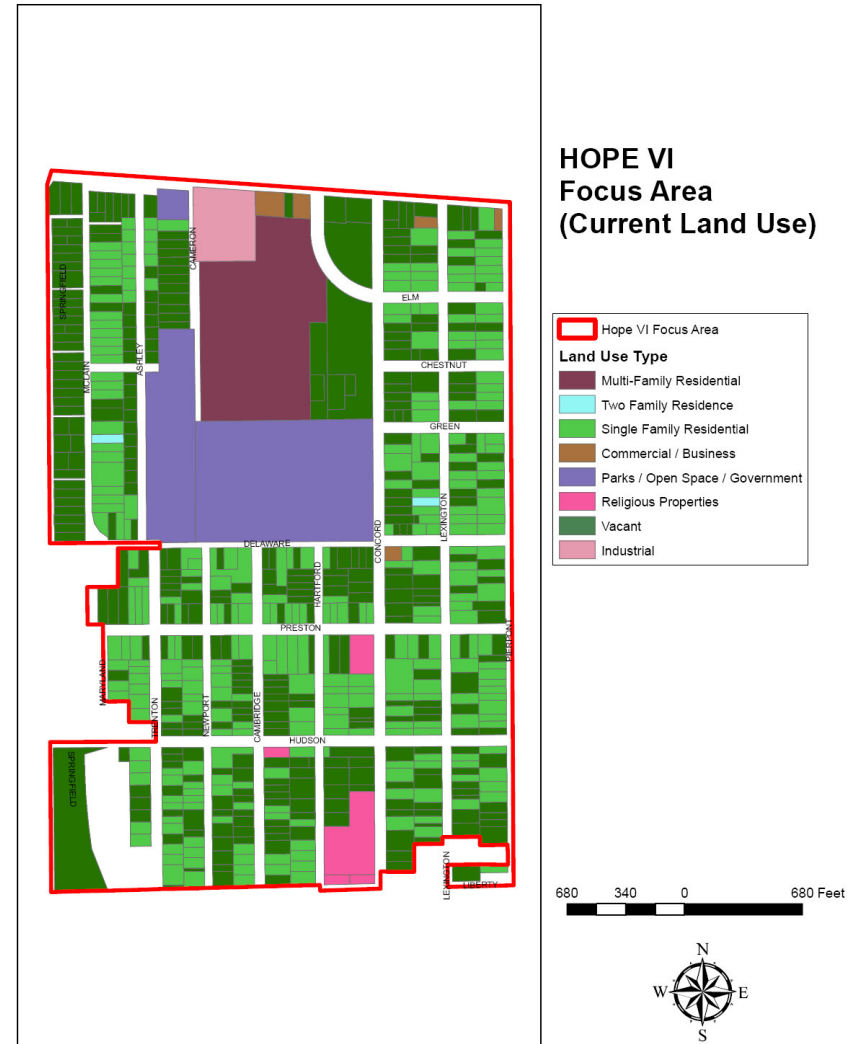
The latest full year of crime data available from 2005 showed the following types of offenses which occurred in the subbeats that include the focus area.

Between 2004 and 2005 total offenses decreased by over 18%. Some specific crimes that had a substantial increase of incidents were thefts, which rose 53.9% from 2004 to 2005, and drug offenses, which rose 61.5% during the selected period. Assault and Battery cases decreased by 50% and Auto Thefts decreased by 41.7%

