

River Edge Redevelopment Zone

Application for Certification

November 4, 2025

By:

City of Joliet

Community Development Department
Economic Development Division



[Insert letterhead]

November 4, 2025

Ben Denney
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Enterprise Zone Department
River Edge Redevelopment Zone Program
607 E. Adams St.
Springfield, IL 62701

**Subject: Joliet River Edge Redevelopment Zone
Application for Certification**

Dear Mr. Denney,

Pursuant to the River Edge Redevelopment Zone Act (65 ILCS 115/10-1 et seq.) and the corresponding administrative rules (14 Ill. Adm. Code Part 524), the City of Joliet respectfully submits this application for the certification of the proposed Joliet River Edge Redevelopment Zone (RERZ).

The establishment of the Joliet RERZ will serve as a catalyst for economic growth, environmental remediation, and community revitalization in areas along our riverfront. We are committed to working collaboratively with DCEO to ensure the success of this initiative.

Please contact Paulina Martínez at (815) 724-3734 or pmartinez@joliet.gov if you require any additional information or clarification regarding this application.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

H. Elizabeth Beatty, City Manager
City of Joliet

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List of attachments

- [Confirmation of notice of public hearing and copy of newspaper article]
- [Transcripts of public hearing]
- [Original and two certified copies of designating ordinance]
- Legal description of River Edge Redevelopment Zone
- Boundary map
- Land use map
- Major employers, industrial parks, and vacant facilities map
- Letters of support
- Existing plans

Part A. Legal applicant

Name of jurisdiction (municipality): City of Joliet

Street/P.O. box: 150 W. Jefferson St. **Zip code:** 60432

City: Joliet **County:** Will

Chief elected official: Mayor Terry D'Arcy

Contact person: Paulina Martínez **Phone:** (815) 724-3734

Part B. Eligibility criterion

1. The Proposed River Edge Redevelopment Zone is a contiguous area adjacent to or surrounding a river? Yes X No
2. Total area of the proposed River Edge Redevelopment Zone: **10.99** square miles (minimum of one-half square mile and not more than 12 square miles, exclusive of lakes and waterways)
3. Is the proposed River Edge Redevelopment Zone entirely within the corporate limits of a single designating municipality? Yes X No
4. Does the proposed River Edge Redevelopment Zone have at least 100 acres of environmentally challenged land within 1,500 yards of the riverfront? Yes X No

Part C. Social and economic analysis

In the following, a social and economic analysis of the proposed Joliet River Edge Redevelopment Zone (RERZ) is presented.

C1. Existing plans

The following existing plans are attached to this application:

- Downtown Joliet ETOD Plan (July 2025), Houseal Lavigne
- Joliet Downtown Plan (August 2015), Camiros

C2. Land use patterns

The proposed Joliet River Edge Redevelopment Zone is predominantly residential in character, with over half of the land (57.0%) occupied by housing. Business and commercial uses account for 16.8 percent of the area, providing a significant but secondary role in the land use mix. Institutional and special purpose properties (5.7%) and transportation/communication/utilities (3.4%) add further functional diversity, while industrial uses are limited to 2.0 percent. A notable share of land (13.0%) is classified as vacant, offering redevelopment potential, and smaller amounts are devoted to other uses, including open space, agricultural/undeveloped land, and water features. Overall, the zone reflects a mix of residential neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and underutilized parcels that present opportunities for reinvestment.

C3. Major employers, industrial parks, and vacant facilities

Please see the attached map that locates major employers and vacant sites within the boundaries of the proposed Joliet RERZ. Associated ESRI ArcGIS shapefiles have been shared with DCEO by separate digital upload.

C4. Major employers

The top five major employers in the proposed River Edge Redevelopment Zone, including the type of product or service and the total number of employees, are shown in the table below:

Name of employer	Product/service	Employment
1. North America Central School Bus	Transportation	4,211
2. Ascension Saint Joseph – Joliet Hospital	Healthcare	2,380
3. Harrah's Joliet	Hospitality and entertainment	1,500
4. Madison Industries	Manufacturing	712
5. University of St. Francis	Education	850

C5a. Industrial parks

There are no industrial parks that fall within the proposed boundaries of the Joliet RERZ.

