

Chet D. Kolodziej,

Sustain Rockford: Part

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Haley Dahl: Hello, my name is Haley Dahl, and welcome to another episode of Green Exploration: Rockford. Today I'm speaking with Chet Kolodziej to further explore sustainability in the Rockford region. ***Intro Music*** We are here with Chieko Kolodziej. So I'm really excited to begin this conversation with you. So would you like to say anything to introduce yourself?

Chet: Yeah, I'm Chet Kolodziej and I do not work for the City and all that, but I do have close connections with the City. My connections are not only with the city of Rockford, but in the region, which includes Winnebago county and Boone county, and depending what the circumstances are, can sometimes include Stevenson county. So if he had the three counties together, it's maybe 450,000 people. It's partially rural, very rural. I'm working right now with some people who are working on a biogas project. For... do you know what CAFO is? It's these pig farms where they milk like three or 4000 cows.

Haley: Oh, okay!

Chet: And all that stuff that cows make.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: You can make energy from it.

Haley: The methane.

Chet: Or you let it get rained on and wash into the watershed.

Haley: Yeah, that's no good.

Chet: And destroy the land.

Haley: I remember learning about that concept in my environmental science course, which I actually took at Rock Valley College.

Chet: Yeah, it's actually pretty big in Wisconsin, but Illinois is kind of different. I just want to make one general comment too. When I speak to the subject, there is no the United States when it comes to energy. These United States, and each region is quite different. So like, for example, I'm wavering a little bit, but we've got a circumstance where I'm at a working group for the Illinois Solar for All program, which is for income eligible people. And one of our problems is that the housing stock for generally income eligible people is not as good as the suburbs, you might say, etc, etc. So a number of the homes don't qualify, because the roof's not going to last 25 years.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: So what we're trying to do is, where we work with the, with a low income heating program, which generally will upgrade the house. And then from that point, refer to them that they might want to look at solar, and it's highly subsidized. But the problem is that the two programs are administratively totally separate.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: And so there's no integration, but in Wisconsin, okay, they are integrated. And in the northeast, and in Massachusetts, as an example, in Vermont, and all that. You cannot put in a subsidized solar system, okay, without first having an energy efficiency audit done. Yeah, some things work well, and some things don't work as well. So sorry to get off.

Haley: Yeah, no! That was great.

Chet: I, I think it kind of ties into the general theme of of all this, what are some of the barriers, but I've been kind of at his energy efficiency, and in solar and a bunch of oddball technologies having to do with clean technologies, primarily from the technology and from the innovation and implementing them into into the, I don't like this word, but it is well understood, real world.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Out of the lab, out of the small businesses, etc, etc. So like, as an example, I, I do review work for business plans for the Clean Energy Trust, and also for Argonne Labs.

Haley: Okay.

Chet: And then my, my tech is people are, the people get really wound up about, you know, the technology, how the electrons move, and all the other cool stuff. And the guy says, "Well, who do you, where do you find the people that will install these?"

Haley: Yeah, for sure.

Chet: Yeah, it's great. It's a great thing for Wisconsin, but, you know, you can't do this in Illinois, because interconnect rules that are kind of controlled by the utilities are different. So...

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: So, so at the end of the day, I mean, it's just part of sustainability, you know, type of thing and now that we're getting into, you know, the big buzzword is decarbonisation.

Haley: Yes.

Chet: That's really opening up, really opening the doors that hopefully, that we can get more continuity from state to state. You know, so what's allowed, what's not allowed or at least get to different states to move in those directions, so...

Haley: Yeah, the United States does seem to lack a federal framework to kind of like guide those states in...

Chet: Yeah, I mean, Texas.

Haley: ...right direction.

Chet: Everyone likes to knock Texas this week. What happened last week, where some states call the people that control the, the way that utilities work, they call them Public Service Commission's. Sometimes it has a meaning, they really are public service, but sometimes it's, you know, it's like what public?

Haley: I just, I feel like especially because there's gonna be conflict of interest naturally between different regions and states. But I feel like it's the job of the federal government to kind of be that guide, if that makes sense, because it's important to give the states the freedom to implement things as they see fit, but it's also important to make sure that the states are practicing sustainable operations, because I feel like at this point in our society, we can't keep ignoring that.

Chet: But, you know, brings up the four points I'd like to make is that, you know, there's a technology itself, and then there's the innovation that gets it to the market, but the two barriers, okay, one, are particularly in the in the energy fields, okay, is the public policy, which that's what you're talking about.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: And then the other thing is behavior.

Haley: That's for sure. We're humans!

Chet: One of your questions you're going to ask me is, you know, what, what, what are the big environmental problems in Rockford? I think if you ask, most people will probably say, "Uhhh, I don't know."

Haley: Yeah, that's so true, though. I feel like a good portion of the population is not really well seasoned in environmental issues.

Chet: Yeah, well, you know, they're, they're, you know, the big picture is this. I mean, if your, your house with the river that's next to your house floods every spring, you've got an environmental problem, but if it's happened two neighborhoods over, you know, it doesn't.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: If you live next to a coal fired plant, you know, you got a problem. But if you're, you're out in the country and all that, and your biggest problem is stray cats, you know, that's my environmental problem here.

Haley: Yeah, out of sight, out of mind, for sure. It's kind of hard for people to see past, naturally of course, to see past the problems that they're dealing with right in front of them, and also considering the problems of their neighbors.

Chet: But I think ,I think it's kind of important that when I speak to the subject quite a bit, I've probably spoken a hundred times in the last 10 years, to different groups in Milwaukee and Madison and Sweden.

Haley: Oh, wow.

Chet: I've been to Sweden a couple times, which is, which is quite interesting.

Haley: That's awesome.

Chet: I have a cartoon, you always have to start out with a joke.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: It's a two part cartoon. Somebody is talking to an audience and says, "Who's for change?" Everybody waives their hands. And I says, "Who wants to make change?" Everybody is bowing down and hiding.

Haley: Like, not me! Looks the other way.

Chet: I'm sorry. I think it's, I think it's a good segue to what we're talking about.

Haley: Oh, for sure. No, for sure. Don't apologize, because I'm really, really enjoying to hear your insight on these topics.

Chet: So I'm pretty much an advocate, you know, for sustainability.

Haley: Me too.

Chet: And there's an awful lot of solutions. And I think sometimes we, we're not tugging the same direction.

Haley: Definitely, definitely.

Chet: Even like, you know, the decarbonisation you got cap and trade. And then you got a carbon tax. And then some people say the carbon tax should go, should be rebated back to the public. You know, so that the, you know, the, pardon expression, the corporation is now used it just to raise prices.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: And you get into like, what else can we use the money for stuff. So at the end of the day, we're you know, we're both tugging on the rope, so to speak, you know, to put a carbon value out there, and which I think is a, personally I think is a, is a very good way to do this.

Haley: I agree. 100%

Chet: Some people would say, you can't tax, we just want to get rid of it.

Haley: You can't, you got to incentivize certain things and decentivise other things to make things happen, I feel like naturally, in this system that we live in, in America.

Chet: Yeah.

Haley: Alright, to segway into the first question, I feel like a lot of this has already been touched on, so you know, whatever you want to add in regards to this, go ahead. And so the first thing I would like to know is what motivated you to get involved in the environmental challenges in Rockford. And can you

please give me some background on your involvement, interest and motivation, and what projects are you currently working on? Which I believe you already mentioned?

Chet: Probably tell by the hair. Okay. I have been at this a while, okay. I'm going to use 20 years, okay. Which to you is almost a lifetime, isn't it?

Haley: Actually, I am 20. So... *laughs*

Chet: Okay, fine. So, so about 20 years ago, I decided to kind of go out on my own. And I've always had an interest, and even though my background is, I'm actually a CPA, I don't tell people that. Master's degree in business, so anyway, I really like, as I mentioned, to be able to work with companies that have interesting technology, and they have challenges of getting into the market. I mean, it could be anything, I mean, we could be, I could be helping people make weapons, okay, but the grand challenge is and the fun part for me is working in the energy field, okay, and naturally, with the energy field, the way it's going is with clean energy, clean technologies, etc, etc. So it's all natural, you know, the natural progression. So how I got into it, I just kind of wandered into it. I could make a lot of money, okay, doing other things, but, you know, just a point in life where I want to do something to give back. I just want to relax and work with interesting people.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: I've done some review work for the National Academy of Science. Been on panels because I have an expertise in commercializing clean technologies. And it's kind of fun when you sit in a room with 20 people and find out there's only two of you in the room that don't have a PhD. Okay, and so yeah, you know, that's the reason I get involved in these things. They bring me in to them, because sometimes, you need someone who has a different point of view.

