

By [Brian Leaf](#)[Print Page](#)

March 10, 2016 10:07AM

MercyRockford CEO: 'We're in Rockford to stay'

ROCKFORD — The Rockford City Council is behind MercyRockford Health System's \$485 million hospital campus on the city's northeast side. Javon R. Bea has it in writing, a pledge the president and CEO of MercyRockford says will keep the project in Illinois.

"This bold gesture offered by the mayor and 11 aldermen, signing this commitment to MercyRockford, is greatly appreciated and humbly accepted," said Bea, who watched via cell phone video a news conference called by Rockford Mayor Larry Morrissey at Rockford Health Physicians Clinic, 2300 N. Rockton Ave.

"The vote has to be taken, but with 11 aldermen pledging to vote affirmatively on the 21st, it's done. We're in Rockford to stay."

A giant letter to Bea signed by 11 aldermen and Morrissey, vowing support for what's being called the largest development project in the city's history, was the backdrop for today's news conference.

"We want to personally convey to you and the citizens of the City of Rockford that we are committed to approving the Annexation and Development Agreement that the city has negotiated with MercyRockford, and ensuring that the permit process is accelerated in order to ensure that MercyRockford can commence construction on its new medical campus on March 22, 2016," reads the letter, sent to Bea on March 8, the day after two aldermen delayed a vote on the matter through a parliamentary procedure.

Ald. Venita Hervey, D-5, made a motion to lay over an agreement that would bring MercyRockford's 263-acres at East Riverside Boulevard and Interstate 90 into the city and trigger construction of the project. Ald. Linda McNeely, D-13, seconded the motion that, by state law, automatically prevented aldermen from voting on the matter until the next City Council meeting on March 21.

Both aldermen oppose MercyRockford's expansion because they say it shifts critical medical resources from west side Rockford Memorial Hospital to the new east side campus.

They may be the only two to vote against the project, which has bipartisan support, when it returns to council chambers. Aids. Jamie Getchius, Tom McNamara, Kevin Frost, Pam Connell, Ann Thompson-Kelly, Jeanne Oddo, Teena Newburg, Frank Beach, Karen Elyea, John Beck and Joe Chiarelli all signed the letter. Ald. Tim Durkee, a physician affiliated with SwedishAmerican Health System who abstains from voting on matters involving health care development, did not sign the letter.

Hours before the noon press event Morrissey said at a Next Rockford meeting this morning that he expected the annexation agreement to pass by an 11-2 margin when it comes before the council on March 21. On Monday, aldermen approved rezoning the land from agricultural to commercial by an 11-2-1 vote. Hervey and McNeely voted against the measure and Durkee abstained.

Bea threatened during negotiations to move the project to Beloit, Wisconsin, if it wasn't approved by aldermen Monday.

Bea said he needed approval of the project by the council so he could take the project to the bond market this month. MercyRockford said in documents filed with the state that it would use \$392 million in bond revenue to help finance the project.

Bea said that on March 21 he'll meet with representatives from Moody's, a bond rating service. Then he'll take that bond rating to investors and pitch the project.

"Hopefully they are going to want to gobble up our \$400 million in bonds," Bea said.

MercyRockford has said it wants to begin moving earth for the project this month. It plans to open its 188-bed hospital and diagnostic center by June 2019.

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Mayor Larry Morrissey speaks in support of the \$485 million MercyRockford project during a press conference on Thursday, March 10, 2016, at Rockford Memorial Hospital. Aids. Teena Newburg (center), I-9, and Jeanne Oddo, D-8 also spoke of their support for the project. SUNNY STRADER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/RRSTAR.COM

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