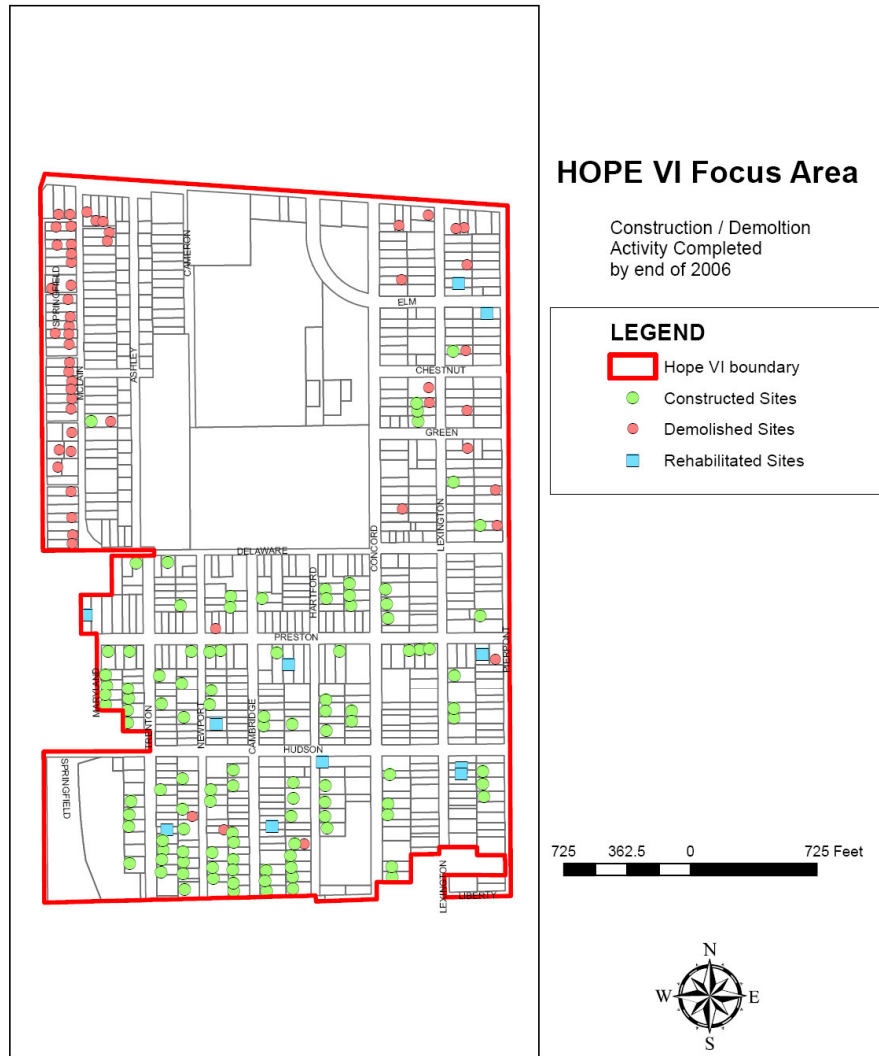
| <b>HOPE VI Focus Area Crime Statistics</b> |                    |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Offense</b>                             | <b>2005 Totals</b> |
| <b>Homicide</b>                            | 2                  |
| <b>Sexual Assault</b>                      | 0                  |
| <b>Robbery</b>                             | 8                  |
| <b>Assault &amp; Battery</b>               | 12                 |
| <b>Burglary</b>                            | 24                 |
| <b>Burglary to Vehicle</b>                 | 8                  |
| <b>Theft</b>                               | 20                 |
| <b>Auto Theft</b>                          | 7                  |
| <b>All Weapons Offenses</b>                | 4                  |
| <b>All Drug Offenses</b>                   | 21                 |
| <b>Domestic Battery</b>                    | 41                 |

## Land Use and Zoning

The bulk of the HOPE VI Focus Area is residential in character. Current land use records show primarily single family residences in the focus area mixed with scattered vacant parcels. The vacant status of parcels on the Focus Area's western edge are mostly due to the recent expansion of the Springfield Corridor which involved the demolition of some existing structures that had existed along that road. The open space of Washington Park is the central park facility to the area. Other government property includes the former site of Champion Park apartments, which will eventually be part of Washington Park's expansion to the west, and a West Suburban Fire Station along West State. The rest of West State Street within the focus area contain abandoned commercial and industrially zoned properties, remnants of the corridor's past active use as a automobile gateway to northwestern Illinois communities. Three religious properties exist among residential streets south of Preston Avenue. The only multi-family residential property is the Rockford Housing Authority's Concord Commons Apartments, just south of West State Street and north of Washington Park. The majority of the focus area is zoned R1, with the exception of the Concord Commons apartments which are zoned R3, a light industrial site along West State zoned I1, and remaining properties zoned C3 along West State from areas north of Concord Commons east to Pierpont Avenue.



