


Amy Salamon

From: R1 Planning Council <info@r1planning.org>
Sent: Wednesday, July 2, 2025 4:39 PM
To: Amy Salamon
Subject: [Test] R1 July 2025 Newsletter -  LCI Brings Neighborhoods to Life

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July 2025

Middle Neighborhoods, Major Potential

Livable Communities Initiative Revives Left-Out Neighborhoods



Not distressed, but not affluent. R1's Livable Communities Initiative (LCI) gives the region's 'middle' neighborhoods the boost they need to flourish.

The Keith Creek neighborhood was the LCI's first awardee in early 2025. R1 met with Keith Creek residents, local officials, and neighborhood organizations throughout 2025 to determine priorities. Next, residents will vote in August on the project design they would like to implement and receive the final design and comprehensive neighborhood plan in October. They can then begin implementation in 2026.

What is LCI?

LCI provides technical assistance to create a plan that improves the quality of life in the region's 'middle' neighborhoods – those teetering between growth and decline. One neighborhood will be selected per year to work with R1 in crafting the path to vibrant development that meets its unique needs. Once that action plan is complete, the neighborhood is eligible to apply for additional LCI funding for project implementation. These projects could be creating a new park, improving traffic safety, or addressing blight.

Better sidewalks or new public gathering spaces doesn't sound transformational – at first. LCI is intended to be the spark that leads to further development in middle neighborhoods. A published plan and some momentum on improvements can open up future state and federal funding that R1 will pursue for bigger change.

“Once we can show that some attention is being given to these neighborhoods, other partners become more interested in contributing their resources,” says Tim Verbeke R1 Director of Planning and LCI project leader. “That’s when we can see dramatic change happen.”

LCI Round 2 Call for Projects Open Now

R1 is now accepting applications until August 4 for Round 2 technical assistance.

Interested neighborhoods can visit <https://engager1.mysocialpinpoint.com/livable-communities-initiative-2025> for an application, map of eligible neighborhoods, and FAQs.

Applications must show broad support, including a local official (like an alderman) and neighborhood organization (like a church or business).

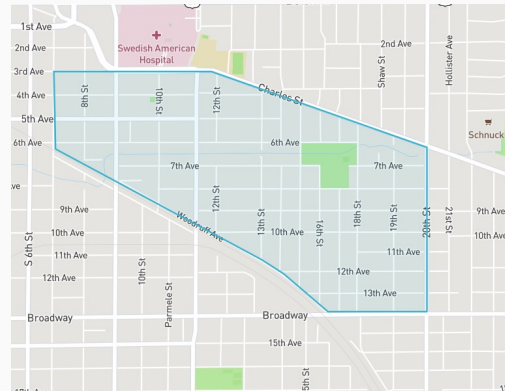
“We want applications to tell their neighborhood’s story: what makes them different and how they’re just one step away from being an excellent neighborhood,” says Tim.

Key Dates

Application Period Closes: **August 4**

Neighborhood Presentations to R1: **October 23**

R1 Board Approval: **November 13**



The Keith Creek neighborhood was selected as the first LCI recipient. They are completing implementation designs and a draft plan, anticipating implementation funds once a plan is adopted later this year. The Keith Creek neighborhood boundary is Charles, 20th, Woodruff/Broadway, and 7th streets.



Open for Public Comment

Click on the survey title to participate

[Broadband Accessibility](#)

R1 is leading an initiative to expand internet access, affordability, and equity. This survey is looking for users' feedback regarding their current service and satisfaction (or lack thereof), and how they use the internet.



[U.S. EPA Brownfield Coalition Grant](#)

This grant allows communities to recommend locations for potential brownfield assessment. Brownfields are unused properties that may contain contaminants that must be addressed before redevelopment can occur.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Open House **COMING IN JULY!**

Give your feedback on the regional plan for robust economic development in northern Illinois over the next five years.

One event will be held in each county in the coverage area: Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry.



Check **Engage R1** or the R1 **Facebook** page for details as they are available.



CEJA Brings Hydropower Demonstration Project to Rockford



Innovation, green collar jobs, growing clean energy economy - all by harnessing the power of the Rock River. With the installation of a hydropower generator, the region is showing it can lead the way in the shift toward renewable energy sources.

Studio GWA and Latitude Power, received a \$920,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to design and install a hydropower demonstration project over the Fordam Dam on the Rock River. The goals of the project are to test its feasibility, determine scalability, and integrate renewable energy into existing urban landscapes. The hydropower generator should be operational in 2027.

Funding is through an Equitable Energy Future (EEF) grant, part of the expansive statewide CEJA funding package. EEF supports equity eligible contractors and workforce to invest in renewable energy projects in low-income, disadvantaged communities. It all supports the state's goal to run on 100% clean energy by 2050.

R1 wrote the grant and continues to pursue projects for additional rounds of EEF grants. R1 is also a partner in the region's CEJA workforce training program, which provides paid training, wraparound supports, and employment assistance for careers in weatherization/green construction, solar panel installation, or CNC machinery operations.

Beyond the project's sustainability benefits, it increases investment in disadvantaged areas. EEF projects must be located in areas that have experienced disinvestment or have a disproportionate pollution burden. The project's workforce also aims to include a minimum 51% of CEJA workforce training graduates or current participants, which also prioritizes people living in these areas.



