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Rockford Register Star

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S STRANGE NEW WORLD

Rockford Park District split with city over Davis Park plans

Jeff Kolkey
Rockford Register Star | USA TODAY NETWORK

ROCKFORD — A disagreement over what Davis Park should be and who should take care of it after a \$15.5 million facelift is putting the responsibility of the park's future upkeep and maintenance in the hands of the city.

The city of Rockford will budget \$250,000 annually and use its own staff for care for Davis Park after the renovations now that the Rockford Park District has backed out of a decades-long maintenance agreement.

"The original spirit and intent was to maintain the park's green space," Jay Sandine, the executive director of the Rockford Park District said in an Aug. 15, 2025, letter to City Council members. "The city's upcoming \$15M+ investment at Davis Park significantly changes the scope of work from what was originally agreed upon."

Since the Davis family donated the 7-acre river-front festival grounds in 1989, the Park District has maintained it, the Rockford Area Venues and Entertainment Authority (RAVE) has programmed it, and the city has owned it.

But Sandine said the planned \$15.5 million revamp will change the nature of the historically underutilized park. Until now, mowing the lawn has been what's mostly been required.

In his letter to the council, Sandine said the Park District favors the city's investment in Davis Park and had a hand in shaping it but "without confirmed revenue to offset the cost" does not have the resources or staffing to commit to maintaining the new park.

"Our priorities remain focused on neighborhood parks, rebuilding playgrounds, enhancing amenities and expanding programming, which are priorities shaped by the feedback of more than 40,000 community members," Sandine said in his letter.

Park District sought changes

While the Park District "fully supports" the Davis Park revamp, its officials raised concerns with Rockford's plans for an intricate, universally designed playground a year ago, Sandine said.

The Davis Park playground is designed to serve as a regional attraction that brings daily activity to the park.

Sandine has advocated for an alternative. He offered for the Park District to take ownership, operational and maintenance responsibility for the playground and skatepark as long as the city found money to pay for it and agreed to change the playground's design.

"Our recommendation was not to have a large, regional destination playground, rather a smaller playground or small play elements throughout the park that would complement the main features of Davis Park," Sandine told City Council.

No agreement reached

Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara said city officials continue to meet with the cash-strapped Park District to find ways to collaborate.

But with the Park District backing out of the maintenance agreement for Davis Park, Rockford has budgeted money from its Redevelopment Fund to maintain Davis Park on its own.

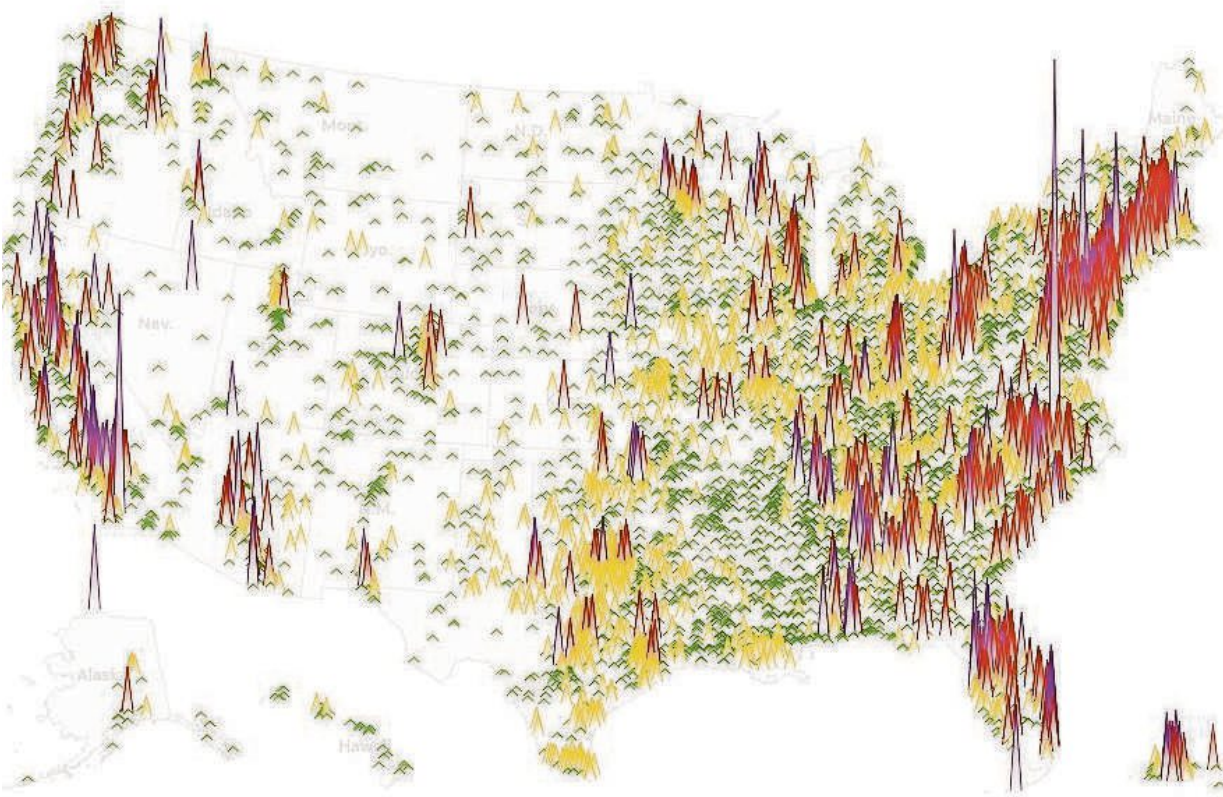
The Redevelopment Fund is a pool of money generated by a 1% tax on hotel stays, bar tabs and restaurant bills reserved for subsidizing the BMO Center and the revitalization of downtown Rockford.