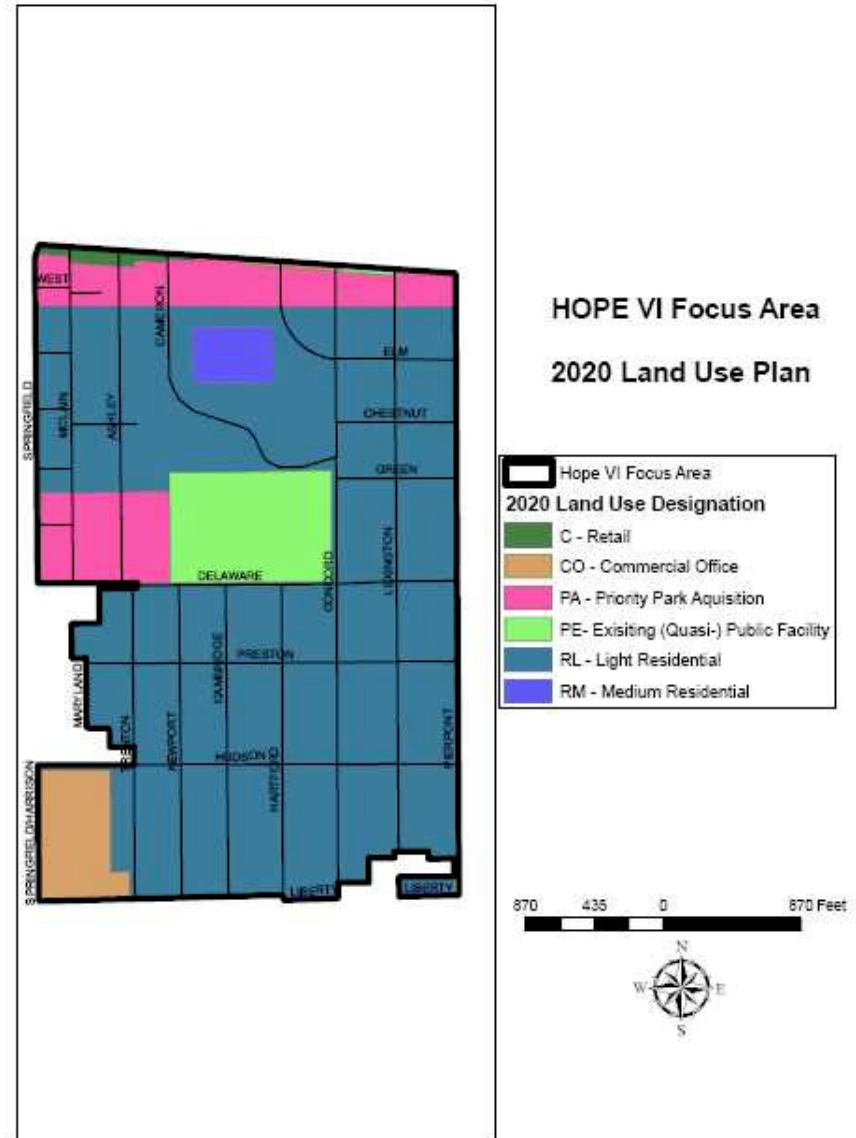




Even recent land use records of the Hope VI Focus Area are going to have some inaccuracies due to roadway expansions and the massive amount of new residential construction being coordinated with HOPE VI program funds. A second map showing property demolition, rehabilitation, and new construction since the HOPE VI project began demonstrates that many of the large groups of vacant parcels are being filled with new residences. Additional construction is planned for more parcels in the southern part of the focus area to be completed by the end of 2007.