**LAND BANK AUCTION
COMING SOON!**

AUCTION

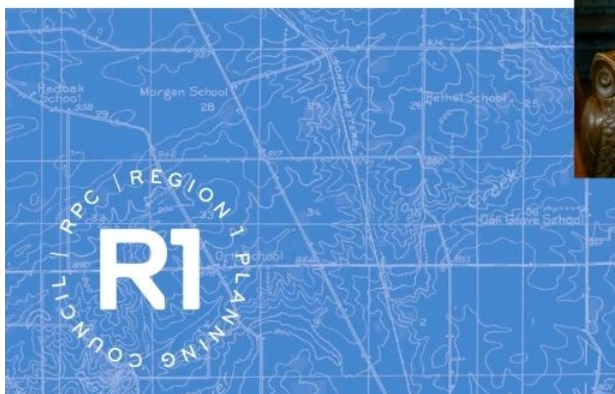
Full details available
in late July

www.r1planning.org

Employee
Spotlight

Jimmy Westenberg

Housing Counselor



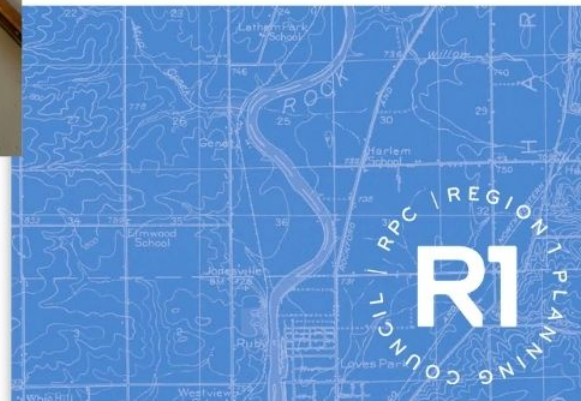
Jimmy Westenberg joins R1 as a Housing Counselor. He has an associate's degree from Rock Valley College. A Rockford native who is invested in community service, Jimmy managed a 60-acre memorial forest in Oregon, IL. This role allowed him to help families find peace and purpose during difficult times. At R1, he will continue this focus by leading housing counseling sessions, supporting the agency's commitment to expanding housing options and equity in the community.



Charlie Rice

Associate Housing Planner

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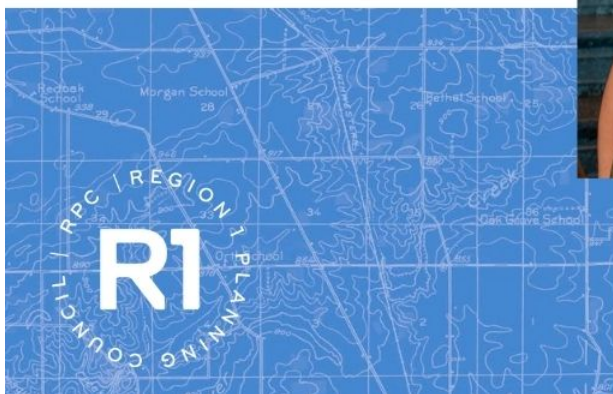


Charlie Rice joins R1 as a Planning/GIS Associate. He has a bachelor's degree in Geography with a GIS certification and Geology minor from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. He has previous planning experience, working as a planning intern for the Bi-State Regional Commission in Rock Island. At R1, Charlie will be the point person for the Planning team's GIS projects, including the State of the Trails and Greenways plans.

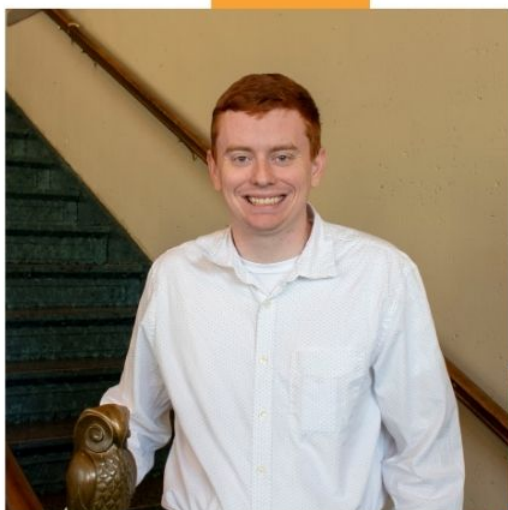
Jessica Garcia

Intern

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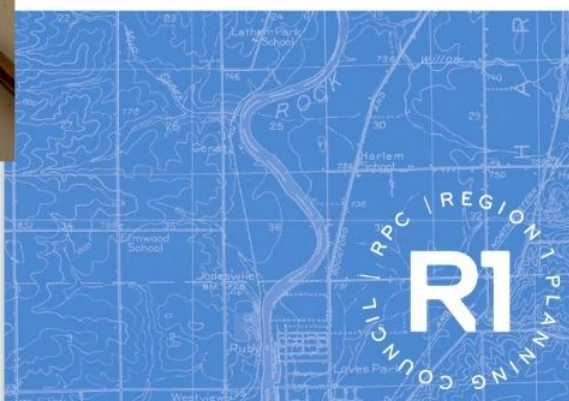
Jessica Garcia is majoring in International Relations and Economics at Syracuse University. She will support government affairs activities as an intern on the Economic Development and Policy team.



Nick Karns

Junior Data Engineer

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Nick Karns joins R1 as a Junior Data Engineer. He relocated to Rockford from Michigan after recently graduating from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor with a bachelor's degree in Computer Science and a Music minor. During an internship at Michigan Software Labs, he overhauled the Stormbreaker mental health app. At R1, Nick will be involved in programming for the Land Bank.

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