



September 2026

Site Readiness Funding

Four State Grants Bring \$8.9 Million to Region for Industrial Development



Intersection at Route 2 and Highway 20 in south Rockford.

Rockford, Belvidere, Four Rivers Sanitation Authority, and Region 1 Planning Council (R1) received a combined \$8.9 million in site readiness grants from the state of Illinois in August.

These Illinois DCEO Regional Site Readiness Grants will fund utility infrastructure installation, making vacant sites across the region shovel-ready for business development. Communities with existing water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure have a competitive advantage when private developers are searching for locations.

Recipients and projects include:

- City of Belvidere - \$5 million to extend water infrastructure to a site bordering the Stellantis plant.
- City of Rockford - \$3.7 million to extend water and sewer infrastructure to a site at the IL 2 and

- U.S. 20 intersection, near the Chicago Rockford International Airport.
- Four Rivers Sanitation Authority - \$150,000 for preliminary engineering to extend sewer toward Boone County, ultimately supporting Stellantis operations
 - Region 1 Planning Council - \$93,000 to create a site readiness database covering Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry counties.

R1 assisted each municipality with its grant applications as part of a broader effort that also secured funding for Marengo and McHenry. These cities received Regional Site Readiness grants in April to develop the I-90 and IL-23 interchange and to conduct environmental assessments for site development, respectively. This brings the total to \$13.6 million in Illinois grants aimed at spurring northern Illinois' economic development.



Click on the survey title to participate



[Greenways Plan](#)

How can northern Illinois preserve its open land and natural resources? Encourage its recreational use? Pair urban development with environmental sustainability? It's all here in the updated draft Greenways Plan.



[Green Streets Guide](#)

The Green Streets Guide describes ways municipalities can redesign streetscapes to be more eco-friendly, particularly through vegetation. This can reduce flooding, extend roadway life, improve safety and quality of life, and encourage active lifestyles. The draft plan is complete and needs your feedback.



[EPA Brownfield Coalition Grant](#)

R1 can assist with costs for conducting environmental assessments and developing cleanup plans for Boone and Winnebago County brownfield sites. Submit a property you think may be eligible for brownfield assessment at the link above.

Charging Smart

R1 Leads Rockton, Poplar Grove to EV-Ready

Designation - Who's Next?



Rockton and Poplar Grove are the newest designated EV-ready communities in northern Illinois, earning a Charging Smart Bronze designation with support from R1. As the program's local administrator, R1 guided both villages through the steps to align local policy to make EV charger installation easier and encourage investment. This service is provided at no cost to local governments and can take as little as a few months to achieve.

R1 worked closely with Rockton and Poplar Grove village leadership over several months to make EV charging more accessible in their communities. This involved writing policies, strengthening relationships with electric utility providers, and developing public-facing EV educational resources.

"This designation reflects our commitment to preparing Poplar Grove for the transportation needs of the future while creating new opportunities for residents, businesses, and future development," said Kristi Richardson, Poplar Grove Village President.

R1 is available to help other local governments follow their lead! Contact Hailey Blanchard at hblanchard@r1planning.org for more information and to sign up.

Walktober 2026

Think Differently About Getting Around During Green Commute Challenge



Ditch the driver's seat this October - even if it's for just one trip.

Walktober is a weeklong community event that encourages residents to try alternate ways of getting to work, school, errands, or appointments. This new R1 initiative will be held from October 5 – 9 and simply asks participants to replace at least one single-rider car trip with walking, biking, taking the bus, or carpooling.

It takes some planning but is worth the effort. You save gas money, add physical activity to your day, reduce road or school congestion, and of course, shrink your carbon footprint.

“Staying active can be as simple as incorporating more active and shared transportation into your daily routine,” said Estelle Adiaba, R1 Planner. “Walktober gives R1 a chance to connect with our community and raise awareness of the available options that support active choices.”

1. Go to www.engage-r1.com/green_commute_week to sign up, get daily themes, and more.
2. Choose how you will commute to work, school, or on errands – walk, bike, carpool, bus – and plan the logistics.
3. During Walktober week, log your miles via the Strava group (R1 Walktober) or enter them on the map at Engage R1.
4. Submit a selfie during your commute and upload to the R1 Facebook site or Engage R1 Walktober site.