C5b. Undeveloped land

The five largest areas of undeveloped or vacant land within the boundaries of the proposed Joliet RERZ are summarized in the table below:

UNDEVELOPED			
Location	PIN	Area (ac.)	Zoning
A. 292 Logan Avenue	30-07-14-116-008-0000	23.27	I-1 (Light Industrial)
B. SW Corner Larkin & Jefferson St Lot	30-07-07-305-001-0000	8.0	B-3 (General Business)
C. SE Corner of Oneida and Hammes	30-07-07-304-012-0000	7.1	B-3 (General Business)
D. Lyon's Lumberyard	30-07-15-102-017-0000	5.3	I-2 (General Industrial)
E. Old Silver Cross Site	30-07-11-200-005-0010	0.7	R-B (Restricted Business)

C6. Vacant facilities

The five largest areas of vacant facilities within the boundaries of the proposed Joliet RERZ are summarized in the table below:

VACANT			
Location	PIN	Area (ac.)	Zoning
A. Collins St.	30-07-03-376-004-0000	42.6	I-2 (General Industrial)
B. 1125 Collins St.	30-07-03-105-012-0000	24.1	I-2 (General Industrial)
C. 1102 Collins St.	30-07-03-400-020-0000	14.9	I-2 (General Industrial)
D. 3101 Hennepin Dr.	06-03-25-103-008-0000	9.9	B-2 (Central Business)
E. Vacant McKinley Avenue	30-07-21-206-002-0000	9.6	R-2 (Single-Family Residential)

Part D. Economic assets and liabilities

In the following, the economic obstacles and liabilities of the proposed Joliet River Edge Redevelopment Zone (RERZ) are described, as well as its economic development assets and special features.

D1. Economic obstacles and liabilities

The City of Joliet's proposed RERZ faces a combination of structural, economic, and environmental challenges that have hindered reinvestment and economic activity in the area for decades. Once home to a robust base of industrial and transportation commerce, parts of the riverfront corridor now suffer from underutilization, blight, and environmental challenges, creating barriers to job creation, business growth, and property redevelopment.

Shifting trends in urban development during the post-war period led to the relocation of many core businesses from downtown Joliet to outlying areas. The loss of retail stores and professional services offices had an adverse effect on the downtown area and beyond, underscored by neglected properties and a general lack of maintenance and investment. In addition, Joliet's industrial history, as the "City of Steel and Stone," is evident in its aging infrastructure and environmental challenges in areas along the City's riverfront.

From a socioeconomic perspective, some areas of the proposed RERZ fall within low- to moderate-income census tracts, where disinvestment has led to persistent poverty (nearly 11.0% of Joliet residents live below the federal poverty line, with higher rates near the downtown area), aging housing stock, and limited access to capital for local entrepreneurs and property owners. Negative public perceptions around crime and safety issues have also created challenges for the area related to branding and identity. In contrast with newer suburban developments, much of the proposed RERZ lacks the modern amenities and site readiness features that many businesses seek when locating or expanding operations, including high-speed broadband/fiber-optic internet and shovel-ready sites.

In addition, a lack of downtown housing and residents significantly hampers economic activity in the proposed RERZ by limiting the area's ability to support a vibrant, walkable, and sustainable urban economy. Without a critical mass of residents living nearby, local businesses can struggle to generate consistent foot traffic, with demand falling even further in the evenings and on weekends. The absence of a stable residential base also reduces the area's appeal to private investors and limits the effectiveness of public realm improvements. As a result, economic momentum stalls, and the area remains underutilized outside of peak work hours or special events.

Finally, while efforts to coordinate economic development have improved markedly, there remains a need for more sustained collaboration between the public sector, private developers, and financial institutions to create a pipeline of catalytic projects. The RERZ designation is intended to overcome these barriers by providing structured incentives, unlocking redevelopment capital, and fostering a shared vision for transforming the riverfront into an active, mixed-use area that honors Joliet's rich history while positioning it for future growth.