Haley: Oh, yeah, for sure.

Chet: I'm working right now with the National Science Foundation, with a professor at Purdue, and some students with a program on commercializing a type of a solar system that has a stop engine light in it, that's how we describe it, because people don't know if it's working or not. You can't watch the electrons, you know, go around. So anyway, that's my interest and how I got dragged into this, and there's just so many new things and good things, and worthwhile things in regards to energy, energy efficiency, decarbonisation. And that's one of the legs of sustainability.

Haley: I think it's actually really interesting that you have that business background, because we want to see the necessary environmental change and sustainability changes that we need. We need to make it economically attractive.

Chet: Yeah, I was talking to, I was talking to the fellow. I won't mention his name, but he knows more about in Illinois, how the energy system works from a policy standpoint. He's not in currently, directly involved, but he's actually consultant for the Metropolitan Mayor's Caucus.

Haley: Okay!

Chet: And we were just talking recently about motivations. And I said, "What I've found is no matter what people say, about 70% of their motivation is to reduce their cost."

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: "20% is to be green. And 10% is so that they can publish an article and look like they're doing something."

Haley: Like PR.

Chet: And he says, "I think you're overstating that 30%, Chet." And I says, "Yeah, I think I am, but I like to think that people are better than that."

Haley: Think positively.

Chet: I'm working right now with a park district. In Rockford.

Haley: Okay.

Chet: On a project, which is about 1000 panels.

Haley: Oh, wow.

Chet: I don't get frustrated because you just can't get frustrated. But I know, I don't want to say I'll never do anything. Okay, but, you know, their stated models and what they can do, I think within their system, okay, it's about 95% money. You know?

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: In fact, what I'm trying to talk him into doing is, is putting in a much smaller, like, demonstration system, and all that, and then to get it done. Okay, and then they can use it for student projects. In fact, I talked to a couple friends of mine, they said they would help fund the project. Not necessarily the solar itself, but the display so the children could go in and see how, you know, how they actually work.

Haley: No, that's awesome!

Chet: Solar systems are either behind barbed wire, okay, because you don't want people wandering around with that high voltage stuff.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Higher up, three stories on a roof.

Haley: So you can't really, like, see it.

Chet: So they can't really, can't really see it. So...

Haley: Education, that's, I feel like the key. Just educating the populace so that they're more receptive to the necessary...

Chet: It's got to be normal. I mean, you have to be like, Colorado. You go down the streets and, you know, there's two people don't have solar on their house. And you know, people go like, "Hey, George, how come you don't have solar on your roof?"

Haley: Yeah like, you're the weirdo for not having solar

Chet: But at least you get a conversation.

Haley: No, that's exactly, exactly. The conversations are important. Segwaying into the next question. I would like to know how you define environmental challenges, and how would you define the parameters of the environmental challenges in Rockford?

Chet: Well, you know, environmental is a, you know, I mean, it's a big thing and we've extended to and I think it's well well done to challenge populations, I think the environmental challenges there, I guess if you, if your house is drafting your kids get asthma, and they miss school, you know, and, you know, publicadas doesn't have enough money, I mean, those are environmental challenges that, you know, that extending to health and so on and so forth. But in regards to, you might say, you know, the consumer, the regular everyday person. And I don't know if you heard the term Alice population, asset challenged, low income, currently working...

Haley: Okay.

Chet: ...etc, you know, they're the people who \$1,000 repair on their car and they lose their job, you know, that type of thing. So, but in regards to specific, I mean, the Rock River, okay, doesn't seem to flood as much as it used to. Done a lot of stuff over the years in regards to where there are homes that are in perpetual flooding areas, flood zones, and they're not there anymore, they're torn down, the got federal money. Keith Creek is the same thing. They've managed to straighten that out, and so on and so forth. So in regards to water, and those types of challenges, we don't have an ocean rising and taking over the, you know, over the waterfront, etc, etc. So I guess once in a while we have a tornado, so we're not in a hurricane zone. So we're not worried about that. Water is something that we're starting to see is becoming an issue in the southwest of Chicago and Joliet. We have very good water in Rockford. In fact, it is quite interesting. I was on a committee about two years ago and found out that our water, our groundwater, goes to Juliet.