Prizes will be randomly drawn from those who participate for all five days, and from all photo submissions.

Housing Counseling

HUD-Certified Counselors Provide Housing Peace of Mind



Lisa Przytulski, R1 HUD-certified Housing Counselor, provides education and resources to regional residents so they can plan for and gain stable housing.

Housing counseling through R1 offers northern Illinois residents the knowledge and support to secure stable, sustainable housing. Lisa Przytulski is R1's newest certified Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) counselor, joining Sarah Renicker, R1 Grant Compliance Specialist, as R1's housing counseling team. to provide housing education and resources for residents in northern Illinois. Lisa is now accepting new clients for housing counseling.

"We are here to give you peace of mind, whatever housing situation you might have," said Lisa.

R1's housing counseling service addresses a critical gap in the region, as the only provider in northern Illinois outside of Chicagoland. As inflation and housing constraints persist, the need to overcome housing barriers will increase. Over the past 10 years, home prices in Illinois have risen by two-thirds and rent costs by 45%, according to the Urban Institute.

"Because I come from a banking background, I can see what others might not," said Lisa. "The more people are aware of trends, their rights, and available resources, the better they can make smart decisions toward their goals."

What is HUD-Certified Housing Counseling?

It provides individualized education and resources for people to plan for, find, or maintain stable housing. This is done through confidential one-on-one sessions with a HUD-certified counselor and can include topics such as:

- Financing and budgeting
- Renting vs. owning
- Homeownership basics
- Fair housing policies
- What to do when facing eviction or foreclosure

R1's housing counselors serve people at all stages. Some may need help understanding whether to rent or buy a home, others need help managing bills, and still others need guidance navigating lenders and applying for a mortgage.

"They determine their goals; we guide them along that path," said Lisa.

WCCMHB Strategic Plan Released for Program Years 7-9



Expanded mental health care.
Improved crisis response services.
Stronger provider collaboration.
Additional support for groups with distinct needs, like youth and the elderly.

These are all priorities the Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board will address in the next three years, as outlined in its newly published strategic plan. The plan centered around input from mental health providers and community members, particularly those with lived experiences regarding mental health and substance use. It also serves as the guide for funding priorities in the next round of WCCMHB grant applications.

View the plan at r1planning.org/community-impact/wccmhb/.

What's inside:

- Data showing the composition of the Winnebago County mental health system: services available, populations served, and more.
- Narrative on board growth and priority shifts since inception
- Actionable goals for PY 7-9

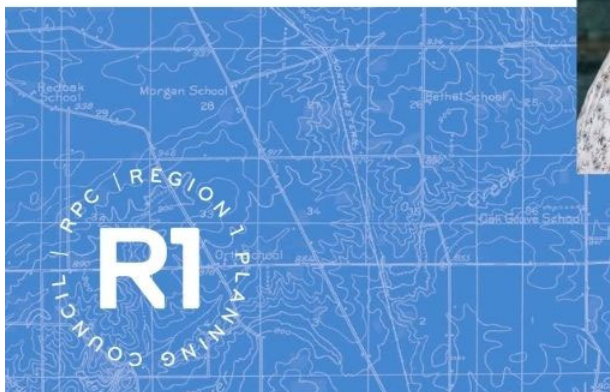
Employee Spotlight

Interested in joining our team? See all open positions at r1planning.org/careers.

Aesha Vinit Acharya

Planner

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Aesha Vinit Acharya joins R1 as a Planner. She has a bachelor's degree in Architecture and a master's degree in City Design from the University of Illinois Chicago. She has

extensive hands-on experience designing residential and urban landscaping. As an planning and design intern in Chicago, she contributed to affordable housing projects, corridor studies, and comprehensive plans. At R1, she will be involved in the Housing Coordination Plan, School Zone Safety Program, and grant writing.

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127 N. Wyman St., Suite 101, Rockford, IL 61101

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