Future plans for the land use composition of the focus area are reflected in the map for the City of Rockford's 2020 Plan. Originally approved by City Council in 2004, the 2020 plan map that covers the focus area recommends changes reflected in plans made for the area over the past several years. A strip on the entire Northern side of the focus area is designated PA for Park Acquisition, reflecting an eventual planned greenway between an improved West State Street corridor and an East/West frontage road through residential neighborhoods. More PA designated land is to the west of Washington Park, as part of the HOPE VI project plans that include the demolition of Champion Park also call for expanded green space to eventually connect to Ingersoll Golf Course and Park, west of Springfield Avenue. A smaller Medium Density Residential (RM) area will be part of redevelopment plans for Concord Commons, which will involve a mixed-use, less compact

development. The far southwestern corner of the focus area contains land along the Springfield/Harrison connector designated for Commercial and Office space (CO), a suitable use considering the expansion of Springfield Avenue and its emergence as a new commercial corridor. In general, the 2020 Plan will help maintain the focus area as a stable, attractive residential neighborhood offering homes to people of all income backgrounds. Growth in the area will also ensure close proximity to basic commercial services, with easy access to major arterial roads that can take residents to other parts of the city efficiently.



## **Human Services Information**

Community and social services in the focus area have historically centered on the programming offered at Washington Park Community Recreation Center. During the early existence of the center in the '50s and '60s, programs offered at the site included a broad range of recreational activities, as well as community service programs that included an accredited Kindergarten, a tutoring program, Well Baby Clinics, and the development of a neighborhood library. The center played an important role in curbing juvenile delinquency and was a popular meeting place for neighborhood groups.

In 1997, the City of Rockford's Department of Human Services, Community Services Division, set up their first branch office in the neighborhood in an apartment in the Concord Commons residences. This office was staffed for half days three to five days a week, and provided counseling, intervention, phone access, assistance in applying for funds to pay utilities, and referrals to other agencies. Other programs were brought to Concord Commons through this arrangement, with presenters that included Rock Valley College, the Public School District's Parent Information Center, and a gang intervention program. Other services included a pantry for non-food items and school supplies and a self-sufficiency program. The Department of Human Services left their Concord Commons office in 2002.

In 2002, Northern Illinois University received a grant from HUD through the Community Outreach Partnership Program (COPC) to set up an outreach office at Concord Commons. NIU, through the Center for Governmental Studies, established Concord "College" for program planning, administration, and use by community groups. Concord College's activities included a series of regular community surveys to identify skills and positive attributes of people living in Concord Commons. Programs provided through the College included computer skills training, non-traditional mental health services, and a business resource center. Concord College lost its funding in 2007.

In addition to the recreational programs the Rockford Park District provides, the Washington Park Community Recreation Center has also provided space for organizations providing coursework on housing ownership, credit counseling, literacy, GED instruction, and other subjects. WCHA obtained a Neighborhood Networks grant from HUD in 2004 to address education and employment needs of the low-income neighborhood population. The Neighborhood Networks coordinator has worked with residents in preparing resumes, conducting job searches, and overcoming obstacles to employment such as

felony conviction and child care problems. A recently renovated portion of the Center houses a technology center with 20 computers and the new offices of the Winnebago County Housing Authority.

### **Survey Results**

To assist with the development of the Washington Park neighborhood and nearby areas, Winnebago County and its Housing Authority, the city of Rockford, and the Rockford Park District contracted with Health Systems Research at the University of Illinois College of Medicine to conduct a household survey of Focus Area residents in the Fall of 2006. The purpose of the survey was to assess satisfaction with the services and interests in the future activities of the Washington Park Community Recreation Center. The survey was also used to get a sense of the level of satisfaction with the general characteristics and services of the neighborhood. Surveys were mailed to all households within designated zip codes and census tracts and were also handed out at community meetings in October of 2006. Out of the 2,255 surveys that were sent, 12.2% were returned, with a total of 275 respondents.

The surveys provided the following key inputs:

- 48.7% of respondents have lived at their current address for 10 or more years. 35.6% of the respondents were over 55 years old.
- 65.5% of respondents had never used Washington Park CRC facilities. When offered a list of possible reasons for not using CRC or not using it more often and allowed to select all reasons that apply, 57.8% chose the option "Don't know what is being offered.", 24.4% selected "Security in the neighborhood is not sufficient", and 24.0% selected "Don't feel safe being there".
- Eight in ten (80.4%) respondents do not believe that enough stores and services are present in the neighborhood.
- 62.6% of respondents (119 total) that were given the opportunity to write in what stores or services were needed the most wrote down the need for a grocery store. Other services weren't mentioned as frequently; services that received 20-30 specific mentions were restaurants, retail/general stores, and pharmacies.

- When presented with a list of 19 possible neighborhood improvements and instructions were given to check all improvements the neighborhood needs, participants checked an average of 8.3 listed improvements. The most popular improvements needed were:
  - ◆ More retail shops, variety = 71.3% of participants
  - ◆ Removal of vacant / boarded-up dilapidated housing = 69.8%
  - ◆ Reduced crime against property, home burglary and personal assaults = 58.5%
  - ◆ Neighborhood cleanup = 56.4%
  - ◆ Better lighting = 55.6%
  - ◆ Increased financial assistance for home renovation = 52.4%

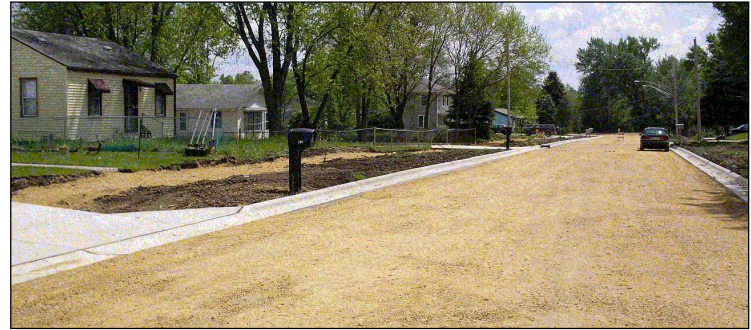
Other improvements were selected by less than 50% of survey participants.

- When given the opportunity to rate selected neighborhood characteristics and services on a 4 tiered scale (Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor), only one characteristic, garbage collection received an excellent rating from more than 10% of participants. Lowest mean scores were given for "Places to Eat Out" (1.31), "Places to shop" (1.37), "Sidewalks" (1.63), and "Opportunities to be Involved in Neighborhood" (1.64).
- Comprehensive survey results, include records of all answers to open-ended questions in the survey, were released in a Health Systems Research report in February of 2007.

