

News

Revitalization begins in College Hill as Augustana launches CDC initiative

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Augustana College is leading a collaboration with the City of Rock Island, businesses and citizens to spur mixed-use retail, residential and neighborhood improvements in the College Hill District. The effort aims to create a more vibrant, walkable and economically dynamic neighborhood that serves both Rock Island residents and Augustana students.

The Hilltop Community Development Corporation is a newly formed initiative to cultivate growth near the edges of Augustana's campus. A CDC is a non-profit community-focused organization designed to foster revitalization by investing in housing, small businesses and neighborhood infrastructure. The CDC is part of Augustana's Bold & Boundless Strategic Plan, aligning with the college's commitment to connecting through partnerships, enhancing neighborhood vitality and activating campus edges as recommended in the Campus Master Plan.

The Hilltop CDC has already purchased its first property, the former Curry-Out QC restaurant at 1407 30th St., to be developed for mixed business and residential use. The property at 30th Street and 14th Avenue, a five-minute walk from the southern edge of Augustana's campus within Rock Island's [College Hill District](#), has undergone an environmental review and is slated for removal this quarter.

Founded in 2011, the College Hill District is a walkable neighborhood that includes restaurants and businesses, including long-time establishments Fred & Ethel's 50's Antiques, Happy Joe's Pizza and Ice Cream, and Kavanaugh's Hilltop Bar & Grill. Past College Hill District events have included College Hill-o-Ween, Small Business Saturday shopping days, Christmas walks and retro car rallies.

A VIBRANT AND THRIVING HUB

Augustana President Andrea Talentino said this local investment creates synergy and builds upon Augustana's relationships to cultivate long-term benefits for both the college and Rock Island residents. Over time, the CDC aims to serve as a driver for sustainable growth, helping Rock Island neighborhoods thrive through targeted investment, collaborative planning and inclusive engagement.

"Augustana is thrilled to join with city and community partners to bolster economic, architectural and community-building initiatives in the College Hill area and to work together to seek solutions to meet the needs of the district," she said. "We want to be a strong partner in making Rock Island a valued place to live and work. Augustana is proud to call Rock Island home, and we're proud to unite to create a more vibrant and thriving hub for the benefit of our students and the community."

Jeff Rose, community member of the CDC board says, "As a business leader with deep roots in this community, it's encouraging to see Augustana stepping up as a thoughtful and engaged neighbor. This initiative isn't just about buildings — it's about creating a place where people feel connected, supported, and proud to live and work. The CDC is helping us imagine what's possible for the Hilltop."

CONNECTING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

The CDC initiative stems from Augustana's strategic goal of connecting through partnership, which seeks to work with Rock Island to contribute to neighborhood vitality and enhanced neighborhoods around campus, and to serve as an engaged partner in the region. This goal is articulated in [the college's strategic plan](#) and was supported by the Augustana Board of Trustees.

Rock Island Mayor Mike Thoms said, "Augustana has been a wonderful partner for many years, and we're very pleased to join them in this new initiative to bring increased resources, housing and storefronts to the College Hill District. We're excited to contribute to future-focused planning for Rock Islanders and the college."

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Augustana President Andrea Talentino

The 10 members of the CDC held an inaugural meeting March 18 at Augustana's Sorensen Hall. One of the group's first orders of business is hiring a part-time executive director who will direct and manage the activities of the non-profit; guide strategic planning and redevelopment efforts; and collaborate with city officials and community partners to ensure long-term, sustainable revitalization, including raising funds and seeking creative solutions to community needs.

Kirk Anderson, Augustana's chief financial officer, is the board president of the CDC.

"The CDC will develop and prioritize projects with an emphasis on serving the College Hill District, including mixed-use redevelopment and attracting small businesses with a focus on food and beverage or retail," he said. "The CDC's projected 2026 operating budget exceeds \$90,000 through grants and philanthropic gifts, demonstrating strong early investment in the district's revitalization. We know the investments of the CDC will have a great impact on enhancing Rock Island and our region. These efforts will support job creation, strengthen local businesses and enhance quality of life for residents and students alike."

In addition to cultivating storefronts, Anderson said the CDC will work on several goals to redevelop and expand quality housing opportunities, such as Augustana employee rental housing and campus-adjacent housing opportunities for Augustana seniors and Rock Island residents. The group also plans neighborhood identity and signage improvements.

Anderson said, "The multifaceted CDC initiative is not only focused on spurring economic development, but also promoting sound environmental practices, public infrastructure improvements and neighborhood events by way of educational gatherings, markets, property clean-up and other volunteer activities."

A HISTORY OF COLLABORATION

The college has a long track record of collaborating with the City of Rock Island, including most recently on the creation of the [\\$1.5 million tennis court complex at Lincoln Park](#) at 38th Street and 11th Avenue. The project includes a 10-year lease to the college for that section of the park. The six regulation National Collegiate Athletic Association courts are available for Augustana and community use.

Over the next three years, the CDC aims to create vibrant commercial spaces, improve housing access for residents and students, and support Rock Island's growth as a dynamic, inclusive community.

"This is more than a symbolic gesture, it's a real investment in Rock Island's future," Mayor Thoms said. "With new infrastructure, commercial space and housing in the pipeline, the Hilltop CDC is setting a bold tone for the next chapter of neighborhood growth."

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