Haley: Oh, I didn't know that.

Chet: Even though the Rock River goes towards the Mississippi, goes south and west. Our groundwater actually goes the Joliet. Okay, underground, I mean, it's quite interesting, but we don't have, we don't have a water challenge. We have the second largest landfill in Illinois. So...

Haley: Yeah, I was reading about that.

Chet: I mean, it's a long term issue, you know, landfills. But at least locally, the light, you know, our garbage is not a problem. And I've never heard anybody complain about the air quality. I actually have an air quality monitor in my house and also measures the outside because I'm a techie.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Our air is generally good. I mean, you know, when it's, you know, when there's fog, we don't have the traffic, you know. Though, I am sure that if you measure the, measure the corridors, on one, you know, main through, throughways in Rockford at certain times, you know, there's probably that. We don't have a coal fired plant. We have a nuclear plant 40 miles down the road, which...

Haley: Byron.

Chet: Yeah, Byron, which is, you know, but they call that zero emissions? I don't, I don't think that the local people perceive that we have environmental challenges in terms of, you know, hurricanes, floods, forest fires, water, etc, etc, which may, which may explain why maybe we're not as environmentally conscious, you know, etc, etc. And you know, we're outside of the Chicago EPA zone...

Haley: The Region 5 headquarters?

Chet: Yeah, yeah. In fact, at one time, about three or four years ago, I was trying to find out about getting Rockford in the, I can't remember what it is called, but it's the EPA, having new transportation, we found out we couldn't even join, because we weren't continuous with the current one. I talked to the person that ran the one in Milwaukee and found out that we could not join. Okay, we weren't in Wisconsin, so we're kind of like an island out there.

Haley: Yeah. So like, we don't really have any EPA influence out here?

Chet: Well, yeah, there. No, not really, not really, unless somebody can play. We have a groundwater deep issue. This goes back to our industrial past, but I think most people know about them. And they're pretty well in check, you know, etc, etc. So there doesn't seem to be like one thing that can coalesce the community around our waterfront or our beaches, or our kids are dying of asthma, etc. So I imagine, in fact, you know, I'm not, I don't want to accuse anybody of this, but up in Madison that I'm very familiar with, because I'm up there a lot. There's a company called Propeller and what they do is they take, they

have taken the monitoring, air monitoring systems in different communities in the area in Madison, and compare them with the incidences of asthma. Okay, It's like wacko.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: If there's three collaborating reasons that, you know, there's asthma problems, okay? It's number one and two. And I was talking to a fellow who, or the person who started the business, and he told me this, he says, frankly, he says the hospital or health, don't want to know, they really don't want to know.

Haley: Because it's like, if they don't know about it, then there's not a problem to address.

Chet: There's not a problem to address, okay.

Haley: But that, ah that's so, like, avoidant.

Chet: Yeah, it is, but now it's working, okay. It was a startup business seven years ago. So I can't say that I had that much to do with it, but...

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Talking to the person and kind of talking through some of the, you know, the gee whizzed about the thing, because often, you know, you go like, you know, that doesn't make any sense, but maybe just the way it is, maybe there's nothing wrong with me. So anyway, you know, I wish I could say this is it. We do have a couple brownfields. That fact, I don't know if we call it the Barbara Coleman Reed-Chatwood. It's on the river, etc. And they've had, they've gotten federal money to clean it up. They were going to renovate the whole place, and then that project fell apart. So there are spots. Okay, but we don't see people out there starting committee to do this, or to do that, but that I'm aware of.

Haley: Alrighty.

Chet: But they're there. They're there.

Haley: Yes, definitely.

Chet: But I think maybe it's just a matter, yeah, that's a matter of making them known and getting out in the community and saying, "This is how it impacts you and your children."

Haley: Yes, the education is key.

Chet: There's a, there's a person who I met, works for a not-for-profit, large not-for-profit, in Chicago. She lives in Hyde Park. I was talking to her one day, and I almost broke out in tears. Found out that she was actually a lead baby.

Haley: Oh, wow.

