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PRESS RELEASE

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CITY OF ROCKFORD COLLABORATION SEEKS TO LAUNCH NORTHWEST ILLINOIS REGIONAL BUILDING CODE

ROCKFORD, IL – In a collaborative effort led by the City of Rockford, the region is positioned to launch a newly adopted unified building code effective January 1, 2016. The Northwest Illinois Regional Building Code will provide standardization and continuity for building and construction projects across multiple municipalities and counties in the Rock River Valley.

The Northwest Illinois Regional Building Code establishes a uniform code for participating communities, providing a comprehensive set of standards and requirements for structural and life safety and sustainability in building construction. The adoption of a unified code sets, or for the first time in some cases, implements core standards, mitigates code confusion, and streamlines processes and associated paperwork for design professionals. It is anticipated that the result of adopting the unified code will result in reduced code violations, and lower building costs due to new material allowances and fewer building practice restrictions.

“Adopting a unified code is a critical step in increasing the Northwest Illinois region’s economic vitality,” said Todd Cagnoni, director of community and economic development for the City of Rockford. “This collaborative effort will better assist and encourage design professionals who are interested in investing in participating communities by providing an agreed-upon, common set of clear and consistent building code standards.”

The comprehensive document features 144 total amendments, a significant reduction of some municipalities’ current code and includes seven International Code Council (ICC) codes, National Electrical (NEC / NFPA 70) codes and the Illinois Plumbing Code. Life safety features include provisions to keep fires from spreading, smoke and carbon monoxide

detection, emergency escapes, and fire sprinkler requirements in townhomes, an issue that has warranted much discussion during the code development process.

“There are a lot of misconceptions regarding the townhouse sprinkler issue,” said Andrew Pieri, planner and building plans examiner for the City of Rockford. “We reached out to local fire sprinkler contractors who have advised that a typical 1,500 square-foot townhouse would range in price from \$1.80 to \$2.39 per foot of protected area. It is also import to note that the whole townhouse is not required to be protected. The fire sprinkler installation standard NFPA 13D only requires fire sprinklers in areas such as living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms. Sprinklers are not required in closets, garages, or attics.”

Pieri continued, “To a certain extent, most individuals do not realize that installing sprinklers reduces the cost of construction because sprinklers eliminate additional building code requirements; such as the need for larger fire-resistant walls and roofing materials between townhouse units and additional measures to protect the wood supporting beams in the structure. When taken into consideration, the cost is equalized and homeowners get the added benefit of this life-saving technology.”

The City initiated the process in early March by meeting with more than 30 municipalities in the region to gauge interest in an intentional and collaborative effort to streamline design processes and procedures. A kick-off meeting was held in April with regional partners representing six counties and 28 communities. During the next three months, code committees comprised of building officials, inspectors, architects, residential and commercial builders, trade unions and associations, and fire service reviewed residential, commercial, mechanical and administrative codes and policies. A draft document was completed in mid-summer and a unanimously agreed upon unified building code was finalized in September. Each participating entity is currently in the process of presenting the unified code to its respective governing body for approval.

“Adopting the Northwest Illinois Regional Building Code is a significant step forward in building safety as well as aiding in the design and construction of quality structures in our community. An added benefit will be reduction of building code amendments which sometimes add costly modifications to building plans without a recognizable benefit in increased value, comfort, or safety for building occupants,” stated local architects Dan Saavedra and Guy Gelhausen of Saavedra Gehlhausen Architects. “Sprinkler systems in townhomes and multifamily dwellings add a level of safety that buyers appreciate and view favorably. Especially in situations such as townhomes and multi-family units where one does not have control over their neighbors.”

The City of Rockford and other participating municipalities will offer workshops in various locations for architects, developers, contractors, engineers and construction professionals to learn more about the unified building code and support a smooth transition as the effective date approaches. Dates and times will be announced in the future. For additional information, please contact Andrew Pieri at Andrew.Pieri@rockfordil.gov or 779-348-7445.