

**CITY OF ROCK ISLAND  
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION  
October 24, 2022 - 5:00 p.m.**

**City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor  
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL**

10/24/2022 - Minutes

**CALL TO ORDER**

**THIS MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED BY AUDIO AND VIDEO CONFERENCE WITHOUT A PHYSICALLY PRESENT QUORUM OF THE ROCK ISLAND CITY COUNCIL DUE TO THE DISASTER DECLARATION ISSUED BY GOVERNOR PRITZKER.**

**ROLL CALL**

Mayor Thoms asked City Clerk Samantha Gange to call the roll.

Present: Alderpersons Moses Robinson, Randy Hurt, Judith Gilbert, Jenni Swanson, Dylan Parker (virtual), Mark Poulos, Bill Healy, and Mayor Mike Thoms. Absent: None.

Staff: City Manager Todd Thompson, City Attorney Dave Morrison, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City staff.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mayor Thoms said public comments regarding the Special Service Area (SSA) would be reserved for the public hearing shortly thereafter. He asked if anyone wished to speak on any additional topics. No one volunteered to speak in person or virtually.

**MAYOR THOMS WILL CLOSE THE STUDY SESSION MEETING AND OPEN A PUBLIC HEARING FOR PUBLIC INPUT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SPECIAL SERVICES AREA (SSA) IN DOWNTOWN ROCK ISLAND.**

Mayor Thoms closed the regular meeting and opened the Public Hearing.

Rock Island resident and business owner Scott Wolf addressed Council. He said the City and State of Illinois continuously make themselves noncompetitive in keeping businesses. He said the new tax would make the City even more noncompetitive. He added that the direction is already known in terms of what to do with the downtown, and paying wages for another party to provide assistance for direction is not what is needed. He offered that the City should be more cost competitive and cost effective, and should address crime concerns in the downtown area. He said he disagrees with the SSA completely, as he does not believe it will bring in business,

and will erode the tax base. He said filling the empty buildings with businesses will get more of a tax base, which will add funds to the City to spend.

Rock Island resident and downtown property owner Jeff Duncan addressed Council. He said he is not in favor of the SSA, as more work should be done with development and making properties in the City cheaper instead of adding cost. He compared cities like Davenport to Rock Island, noting it was less expensive across the river in Iowa, and they are seeing more development.

Rock Island resident and downtown property owner Tom Thoms addressed Council. He noted recent discussions with Jack Cullen, Downtown Director for the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce, and his condos in McKesson Lofts have been up to speed regarding this proposal. He said he is in favor of the SSA along with fellow residents, and commended Council for being open to change during the process. He added that the downtown needs to have people in the streets and engaged with the area, and the SSA is a catalyst for that. He said additional taxes will cause additional expense, but without it, property values will continue to drop. He noted that efforts such as this are being embraced across the country to become more competitive, and the dollars spent are much smaller than what would be lost if nothing is done.

Rock Island property owner and Moline, IL resident Richard Edwards addressed Council. He noted that 88 counties in Illinois out of 102 have less taxes than Rock Island County, and local taxes continue to go up. He said many properties that are not taxable are currently a liability and not an asset, and the City needs to generate taxes in order to expand the tax base. He has been attempting to acquire the adjacent land to his business for years to expand and establish parking, but has been unable to do so. He added that he would be in support of it if more tax income would be developed.

Rock Island property owner Tom Norman addressed Council. As a property owner of over 40 years, he perceives that the City has gone from the top to the bottom relative to downtown activities. He noted that every municipal body in the Quad Cities is involved in an SSA process. He does not see it as an additional tax, but rather an opportunity to see property and business owners have input on the downtown. He is willing to put some money into the area, as it is part of his livelihood. He feels it is a step in the right direction, and is in favor of the SSA.

McKesson property owner Jack Knepp addressed Council. He said he is in favor of the proposal, as something dramatic needs to be done to avoid falling further behind.

Davenport, Iowa resident and President of the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce Dr. LaDrina Wilson addressed Council regarding the SSA proposal. She thanked Council for allowing the conversation to take place, and as someone who grew up in the area, she wants to see the community thrive. In contrast to her youth, she noted that her daughters do not have much to look forward to in projecting their future time in Rock Island's District. She said creating a vibrant downtown is essential for the youth of the community and adults that reside there. She believes the SSA is a way to get the downtown back to what it used to be.

Lisa Vinar, property owner on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, addressed Council, noting the increased costs for operating in the City, including water charges and taxes. She disagreed that paying more would help with the problems at her location, and is against the SSA proposal. She said she is unhappy with the City, and does not like how it treats businesses.

Terry Tilka, owner of Rock Island Brewing Company. He said the City has mismanaged the downtown by telling businesses how to operate. He added that another tax is not needed, as he has paid Tax Increment Financing (TIF) taxes, which go to City projects and side projects. He noted that a few businesses in the area are trying to survive with assistance from the Federal

Government, not the City. He is opposed to an additional tax, suggesting it be taken from the food and beverage tax amount. He said many District businesses do not come to Council meetings, as they feel they are wasting their time.

Downtown property and business owner Brett Hitchcock addressed Council. He said he is against the SSA, and noted that everyone agrees something must be done. He expressed disbelief that the proposal has 44 cents of each dollar spent going to the Chamber of Commerce instead of helping the downtown area. He said security is still the top concern, and there is no established plan. He referenced the Downtown Steering Committee, stating that Council has an obligation to disband it if the SSA is approved, and restart it with people that are for and against the SSA.

Aaron Sutherland with Illinois Casualty Company addressed Council. He is in favor of the proposal, noting there are many businesses he has spoken to that are also in favor. He sees the SSA as an investment, allowing voices to be part of the solution. His main concern is keeping personal feelings out, and encouraged a big picture view of fixing the problems with money, time, and effort.

Rock Island resident Robert Burke addressed Council virtually. He expressed concern about the lack of transparency in how the SSA process began, and noted that the people most drastically impacted were not consulted. He said the Steering Committee went out of their way to ensure meetings were difficult to attend, and provided no means of input for the majority of downtown residents. He received no notice except from his landlord regarding the meetings. He asked why outreach was not attempted sooner, as a plan was already underway. He said the Steering Committee has not done enough to evaluate more equitable alternatives to funding, and Jack Cullen has not provided the promised information regarding low-to-moderate income residents. He noted that the most successful small businesses in the downtown area have said the SSA is not a good idea, as well as residents. He added that an aggressive tax on the poorest is not the way to do the necessary work for the downtown.

Aldersperson Gilbert asked City Manager Thompson to confirm that only property owners not renters received the notification regarding the SSA public hearing. Mr. Thompson responded affirmatively.

Mayor Thoms closed the Public Hearing and reopened the regular meeting.

**MOTION:**

Aldersperson Parker moved to adjourn the Public Hearing to meet again on November 14, 2022; Aldersperson Swanson seconded.

**VOTE:**

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Healy, Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, and Poulos. Nay: None. Absent: None.

Aldersperson Robinson explained for the Public that the discussion was continued until November 14, 2022. Mayor Thoms confirmed that was true.

Aldersperson Parker thanked everyone who attended the meeting and apologized for his lack of a physical presence due to work.

**MOTION TO ADJOURN.**

MOTION:

Aldersperson Swanson moved to adjourn to the regular meeting; Aldersperson Robinson seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Healy, Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, and Poulos. Nay: None. Absent: None.

The meeting adjourned at 5:43 p.m.



---

Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk