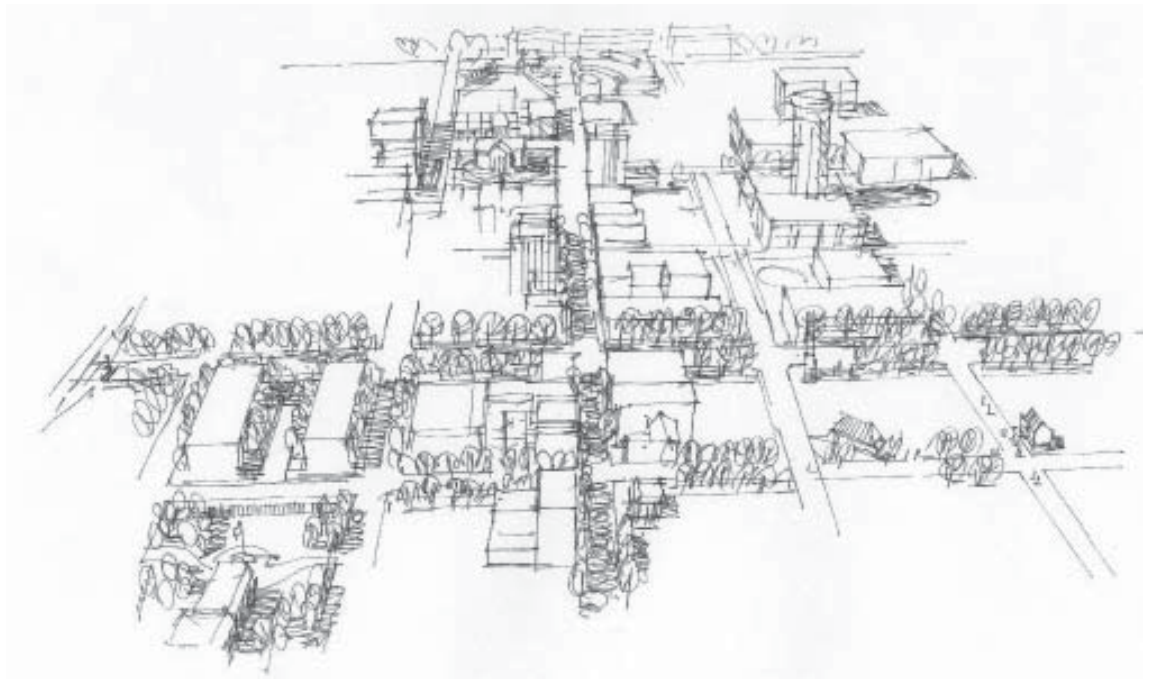


Springfield Downtown Plan



S p r i n g f i e l d D o w n t o w n P l a n

Springfield Downtown Plan

The city of Springfield has a long and proud history. Its location and beauty are not the result of historical accident. Springfield became the capital city in the mid 1800's. Today, it retains a great amount of historic resources and terrific housing stock. It also poses many of the challenges of urban areas throughout America.

Downtown Springfield is more than a set of geographic boundaries. It is a living organism with a very complex set of relationships. It is the economic heart of the city. However, while downtown Springfield and the community as a whole possess enormous strengths, there are serious reasons to be concerned.

There has been some population decline around the downtown. The neighborhoods have serious ailments and need care and support. What follows is a summary of strengths and weaknesses that currently exist. These lists should be viewed as a rough balance sheet for the downtown.

Strengths

Springfield's physical setting on the prairie is spectacular from afar. The nearby lake and generous parks are significant metro amenities.

The presence of the State Capitol and associated state agencies make Springfield the center of government for the state.

Springfield has an energetic and educated population. It is ethnically diverse. People participate in the affairs of the community. There is a rising desire to promote and preserve the best of Springfield.

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The last five years have been good economically. The long-term economic base of Springfield is sound, with its future based on a demand for knowledge-based workers. The medical centers, the state and higher education facilities provide a market for specialty retail and services downtown.

There remains a large stock of distinguished historic structures in the downtown. These buildings provide the interest and character to build on for the future. Foremost among these historic buildings is the State Capitol.

The completion of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) creates a new major world class addition to the state museum and represent a quantum leap in cultural facilities for the downtown.

The renovated train station by the ALPLM provides a needed visitor facility for the city.

While specific problem areas exist, access to downtown Springfield is very easy. Mobility within the region and between downtown and outlying areas is not an immediate constraint to downtown development.

Weaknesses

The Downtown lacks interest for residents and repeat visitors.
Downtown does not yet benefit from the economic activity in the capitol building area.

The 10th street railroad corridor is a substantial psychological barrier to the east side neighborhood.

Downtown's role as a retail center has been lost to the suburban malls. The stores remaining are restaurants and specialty retail.

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Many traditional downtown uses have been permitted or encouraged to occur outside the downtown area. State offices, commercial offices and retail centers have been developed in locations outside the downtown. This has been by either spot zoning or ignoring zoning ordinances and reasonable judgement.

There is a high degree of frustration in portions of the community regarding the lack of inclusion of all segments of the community, particularly African-American residents of east Springfield. To succeed, downtown needs to be everyone's neighborhood.

There is little housing in downtown Springfield. This existing units are almost 100% occupied.

Except for the capitol building, the overall feel of the capitol complex is sterile and institutional. The complex is dominated by appallingly ugly parking lots and desultory, boring, low-bidder office buildings. The campus does not have a dignified feel except for the original historic buildings.

Recommendations

- Establish a capital downtown overlay zoning district to incorporate special performance standards.
- Establish strict rules for administering the district to ensure quality downtown development.
- Establish a height limit of ± 135 feet, which allows up to 10-story development in the remaining infill parcels with proper urban design analysis.

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- Complete and get operational the Springfield Center for the Arts.
- Complete a park on the half block opposite the Union Square Park.
- Encourage downtown residential housing in both historic buildings and new construction.
- Instigate downtown signage and guidance program to ALPLM, new state museum and to the downtown.
- Complete Jackson Street trail from the capital to Lincoln's Home.
- The 11th street corridor will undergo redevelopment and rehabilitation between Carpenter and Cook Streets.
- Establish new home ownership zones in two areas on each side of downtown to focus on funding for these areas and to encourage home ownership and code enforcement.
- Establish an Aristocracy Hill Conservation District to provide guidelines for compatible infill construction.
- Establish guidelines specific to downtown for renovation and appropriate infill construction
- Adopt a demolition delay provision as a part of a historic development ordinance.
- Designate the Central Historic Springfield District as a local historic district.