

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



RACVB Board Votes to Support Home Rule Encourages YES Vote on March 20

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 6, 2018

ROCKFORD, IL – At its January 31st meeting, the Board of Directors of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) voted unanimously to support the March 20, 2018 referendum that would restore home rule powers to the City of Rockford.

The Board's resolution of support advocates a YES vote to support home rule, which was rescinded by voters 35 years ago, in 1983. The board voted following a period of research and internal dialogue, which included a presentation from and discussions with Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara and representatives of Rockford for Home Rule, the citizens' group advocating for passage of the March 20 referendum.

"The board feels strongly that the City of Rockford would be best served by returning to home rule," said RACVB Board Chair David Anderson. "At RACVB, we know that what is good for residents will help attract visitors. Our residents are concerned about public safety and want to see their neighborhoods thrive. Home rule will provide our elected leaders the ability to make decisions locally and efficiently about what is best for Rockford, rather than relying on Springfield to do the right thing. We need to return control to the citizens of Rockford."

Further, the board cited the city's overdependence on property taxes to fund essential city services and programs as a concern. Among its benefits, the board believes home rule powers would allow the city to diversify its revenue stream and lower property taxes.

At its core, RACVB exists to help grow the local economy and expand the community's tax base. In 1984, following the repeal of home rule and a severe recession, RACVB was created to help grow our economy by increasing visitor spending in the community.

"Simply put, visitors come to Rockford, leave their money and take home new memories. So, visitors can and should be part of the solution to growing our economy and reducing the city's reliance on property taxes. However, to attract visitors we need to have strong, vibrant neighborhoods; a safe community with an open and welcoming reputation; quality experiences and small businesses that thrive. We believe restoring home rule will put us on a path to creating a stronger community and a more appealing destination," said John Groh, RACVB's president/CEO.

One way a community appeals to visitors is through the experiences and facilities it offers. "Unfortunately, the Reclaiming First sports facilities project was delayed by nearly two years because we had to seek

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Springfield's permission to increase our local hotel tax to, in part, pay for those facilities. I'll never forget the many conversations I had with legislators in Springfield who were puzzled by our request and wondered aloud why we needed their approval on what should have been a local issue. Reminding them of our non-home rule status, each one was perplexed as to why a city as large as Rockford lacked home rule authority," said Groh. "The board feels it's time to take back that authority and invest it in our leaders, who are our neighbors and friends and who have a real stake in our future."

Should home rule be approved, Mayor McNamara has indicated he will propose increasing the city's hotel tax one percent (1%), the proceeds of which would be used to fund city operations. Should such a proposal be made, RACVB's board would analyze the proposal and its impact. To date, the only position taken by the board is in support of the March 20 referendum and in doing so encourages residents to vote YES.

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The mission of the RACVB is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development. www.gorockford.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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