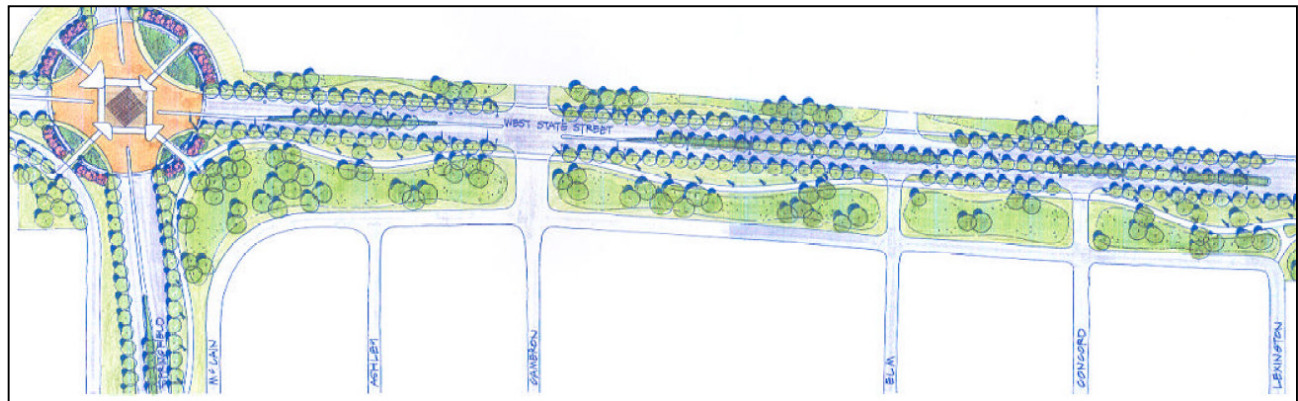


## **Public Improvements**

With a combination of jurisdictions covering the focus area until only recently, creating a consistent and complete network of public infrastructure was problematic. Road conditions on main residential streets were often very poor, and only a few blocks had sidewalks. Star General Contractors began the engineering for improvements of this infrastructure in 2004. Their design and construction activities included water main distribution systems, storm sewer collection and drainage way systems, and sanitary sewer realignment, with extensions and sanitary services to both HOPE VI proposed home sites and existing non-project home sites and buildable sites. Streets are also being reconstructed, with the placement of base material, concrete curb and gutter, and other improvements. In addition, a portion of water main improvements have been undertaken by the County and funded through separate grants in areas East of Concord Avenue and as far North as Green Street. HOPE VI funds and CDAP grants have funded these improvements, but other parts of the focus area (most of its northern half along State Street) outside of the HOPE VI project area are lacking the resources for these improvements. While sewer and water lines serve these blocks, they lack roads in good condition and often do not have any sidewalks. Other remaining improvement priorities covering neglected parts of the focus area will be based on neighborhood input and planning suggestions to the alderman and county board members representing the area.



The West State Street Corridor plan also calls for several specific improvements to enhance the quality of this gateway corridor. Between Springfield Avenue and Pierpont Avenue (the northern boundary of the HOPE VI



Focus Area), suggested State Street improvements include a median cut on West State between Lexington and Pierpont Avenues (for access by the City Fire Department), a closing of Lexington Avenue at West State to prevent unwanted left turns, a frontage road south of West State Street from Lexington Avenue to Cameron Avenue, and the elimination of side street curb cuts at Ashley Avenue and Lexington Avenue. These improvements have not yet been scheduled, as funding for implementation for the West Corridor Plan has focused on eastern portions of the corridor, closer to downtown Rockford.

In addition, the construction of the Springfield / Harrison connector (the western boundary of the focus area), recently completed only a few years ago, expanded the roadway into a four-lane arterial, and will provide better connections to other parts of the city and new industrial properties and job centers being established on this emerging transportation corridor.

### **Planned Actions**

**Winnebago County Housing Authority** – WCHA successfully applied for HOPE VI funds in 2002 for demolition of the Champion Park Apartments. This demolition took place in August of 2007. Additional Hope VI funds have been used to fund construction for 78 new residences, while 26 more residences have been planned for completion by the end of the year. Half of present and future newly constructed homes will be rental units and the other half will be for sale. As of January 2007, all rental units were occupied and 26 units have been sold. While the period of most of the HOPE VI funded new construction has ended, WCHA is now beginning Phases V and VI of the HOPE VI project, involving the rehabilitation of additional abandoned and blighted properties. A Development Agreement was awarded in the summer of 2007 to Comprehensive Community Solutions (CCS), to acquire, rehabilitate, and sell approximately 52 deteriorated homes that are in proximity to the former Champion Park site. A land deal with the Rockford Park District has allowed WCHA to operate and renovate the Washington Park Community Center. WCHA headquarters relocated to the Center in July after remodeling had been completed.

**HOPE VI TIF District** – The southern portion of the focus area is within this Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district, which was approved in December of 2005. TIF funds were leveraged with Hope VI funds for infrastructure improvements. Additional funds may be used for rehabilitation, demolition, or redevelopment costs within the TIF district boundaries.

**Springfield Corridor Study / West State Corridor Plan** – Completed by Winnebago County in May of 2005, the Springfield corridor study proposes improvements in access points, open space, corridor beautification, and increased multi-use activity along this emerging arterial roadway on Rockford’s West Side. Included in the plan are portions of the focus area around the intersections of Springfield Avenue and West State Street. The Springfield study calls for infill residential development and commercial development in the focus area, and adopts recommendations from the earlier 2002 West State Corridor Plan for road and business improvements along State Street from Meridian Road to the Rock River. The implementation of the West State Corridor Plan has focused on actions on the eastern side of the corridor closest to Rockford’s downtown, with gradual movement further west.

**Rockford Park District** – The demolition of Champion Park provides an opportunity for the expansion of Washington Park’s facilities. WCHA, which now owns the land available for park expansion under a land trade agreement with the park district, will begin to carry out these plans once Champion Park has been demolished.