Chet: She was two years old. She was infected by lead, and they diagnosed her. She's a very successful, motivated person with a master's degree and you read about what lead does children, you know, etc. So it might be happening here, but we're not hearing about it.

Haley: That's important to keep exploring, that's basically the whole premise of this podcast is to just explore what's going on in the community and seeing how things could be better.

Chet: Yeah, I've asked the, asked the Commonwealth Edison, okay, they can tell you, you know, down to the, down to the block, you know, the amount of money they put into energy efficiency programs, different house, households, and all that. And it's a bit of a thing with me is that I think, Commonwealth Edison needs a larger presence on record. I mean, I can't wrap the statistics, but we're running about 30% of what our fair share should be in regards to energy efficiency money. So I raised the question, I found out that they had the data and says, "Can you let us have the data, block by block by block?" You know, what communities, you know, are taking advantage of the energy efficiency programs. Okay, and I kind of know what the answer is, but without the data. I guess, if I was in public office, I might be pushing that a little bit.

Haley: Yeah, that's the end goal for me is I'm getting my civil and environmental engineering undergraduate degree. And I want to take practical experience that I'll get from working in the environmental engineering field, and then bringing that to the political sphere. So...

Chet: Yeah, and that's, that's the important thing is combining those.

Haley: Yes.

Chet: Because otherwise, you know, I worked with some really, really fine people from CUB, you know, Natural Resources Defense (Council) and a number of these other things and quite often, and they're more in the policy area.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: After a while, you know, it's like, well, we want to see if we can do that.

Haley: Because to get that change, you have to, you know, work the system. I have a minor as well, in sustainable cities, which brings the policy side to my civil engineering degree, which I've been really enjoying.

Chet: I think you're getting into a field that's, you know, it's wonderful, because I think this is a growing field. I don't think we're going to catch, ever catch up with Europe. Sweden, they, backtracking a little bit, we went to town that's called Lidköping in southern Sweden, and they burn garbage, okay. And they

use the heat, okay, to heat virtually every house in the city. Now, one reason that works in Sweden is because they use that water heat there. We stopped using hot water heat in our cities back in the 1920s.

Haley: Oh wow.

Chet: Okay, I mean if you study it, if you study it virtually the downtown Rockford was all hot water heat. There was a power plant down there and they piped that hot water. The University of Wisconsin Madison, the whole campus is heated by their coal fired plant that's downtown, but anyway they were they were so efficient with the heat plant, and Sweden was doing this, they have to import their garbage from England.

Chet: They literally didn't have enough garbage. And when you went to the recycling centers there, I'm not exaggerating, okay, I've got pictures of it, okay, they had 20 different types of bins.

Haley: Wow.

Chet: Okay, all different colors. Now here, you know, we're, you know, we just throw everything into the recycle thing.

Haley: And not everyone even properly does that.

Chet: But in Sweden, okay, they have one for this kind of glass and one for that kind of glass because glass isn't glass and plastic and so on. So it's incredible, but it's kind of baked into their culture.

Haley: That's the thing, it's a lifestyle for sure.

Chet: There was one thing I did find out about that, they were practical, okay. I happen to notice the smoke coming. I mean it wasn't black smoke like a coal fired plant and all that, but I happened to notice that and I asked them guys, okay, if they had what whatever, it was one of the deputy mayors, if they knew what was coming out of that smokestack. They gave me this thing and I found out you couldn't do that here in the United States.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Okay, I can't remember what it was was coming out of there, but it was like twice what our limit is and they knew, okay, but you know they accepted it because, you know, it's a it's a practical thing, so...

Haley: So, into our third question, what environmental challenges has Rockford struggled with the most in the past? So, I know you kind of mentioned that there really hasn't been like one to rally around. So I guess just, we can just answer this as best we can.

Chet: It's mostly flooding.

Haley: Flooding.

Chet: And I guess the other one is, it's an environmental challenge, but I don't think we've, we call it environmental challenge. We've had a bit of, I shouldn't say a bit of, bit of urban sprawl.

Haley: Yeah. Rockford is definitely a wide region.

Chet: Yeah, and the city Rockford is, as an example, you know, we have, we have stretches of the main street that goes through Rockford State Street. You get off the interstate, you get on State Street and you get all through town, but it's the way you get downtown. And the commercial strip where that was built in the 70s and 80s, which is about a mile and a half long, is almost dead now, ookay, replaced by the next commercial strip, which is another...

Haley: By Riverside probably where they're all building up, like the Costco? Yeah.

Chet: Yeah! So, I think we haven't really recognized that as a environmental challenge, but it is one. Whenever they extend the boundaries of the City out, you know, they have to put in longer, more waterpipes and more gasoline lines and so on, so forth, but because they're not used, you know, sooner or later they'll deteriorate. So I don't think it's recognized as an environmental challenge, but I think it is.

Haley: Definitely definitely.

Chet: I lived in Lansing, Michigan, and we lived there, it was the headquarters for Oldsmobile. They don't make Oldsmobiles anymore. And I was, we lived right on the outskirts, right on the interstate. And I was back there about six years ago and it looks like a city that has three rings. The downtown area is the state capitol, and it's, you know, it looks like Springfield, Illinois. It's an older city, but it's vibrant. There's restaurants and stuff like that. And then actually like for almost like a mile and a half around there in a circle, it's empty. Okay, it's just like, clear. And all that, and then when you get out another mile towards the interstate, then it's, "Oh, it's all changed."

Haley: Yeah, yeah.

Chet: We've got a little bit, but I'm sure that's true everywhere.

Haley: I really liked that you brought up the urban sprawl. I just wrote about how rapid urbanization has been causing a lot of water resource issues. Because non-permeable surfaces, such as buildings and concrete, asphalt and how that's been causing a problem with the aquifer that we get our water supply and how we still are managing to take out more water than gets put back in.

Chet: 40 years ago, Olympia brewery, okay, was actually in a building, is actually going to build a brewery. Okay, near, you know, Roscoe, Rockton, north west of downtown Rockford, and there's a,

there is an underground river there. This is not urban legend. Okay, that's down about 300 feet that literally, okay, is a river. It's underneath the, I mean, it's, I mean it doesn't flow in, you know, like a regular river, but there's so much water there, okay, and it parallels, actually parallels the Rock River.

Haley: Oh.

Chet: And where I live, where I live, I live about halfway between Rockford and Belvidere out in the country and out here. We had, we actually had artesian well and a seasonal stream running to the back of my property. About three years after we moved in here, it's not there anymore.

Haley: Oh, wow.

Chet: And I know why, because we were the fourth house in the subdivision. And we all had wells. And now there's about 60 hours. So the water tables dropped. My wells fine, so you know, I guess, you know, and actually, I have a very shallow well, because the underlying rock, but point of the matter is, is that that Creek isn't there anymore.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: The Creek is there only when there's runoff, you know, etc, but the natural spring there, isn't there anymore.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: So it's everywhere. Yeah, they're just, they're just what they call just noticeable differences. I'm good friends with the person who manages the Climate Change program for the city of Madison.

Haley: Oh, okay!

Chet: And I also know the one that runs the Climate Change program for the county of Dane, they've addressed a lot of stuff as farm runoff, etc. Urban sprawl.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Which, you know, eventually, you know, the, you know, the, the water level, and they actually have a problem with flooding there.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: From the, you know, from the Madison lakes, but they're more, they're more apparent, okay. They're more apparent because they had to shut the (road to get) downtown, but two years ago.

Haley: Oh, wow.

Chet: Because they had flooding. And a lot of flooding came down to silting between the lakes. I can't, I can't remember what the lakes were, Mendota, Monona or something. Okay, over there. So they had to, they had to level up the ranges, so they're more apparent. I guess what I'm trying to say is that we just don't seem to have something that, you know, that just hits you in the face when you...

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Or something people talking about? Maybe we can dig into the numbers.

Haley: Exactly.

Chet: I mean, we did a, we did a, City of Rockford actually did a carbon study in 2011. And we've never done another one after that. When I was running, Freedom Field before it closed in 2017 2018. We had students from Rock Valley there, talking about solar farms is, where's it at? And if you missed...

Haley: The airport?

Chet: ...nintey percent of people in Rockford I mean, it's huge. It was the second biggest solar farm in the state when it was built.

Haley: What seems to be the most pressing environmental issues for Rockford currently? Has this change or evolved? How? Why? And I remember, in your email, ah, you actually kind of answered this. And you said the number one issue in my mind is that we do not have an environmental sustainability plan in Rockford or in any of our regional cities or regional plan. And when I was talking to the R1 Planning Council, and that's what they were saying to that, pretty much the biggest issue is that there isn't that plan and they're currently in the works of developing that.