D2. Economic development assets and special features

The proposed RERZ possesses a distinct set of strengths, including its entertainment and cultural attractions, the prominence of governmental and institutional uses, and its role as a

transportation hub. One of its most prominent anchors is the historic Rialto Square Theatre, a 1,966-seat performing arts venue often referred to as the "Jewel of Joliet." The theater attracts thousands of visitors annually for concerts, comedy shows, and civic events, serving as both a cultural landmark and an economic catalyst for the surrounding restaurants, bars, and hotels.

Downtown Joliet is also a major seat of local government. With Joliet's City Hall and the recently constructed \$215 million Will County Courthouse, government offices are the proposed RERZ's largest employer, generating significant daytime activity, particularly in the downtown area. In addition, institutional users like the University of St. Francis and Saint Joseph Medical Center, both located west of the Des Plaines River, are also large employers that serve as strong anchors within the proposed RERZ and can help attract other users.

Transportation connectivity is another major asset that positions the proposed RERZ for sustained economic growth. Downtown Joliet serves as a regional transportation hub, featuring Metra's Rock Island and Heritage Corridor commuter lines, Amtrak's Texas Eagle and Lincoln Service Missouri River Runner lines, and Pace bus service. This level of transportation access and service is rarely found outside of a large city, which can be attractive to businesses looking to locate in Joliet or commuters looking for housing options near transit.

Finally, the overall layout and historic character of downtown Joliet create a strong foundation for placemaking and investment. The area features a compact, walkable street grid, a mix of historic and underutilized buildings ideal for adaptive reuse, and proximity to the Des Plaines River, offering opportunities for waterfront development and recreation. With strategic investments in streetscape improvements, public spaces like the planned City Square across from the Rialto Square Theatre, and new mixed-use projects, downtown Joliet is poised to evolve into a vibrant urban center that balances cultural heritage with modern economic activity.

The proposed RERZ contains four National Register Historic Districts, including the Downtown Joliet National Register Historic, East Side National Register Historic District, Upper Bluff National Register Historic District, and Illinois State Penitentiary-Joliet National Register Historic District. Designation of a National Register Historic District can be a powerful economic development tool, unlocking access to federal and state historic tax credits, grants, and other incentives that make rehabilitation projects financially feasible. The inclusion of these four districts underscores the City's commitment to using historic preservation as an economic development tool.

Part E. Development goals and objectives

In the following, the development goals and objectives of the proposed Joliet River Edge Redevelopment Zone (RERZ) are described.

E1. Goal #1: Revitalize historic, underutilized, and vacant properties in RERZ

Objective 1.1

Return five underutilized or vacant properties to productive use within five years of RERZ designation.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Create a property inventory and condition assessment of all historic, vacant, and underutilized parcels.

Responsibility: Community Development Department

Timeline: Q1-2 2026

- B. Launch RERZ incentive program for property owners and developers.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division

Timeline: Launch program guidelines by Q1 2026; launch Q2 2026

- C. Market prioritized properties to developers through regular outreach.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division

Timeline: Q2-3 2026 (and ongoing)

Objective 1.2

Complete adaptive reuse of three historic buildings within five years of RERZ designation.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Secure designation for local/state/national historic registers, if not already listed.

Responsibility: Community Development Department

Timeline: Engage consultant to prepare designation nomination in Q1-2 2027; secure designation in Q4 2028.

- B. Pursue state/federal historic tax credits for eligible projects and assist developers in applying.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division and private developers

Timeline: Applications supported starting Q2 2026

E2. Goal #2: Increase housing options in RERZ, especially downtown

Objective 2.1

Convert five upper floors of existing historic buildings into housing within five years of RERZ designation.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Identify candidate buildings and assess feasibility.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division, Planning Division, local architects, and consultant(s)

Timeline: Q2 2026

- B. Provide design and code compliance assistance to property owners.