**Rock River Training** – Rock River Training is the administrator of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds for the city of Rockford. They offer a variety of services at the Washington Park Education and Training Center, including resume development, job search assistance, basic computer training, and GED classes. They have partnered with the Rockford Park District to offer children computer training as part of summer programming, and also partnered with Crusader Clinic, WCHA and the RPD to bring a community Health and Education Fair to the center on July 27, 2007. Rock River Training looks to expand their partnerships and bring services as appropriate to the Washington Park Community.

**Rockford Housing Authority** – The strategic plan being developed by RHA includes a redevelopment plan for the Concord Commons apartments. General redevelopment plans call for the area of Concord Commons to become a less compact facility with development that is more of a mixed-use character.

**CDBG** – CDBG funds are currently being utilized for this focus area for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied structures. Property owners may receive up to \$25,000 to make exterior improvements and correct code deficiencies.

**Tax Incentive Program (TIP)** - TIP was approved in the summer of 2007 and offers a tax incentive to owner occupants who make major renovations to their property or build new additions. The incentive is a freeze of the base taxes on the property for 10 years (12 if the property is in a historic district or “green construction” techniques are utilized).

# Issues and Assets

City staff assisted task force members in producing a list of neighborhood assets. These assets are in a variety of forms; some refer to specific facilities, while others are more generalized or exist just beyond the focus areas boundaries. All assets are considered to have a positive impact on the neighborhood and should be preserved to ensure the continued healthy growth of the focus area.

**Amenities:** Washington Park, New WCHA Offices, Greenways / Multi-use paths.

**Resident Groups:** Orchard Park Neighborhood Watch Group, Serenity Neighborhood Watch Group

**Institutions and Services:** Rock River Training, 2 churches within focus area (Washington Park Community Church and Liberty Baptist Church), 2 churches just outside focus area, community policing, police substation, 2 RMTD Bus routes

**Just outside the neighborhood:** Dennis Early Education Center, Ingersoll Golf Course, University of Illinois Extension, Lincolnwood Estates

**Planned improvements:** Champion Park demolition, Concord Commons redevelopment, Expansion of Washington Park, EPA Grants for Environmental Remediation in nearby areas, improved roads, sewer, and other utilities.



Through several meetings, the Task Force came up with a list of **critical issues, problems, and liabilities** that the neighborhood faces as it plans for future improvements. They are broken down as follows:

**Subsidized Housing:**

- Champion Park demolition and Washington Park Expansion and improvements
- Concord Commons Redevelopment Agreement – continued negotiations with developer and approval of HUD transfer of \$2.4 million debt

**Public Improvements:**

- Street lighting
- Street network
- Street conditions
- Curb and gutters
- Storm sewers
- City water
- Sidewalks
- Sanitary sewer system
- Rockford Mass Transit District service

**Private Property Improvements:**

- Dense undergrowth, brush, and weeds in vacant lots, including the former Lincolnwood Shopping Center site
- Combining Lots to make them buildable
- Removal of dilapidated housing

**Neighborhood Sustainability:**

- Crime prevention
- Targeted prevention at various locations along State Street and at Concord Commons
- Need for organized and active neighborhood groups
- Lack of community identity and cohesion
- The West State Corridor Plan's replacement of blighted properties with an open space/pathway corridor in advance of roadway improvements

**Marketing the Area to New Businesses and Residents:**

- Attracting additional commercial areas
- Promoting new residential development in vacant and underutilized areas
- Use of TIF incentives to attract development, including grocery store, and additional retail such as a pharmacy, restaurants, general retail, department stores, clothing stores, banks, home improvement/hardware stores, movie theaters, etc.
- Attracting industrial jobs to the area
- Adopting marketing strategies (media articles, promotional signs) to bring attention to rehab efforts in focus area
- City's Pending Tax Incentive Program

**Social Service Improvements and Expansion:**

- Adult education (Rock Valley College)
- Rosecrance Programs
- Child care/day care
- Job training
- Home ownership education
- Library services
- Medical services / Illinois Medical Center, Crusader Clinic, etc.