Chet: Yeah, they hired, I have to compliment the Regional Planning in the last three or four years, they've really upped their game.

Haley: Yes, sounds like it.

Chet: If they can continue in the way they're doing it. I don't think some of, the some of the things that I'm talking about will be a problem anymore. The staff they put on in the last two years, their credentials are incredible, really first class. There is an environmental committee.

Haley: Ah yeah, they mentioned that and when I was speaking to them.

Chet: But when you look at the members there's no environmentalist on it. I mean, you're not seeing, you know, the Sierra Club, you're not seeing, the (Illinois) Department of Natural Resources, you're not seeing 350 in all of the, all the environmental advocates.

Haley: So they're lacking like a crucial perspective, essentially.

Chet: Yeah, yeah the perspective is all the dot orgs and dot...

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: You know, dot gov's, you know, etc, and that's okay, you know, that's okay, but I'm actually on the committee, but I have not been going to the meetings, there's a lot of things that that organization does, okay, that are kind of mandated. Okay, you know, like in fact up to about seven years ago, it was almost all transportation, so when you get the, you know, the motor fuel money that, you know, when if you look at the taxes there's a there's a federal tax and there's a state tax, some of that motor fuel money goes back to the regions, okay, to be used for the roads and stuff like that. And in order to qualify for that, you have to have a regional plan. Because you're gonna use the money. A lot of the stuff they were doing there was really mandatory. And then the other stuff is like, and actually one thing they do have that I think is first class is a Greenways Plan, okay.

Haley: Oh, they mentioned that.

Chet: Yeah, that started out because there was grant money available, so it wasn't because necessarily because they thought there was a need for it for the community, it was just more of a, it's the way you you get your money, which is okay. I mean, that's, that's the federal way of making you do things, so...

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: And I got asked by Cheri Bustos, the representative Bustos, about four or five years ago, "How come we don't have EVs?" And I says, "Go to a dealer and ask."

Haley: They don't have, like, they need that education.

Chet: They don't have the stock (inventory), okay, they don't have any literature. Okay, the sales people don't know anything about them. In fact, when I did the study, about five years ago, we had more Tesla's than we had any than every other hybrid existed.

Haley: And that's not very financially feasible for a lot of people.

Chet: And we have, you know, and then ComEd said that they put on an EV charging station, but what they didn't tell the public is that that they close the gate at five o'clock at night. But anyway, anyway, I'm, when we talk about inclusive voices and inclusiveness and so on and so forth, you know, which is, I think that's what we need a little bit more of, you know, etc, ect.

Haley: Definitely, definitely.

Chet: One other, one other thing, and I'm very glad the, I call him the new mayor, he's only, he's been in about two years ago. We have recognized community groups in the community, in different neighborhoods.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: And there was no coordination of that, went away about four or five years ago, so the City didn't really know what's going on in neighborhoods, unless they showed up at the City Council meeting. And they reinstated that position about a year and a half ago. Now we do have some communities are very active, like the one that's near the, what used to be Rockford Memorial Hospital. Because the neighborhood is trying to keep the hospital there.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: Because they built that new hospital.

Haley: Oh, the one off Riverside?

Chet: Yeah, yeah, that replaced the old Rockford Memorial.

Haley: Yeah.

Chet: So they're, they're trying to keep it there, but mostly other communities are pretty quiet. But that's where this is going to come from, okay, getting these...

Haley: Okay.

Chet: Getting these communities awake.

Haley: Yes.

Chet: If I was gonna do one thing. The mayor said, "Do one thing." That's what I'd do.

Haley: Yeah, getting the communities awake and involved.

Chet: Let them know they're being heard.

Haley: I think now would be a good time to wrap up part one of this episode. ***Outro Music*** As always, I would love to thank Chet Kolodziej for sharing his valuable insight during this discussion. I'm looking forward to continuing this discussion and part two of this episode to continue to explore sustainability in the Rockford region. I hope all the listeners learned something new today, and will continue to learn new things as this series progresses. My name is Haley Dahl and I will be signing off until the second part of this episode. Stay green and stay exploring Rockford.