City Administrator Todd Cagnoni said the plan is for Public Works personnel to maintain Davis Park. A total of \$75,000 annually will be reserved for

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FOREVER CHEMICALS

Analysis: Water systems fail to meet EPA standards



USA TODAY's analysis shows hundreds of public drinking water systems recently failed to meet EPA standards on 'forever chemicals,' which they'll need to fix within a few years. Thousands more reported lower levels of these toxic chemicals within EPA limits. AUSTIN FAST/USA TODAY

Smaller towns suffer contamination, too

Austin Fast
USA TODAY

Shane Pepe knows exactly how his town's drinking water came to be polluted with the "forever chemicals" it recently reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The borough manager in Emmaus, Pennsylvania, points to a firefighter training facility as the source of contamination that averaged 32 times the federal limit over the past year. For decades, fire-extinguishing foams containing PFAS seeped into the local aquifer during training exercises.

"While our firefighters are practicing to save your life, they had no idea that at the same time the water system was getting poisoned," he said.

Emmaus was among 839 water systems whose yearly average exceeded EPA limits for two types of forever chemicals, according to a USA TODAY analysis of new test results the EPA has released. Together, these utilities serve 46 million Americans.

These PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are part of a family of chemicals engineered to repel liquids and heat, making them nearly indestructible. They can build up in nature and in human bodies, increasing the risk of certain types of cancer and other health problems.

The EPA is nearing the end of the largest PFAS testing initiative it has undertaken – a three-year effort that requires most public drinking water systems serving at least 3,300 customers to sample and report measurements for several types of forever chemicals.

Places that have found contamination now need to find other sources of drinking water or install filtration systems that can remove the PFAS within the next few years. That deadline had been set for 2029, but in May, the EPA announced plans for an extension. The agency also rescinded limits on four other types of PFAS set under the Biden administration in 2024.

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Is it safe to drink tap water in Illinois?

Hannah Hudnall
USA TODAY NETWORK

Have you ever wondered what chemicals are in your town's drinking water? Unfortunately, some Illinois areas may not like the answer.

USA TODAY published a map of public drinking water systems that recently submitted test results for "forever chemicals" to the Environmental Protection Agency. Several areas in Illinois were found to have levels over the federally dictated levels.

Here's what we know.

What are 'forever chemicals'?

PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals," are defined by the EPA as long-lasting chemicals with components that break down very slowly over time.

Because of the widespread use of these chemicals, they are found in water, air, soil, fish and even human blood in varying levels. Scientific studies have shown that exposure to some of these chemicals may be linked to harmful health effects in humans and animals.

As a result, the EPA established legally enforceable levels in 2024 for six PFAS in public drinking water. Public water systems must monitor for these chemicals and take action to reduce the levels of these chemicals if they violate the EPA's standards. They must also provide notification to the public of the violation.

Can PFAS be filtered out of water?

Not all filters reduce PFAS in water, so you should look for a filter that is specifically certified to do so, according to the EPA.

The agency recommends using the following types of water filters:

- Charcoal (Granular Activated Carbon or GAC): These filters use carbon to trap chemicals as water passes through them.

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