# Goals

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These issues guided the formation of the neighborhood plan's goals and action steps that were designed to build upon the identified assets of the focus area while taking specific steps to address the problems and barriers that will impede the positive changes to come in the focus area's future.

The goals of the neighborhood plan are intended to provide direction and purpose in the collaborative efforts to create positive changes for the Hope VI Area over the next few years. Emerging from the issues and recognized problems that were discussed by the task force at regularly scheduled meetings, the goals of the neighborhood plan are as follows:

- 1. Upgrade public improvements – streets, sidewalks, street lighting, etc.**
- 2. Encourage improvements and investments in privately-owned property**
- 3. Improve and expand social services to the area**
- 4. Market the area to attract new businesses and residents**
- 5. Create a sustainable and safe neighborhood through crime prevention**
- 6. Strengthen community identity through active neighborhood groups and community activities**
- 7. Redevelop and upgrade Concord Commons**

## **Action Plan**

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The specific steps to be taken to achieve these goals are outlined in the attached table of Action Steps. These include programs and tasks to be carried out by the City of Rockford, the Rockford Housing Authority, the Rockford Park District, the Rockford School District, and, most importantly, the residents, property owners and business owners of the Hope VI / Washington Park neighborhood.

## **Plan Implementation and Monitoring**

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Preparing a plan is one thing; ensuring its implementation is something else altogether. While the City of Rockford took the lead in having this plan prepared, its implementation will depend on much more than City actions. With that in mind, the following steps will be taken to ensure continued implementation of this plan to the fullest extent possible.

- 1) As a first step, this plan for the Hope VI Focus Area will be adopted by the governing boards of all organizations represented on the Hope VI Focus Area Task Force. In addition to the City of Rockford, these are the Rockford Housing Authority, Rockford Park District, Rockford School District, Winnebago County Housing Authority, and the Winnebago County Board. As part of this process, the City will also adopt this plan as an amendment to the 2020 Plan, Rockford's comprehensive plan.
- 2) After approval of the neighborhood plan, members of the Task Force and other facilitators of the plan's implementation will meet on a quarterly basis to share information and discuss the progress of the plan's action steps

- 3) City staff will prepare a progress report at the end of each year (to be completed by January 31<sup>st</sup> of the following year) showing what has been accomplished by that point. For this to work, the City will need to rely on all of the organizations involved in implementation of this plan to get them information in a timely manner. To expedite this process, the City will prepare a simple update form to be distributed to designated contact people within each organization. Each organization will then send the completed forms back to the City in digital form.
- 4) If there is agreement that the plan needs to be changed, the City will reconvene the Task Force for that purpose.
- 5) At the end of the five-year plan period, the City – again with input from all other groups – will prepare a final report showing what has been accomplished and what remains to be done, with suggestions on how to carry out those projects that were not completed.

## **HOPE VI Focus Area Task Force**

### **2006-2007**

#### **City of Rockford**

Alderman Linda McNeely  
Reid Montgomery, Director of Community and Economic Development  
Vicki Manson, Neighborhood Development Administrator  
Jonah Katz, Planning

#### **Area Organizations**

Pearl Hawks, Winnebago County Board  
Steve Anderson, Executive Director, Rockford Housing Authority  
Barb Baptista una Freund, Rockford Park District  
Brian Brooks, Project Manager, Star Development  
Kathy Ricotta, Realtor, Habitat for Humanity  
Kerry Knodle, CCS, Executive Director  
Carol Nelson, Principal, Dennis Early Education Center  
Marcia Blascoe, Director, Dennis Early Education Center  
Alan Zais, Executive Director, Winnebago County Housing Authority  
Clint Cole, Assistant Executive Director, Winnebago County Housing Authority  
Maylan Dunn-Kenney, Assistant Professor, NIU Dept. of Teaching & Learning  
Debbie Alfredson, Concord College  
Dr. Tate, United Faith Baptist Church  
Camera Johnson, Hope VI Resident  
Julie Getter, Concord Commons Resident  
Lisa Brown, Rockford Municipal Transit District

