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June 29, 2026

Dear Mayor and Alderpersons,

The Board of Commissioners of the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County writes to again express our strong opposition to the formation of the South Rockford Industrial Redevelopment Project Area (“RPA”), particularly for the development of properties for industrial use.

As stated in our previous letter, the proposed RPA is located directly adjacent to the District’s Kilbuck Bluffs Forest Preserve which is bisected by Kilbuck Creek. Equally alarming to the District and its Board is the negative impact that the flooding and erosion caused by this proposed development will have on the flow of larger watersheds like the Kishwaukee and Rock Rivers, which will subsequently affect the aquatic flora and fauna of these ecosystems. If approved, the consequences of the RPA could extend far beyond the borders of Winnebago County, much less the City of Rockford.

Mark Goode, principal at Venture One Real Estate—one of the agencies with which the Council would work on this project—spoke at the Planning and Development Committee Meeting on Monday, June 22, 2026 regarding the intended use of the RPA. Based on Mr. Goode’s testimony, two million square feet of precast industrial warehouse and manufacturing buildings are proposed to be developed over twelve to fifteen months at this location. Although Mr. Goode states an agreement with the Council will preclude the development of a data center on this land, the impacts of the development of industrial buildings alone have great potential to negatively affect the ecology, hydrology, air quality, and pollution levels of this area in both the construction and operation phases.

Contamination and degradation of soil during development have been shown to result in disturbance to or loss of native plants and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. Vibrations from increased transport at development sites like business parks are highly intrusive to bats and pollinators, and the light pollution from these vehicles and buildings disrupts migratory birds and their movements. Industrial development results in the compaction of soil, increasing impermeable surfaces and resulting in runoff, as well as an increased risk of flooding and soil erosion. Not only will this lower the stability of Kilbuck Creek’s banks, but it can also change the flow of waterways downstream—namely the Rock and Kishwaukee Rivers. Increased sediment loads in waterways are also seen during and after industrial development, as well as soil and water contamination from spills of oil, fuel, cement and other substances.

Finally, with development comes increased exhaust emissions and dust from onsite activity, which affects local air quality.

If the Council chooses to move forward with this development, the District again requests to have representation in the next steps, including but not limited to the community involvement assessment and the development agreement process. As the steward of Winnebago County's forest preserves and natural heritage, it is our civic responsibility to advise the Council on the impacts of this development and the ways in which negative ecological impacts to these high quality landscapes could be avoided or reduced.

The District thanks the Mayor and Alderpersons for your consideration. We welcome the opportunity to speak with you further regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Board of Commissioners

Forest Preserves of Winnebago County