Responsibility: Community Development Department, local architects, and consultant(s)

Timeline: Begin consultations Q3 2026

- C. Leverage building code flexibility for historic rehab where applicable

Responsibility: Community Development Department, Public Works Department, and Utilities Department

Timeline: Case-by-case, starting in 2026

Objective 2.2

Facilitate the construction or rehab of 50 new housing units in the proposed RERZ within five years of RERZ designation.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Adopt zoning amendments to allow higher residential densities, mixed-use development, and reduced parking minimums in targeted areas.

Responsibility: Planning Division

Timeline: Draft by Q4 2026, adopt by Q4 2026

- B. Develop a developer outreach campaign to market housing opportunities and sites.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division and Communications Department

Timeline: Campaign launch by Q3 2026

- C. Offer pre-development assistance (e.g., site plans, market analysis, financial feasibility analysis) for up to five key sites/buildings.

Responsibility: Community Development Department and consultant(s)

Timeline: Ongoing from Q3 2026

E3. Goal #3: Attract investment and support economic development in RERZ

Objective 3.1

Designate and promote priority redevelopment zones by Q4 2026.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Map priority redevelopment sites (e.g., Cass St. and Chicago St. corridors, Saint Joseph Medical Center, and select riverfront parcels)

Responsibility: Community Development Department

Timeline: Q1 2026

- B. Assess infrastructure, zoning, and environmental readiness for each site

Responsibility: Engineering Division and consultant(s)

Timeline: Q2-4 2026

- C. Create property profiles and investment briefs for the top five redevelopment sites

Responsibility: Economic Development Division

Timeline: Q4 2026

Objective 3.2

Launch a business recruitment and retention strategy focused on downtown and riverfront-compatible businesses by Q1 2027.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Conduct a business inventory and market gap analysis for downtown and riverfront districts

Responsibility: Economic Development Division and consultant(s)

Timeline: Q1-2 2026

- B. Identify five to 10 target sectors or business types (e.g., cafés and restaurants, drugstores, professional services, boutique retail)

Responsibility: Economic Development Division

Timeline: Q3 2026

- C. Develop business recruitment toolkit with available spaces, incentives, and demographic data.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division

Timeline: Q4 2026

E4. Goal #4: Expand quality-of-life amenities for residents and workers in RERZ

Objective 4.1

Increase access to daily goods and services in RERZ, especially downtown, by attracting five new convenience-based businesses within five years of RERZ designation.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Conduct retail gap analysis to identify underserved needs.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division and consultant(s)

Timeline: Q1 2026

- B. Offer targeted retail recruitment support, including rent assistance and marketing.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division and Joliet City Center Partnership

Timeline: Launch program Q3 2026

- C. Coordinate pop-up or temporary vendor spaces in vacant storefronts or public spaces.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division and Joliet City Center Partnership

Timeline: Seasonal pilot starting Summer 2026

Objective 4.2

Develop two new public spaces or plaza enhancements within the proposed RERZ within five years of RERZ designation.

Tasks and activities:

- A. Identify priority sites for parklets, plazas, or green spaces in the proposed RERZ.

Responsibility: Community Development Department and Joliet Park District

Timeline: Site selection by Q3 2026

- B. Secure funding through grants or capital improvement budget.

Responsibility: Economic Development Division, and Grants Coordinator, Public Works Department

Timeline: Apply by Q4 2026

- C. Design and construct enhancements (e.g., seating, landscaping, lighting).

Responsibility: Engineering Division and private contractor(s)

Timeline: Construction complete by Q4 2029

Part F. Course of action/zone management plan

In the following, the course of action/zone management plan for the proposed Joliet River Edge Redevelopment Zone (RERZ) is described.

