



Downtown's Report

Springfield, Massachusetts

ULI Boston

Report of the Technical Assistance Panel
Urban Land Institute
Boston District Council

October 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
Background.....	2
Observations and Findings.....	2
Recommendations.....	2
INTRODUCTION	4
I. BACKGROUND	4
A. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)	4
B. Urban Land Institute (ULI).....	4
C. ULI National Report	5
D. City of Springfield’s Objectives	5
E. Subject Area.....	5
F. Panel of Experts and TAP Process.....	6
II. OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS.....	9
A. Downtown Assets and Strengths	9
B. Downtown Concerns and Liabilities.....	11
C. Current Initiatives.	14
III. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	16
A. Planning Principles for Downtown Revitalization	16
B. Address Perceptions Regarding Public Safety and Image.....	18
C. Leadership and Organizational Structure.....	20
D. Facilitate Organizational Changes to Promote Real Estate Development.....	24
E. Make Parking an Asset	24
F. Funding	25
G. Physical Priorities and Framework for Revitalization	27
IV. CONCLUSION.....	33
V. APPENDICES	34

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the result of meetings and investigations conducted by the Urban Land Institute Technical Advisory Panel (ULI TAP) of the Boston Chapter, working in conjunction with the City of Springfield, Massachusetts. The Panel gathered information through research and discussions and proposed ideas to support of the City's stated goals and objectives.

This Panel followed the 2006 ULI National Advisory Panel, which set forth recommendations for the entire city. This report refers to the National Panel and establishes priorities and guiding principles for revitalization Downtown, as well as providing a local perspective. Simultaneously, ULI Boston convened a panel on Springfield's South End neighborhood.

Background

The City of Springfield requested that ULI-Boston help to address revitalization priorities. This TAP focused on a geographic area delineated by the Railroad tracks to the north, State Street to the south, the Springfield Armory to the east, and Interstate 91 to the west (Figure 1 of report).

Panelists represented expertise in Urban Planning, Urban Design, Commercial Development and Banking, Housing Development, Architecture, Transportation Planning, and Parking Management. The City provided professional assistance and engagement throughout the project. MassDevelopment, a State-level economic development agency, was also continually involved. Given the complexity of Downtown's issues and the foundation of the National Report, the process of this TAP consisted of two full days plus auxiliary meetings, a more extensive process than ULI-Boston's typical one-day undertaking.

Observations and Findings

Downtown Springfield has many strengths. It possesses a breadth of architectural fabric, an historic built environment, and myriad cultural offerings. The layout is a textbook example of good urban design. One of Massachusetts' only Business Improvement Districts (BID) provides maintenance and surveillance in the area, a dedicated corps of Downtown residents are active and organized, and the regional economy has experienced consistent growth.

Like many historic downtowns, Springfield's faces a variety of challenges. A reputation for crime and homelessness is hurting the investment climate, and the community and media tend to perpetuate this negative reputation. Office vacancy is particularly visible with vacancy rates of 28% in class C, and government-assisted housing units make up 71% of Downtown's 2,500 housing units, with only 3.3% owner-occupancy. Municipal parking facilities experience high vacancies and low rates, and some longstanding art & cultural institutions are relocating.

Recommendations

The Panel offered a number of general principles to guide revitalization activities, as well as specific recommendations. Round-the-clock vitality should be introduced by establishing a balanced mix of housing, employment, and higher education uses. Market-rate housing is important in order to achieve balance, and public sector jobs may be a good target to start with. Existing downtown stakeholders – including the City itself – should lead by example, reviewing assumptions and assessing whether they can increase their contributions to downtown vitality. While immediate action is needed on many priorities, establishing a long-term view of progress is

also important. Active engagement and participation from all sectors, interests, and minority groups will be required for sustained change in Downtown.

Steps should be taken to engage with local media to reshape public perceptions about Downtown. While real issues regarding blight and crime are apparent, the perception of crime appears to be worse than the reality, and addressing the real issues is definitely possible. Springfield need not wait for public safety to be “solved” before moving forward on development and revitalization. Consolidation of social services may help Downtown’s image as well as improve service quality.

Several recommendations are provided around leadership and organizational structure. This is particularly important as the end of Control Board administration approaches. An organization with sufficient capacity to assemble land and negotiate real estate transactions is needed. The Panel identified stakeholder groups lacking leadership representation, and presented four possible entities to lead overall Downtown revitalization, with the suggestion that a new private nonprofit organization might be the best choice.

Improving the functioning of Downtown’s parking system is important to successful revitalization. Well managed parking can be a valuable asset. A series of recommendations is offered to achieve this goal.

The Panel discussed some ideas relative to overall funding. Options included increased State funding, matching funds for the Business Improvement District, funding from the BID itself, parking assets, federal sources, tax credits, and Community Development Block Grants. Organizational staff, Infrastructure, Parking, and Real Estate Development are funding priorities.

Priority revitalization projects were identified based on a set of five principles: 1. Strengthen the “heart” of the City – Court Square to the Quadrangle; 2. Develop infill/downtown housing to support a dynamic community; 3. Provide services; 4. Use transportation infrastructure to enhance, not relocate, activity; and 5. Promote downtown identity and branding.

Based on these principles, four projects were recommended as immediate priorities: 1) Occupancy at Court Square (Old First Church and 13-31 Elm Street); 2. Pyncheon Plaza redevelopment / reopening; 3. Occupancy at the Main Street Federal Building, and 4. Redevelopment of the Civic Center parking garage and frontage on Dwight and Court Streets. An additional nine secondary projects were identified, including the redevelopment of Union Station, and connection of the riverfront bikeway to a larger regional system of trails.

INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of meetings and investigations conducted by the Urban Land Institute Technical Advisory Panel (ULI TAP) of the Boston Chapter, a group of volunteers working in conjunction with the City of Springfield, Massachusetts. The Panel gathered information through research and discussions, examined Downtown, and proposed ideas that would promote positive change in support of the City's stated goals and objectives.

This Panel was designed to follow the Fall 2006 ULI National Advisory Panel, which set forth recommendations for the entire city. The National ULI Report identified numerous opportunities for Downtown revitalization, including maximizing the effect of the many local colleges and high-profile employers, better aligning retail offerings to match current market trends and surrounding demographics, comprehensively showcasing the city's cultural assets, and cultivating new residential and retail development.

This report will refer to the National Panel and report often; however, the ULI-Boston Panel did not seek to confirm nor refute the National Panel's recommendations. With its more limited time and scope, the ULI-Boston Panel focused their attention on steps toward implementation – how a revitalization effort for Downtown could be catalyzed, while also providing a more local perspective. All members of the ULI-Boston Panel are based in eastern Massachusetts, but they all have a personal connection of some sort to Springfield – they are not interested directly in the city but want to see Springfield succeed.

In addition to the Downtown Panel, another panel was convened on important parts of Springfield's South End neighborhood.¹

I. BACKGROUND

A. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

In keeping with ULI's mission, Technical Assistance Panels are convened to provide pro bono planning and development assistance to public officials and local stakeholders of under-resourced communities and nonprofit organizations who have requested assistance in addressing their land use challenges. A group of diverse professionals representing the full spectrum of land use and real estate disciplines typically spend one to two days visiting and analyzing existing built environments, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a fashion consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives, as well as those in the ULI National TAP Report.

B. Urban Land Institute (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the institute now has more than 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

¹ Report for the Hollywood/Gemini Sites in the South End Neighborhood, City of Springfield, Technical Assistance Panel, Urban Land Institute, Boston District Council, 2007

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and help create and sustain thriving communities worldwide.

C. ULI National Report

On September 24-29, 2006 the ULI National Advisory Panel, under contract with the City of Springfield, conducted a comprehensive study and reported the panel's findings and recommendations on the City's assets and liabilities in the areas of residential, commercial and industrial space, as well as their effects on the City in general.

This national report on Springfield devoted considerable attention to the Downtown. It advocated solidifying Downtown Springfield as the preeminent employment, urban, cultural, and visitor center for the Pioneer Valley by reducing crime, encouraging market-rate housing, additional amenities, and ultimately more retail and entertainment. A focus on Court Square and the Federal Building on Main Street were also recommended. The complete report by the National Panel is available online.²

D. City of Springfield's Objectives

In 1992, the City of Springfield lost approximately 80 percent of its non-school state aid, crippling local services. The City did not benefit from periods of economic and housing growth as did the state and country. In 2004, the state stepped in under the Chelsea Receivership Act and formed the five-member Springfield Finance Control Board. Governor Duval Patrick recently announced consistent with the recommendations of the ULI National Panel, that the Control Board will be kept in place for another year. Office of Planning and Economic Development Director David Panagore explained that the city has largely completed the first stage of their reorganization plan to address the lack of core competencies. Currently, the city is in an "administrative stabilization" stage, improving and formalizing administrative best management practices (e.g. community policing and computer systems), as well as switching over their financial system to a more effective and efficient one. Continuing to work on governance while simultaneously tackling challenging economic development issues will continue in following phases.

Overall Master Planning goals for the City have been generally unproductive due to a lack of sufficient resources and a diverse group of constituencies without a clear set of priorities. The City of Springfield requested that the Panel provide recommendations and ideas to (1) jump-start the master plan process for the entire city and (2) develop an improvement program for the South End, given its critical location adjacent to the City's downtown core.

E. Subject Area

Downtown Springfield is located along the western edge of the city, at the center of the City's Connecticut River frontage. The ULI Panel focused on the area bounded by the Railroad arches and tracks to the north, State Street to the south, Spring Street and the Springfield Armory

² [Springfield, Massachusetts, an Advisory Services Panel Report](http://www.uli.org), Urban Land Institute, Boston District Council. This report is available as of June 12, 2007 at <http://www.uli.org>

property to the east, and Interstate 91 to the west. The panel also paid special attention to significant land uses at the edges of this study area, including Union Station, the Springfield Army, and the Connecticut riverfront.

Downtown Springfield is the government, business and cultural center for the city, serves as a regional center for the Pioneer Valley, and includes residential, industrial and institutional uses.

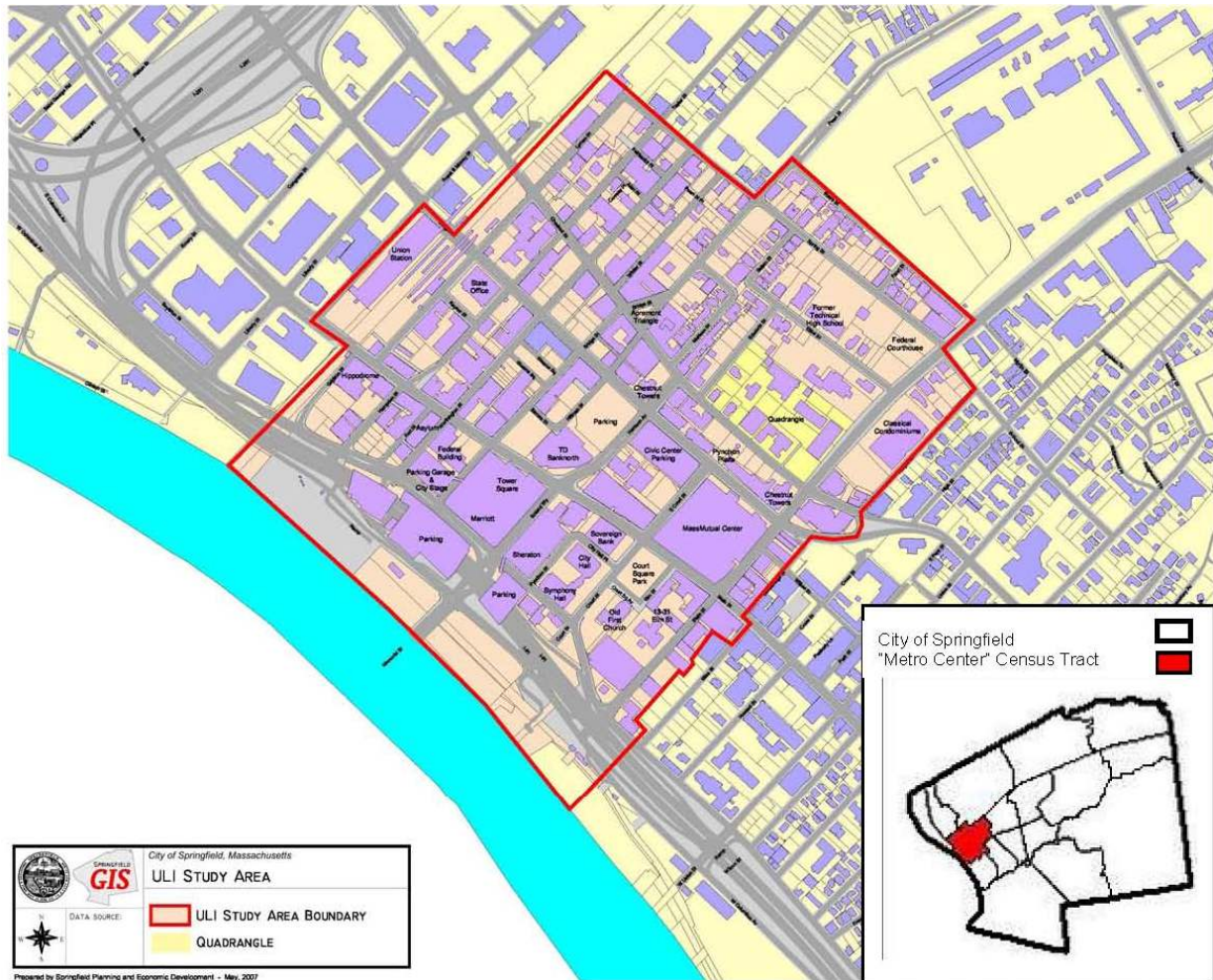


Figure 1. Study Area Boundaries.

F. Panel of Experts and TAP Process

Panel Members

ULI Boston convened a panel of volunteers whose members represent several disciplines connected with land use and development, such as planning, urban design development, marketing and finance, required to understand and assess the critical physical, planning, and real estate challenges in Downtown. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the City’s objectives of the study. Panel members included the following:

- Eric Fellingner, Transportation Planner, Wilbur-Smith Associates (Co-Chair)
- Nancy Springett, Architect, ICON Architecture (Co-Chair)
- Kevin Boyle, Senior Vice President, Commercial Real Estate, Citizens Bank
- Steve Cebra, Sr. Vice President, Walker Parking Consultants
- Larry Koff, Principal, Larry Koff & Associates
- Frederick A. Kramer, President, ADD, Inc (Chair of ULI’s Public Outreach Committee)
- Kathryn Madden, Principal, Sasaki Associates
- Richard Monopoli, Development Project Manager, Boston Properties
- Tracy Smith, District Council Coordinator, ULI Boston
- Lynn Wolff, Principal, Copley Wolff Design Group

Renu Madan provided invaluable services as a consulting technical writer. Richard Henderson from MassDevelopment provided important information and feedback throughout the TAP Process, and the Panel is grateful for his thoughtful participation. Gary Jennison, principal of The Corcoran-Jennison Companies and a native of Springfield, was originally slated to participate with the panel. Unfortunately, extenuating circumstances kept Mr. Jennison from participating, but he did communicate a number of thoughts and ideas to the Panel.

Officials of the City of Springfield who served as primary contacts for ULI Boston included the following:

- David B. Panagore, Chief Development Officer, Springfield Finance Control Board
- Brian Connors, Deputy Director, Office of Planning and Economic Development, City of Springfield
- Ryan McCollum, Assistant Project Manager, Office of Planning and Economic Development, City of Springfield

TAP Process

Due to the importance and complexity of downtown Springfield’s issues, and given the strong foundation laid by the National ULI Report, the process of this TAP was more extensive than ULI-Boston’s typical undertaking. The downtown Springfield effort included two days of full panel engagement, as well as auxiliary meetings with sub-sets of panelists at the beginning, middle, and end of the process.

Upon the submission of the TAP request and materials by the City of Springfield, additional information sessions were held with the Panel. A package of information was distributed to the Panel in advance. Co-chairs paid a preliminary visit to Springfield in late April, and were briefed on the issues and given a tour of Downtown by City staff.

On May 8, 2007, the Panel held its fact-finding session. An introduction to the issues was provided by the City of Springfield representatives. The City then led a tour to allow the Panel to visually assess the character, challenges, and opportunities in Downtown as a whole, as well as particular development sites. The tour was followed by a series of question & answer sessions. The Panel engaged several stakeholder groups in informal discussions regarding issues and goals. A list of these sessions follows, and a list of attendees for each session, as provided by the City, is included in Appendix A.

- Arts, Culture & Historic Institutions
- Springfield Parking Authority
- Springfield Police Department
- Property Owners
- Economic Development Agencies
- Downtown Residents
- Business Owners

The City and the Panel agreed to hold an auxiliary meeting during the time between the full Panel sessions, in order to provide Panel members with the fullest possible understanding of the steps the City is currently or has already taken to address the myriad issues faced by downtown. This meeting was held in Boston on May 24, 2007 and a half dozen of the panelists attended all or part of the meeting.

On May 29th, the night before the TAP's charrette session, three panelists including the co-chairs, had the opportunity to dine with the Honorable Charles Ryan, Mayor of Springfield; Springfield Police Commissioner Edward Flynn, President of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce Russell Denver as well as City staff. The Mayor presented details on the City's efforts to consolidate and relocate social service facilities including shelters. Chief Cochrane spoke about efforts to promote better security and the perception of better security.

On May 30, 2007, the Panel held its charrette session. Panelists met at Old First Church on Court Square, and worked privately to develop consensus recommendations prepare a public presentation. Additional interviews were also held with representatives of the following groups:

- Springfield's Office of Planning & Economic Development
- Homeless advocacy organizations and shelters
- Springfield Business Development Corp (SBDC)

The presentation was delivered that evening to an audience of approximately 50 people, including downtown residents, business and property owners, city employees, elected officials, and members of the media. This report has been generated to document the findings of the TAP and to supplement the presentation.

This report is a result of two days of research, site visits, and interviews involving Panelists, City officials, and community representatives. ULI Boston and the TAP Panel would like to extend a sincere thanks to the citizens and public officials of Springfield for their time at multiple meetings, for providing excellent data, and for coordinating an informative and productive experience for the Panel. Thanks also go out to David B. Panagore, Brian Connors and Ryan McCollum for their professional assistance. ULI Boston also thanks ADD Inc, Architects for the printing and binding of this report.

II. OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

A. Downtown Assets and Strengths

Downtown Springfield offers many positive features that continue to draw people, and for good reason. No other city or town in the Pioneer Valley Region possesses its breadth of architectural fabric, historic built environment, and cultural offerings including museums, performing arts, theaters, the Springfield Armory National Historic Site, the MassMutual Civic and Convention Center, as well as the Basketball Hall of Fame, which lies just outside of downtown. The Springfield Quadrangle is home to the Museum of Fine Arts, the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, the Springfield Science Museum, and the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum. The beautiful Court Square and the attractive residential Mattoon Street Historic District are distinctive areas within the downtown. The city's geographic centrality between the major metropolitan areas of Boston and Albany, and proximity to New York, New Haven, and Hartford make Springfield truly the gateway to the Pioneer Valley. Also assets for the city are its large employers, many of whom continue to grow and have proven to be outstanding corporate citizens, contributing to all aspects of the community.



13-31 Elm Street

Source: City of Springfield's website

Textbook Urban Design

The layout of Downtown Springfield is a “textbook” example of good urban design. It is compact, walkable, and contains a diversity of retail, cultural, civic, and business uses.

The following map illustrates the layout of Downtown. The “heart” of downtown is Court Square, which is framed by Symphony Hall and City Hall, twin Greek Revival Buildings, to the north; The Old First Church, completed in 1637 is to the West. Adjacent buildings were built between 1835 and 1892 and are some of the City’s oldest structures. One is a former hotel and has striking archwork on the first storey. Main St. forms the eastern boundary, and the newly completed Mass Mutual Civic and Convention Center is directly across the street.

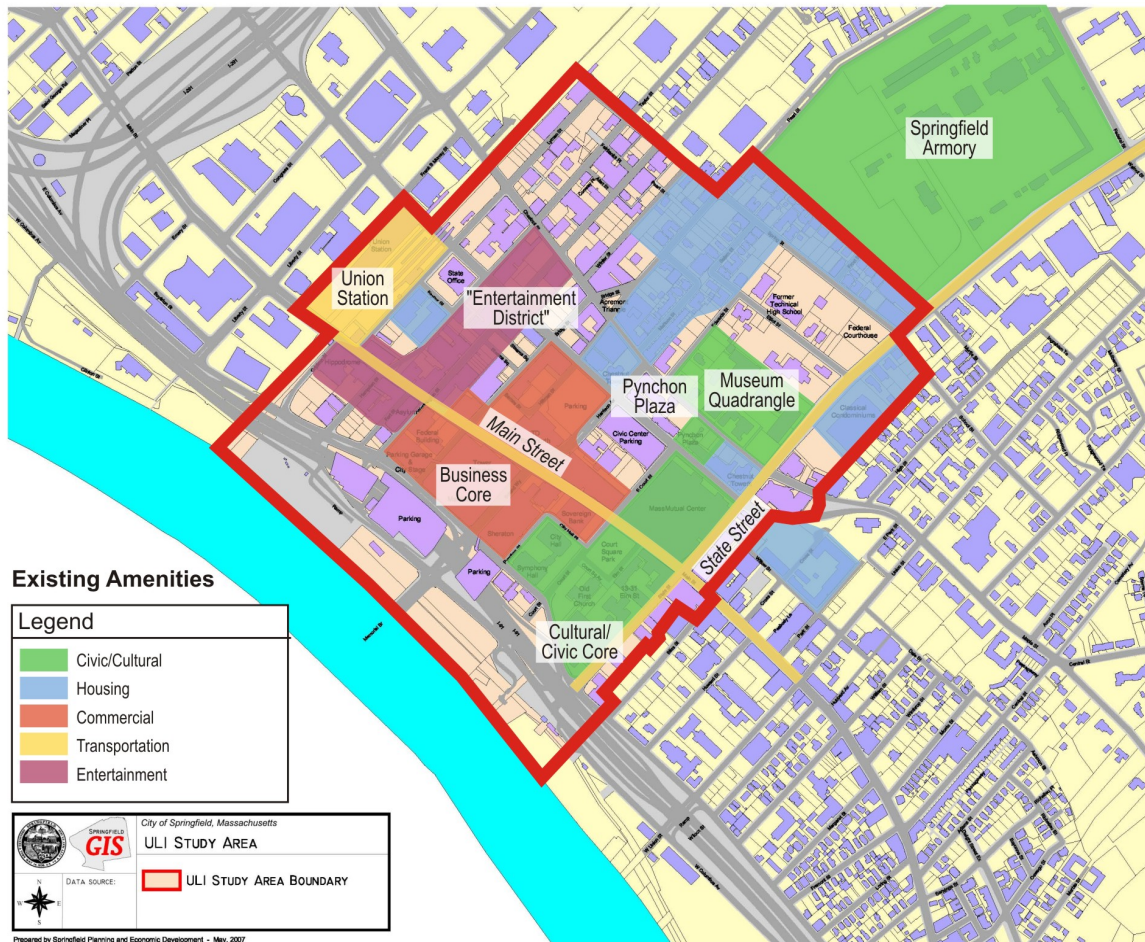


Figure 2. Existing Amenities in Downtown Springfield.

Northward³ from Court Square along Main Street is the business core of Springfield, featuring several other prominent office buildings. Main Street is “capped” by a gothic style railroad arch and Union Station lies just across the tracks.

The corridor running Eastward from Court Square forms the City’s cultural heart. Court Street leads past the Mass Mutual Center to Pynchon Plaza, a staircase plaza built into the hillside – currently though, Pynchon Plaza is closed. At the top of the Plaza, one arrives at the Museum Quadrangle and Dr. Seuss sculpture garden. From the Quadrangle, a pedestrian can divert to State Street and a two-block walk brings one to the Springfield Armory, a significant revolutionary war facility managed by the National Parks Service.

South from Court Square the environment becomes neighborhood-oriented. The Connecticut River is very near Court Square to the west, but like many communities, a major roadway separates Springfield’s downtown from its waterfront. Housing lies around and within the downtown.

³ Direction in downtown Springfield is reckoned assuming the Connecticut River flows due south. So “north” actually refers to northwest as viewed on the map.

Business Improvement District (BID)

Springfield should pride itself on having a successfully established Business Improvement District, or BID, one of few in Massachusetts. Established in 1998, the SBID is a well organized coalition of property owners and other stakeholders focused on cleaner streets and sidewalks, more attention to the aesthetics of downtown, and which also participates in marketing the Downtown. Funding is provided by fees assessed to property owners by an 11-member Board of Directors. The City collects the funds and keeps it in a dedicated account. Participation, which is voluntary, is about 95% of property owners. Many interviewees commented on the importance and success of the BID in maintaining Downtown.

Dedicated Corps of Downtown Residents

The Armory-Quadrangle Neighborhood Association and the Mattoon Street Neighborhood Association are both very active and include many who have lived in the area for decades. Many downtowns lack a real sense of residential identity, but Springfield's is apparent and is organized. This demonstrates the extent to which downtown Springfield is a place that people can come to love, particularly given the challenges that residents and property owners have faced.

Solid Regional Economy

The Pioneer Valley, which includes Hampshire and Hampden Counties, enjoys a prosperous economy. Major employers are growing or planning for growth, and population and per-capita incomes have grown in synch with the State and national economies. While growth has been slower than in Massachusetts as a whole, 15-year population and wage trends are upward, with unemployment falling. Since 2001, unemployment has risen from a record-low of 3.0% to 5.6% in 2006, although employment has grown during this period, and the increased unemployment has been due to growth in the workforce outpacing employment growth.

The complexion of the City has changed substantially over the past decades, with Latino and other minority households – especially immigrants and Puerto Rican migrants – making up a substantial portion of the population. Minority population growth has been on par with national rates. While the poverty rate for the Pioneer Valley overall is slightly higher than the national average, the poverty rate among foreign-born individuals in the Pioneer Valley is lower than national averages, and is only 1.3 points lower than the overall poverty rate; the corresponding difference is 5.1 points in Massachusetts overall and 5.5 points nationally.⁴

A broader view of the region draws in Northern Connecticut, including Hartford, and this paints an even stronger picture. Regional economic development entities on both sides of the state line are marketing the area between Northampton (MA) and Hartford as the “Knowledge Corridor,” for its university and research industry strengths. Downtown Springfield is located at the heart of this area.

B. Downtown Concerns and Liabilities

Like many historic downtowns around New England and the country, today downtown Springfield faces a variety of social and economic challenges. The synopsis below presents those challenges the Panel heard about most often, or found to be critical to address.

⁴ Source: [An Analysis of Regional Economic Conditions](#), Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, 2006

Perception of Crime, Disorder, and Homelessness

An issue that the panel heard repeatedly is that downtown is – or is at least perceived to be – unsafe, rife with homelessness, and suffering from a host of unsavory social ills and bad public behavior. While the perception does have some basis in reality, crime statistics for the City indicate that Springfield is not substantially more dangerous than other similar cities.

The geographic location of shelters, soup kitchens, and social-service facilities was frequently cited as a factor in Downtown’s reputation for social blight. All communities need social service facilities, but Springfield’s are located in disparate, often very prominent spots – e.g. soup kitchens at Court Square and the Quadrangle – and are juxtaposed in such a way that patrons must regularly traverse the heart of downtown to meet their basic needs.

Negative Community Attitude toward Downtown

The National ULI Panel reported finding themselves more positive and enthusiastic about Springfield’s future than their interviewees. Some newcomers to Springfield who participated in our interviews expressed a similar perspective, as did Panel members with personal experience in Springfield. Many Springfield residents – including longtime residents, business owners, and property owners, are very positive about their City; however, many of those who are positive about the City agree that many other City and regional residents seem to go out of their way to warn visitors away from visiting downtown, and newcomers from living there. The pervasive negative attitude sustains a cycle discouraging investment and patronage downtown.

Vacant and Under-Utilized Buildings

Office vacancy is particularly visible in Downtown Springfield, with a number of prominent historic buildings boarded up or for lease. In Springfield as a whole, as of 2003 there was almost a half million square feet of vacant office space, with vacancy rates of 28%, 16%, and 4% in classes C, B, and A, respectively.⁵ Although vacancy has fallen substantially in the past 10 years (the class C vacancy was 44% in 1994, for example), a number of high-profile buildings may soon become vacant, including the Main Street Federal Building.



Main Street Federal Building
Source: City of Springfield’s website

Imbalanced Housing Stock

According to a December 2006 market study, government-assisted units currently make up approximately 83% of Downtown’s occupied rental units. This represents 71% of Downtown’s total 2,500 housing units, of which only 3.3% are owner-occupied, 11.8% are vacant, and the

⁵ Source: [A Demographic and Economic Analysis of the City of Springfield](#), Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, August, 2006. pp. 81-83

remaining 85% are occupied rental units.⁶ While affordable housing is critical to the economic and civic health of any region, the concentration of subsidized housing in one or a few areas is not healthy economically and tends to reduce the level of services available to residents. The concentration of subsidized housing in Downtown Springfield is well into the unhealthy range.

Parking Challenges

Vacancies and Rates

The Panel member with the most expertise in parking performed a brief site inspection of several Downtown garages on Wednesday, May 30. Most City parking structures were in need of a thorough cleaning, upgrading, and a few will require major restoration work. Vacancies ranged from 25 to 50% at 11am. Posted rates are 75 cents for the first hour and \$1.50 per hour afterward, with monthly passes between \$75 and \$150.

At the same time, many interviewees complained that parking downtown is not adequate. A “suburban mentality” toward parking on the part of users was offered to explain the paradox. The President of the Chamber of Commerce stated that parking costs are frequently the factor that dissuade businesses from locating downtown.

Structured parking is managed by the Springfield Parking Authority (SPA) while on-street parking is managed directly by the city, and costs 25 cents per half-hour. On-street parking is perceived to be scarce.



Downtown parking lot - May 30 at 11:00am

Source: Panel member Steve Cebra

Struggling Arts & Cultural Institutions

Downtown Springfield has been and remains the cultural hub of the City and the Region. It is home to the Springfield Symphony, a campus of excellent museums, and a host of private music, visual art, and theatre enterprises. Yet, the trend is toward organizations with long histories in downtown relocating to other parts of the region, especially community-supported art organizations. Interviewees told the panel that a community chorus with a long history of rehearsals and performances in Downtown was the most recent to relocate their activities to a suburban community. Remaining institutions are finding patrons and funding more challenging to secure.

A Lack of Inclusion and Connection

Springfield has become a very racially diverse community with large minority, migrant, and immigrant populations. Yet recognized stakeholders in the Downtown community – as represented by the individuals the Panel has the opportunity to interview – are predominantly white. Two of the several minority interviewees expressed strong negative opinions about race relations. City officials attempted but were not able to identify a group or individual who could credibly represent residents of the abundant subsidized housing. Retail offerings downtown seem to target a narrow demographic range and reflect a strategy of serving a base of legacy customers

⁶ Residential Market Potential, Downtown Springfield. Produced for the City of Springfield by Zimmerman/Volk Associates, December, 2006. <http://www.springfieldcityhall.com/planning/projects.0.html>.

who no longer live in the City. Some long-time merchants who were interviewed did not indicate efforts or plans to court the “new” market segments now established in the City.

C. Current Initiatives.

Several efforts to revitalize Downtown Springfield are currently underway:

Downtown Springfield Development Strategy. The City of Springfield is working on its own report to describe its vision and initiatives for Downtown.⁷

State Street Corridor Development. The City is planning a substantial reconstruction of this major urban thoroughfare, extending east to west for 3.2 miles through Springfield, beginning downtown at West Columbus Avenue.⁸ This project is funded by Federal and State transportation dollars and a local match. In addition the Office of Planning and Economic Development continues to work with the State Street Alliance on an overall strategy for economic development along the corridor. A comprehensive redevelopment program for the corridor is moving forward, and a series of public focus groups were held in August to seek input on potential development sites and opportunities along the corridor.

Main Street Corridor Redevelopment. The City is also planning a substantial redesign and streetscaping of Main Street through the heart of downtown. Unlike the State Street project, the Main Street improvements will be entirely locally funded. The BID is an important proponent.

Consolidated Social Services Location and “Housing First” Initiative. One of the chief initiatives of the Mayor’s office is the pursuit of funding and a site for a consolidated social services center. The target location is several blocks east of downtown, and would replace several facilities currently located in Downtown or on the riverfront. In parallel, the City is pursuing a “housing first” strategy to address homelessness. In the new system, existing apartments will be made available to patrons, provided they fulfill expectations with regard to work, job training, and/or rehabilitation.

Union Station Redevelopment. The historic Union Station building, at the northern end of the study area between Main and Chestnut streets, is slated for a substantial redevelopment supported by a Federal transportation earmark. In June, a \$350,000 planning grant was announced from the Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Transportation, to create a revised development plan for Union Station and for a market analysis aimed at making the project feasible and achievable, a bid for redevelopment planning and design is due out in summer 2007. The station currently supports several trains per day to and from Hartford and New Haven, CT, connected to Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor service. Planning for commuter rail service is ongoing.

⁷Further information is available on the website for the City of Springfield.

http://www.springfieldcityhall.com/planning/state_street.0.html.

⁸Ibid.

Downtown Residential Market Study. As a first step in encouraging the market, Upon the ULI National Panel’s recommendation, a comprehensive market study of Downtown’s residential market was completed in December 2006 by Zimmerman/Volk Associates, Inc.⁹

New Federal Courthouse. Due to security requirements instituted since September, 2001, a new Federal Building is being constructed on State Street between Elliot and Spring Streets, near the Springfield Armory. On the downside, the current Federal Building on Main Street will be vacant if a new tenant is not found.



New Federal Courthouse

Source: City of Springfield website

Demolition of the York Street Jail. The City acquired this former corrections facility along the Connecticut River in 1997 and indicates that all of its 16 structures are in serious disrepair. The National ULI report also noted it is an extremely visible symbol of downtown stagnation and recommended its demolition toward making the property available for the right development opportunity. The Control Board and City have set aside funds to demolish the complex during Fiscal Year 2007. While the property is mostly vacant, a homeless shelter currently operated in the gym until recently.

⁹ Residential Market Potential, Downtown Springfield. Produced for the City of Springfield by Zimmerman/Volk Associates, December, 2006. <http://www.springfieldcityhall.com/planning/projects.0.html>.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel presented observations and recommendations at the conclusion of the working sessions in May 2007. The following section begins by describing planning principles which should guide the revitalization of downtown. This is followed by recommendations on topics the Panel deemed critical:

- Perceptions and Public Safety
- Leadership & Organizational Structure
- Organizational Change to Promote Real Estate Development
- Making Parking an Asset
- Funding Sources and Uses
- Physical Development Priorities and Framework for Revitalization

Many additional issues, recommendations, and ideas were broached and are important but they could not receive the attention of the Panel in its two days in Springfield. It became clear, however, that the leadership and ideas necessary to create a thriving Downtown are present in the many people who are active today in Springfield.

A. Planning Principles for Downtown Revitalization

Promote Round-the-Clock Vitality

Downtowns in communities around New England and around the country are re-emerging as highly desirable locations in which to live, work, and play. Many people are drawn to environments that feature abundant pedestrian activity, offer walkable access to a broad variety of services and cultural attractions, and where one can encounter a diversity of people and cultures.

Currently, the housing stock downtown is slanted heavily toward subsidized, low-income units, office vacancy rates are too high, and there is a lack of neighborhood amenities. Efforts to encourage activity via special events – such as the summer concert series at both Stearns Square and City Square, the former Steiger’s Parcel – are worthwhile, and visitors to downtown’s retail and cultural offerings are also important, but neither will produce the round-the-clock vitality that is needed. In order to be vibrant, a downtown needs enough people to spend a significant portion of their time there – employees during the day, and residents at night and on weekends. With this in mind, the Panel recommends the City pursue jobs, *market rate* housing, and higher education as target uses for real estate opportunities downtown.

Progress toward a vital downtown is likely to be accomplished in cyclical steps. A marginal increase in people downtown – be they residents, employees, or students – will support marginal growth in services, enhancing downtown activity and making the next tenant somewhat easier to recruit. During the panel session there was some discussion of which – jobs or housing – should be the highest priority. This Panel feels that all of these uses have the potential to contribute, and all compatible opportunities should be pursued. The final mix of uses will be important in order to ensure round-the-clock activity, but the path taken to that optimal mix is less important.

Jobs. Employees support restaurants and retail establishments during weekday hours.

Downtown’s office vacancy rate, particularly in class B and C space, is too high. The Panel recognizes the strong efforts made by the City and Chamber of Commerce to

attract and retain office tenants downtown. These efforts must continue, with continued public support.

Public-sector institutions, at Federal, State, or local levels, may be particularly good targets as downtown office tenants. Downtown office space in Springfield currently suffers an image bias and is felt by many to be less cost-effective than suburban sites. For public agencies, real or perceived cost differentials of locating downtown can be justified by the public benefit of enhancing the downtown environment, stabilizing the office market, and spurring further activity.

Market-Rate Housing. The Panel concurs with the National ULI Report regarding the need to encourage market-rate housing in Downtown to diversify its resident population. As indicated previously, 83% of Downtown's occupied rental units are government-assisted units. The December, 2006 Market Rate Housing Study estimates an addition of 785 new dwelling units is possible over the next five years – an increase of 34 percent.¹⁰

Higher Education. Students can be very well suited to downtown environments, as they generally require less parking, support higher housing unit densities, and contribute to activity at all times of day. There are six institutions of higher education located within Springfield itself, as well as a major teaching hospital, and many other colleges and universities throughout the Pioneer Valley region. The City has exerted significant effort to encourage these institutions to invest in downtown. In particular, the Springfield institutions have been targeted as potential tenants for the Main Street Federal Building which will soon be vacated. Efforts should continue to be made toward any realistic situations that would introduce student activity downtown.

Again, a key goal is to introduce people who will spend significant amounts of time downtown. Therefore, a community college auxiliary, offering only night classes, will not carry the same benefit as a full-time campus facility, back office uses, or off-campus student housing.

Engage All Stakeholders

Participation and support from all sectors, interests, and minority groups will be required for sustained change in Downtown. The composition of the population of Springfield has become increasingly diverse. This trend is likely to continue and not reverse. The culture of the community embodied by the city in a leadership role must also change to appreciate diversity and be inclusive of these many cultures in the community.

While some residents have already been working very hard through neighborhood involvement, successful change in Downtown is impossible without significantly more representative involvement of the current residents, business-owners, and other stakeholders of Downtown. A vacuum where engaged participation should be is symptomatic of a major issue constraining downtown revitalization.

The Panel also recommends fostering collaboration and building local non-profit capacity in arts, business, development, neighborhood revitalization. Substantial outreach, including sending bilingual representatives to disseminate information and, also, find leaders in the community will be needed to supplement these organization-building activities.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Lead by Example

In many successful urban communities, stakeholders can be seen “putting their money where their mouths are.” All stakeholders downtown should review their standard operating procedures and assumptions, and assess whether they can make changes to contribute to downtown vitality. Opportunities to do so may carry a substantial cost, but these may be offset by previously unrecognized benefits.

The City itself may be in a position to contribute additional jobs to the downtown environment. Economic Development, Planning, and permitting functions have recently been consolidated to a DPW facility quite removed from downtown. Customer convenience, improvements to the permitting process, and consolidation of functions were the rationale for this location decision; however, an implicit message seemed not to have been considered: “If the City itself doesn’t believe people should come downtown, why should developers or retailers?”

There are positives and negatives involved with any location decision. Nonetheless, the Panel recommends that the City seriously consider relocating all appropriate employees and services into downtown. This would bring both employees as well as traffic generated by functions currently located at the DPW facility into downtown. The City itself could stabilize one or more top-priority buildings (the Main St. Federal Building or the Old First Church). Customer parking could be addressed by establishing and enforcing time-limited spaces immediately in front of the appropriate buildings. Employee parking is clearly available in structures controlled by the Springfield Parking Authority.

Address Immediate Needs While Taking a Long Term View

The strategies in this report are largely focused on the near term of zero to five years. The next phases for five to ten years and the longer-term will follow. It is critical to focus on Downtown, which has some critical needs now. Sustained efforts by an organized group of individuals will be required to ensure that initiatives are followed through. A period of 20 years is the appropriate time frame in which to envision the full recovery of a downtown, and constant effort is required to maintain a downtown’s health once it is restored. As the organizational structures for Downtown revitalization take form, the requirements for long-term sustainability will be identified.

B. Address Perceptions Regarding Public Safety and Image

Addressing Crime

Downtown’s reputation with regard to blight and public safety was foremost on the minds of nearly everyone interviewed by the Panel. Opinions ranged on the degree to which the reputation is deserved versus the product of negative marketing and long memories. While real issues in downtown were apparent, on the whole the Panel agreed with the finding of the National ULI report that the perception of crime appears to be worse than the reality, and that addressing the real issues is definitely possible.

Every urban community must have adequate resources, and make effective use of them, in order to establish and maintain a clean and peaceful environment. In this regard Springfield has been performing admirably in the wake of its funding crisis, yet additional resources to help focus on downtown’s issues are needed and deserved. A reasonable argument can be made that dollars

spent on public safety downtown are effectively dollars spent on economic development downtown.

At the same time, Springfield should not, and need not wait for public safety to be completely “solved” before moving forward. Public safety and the perception of crime are threshold issues, and it will be important for progress to continue in order for revitalization to truly take hold. At the same time, all urban communities experience their share of crime, homelessness, and bad public behavior. The difference between a vibrant downtown and a blighted one is the extent to which these stand out relative to positive energy and vitality. Vitality itself discourages crime and dereliction. “Eyes on the street” added by retail establishments, residents, and employees naturally discourage criminal acts and deter loitering.

Addressing the Blighted Image

The City has an opportunity to shift the image of downtown – as well as provide better social services – through the consolidation of shelters, food pantries, and other facilities. Currently, these facilities are spread throughout downtown, and this situation does not work particularly well for patrons of the services – many of whom have mobility impairments – or for downtown stakeholders. Providing services centrally could tip the balance of activities in downtown toward the positive and, perhaps more importantly, offer a starting point from which to change community perceptions and attitudes.

All of this said, changing any existing system involves the risk of unintended consequences. The Panel met briefly with representatives of the shelter at the York Street Jail building and a soup kitchen. Interviewees expressed serious concerns with specific elements of the City’s efforts. The Panel felt it did not have the background to weigh in on these details; however, two points are apparent. First, any net reduction of existing services, even on a temporary basis, will increase desperation, which in turn will encourage crime.

Secondly, social service providers and advocates should be regarded as allies to those promoting economic development in a downtown. All parties would like to see people in job training or rehabilitation and sheltered, rather than panhandling, abusing substances, and living on the streets. Many communities owe success on these issues to productive partnerships between the public and private-non-profit sectors. If relationships or past history are obstacles to the achievement of Springfield’s common goals, third-party mediation should be considered.

Engaging With the Media

A theme that came up consistently throughout the Panel’s meetings in Springfield was the need to have more positive reporting about Downtown Springfield, focusing on activities, initiatives, and new development rather than focusing on crime. The Panel recommends that steps be taken to approach local media outlets and engage with them regularly. The BID and/or downtown merchants should express their views, and any new downtown-oriented coalition should include the function of media relations. Public perceptions about Downtown are critical to its redevelopment, and building a relationship with key media personnel can be a very effective way to ensure balanced reporting that helps to tell downtown’s story.

C. Leadership and Organizational Structure

Downtown revitalization requires ongoing momentum and constant energy, which is best orchestrated through a clear organizational structure. The structure needs to embrace the activities and interests of the large and small businesses, residents, institutions, non-profit organizations, the City, and the State. Also, to transition away from administration under the Control Board, it is critical to immediately focus on the process of organizational development and building local leadership in both the public and private sectors to obtain the necessary financing and carry out a Downtown revitalization plan.

Strengthen Coalitions for Interest Groups

Some people are already working very well together to promote Downtown. However, a few gaps were clear to the Panel. The following are coalitions that have promising potential “synergies” of need that could be capitalized upon.

Arts and Entertainment. The arts have proven to be catalytic in revitalizing many downtowns. The accessibility and concentration of arts and entertainment are significant reasons that middle class residents are drawn to downtown living. Springfield’s downtown arts and culture community offers a diversity of cultural activities, and the organizations involved have many shared interests. There used to be more cohesion under the nonprofit Spirit of Springfield. However, participation and investment in this coalition have dwindled, the causes for which need to be understood and addressed. The Springfield BID could also play a significant role. The ULI-Boston Panel supports the requests of the arts community from whom the Panel heard in their call for venues for artists to live and work, in addition to retail to meet their shopping needs.

Retail/Merchants. The Springfield Business Improvement District (SBID) represents property owners while the Regional Chamber of Commerce has members throughout the region and is focused on member services. A **merchants’ association** would give more of a voice to the retail tenants and a downtown retail coordinator can be effective in recruiting and retaining the right tenant mix in Downtown. In many cities, the BID takes this on if there is sufficient merchant representation on the BID board.

Residents. Without the participation and inclusion of the wide diversity of Downtown residents, successful revitalization of Downtown will not be balanced. A significant effort to reach and organize residents is required, including sending bi-lingual representatives to disseminate information and also find leaders in the community. Funds or nonprofit support should be sought specifically for this undertaking. In addition, the number of Downtown residents should increase as Downtown redevelops, thus a structure to accommodate them is needed.

Kansas City, Missouri: Demonstrating What is Possible

Everyone had abandoned Kansas City. Its office space was 50% vacant. Business leaders took the reigns because the City had too much on its plate. Everyone did their part. With everyone working together on a plan, a BID was put in place. The individual brought in to take charge of the BID was an amazing cheerleader of Downtown who was successful at recruiting businesses into the City. He was a hard to turn off. A signature success in Kansas City involved H&R Block deciding to move back from the suburbs and locate downtown. Another lesson from Kansas City is that there has to be mutual trust that everyone is doing their part. It is a tough job.

Financial and other services. To the extent that they are property owners, financial services firms Downtown are represented on the BID. However, there are also members of this industry who are tenants. A tenants organization would promote ownership and support retention among these stakeholders.

Downtown Champion Needed

There are numerous players currently involved in economic development and the revitalization of Springfield in one capacity or another, although some of these organizations have no staff and are remnants of what existed previously. The proliferation of players dilutes the resources and capacity needed to carry out a downtown planning initiative.

CITY-WIDE FOCUS

- Elected public officials (mayor, city council, US congress)
- Springfield Finance Control Board
- City Planning Staff
- Springfield Redevelopment Authority (SRA)
- Springfield Business Development Corp (SBDC)
- Chambers of Commerce (regional, black, and latino)
- Spirit of Springfield
- Springfield Parking Authority

DOWNTOWN OR LOCAL FOCUS

- Springfield Business Improvement District (SBID)
- Springfield Riverfront Development Corp

REGIONAL / STATE FOCUS

- MassDevelopment
- Economic Development Council of Western Mass (EDC)
- Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Massachusetts Convention Center Authority
- Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD)
- Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA)
- Chambers of Commerce (regional, Black, and Latino)
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Given limited resources and time, a duplication of efforts is undesirable. Each organization has a differing mission and their own capacity challenges. Some organizations are more locally-focused. Others are regionally- or state-focused and have much broader goals than just Downtown Springfield. The Panel recognizes that numerous economic development initiatives are currently underway. To effectively capitalize upon all of the current capacity and improve efforts, the broadly-focused organizations can easily get distracted. The Panel recommends an organization or effort that is focused not on the City as a whole, but specifically on Downtown. Four options for organizational structures are presented below along with the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Roles & Responsibilities

A master plan for Downtown’s revitalization may be best executed through a structure or organization other than the City. Following are some economic development roles, as they currently exist:

City Roles

- Planning/vision
- Zoning
- Key parcel ownership
- TIFs and DIFs
- Infrastructure
- Public approvals
- Eminent domain (SRA)
- Parking authority (SPA)

BID Roles

- Clean/safe
- Events
- Data/information
- Marketing

Downtown Development Entities – Options

The Panel discussed and presented four possible options for organizations that could catalyze and lead the revitalization effort in Springfield. Each of the options below has both strengths and weaknesses. Some pros and cons are noted here, and greater detail is presented in Appendix B.

Downtown Development Entities Options	Type of Org.	Existing v. New Org.	Focus	Pros and Cons*
CITY OF SPRINGFIELD Office of Planning and Economic Development	Public	Existing Structure	City-wide Focus	Public powers and finance but less nimble; cannot accept private funds; agenda subject to shifts with elections.
SPRINGFIELD REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (SRA)	Quasi-Public	Existing Structure	City-wide Focus	Some public powers and finance; limited private role; lack of checks and balances
NEW PRIVATE NONPROFIT with some public funding e.g. Downtown Development Corporation	Public-Private	New	Geographic Focus on Downtown	High private sector involvement; greater capacity to be nimble and responsive to market; new representative board; politically independent; funding sources always a challenge
ENHANCED BID (potential to enhance SBDC to fill this role)	Private Nonprofit	Existing Structure	Geographic Focus on Downtown	Regular funding source; proven record; but adding development roles may be beyond capacity; no current development experience

* Pros and cons are presented in greater detail in Appendix B.

Evaluation Criteria

In considering the four options above, as well as any others, the following criteria are important:

- *Alignment with city interests.* While some of the options present considerable involvement by the private sector, it is very important that a plan to create a better Downtown for all of its citizens is shared with any entity that leads the revitalization of Downtown.
- *Checks and balance / accountability.* Another priority consideration is that any structure should include built-in accountability to ensure that public funds are used to carry out an approved plan.
- *Leadership/Capacity.* The organization must have the leadership, staff, and organizational capacity to manage a downtown revitalization initiative.
- *Transparency.* Full accounting and disclosure of the use of public and private funds is essential
- *Integrity.* If a private entity is involved, it must be lead with integrity and independence.
- *Geographic focus.* It is critical for the lead redevelopment structure to be a champion and cheerleader for Downtown. Balancing the needs of the rest of the City or Greater Springfield will distract from Downtown’s success, and a thriving Downtown is necessary to support a flourishing City.
- *Ability to use public and private funds.* Finance is the driver of redevelopment. Thus, it is important for a structure to be able to leverage all types of funding.
- *Ongoing revenue stream.* Maintaining a sustainable supply of funding is also important to a successful revitalization effort and structure.
- *Representative board.* A diverse, inclusive Board that can access resources in multiple spheres is also important to the success of a structure.

On one hand, given financial, legal, organizational and political constraints, it can be very difficult for a City to take charge of a downtown revitalization effort. Staffing, organizational capacity, private donations, and investments will be required for a significant revitalization effort, and leveraging them through a primarily public or quasi-public entity is very difficult. The SBID, on the other hand, is not currently equipped to handle development activities and participants can too easily opt out of this structure.

Given all of the strengths and weaknesses offered by the entities and organizations considered here, the Panel favored the option of a new private nonprofit such as a Downtown development corporation. It would be geographically-focused similarly to the existing Springfield Riverfront Development Corporation (SRDC), which is concerned with the area around the Basketball Hall of Fame. Its Board could similarly include public officials, officers of the City, as well as private stakeholders. A historic example is Springfield Central, which was a group of lawyers and economic development professionals who came together in the early 1970s to develop housing in Downtown. Further discussions in Springfield should determine the role for this new organization as a complement to the City and the BID. Sources of grant, foundation, property owner, State and City funding should be investigated to support such an organization.

D. Facilitate Organizational Changes to Promote Real Estate Development

Another significant goal with which a redevelopment organization must be involved is real estate development to catalyze the realization of the City's and residents' vision for a brighter Downtown. The Panel found many gaps associated with physical development. There is need for an organization with sufficient capacity (financial and capital skills) to assemble land and property and negotiate transactions on behalf of the community. Following is a list of specific roles suggested for the real estate development community:

- Orchestrate development
- Identify assets/opportunities
- Branding
- Negotiate and acquire land
- Assemble capital
- Recruit developers
- Issue RFP packages
- Generate project revenues

E. Make Parking an Asset

A well-functioning parking system is an important ingredient to successful revitalization of downtown. If well managed, parking in Downtown Springfield can be a valuable asset as a source of revenue. Management of existing facilities, a market driven rate structure for on and off street parking to ensure full utilization of clean and safe facilities, and new construction of facilities where needed will facilitate downtown revitalization will be important.

Following are some important strategies that can be employed to tackle the issues. The first four strategies can be implemented quickly.

1. *Decide between a completely private or public organization.* The Springfield Parking Authority (SPA) is a quasi-public-private structure that has been operating for 25 years and requires in-house auditors, accountants, and other such overhead. As the Downtown looks to significant redevelopment and a new future, it needs to be determined objectively whether this organizational structure will be optimal to meet the City's needs going forward. This requires evaluating many pros & cons. The SPA has bonding capacity; however, it has not been used for decades. Successes in other cities should also be examined, for examples Hartford, CT., Albany, NY, and Allentown and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
2. *Employ an experienced executive director.* A leader with experience in parking is also critical to a well-run system. Perhaps a new director can be asked to accomplish the remaining strategies within the first 100 days of a term.
3. *Consolidate Parking Operations.* Consolidate the responsibility for operations, management and enforcement of both the off-street and on-street parking under the auspices of the Parking Authority.
4. *Maintenance and daily housekeeping.* Given the current condition of Downtown parking structures, this is an area that should receive consistent attention.
5. *Market supply and demand study; Rate study to set differential rates.* Before any big decisions about parking are implemented, it is important to obtain a proper study of the

- parking supply and needs. For example, the high vacancies noted above may not be due to oversupply but, rather, to location. Parking rate structures are also critical to how well a parking system works.
6. *Liquidate underperforming assets.* Several properties were noted to be underperforming, and it may be in the best interest of the Parking Authority to liquidate these smaller parcels.
 7. *Reinvigorate on-street parking with traffic calming and Main Street and State Street streetscape.* Note, a market study is recommended before embarking on such improvements. Also, note on-street parking works well if it is consistently enforced and patrolled. If on- and off-site parking are combined, all operational revenues can be used for upgrades and maintenance.
 8. *Rebuild civic center garage.* The Civic Center Garage is in dire need of an entire restoration program; however, it may be more cost effective to reconfigure and rebuild the facility, either on the existing site, or on an adjacent parcel. Two critical issues are funding and interim parking solutions.
 9. *Enhance way-finding for parking in downtown.* At every portal from which people enter the city, signs should direct visitors to parking.



Downtown parking lot and structure - May 30 at 11:00am

Source: Panel member Steve Cebra

F. Funding

The City recommended that the Panel not focus on hunting for funding sources. Thus the Panel did not make this a primary objective. Some ideas, however, were discussed. Overall, the Panel is fairly confident that the ideas presented in this report are financially feasible.

Sources of Funds

One of the Springfield's biggest issues is its very limited access to public revenue sources. Urban revitalization requires substantial public investment to provide the incentives needed to attract private investment. Today, with the limited role of the Federal Government in urban revitalization, a broad range of State, quasi state, and public private partnerships are needed to finance infrastructure, residential, commercial, and nonprofit real estate ventures, and a range of public services. Following are some of the key funding sources needed to spearhead this revitalization. A review of this list indicates that with appropriate leadership and revenue sharing

at all levels of government between the public and private sector, funds can and should be made available to carry out the recommended programs:

- *State funding.* A primary issue to be addressed is the gross inequity in funding that the City of Springfield receives from the State. The National ULI Panel illustrated that in 2005, Springfield, the third-largest city in Massachusetts, ranked 36th among municipalities receiving funds from the State Additional Assistance program, which is one of two major sources of nonschool aid.
- *State funds to match BID.* City and BID representatives should explore the possibility of obtaining matching funds from the State for patrolling activities.
- *BID.* The BID has a surplus of funds which, as private funds, might be used to leverage additional private or public investment. The BID should consider how best to do this.
- *Springfield Parking Authority.* This entity has bonding authority; however, it has not issued bonds for new parking facilities in well over a decade.
- *Federal Grants.* Federal grants and earmarks are available for targeted efforts such as Union Station.
- *Tax Credits:* Three types of tax credits are available to finance revitalization efforts. Developers with qualifying historic rehabilitation projects, both residential and commercial, can qualify for historic tax credits. Second, the New Market Tax Credit is another source of funding available to agencies such as MassDevelopment to help fund commercial and retail development. A third source of tax credit funding supports low-income rental housing developments.
- *CDBG funding.* Given the over-supply of assisted housing in the downtown, the city needs the support of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to subsidize mixed-income developments in order to attract a base of market housing in the downtown. A range of possible subsidies is possible, depending upon the project, including land acquisition, improvements, and possibly rent subsidies for occupants who fall above 80% of area median income.

Uses of Funds

Funding is needed to address the following key needs.

- *Organization.* There is currently insufficient staff in both the private and public sectors to carry out a broad based downtown revitalization initiative. As priorities are identified, additional staffing must be funded.
- *Infrastructure.* A number of infrastructure improvements have been recommended. Again, a blend of both public and private resources will be needed to carry out these plans.
- *Parking.* A number of improvements have been recommended.
- *Real Estate.* All of the projects under consideration will need a blend of public and private funding for acquisition, construction, long-term financing, and gap financing.

G. Physical Priorities and Framework for Revitalization

The following are suggestions and possible priorities for consideration from the proposed organizational structure that will lead Downtown’s revitalization. These ideas should stimulate discussions and creative solutions among participants of the redevelopment process, as the involved stakeholders create their vision for Downtown Springfield.

Principles and Framework

The Panel identified the following keys to prioritizing downtown revitalization:

Pursue existing opportunities that strengthen and/or preserve the civic/cultural core and “heart” of the City. In other words, start at the center and work outwards. Accentuate and make visual pedestrian connections between the existing significant amenities of Court Square, with the Old First Church, Symphony Hall, and the Civic Center with Dwight Street, Pynchon Plaza and the Museum Quadrangle.

Develop infill/downtown housing as a vital component of a dynamic mixed-use community. Vibrant downtowns that attract residents, businesses and visitors are generally characterized as “live-work-play” environments. The mix of housing currently available is slanted toward the very low end of quality and pricing. A mix of moderate- and market-rate housing will bring more residents, their expendable income, and their investment, which will support an upward spiral of economic activity and act to deter crime.

Provide services to those who live and work in Downtown (e.g. general retail, drug store, grocery, restaurants, and banking). To attract new residents and also accommodate current ones, it is critical to ensure that at least the basic retail needs are available Downtown.

Use Transportation Infrastructure to Enhance Activity Downtown, Not To Relocate It. While it is not a destination, Union Station is a major gateway into and through Downtown Springfield. It can be better leveraged to encourage increased activity into Downtown, as well as attract residents and workers.

Promote a dynamic Downtown identity through Downtown’s gateways, way-finding, signage and visitor information. The Downtown Area and its numerous amenities should be better identified so that arrival into the downtown and movement between attractions is celebrated and clarified. Branding for the downtown area should be done to include more complete visitor information, improved signage, way-finding, and gateway expressions. This branding would also inform marketing materials to attract new businesses.

Priority Projects

Following are projects that are suggested as priority initiatives to stabilize and enhance the heart of Downtown, and ultimately spur further activity.

1 – Court Square / Old First Church / 13-31 Elm Street

This entire square should be prioritized for prevention of any further blight. Already beautiful, this core area of Downtown is a significant symbol of Downtown and must be well-maintained. It is startling to see a key building on this lovely square empty and boarded. Filling this building (13-31 Elm Street) should be a priority.

A second important Court Square building, the Old First Church, is in danger of being boarded up. Its congregation has been experiencing negative cash-flow for a long time, and is finally facing the need to find a new home. A real risk exists that this central building in the City could also become boarded up and blighted.

The Church building may offer a “Lead by Example” opportunity for the City. The Panel recommends investigating whether Old First Church can be subdivided to lease space to City offices. This would preserve a critical building, while simultaneously making an important statement about the City’s dedication to Downtown revitalization.

2 – Pynchon Plaza

Pynchon Plaza is a critical axis and pedestrian gateway between the Civic Center area and the Museum Quadrangle. This connection can be continued to the Armory. However, Pynchon Plaza it closed with gates due to security concerns. Its steep design is said to allow people to hide from the immediate view of passers-by. However, closing this gateway may cause more harm than good. The Panel believes that a small investment to open this gateway is a priority project that should not require significant redevelopment or expense. Involving the residents surrounding Pynchon Plaza is critical.

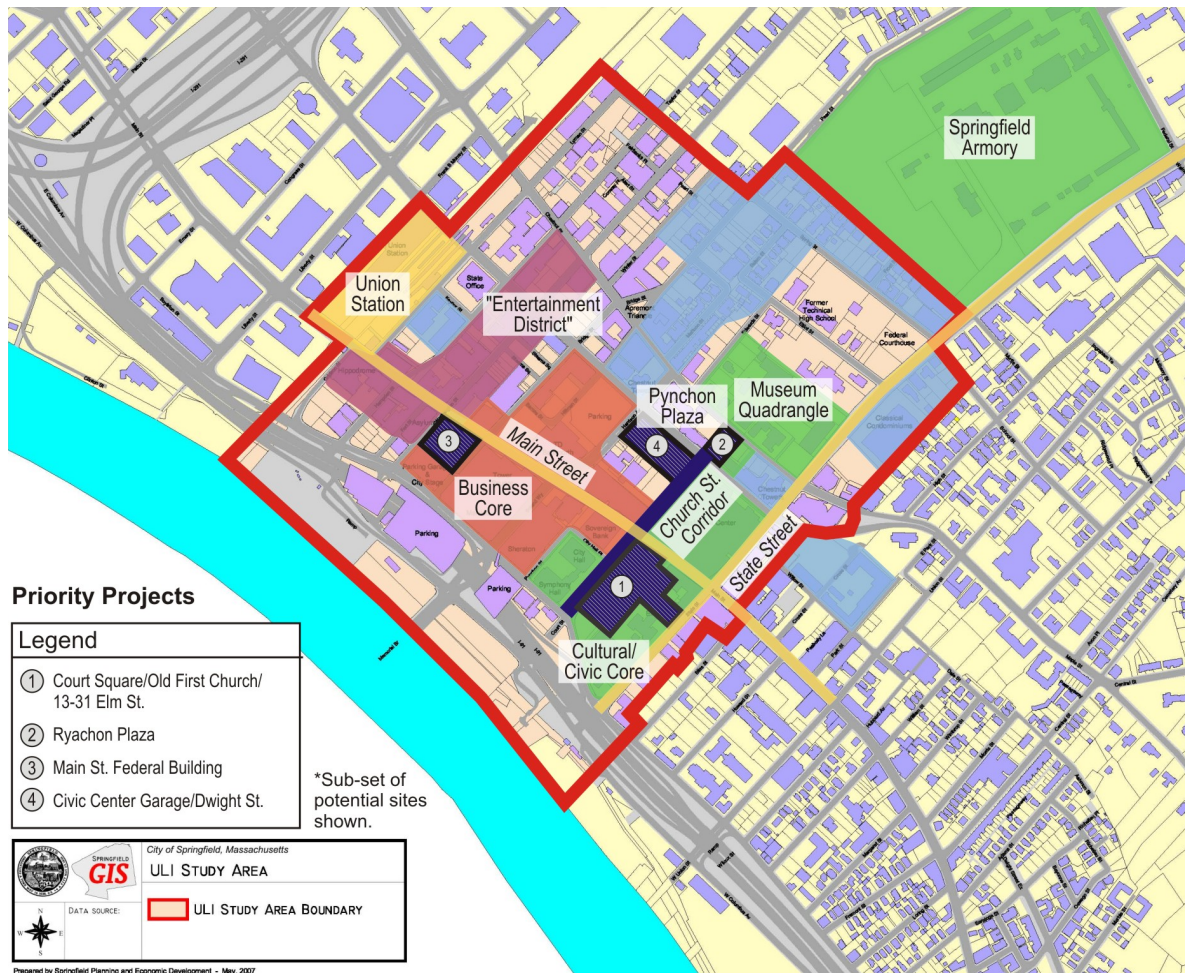


Figure 3. Top Four Priority Projects for Downtown Springfield Revitalization.

3 – Main Street Federal Building

This property only needs a tenant, and not complete redevelopment. Its location is not what renders it a catalytic project. Rather, it is a large and important building, as well as low-hanging fruit which must be kept occupied in order to prevent loss of further vitality in the business core.

This also could be an appropriate location for relocated City office facilities, affording the City a Lead by Example opportunity. The floorplan may be a particularly good match, as the former tenant was also a government agency.

4 – Civic Center Garage / Dwight Street

This presents another opportunity for immediate redevelopment and its location is strategic. We understand that a plan is already underway to redevelop the Civic Center garage.

The streetscaping and reconstruction projects on State and Main Streets are in final planning phases and will go ahead, so they are not addressed individually. These are important as investments in the infrastructure to support continued revitalization and, in the case of Main Street, to continue to support an improved image for Downtown.

If it is not too late in the design process, on-street parallel parking should definitely be considered for the Main Street improvements. Four lanes of capacity are excessive in a situation where parking is perceived to be scarce, and substantial parallel capacity exists one block to the west.

Secondary Projects

These projects are listed as “secondary” on the basis of importance, but this need not control the timeline of redevelopment. Planning these secondary projects should continue while the primary projects are implemented, and secondary projects need not be postponed if they are ready for implementation before the primary projects. The Panel recommends only that, as resource allocation decisions are made going forward, the priority projects be given precedence.

5 – Union Station & Gateways

The Panel found that the redevelopment of Union Station has the potential to enhance activity in Downtown Springfield; however, the potential also exists to draw activity away from Downtown if the site is overdeveloped.¹¹ As redevelopment proceeds, planning must aim to complement existing downtown businesses and amenities, as well as enhancing access to them, while at the same time providing services demanded by transit passengers. The recent master plan for Union Station struck the Panel as potentially over-ambitious.

Redevelopment of Union Station provides the opportunity to enhance the experience of arriving downtown from the north by car or on foot. The railroad arches that carry the tracks over Main, Dwight, and Chestnut Streets form natural gateways to Downtown. Currently there is nothing enhancing these gateways or announcing to visitors that they have arrived downtown. Such improvements could be made for a very small investment compared to the overall redevelopment of the Station.

¹¹ Unlike the National ULI Panel, this panel did not directly consider the cost to benefit ratio of Union Station’s redevelopment.

6 – Apremont Triangle / Residential

The Apremont Triangle is an appropriate target for the recruitment of essential neighborhood services. It is very near most of Downtown’s housing stock, especially the Mattoon Street district which represents a great deal of purchasing power – as well as Chestnut Towers which represents a large volume of potential customers. In addition, grocers and other services would benefit from significant afternoon peak-period traffic on Chestnut Street.

The City discussed the possibility of a site at Apremont Triangle for an urban grocer, which is probably feasible – examples of New England cities with successful urban grocers include Burlington, VT and various neighborhoods of Providence, RI, and Boston. Efforts should be made to recruit brands that will serve the current market in Springfield, and not grocers or other retailers that will serve a subset of the market.

7 – Mixed Use / Residential

Market-rate housing development should be pursued consistently. The report from Zimmerman / Volk Associates (ZVA) lays out the potential housing market for Downtown, as well as steps that must be taken to fulfill it. The figure shows new housing projects located so as to create a geographically even distribution; these are not intended as specific housing priority sites.

The ZVA study identifies the following target markets: 1) Current diverse residents of Downtown who are ready for homeownership; 2) Young, urban pioneers who do not have preconceived notions of what Springfield is (or used to be) and generally fall in the category of “risk oblivious” populations (e.g. artists, students, young professionals); and 3) Empty nesters, who are less likely to find the services/cache in Downtown Springfield this early in the redevelopment lifecycle.

8 – Hippodrome

The upper stories of this building should be a priority for recruitment. Retaining active use of the performance space is important to supporting the “Entertainment District” and the arts in Downtown generally. As a result, housing on the upper stories is probably not an appropriate target.

9 – Asylum Building.

This substantial Main Street building needs a responsible retail or office tenant; alternatively, housing could be developed on the upper stories, if not the entire building.

10 – Harrison Street / Pedestrian Connection

Just as Court Street forms the axis of the Cultural / Civic Core of the City from Court Square to the Museum Quadrangle, Harrison Street acts as the axis of the business core to the square as it crosses Main Street. A pedestrian connection between the two streets would provide place-making opportunities to create a unique pedestrian environment with small retail, and café amenities that would support both the surrounding business and cultural activities.

11 – Infill on Court Street

Mid-block Infill, between the Harrison Street connection and the Civic Center Garage should be considered to reinforce the Court Street Cultural Core, the new pedestrian connection and the Harrison Street improvements.

12 – Southern Gateways

There will be two very important gateways to Downtown from the south, State Street and Dwight Street. Currently, when one enters on Dwight Street, there is nothing indicating

that one has arrived in Downtown. Even on the highway (I-291) exit, only “Dwight Street” is mentioned; Downtown is not. All gateways to Downtown should be clear and well-marked.

13 – Connect the Existing Riverfront Trails to a Broader Regional System

As in many communities, an Interstate Highway separates downtown Springfield from its waterfront. Enhancing pedestrian connections to the riverfront was often mentioned, but on its own this is not a realistic goal. Despite the lovely park space developed along the River itself, corridors leading from Main Street to the Interstate, then under it to the River, are too few, generally lacking in developed first-floor space, and require pedestrians to cross too much traffic in order to be made comfortable. The riverfront itself is too narrow to develop any amenities such as playing fields or cafés.

The best goal for the riverfront is connection of the existing bicycle path to a broader regional system of multi-use trails. So-called “rail trails” are extremely popular throughout the country, and support a great deal of activity and business; several exceptional examples exist in Massachusetts. Adding wayfinding and pedestrian enhancements to routes between the riverfront and Downtown should be done only in association with steps to connect the riverfront path to a regional system.

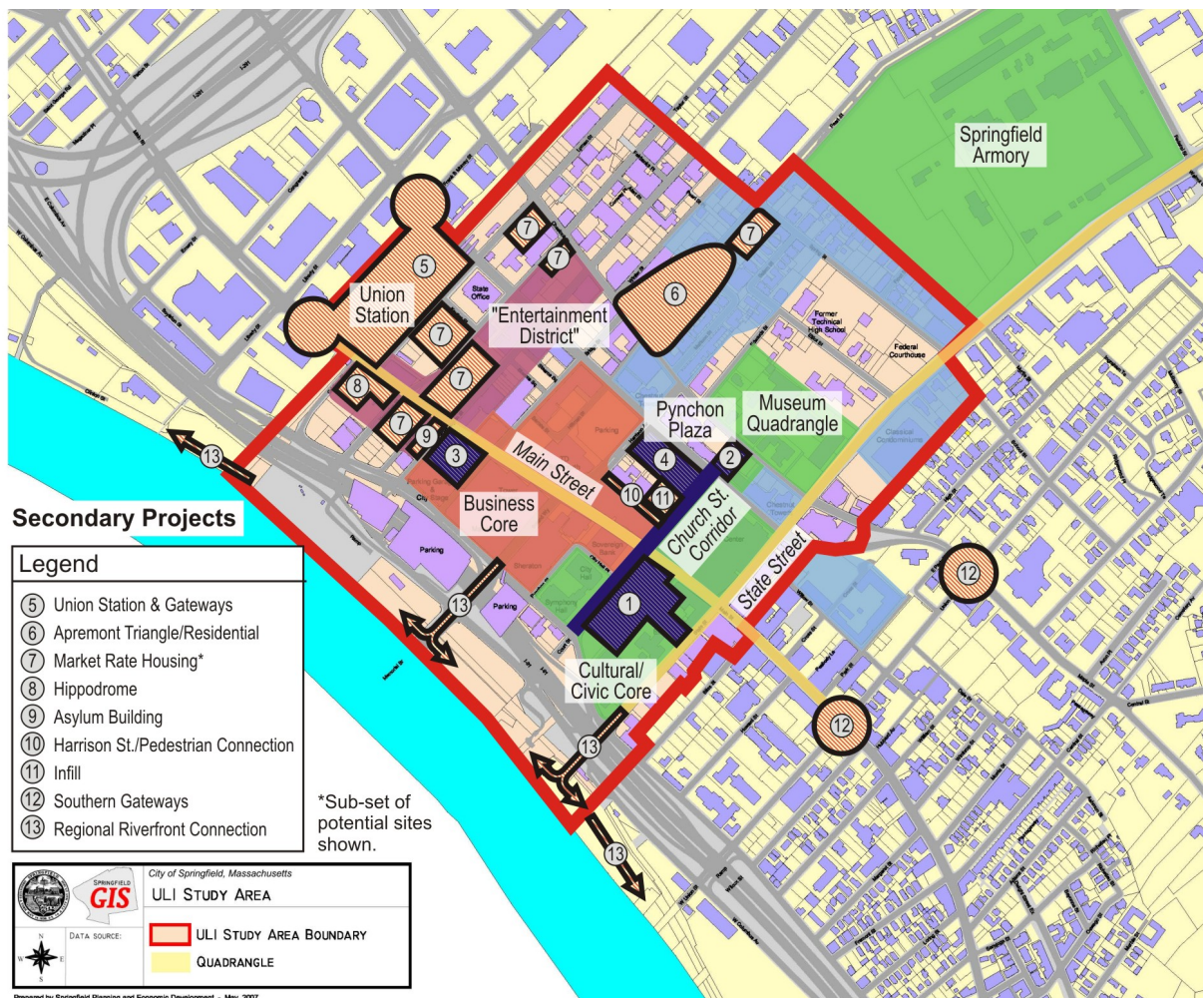


Figure 4. Second Priority Projects for Downtown Springfield Revitalization.

