

D o w n t o w n a s a N e i g h b o r h o o d



D o w n t o w n a s a N e i g h b o r h o o d

Housing

Downtown Springfield has housing opportunities for both rehabilitation and new construction projects. While some brave pioneers enjoy the convenience and ambiance of living in an urban setting, the downtown would benefit substantially from more housing and a greater resident population. There is more than adequate building stock available to develop as adaptive reuse projects and parking lots could be converted to New Urbanism style neighborhoods. Residents downtown tend to utilize public transportation and other alternate modes of transportation including walking and biking. Their everyday parking requirements are more modest and they provide a built-in market for downtown businesses.

The city of Springfield has an excellent downtown residential assistance program that is woefully under-utilized. Architectural consultation is available as well as loans of up to \$35,000 at a 3% fixed interest rate. The amortization period is negotiable. While this is an excellent choice for the property owner wishing to renovate upper story space, the city could also take the lead by preparing a multi-unit building for turnkey development. The city could acquire the building, do the basic infrastructure work and make it available to a local developer. There are several such buildings in the TIF area that would be excellent models for this type of project. The leadership shown by the city would also encourage other private development in downtown Springfield.

Retail

The retail mix should meet the needs of the downtown residents, the downtown employees, the residents in the neighborhoods surrounding downtown and downtown visitors and tourists. This mix should include coffee shops, gourmet retail



D o w n t o w n a s a N e i g h b o r h o o d

and take out, bookstores, general grocery and merchandise, dry cleaners that offer bundle service, souvenir and general gift shops, ice cream, bakery and other service based businesses for residents. Bringing these uses into the downtown depends on achieving a larger resident population and the resulting greater purchasing power.

Entertainment

Downtown Springfield should become the entertainment district for the entire community offering cultural activities, dining (both casual and upscale), outdoor café experiences, live music, street performances and pleasant strolling. The entertainment based businesses offering music should be sensitive to downtown residents and care should be taken to locate these businesses where they will have the least amount of noise impact on residents.

Rehabilitation and consistent use of the Masonic Temple as a performance venue should be a high priority. There are limited facilities of this type and size in Springfield and the location of such a center in the downtown would strengthen downtown's position as the cultural center of the community. It would also provide a powerful anchor for the developing 6th Street retail corridor.

Downtown Springfield should be the center for community celebrations functioning as the public stage for the community offering promotions, festivals, events and markets. This schedule must be carefully programmed to offer a wide variety of experiences that will both delight tourists and attract the long time Springfield resident that might have a "been there / done that" attitude about downtown Springfield.

D o w n t o w n a s a N e i g h b o r h o o d

A central entity should be responsible for coordinating (not necessarily producing) the programming of the Springfield public stage both on the streets, the sidewalks and the plazas. We see this as the responsibility of Downtown Springfield, Inc. (DSI) as it is critical for them to be aware of all entertainment-based activity in public spaces downtown. DSI does not have to be responsible for the production of these events; but the staff should have close partnerships with all the entities (the Junior League, the Rotary Club, the City of Springfield, the state) that coordinate events on public space and be the “keeper” of the downtown community event calendar. For example, the ALPLM may schedule events in the area that is now Union Square Park. DSI needs to know about the event and the particulars of the event so they can provide support and market it as part of a comprehensive marketing program for downtown Springfield.

Comprehensive public space programming should take into consideration the needs of both the Springfield resident and the Springfield tourist. Some events may appeal to and be compatible to both audiences, but some promotions may be targeted to each individual group.

Pedestrian Friendly

As a neighborhood, downtown Springfield should offer a pedestrian friendly environment with pleasant streetscapes, welcoming crosswalks, green space, or other “softscape” areas, parallel or diagonal parking as a buffer from vehicular traffic, adequate signage and easy to understand “way-finding” systems for visitors. The “way-finding” system should be easy to use, but should be somewhat unobtrusive in keeping with the neighborhood environment. Although the linkages are not yet established, the contiguous districts of commercial and historical importance in Springfield - the Lincoln home, the Capitol District - are very walkable from the



D o w n t o w n a s a N e i g h b o r h o o d



central downtown core. A visitor will find it convenient to park in downtown Springfield and walk to these and other nearby attractions. Such programs as Lincoln Walks to Work and Looking for Lincoln will reinforce this walk-ability and contribute to the linkages between the downtown and the Lincoln home neighborhood.

Clean and Safe

Of course any neighborhood should be clean and safe for residents, visitors and shopkeepers. The city needs to pay special attention to streetscape maintenance. The streetscape program is excellent, but maintenance of the elements could use improvement. From our observations, downtown Springfield is a relatively safe place to be, but the *perception* that it is safe will improve public sentiment about the downtown. Adequate lighting, particularly in the alleys or less traveled streets, and keeping the street areas clean can also contribute to the perception of a safe downtown. While the city of Springfield should provide baseline services, clean streets and sidewalks are part of the responsibility of each and every resident and shopkeeper.

Downtown Springfield and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

Obviously, this attraction will have major impact on downtown usage and development. Much of this impact has already been studied and assessed. However the team would like to note the following concern.

Downtown development is most successful when it is incremental. When communities rely on the big fix, the big project to “fix” all their problems and stimulate the development they desire, they are often disappointed. The downtown Springfield

D o w n t o w n a s a N e i g h b o r h o o d

community needs to be proactive in planning and implementing an incremental approach for the growth of downtown Springfield. The ALPLM is just one component of a larger vision for downtown Springfield.

Summary

Historically, downtown Springfield was the cultural, social and commercial center of the community. It is doubtful that downtown Springfield will easily regain its prominence in the community as a retail center, but it can be the center of social and cultural activities. While the primary function of the district should be commercial, public policies should allow for the treatment of a district that is a neighborhood for residents, as well as provide a neighborhood feel for visitors to Springfield.



D o w n t o w n a s a N e i g h b o r h o o d



SMTD Transit Center
...the center will provide a high concentration of transit capacity in close proximity to the Capitol Campus and downtown