F1. Targeted industries

Joliet's strategic location makes it an attractive location for a variety of industries and business types. Its strategic location at the crossroads of major transportation routes, combined with available industrial land, access to labor, and proximity to the Chicago metro area, makes it especially well-suited for the following target industries:

Healthcare and life sciences industries

Joliet's growing and aging population, along with the presence of institutions like Saint Joseph Medical Center and other regional health facilities, supports continued investment in outpatient care, diagnostics, and health-related services. The area is also a cost-effective location for back-office health operations and medical logistics. Access to trained professionals from local education providers and proximity to the greater Chicago healthcare network make Joliet a practical and scalable location for healthcare service providers.

Downtown and tourism-related businesses

Downtown Joliet offers a unique setting for tourism-related enterprises, drawing from attractions such as the historic Rialto Square Theatre, Harrah's Casino, and historic U.S. Route 66. With growing investment in downtown redevelopment and residential infill, the area is becoming increasingly attractive to restaurants, boutique hotels, arts organizations, and professional services. A walkable environment, historic architecture, and a growing calendar of events create a vibrant setting for tourism and hospitality ventures.

Advanced manufacturing

Joliet is well-positioned to support advanced manufacturing due to its robust infrastructure, skilled labor force, and proximity to major markets in Chicago and the broader Midwest. Workforce training programs offered by Joliet Junior College and other regional institutions help meet the technical labor demands of modern manufacturers, and competitive land costs and access to reliable utilities make the area attractive for companies looking to expand or relocate.

Despite Joliet's strengths, several persistent deficiencies must be addressed to unlock the proposed RERZ's full potential, including the presence of environmentally contaminated sites, aging and inadequate infrastructure, and blighted properties. Public investments will be required to improve access, upgrade utilities, and remediate environmentally challenged sites. Additionally, the City must help mitigate the higher upfront costs often associated with riverfront redevelopment, including floodplain compliance. Through the RERZ designation, the City aims to overcome these barriers, attract private investment, and foster high-quality development that aligns with its vision for a vibrant and economically diverse area.

F2. Marketing of RERZ

The City of Joliet's Economic Development Division will serve as the lead entity responsible for marketing the Joliet RERZ. The division will coordinate all outreach and promotional activities related to the zone and will serve as the primary point of contact for developers, property owners, businesses, and community stakeholders interested in pursuing projects within the RERZ.

To support these efforts, the City intends to produce print and digital promotional materials, create and maintain a dedicated RERZ webpage, and host events and outreach sessions. The City also anticipates leveraging additional marketing and technical assistance resources through partnerships with the Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry and Will County Center for Economic Development.

Planned marketing activities will include:

- Production of informational brochures for property owners and developers,
- An RERZ webpage featuring an interactive map, eligibility criteria, application forms, and FAQs,
- Hosting of RERZ information sessions and developer roundtables,
- Promotion through social media campaigns and newsletters,
- Participation in real estate development conferences, and
- Targeted outreach to owners of key riverfront properties and historic assets.

Through this multi-channel marketing effort, the City aims to raise awareness of the RERZ program, drive private investment, and ensure the zone achieves its potential as a catalyst for environmental, historic, and economic revitalization along the river corridor.

F3. Publicly owned land disposition

The City of Joliet is committed to leveraging publicly owned real property within the proposed RERZ to catalyze private investment and achieve long-term redevelopment goals. To that end, the City intends to develop a structured public property disposition program that prioritizes the strategic sale, lease, or transfer of City-owned parcels to qualified developers, non-profit partners, and institutions whose projects align with the objectives of the RERZ. The primary goals of this program are to:

- Encourage productive reuse of underutilized or vacant City-owned parcels, particularly historic structures or those with riverfront access,
- Facilitate projects that advance the goals of environmental remediation, historic preservation, and job creation, and
- Ensure that redevelopment of public land contributes to a walkable, mixed-use urban environment that strengthens the economic vitality of the downtown and river corridor.

To achieve these goals, the City will issue periodic requests for proposals (RFPs) for key public sites within the RERZ, with clear evaluation criteria that focus on economic impact, design quality, community benefits, and consistency with the RERZ's overall goals and objectives. For smaller or less strategically located parcels, the City may consider direct negotiations or negotiated sales, subject to City Council approval, provided the proposed use meets minimum redevelopment standards and includes provisions for public benefits.

