

To our Airport Board and the people of Rockford:

I have been a pastor in Rockford, working for the unity of religious leaders, a police chaplain, an elder for youth, advocate for racial equity, for healing of the city, etc.... like a lot of Rockford folks.

I have been an advocate for Rockford for 48 years.

I have children who work for the city and airport. I want Rockford to be the city that "Transform Rockford" envisions, especially for ALL the people.

Our airport is a big success, a premier cargo hub, and it is expanding. But it also contains a rare 8000 year old prairie with endangered species in its midst. It can't be transplanted, duplicated, unless you've got 8 thousand years to spare. There is only 0.1 of one percent left in the Prairie State. It is like a quiet crown jewel within the setting of a busy airport.

It has a high profile! Chicago Tribune, other new and TV outlets, national organizations like the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, Audubon, etc. are following its story. It is seen as a conflict between lovers and defenders of the land and growth/ progress/ investment of Rockford region. All for a city that is struggling to be seen, attractive, and worth living in.

And if that drama isn't enough attention, here's the hot sauce in the gumbo: the airport is getting \$3.6 million from the state that could be used for an alternate plan and construction that could save a modern expansion **AND** an ancient prairie.

So, Airport Board, city of Rockford, write the headline! You have the ball, the power, the voice to craft it. It could be:

"Rockford paves an ancient prairie for economic progress"
or "Rockford lets an ancient prairie and an airport grow!"
or "Rockford expands their cargo hub and keeps a rare prairie within"

This is a great story! Everyone is waiting to see the soul of our city! What an opportunity for free press and video to showcase us. It will stick, whatever we do now. But while you craft the headline, remember all the people who have worked for decades, stood up in hard times, and toiled together to expand a modern city on an ancient river. Write the headline...it could be time to "shine"!

james a. roberts retired pastor, untired advocate