The illustration of Downtown in Figure 4 displays a beautiful civic and cultural district, a busy and distinct business district, and a colorful and thriving entertainment district. The Multi-modal transportation hub is connected to the entertainment, business and cultural districts via a reenergized Main Street complete with street improvements, way-finding, and distinctive signage. Residents, commuters and visitors alike find the convenience and accessibility to Pioneer Valley, North Hampton, Hartford and beyond a real asset. Defined gateways on either ends of Main Street and Dwight Street celebrate arrival into the downtown area. Additional residential building in the Apremont Triangle and elsewhere, and their supporting neighborhood amenities, provides housing for new business employees in a diversified and cutting edge urban environment.

Timeframe

The four Priority Projects – with the exception of Pynchon Plaza – are on a tight time clock. Vacancies at 13 – 31 Court Square, and threats of new vacancy at the Old First Church and the Main Street Federal Building, must be addressed so as to avoid furthering downtown’s blighted reputation. The Civic Center garage is in need of rehabilitation, so “the iron is hot”; the opportunity needs to be used to program the site creatively in order to promote Downtown vitality, and not simply replace the parking structure. These priorities must be addressed within the next 12 to 24 months at the most.

Union Station is on a fast track by virtue of the risk of expiration carried by the Federal earmark, therefore this project should go forward. Planning should continue as other priorities are addressed, and care must be taken to use the project to support downtown activity, not relocate it.

Remaining priorities and opportunities should be pursued as quickly as is reasonable in order to meet the goals and remain consistent with the planning principles critical to successful downtown revitalization.

IV. CONCLUSION

Strategies and actions taken to strengthen the heartbeat of the Downtown core will set a pulse for the rest of Springfield. Many of the elements common to great downtowns are already present in Downtown Springfield, and her residents and stakeholders truly have a lot to work with. The Panel realized quickly that they were not alone their in appreciation of Downtown’s beauty. Many people have been working very hard to maintain Downtown Springfield, and many are committed to and optimistic about its future – from involved and devoted employers, to residents, business owners, to art and culture enthusiasts, development professionals and city officials.

Now is a time to not only plan carefully, but to implement. Doing nothing will erode public confidence. To prevent losing even more public support, it is important to take *visible* action toward the priority goals of coalition-building, key real estate developments as described, perceived safety, and better management of parking. The City of Springfield has suffered some very tough times with bankruptcy, corruption, and blight. However, the worst seems to be in the past. It is clear the City has passed through one phase of reorganization and is now entering a new one. Now is the time for a fresh start. There is renewed energy, attention from the State, and many more eyes on Springfield. Now is the time for Downtown to re-emerge as a vibrant live-work-play environment and, for Springfield as a whole, to realize its great potential.

As Springfield improves, it will be important to remember that sustainable revitalization is a marathon, not a sprint, and that sustaining any great place is an ongoing task. Adopting a twenty-year time-frame is appropriate, as is an attitude that, however good a place Downtown Springfield becomes, it can always be made better.

V. APPENDICES

Appendix A: List of attendees of informal stakeholder sessions with Panel, as provided by the City

Please note, on the day of the sessions, there may have been more changes in actual attendees.

Arts, Culture & Historic Institutions:

Cindy Anzalotti (City Stage/Symphony Hall)
Emily Bader (Springfield Libraries)
Bob McCarroll (Historic Preservation)
Joe Carvalho (Springfield Museums)
Eric Bachrach (Community Music School)
Judith Matt (Spirit of Springfield)
Michael Quijano (Springfield Armory)
Carol Casartello (Old 1st Church)

Parking Authority, Police Department, and Economic Development:

David Panagore (Chief Development Officer)
Deputy Chief William Cochrane (Springfield Police Department)
Marc Draper (Springfield Parking Authority)
Russell Denver (Chamber of Commerce)
Richard Henderson (MassDevelopment)

Property Owners:

Nicole Mortin (Chestnut Park)
Herbie Flores (NE Farm Workers)
Mike Barrasso (Hioppodrome)
Paul Picknelly (Hotels)
Fran Cataldo, Jr. (WS Realty)
Paul Bacon & Fred Christenson (Tower Sq.)
Matt Hollander (MCCA, MassMutual Center)
Carol Barbo

Economic Development Agencies:

Jeff Keck (Business Improvement District)
Maureen Hayes (Springfield Business Development Corporation)
Ann Burke (Western Mass Economic Development Council)
Jeff Daley (Massachusetts Office of Business Development)
Richard Henderson (MassDevelopment)

Downtown Residents:

Erica Walsh (Matoon)
Rosemary Woods (Classical)
Carol Costa (Classical)
Bob McCarroll (Historic Preservation)
Jeff Keck (Kimball Towers)

Business Owners:

Dan Boyle (Common Ground Diner)
Jim Hutchinson (JH Miller)
Rudy Scherff (The Fort)
Nancy Urbschat (TSM Designs)
Victor Woolridge (Babson Capital)

Appendix B: Downtown Development Entities Options -- Pro's and Con's

[Public] City of Springfield Office of Planning and Economic Development	
<p><u>PROS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Existing structure.</i> Working through an existing structure rather creating a new one will save time and resources. ▪ <i>Public power.</i> The City has authority and control (e.g. zoning, policies, and land acquisition) unlike any other agencies or organizations. ▪ <i>Public finance.</i> Only the City is capable of channeling tax and government funding for redevelopment (e.g. TIFs and DIFs) 	<p><u>CONS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Dispersed focus.</i> The city is geographically large, its priorities and issues are diverse, and its resources are limited. Thus, it would sometimes be difficult for the City maintain a consistent focus on Downtown. ▪ <i>Less Nimble.</i> The City has to adhere to regulations such as a lengthy procurement process, as well as a wide diversity of responsibilities, which addresses accountability but can hinder its ability to be quick and responsive to changing circumstances or markets. ▪ <i>Maintain capacity.</i> Requires substantial staff capacity in planning, real estate, project management. ▪ <i>Focus on public purpose.</i> The City's purpose must also consistently favor the public. While the Panel is concerned most with public benefit, this focus sometimes prohibits the policies and incentives that effectively enable sufficient private sector involvement. ▪ <i>Limitations on Use of Private Funds.</i> Investments, grants, and financing for redevelopment efforts which originate from private foundations, individuals, and corporations can more easily leverage additional funding if channeled through a quasi-public corporation. ▪ <i>Agenda shifts with elections.</i> This contributes to the risk of losing focus on Downtown or changing priorities with each political cycle.

[Quasi-Public] Springfield Redevelopment Authority (SRA)	
<p><u>PROS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existing structure. Working through an existing structure rather than creating a new one will save time and resources. ▪ Bonding capacity and other public finance. The SRA is capable of channeling tax and government funding for redevelopment. And its bonding capacity provides a source of public funding that the private nonprofits will not be able to offer. ▪ Eminent domain powers. While not a first choice option, this additional power of the SRA can be helpful for a substantial redevelopment effort. ▪ Public finance. The City is the only entity capable of channeling tax and government funding for redevelopment (e.g. Bonds, TIFs, and DIFs) ▪ Oversight board. Competent civic leadership (elected or appointed) can provide public accountability and management. 	<p><u>CONS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited private Funding. As with City, an Authority is largely dependent upon public funds. ▪ Image. Traditionally redevelopment authorities are associated with heavy-handed use of eminent domain and urban renewal. ▪ Staff recruiting. While the SRA once had a large and active staff and role in the City, it now has no staff and only a 5-member Board. Its current role is acquisitions and dispositions of real estate. Thus while a structure pre-exists, a significant recruiting effort would be required. ▪ Agenda shifts with elections. Like the City, the SRA's focus on Downtown and its initiatives are subject to changes in administration. ▪ Insular. Without effective leadership, a quasi government-led agency can become too self-serving.

New Private Nonprofit (with some public funding) e.g. Downtown Development Corporation	
<p><u>PROS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Private sector involvement. This entity will enable significant participation of the private sector by its ability to negotiate transactions that will be favorable enough to ensure private investments. ▪ New representative board. A new entity could present a new opportunity to have a Board that is inclusive and representative of the current Downtown community. The board should be representative of the private, public, and civic sectors of the downtown. ▪ Geographic focus. This structure will ensure focus, action, and follow-through specifically for Downtown. ▪ Politically independent. Unlike public or quasi-public entities, a nonprofit's existence 	<p><u>CONS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for new staff. As a new structure, a significant recruiting effort would be required. ▪ Ongoing funding sources. Maintaining an ongoing supply of funding will always be a challenge. ▪ Legislative approval. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be held accountable through the representative nature of the board and the quality of the leadership at board and staff level. • Must have an excellent partnership with city staff and elected public officials to orchestrate downtown development, complement work efforts, and take advantage of city capabilities (land takings if ever

<p>and funding will not be subject to changes in administration through elections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Market responsive and not subject to public procurement (30b). With its narrow focus on downtown and its freedom from the regulations, an independent organization or authority can be much more nimble and capable of responding quickly to changes in the market. ▪ Private Funds. Ability to channel private donations, grants, foundation funding and other non-governmental sources of revenue. 	<p>necessary, department of public works, zoning approvals, etc.)</p>
--	---

[Existing Private Nonprofit] Enhanced BID (potential to enhance SBDC to fill this role)	
<p><u>PROS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geographic focus. This existing structure is already set up to ensure focus, action, and follow-through specifically for Downtown. ▪ Existing structure. Working through an existing structure rather creating a new one will save time and resources. ▪ Regular funding source. Unlike a new nonprofit with a more specific focus the BID will always have a consistent source of funding from Downtown property owners, but these members will need to see the value of additional services and larger benefits of economic development. ▪ Proven record. The SBID is a recognized and respected entity that has been working toward an improved downtown through the clean and safe programs, and has a good working relationship with the City. 	<p><u>CONS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excessive roles. There is a risk that this would add to the already large role that BID is being required to play in Downtown. ▪ Property owner based. There is risk of a bias toward current property owners. ▪ Board too big. The board is now made up of paying members but would need to have a leaner and more representative leadership. ▪ Optional participation. Because the participation in the BID is optional, there is a risk of under-participation. ▪ No current development expertise. Currently, the BID lacks the capacity to lead a redevelopment effort for Downtown. Thus, a significant recruiting effort would be required. ▪ Record. The expansion of SBID right now might threaten the current success it is starting to realize by diluting its efforts.