In all cases, the City will conduct disposition processes with transparency and will work closely with private developers and community partners to identify and remove barriers to redevelopment, such as site access, zoning constraints, or title issues. Through this coordinated disposition strategy, the City of Joliet seeks to position its publicly owned land assets as tools for economic growth, environmental cleanup, and high-impact redevelopment within the RERZ.

F4. Local incentives

No local incentives will be offered at this time.

Part G. Community support

The preparation of the City of Joliet's River Edge Redevelopment Zone (RERZ) application was informed by meaningful input, collaboration, and support from a broad cross-section of community stakeholders. Throughout the planning process, the City engaged in discussions with business leaders, workforce and economic development professionals, non-profit and cultural institutions, and financial institutions to ensure that the proposed RERZ reflects shared priorities for revitalization, job creation, and long-term economic resilience.

Key partners included the Will County Center for Economic Development, which provided strategic guidance on redevelopment priorities with regional economic goals. The Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry offered insight into local business needs and advocated for policies that will help attract private investment within the proposed zone. The Workforce Investment Board of Will County provided valuable insights into the local labor market and emphasized the importance of integrating workforce training opportunities into redevelopment strategies.

In addition, the City consulted with representatives of Rialto Square Theatre, a cultural anchor within the proposed RERZ, whose continued success depends on a vibrant surrounding environment. The theater's leadership emphasized the importance of the RERZ in attracting complementary uses, increasing downtown foot traffic, and preserving the historic character of the area. The City also consulted with local financial institutions such as Midland States Bank, which shared perspectives on capital access, lending conditions, and the potential for leveraging RERZ incentives to support redevelopment of underutilized properties.

This collaborative, consultative approach underscores the broad-based community support for establishing an RERZ in Joliet. Stakeholders recognize the unique potential of the proposed RERZ to catalyze reinvestment in challenged areas, preserve key historic assets, expand housing and employment opportunities, and reinforce Joliet's role as a regional center of commerce, government, and culture.

Part H. Zone administrator

Name: Paulina Martínez
Title: Economic Development Director
Phone: (815) 724-3734
Email: pmartinez@joliet.gov

The River Edge Redevelopment Zone (RERZ) Administrator is responsible for managing the administration and implementation of the RERZ program for the City of Joliet. In addition, the RERZ Administrator will serve as the primary point of contact for developers, property owners, businesses, and state agencies, coordinate project eligibility and compliance, maintain program records, and facilitate the application and certification process for state and local redevelopment incentives.

Paulina Martínez will serve as the RERZ Administrator for the proposed Joliet RERZ. Ms. Martínez brings experience in economic development, community engagement, and program management, and is well-positioned to support redevelopment efforts within the proposed zone.

The City Manager selected the RERZ Administrator based on criteria including knowledge of redevelopment programs, experience working with public-private partnerships, and the ability to manage inter-departmental coordination and stakeholder communications effectively.

Financial support for the RERZ Administrator position is provided through the City's Economic Development Division, with funding derived from the City's general fund. Where applicable, the City may also allocate administrative cost recovery from grant-funded or incentive-driven redevelopment projects to support ongoing program management.

Part I. Designated zone organization

The City of Joliet does not intend on naming a designated zone organization at this time.

Part J. Applicant certification

THE APPLICANT CERTIFIES THAT:

To the best of my knowledge and belief, data and other information in this application are true and correct, and this document has been authorized by the governing body of the applicant. I further certify that each incentive authorized by the governing body will be implemented and that all necessary administrative procedures will be established and effected.

CERTIFYING REPRESENTATIVE: (To be signed by the Chief Elected Official)

Designating Unit of Government (Municipality)

Chief Elected Official

Date

Title

Attachments

[The confirmation of notice of public hearing along with a copy of newspaper article]

[Transcripts of the public hearing]

[The original and two certified copies of the designating ordinance]

[A legal description of the River Edge Redevelopment zone]

[Boundary map]

[Land use map]

[Letters of support]

[Existing plans]