

H i s t o r i c P r e s e r v a t i o n



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Historic Preservation is a major issue facing downtown Springfield. A National Register Historic District was formed in 1978 and since that time 15 of the 81 buildings in the original district have been demolished. According to Mike Jackson, F.A.I.A., the architectural historian for the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the demolition of older commercial buildings and the lack of any substantial reinvestment in new buildings has become the community norm outside the historic district.

On the other hand, Mr. Jackson reports that federal rehabilitation tax credits have been used to renovate 18 buildings in the downtown area with a total rehabilitation investment of \$15,000,000. City funds were important for most of these projects and a good percentage of the growth of the downtown tax base is due to the rehabilitation investment.

The broader Springfield community needs to come to terms with historic preservation and its importance as an economic tool for downtown redevelopment. Preservation and history are very closely related, but inherently different. Much emphasis and energy in Springfield is spent on telling the Lincoln story, both through the built environment and anecdotal information. While interpretation of the Lincoln story incorporates historic preservation, it is really more of an exercise in history than architecture. The importance of the Lincoln story to Springfield's history can often overshadow the larger community issue of the preservation of a long and a vibrant history. Springfield has a larger story to tell beyond that of the history of the Lincoln era.

When the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, Downtown Springfield, Inc., Save Old Springfield or any other organization involved in marketing Springfield's history develop their respective marketing plans, they should consider the importance of presenting Springfield as a historic place, in addition to a historic site associated with one historical figure.



H i s t o r i c P r e s e r v a t i o n



The city needs to be the leader in fostering a strong community commitment to the preservation of Springfield's continuing history including the outstanding examples of 20th century residential and commercial building stock that remain throughout the community.

Recommendations

1. Commission a historic survey/inventory of the city limits. This exercise will assist the community in evaluating the whole of their historic building stock throughout the entire community – not just the downtown and Lincoln neighborhood areas.
2. Designate the Central Historic Springfield Historic District (a National Register District) as a local historic district with enforceable guidelines as a model for other districts. The district can be expanded as necessary.
3. Draft and adopt a stronger, more reasonable preservation ordinance. This ordinance should:
 - Provide for the designation of local districts with a simple majority of owner approval.
 - Allow the designation of individual local landmarks as well as National Register properties. With the exception of extreme cases (can be defined by ordinance), owner involvement and ultimate approval should be necessary for the designation of individual properties at any level of significance.
 - Establish design guidelines specific to each district or landmark designated.

H i s t o r i c P r e s e r v a t i o n

- Provide appropriate screening requirements for parking lots, service areas, dumpsters, loading zones etc. When possible, views of the Capitol should be protected.
- Establish broad guidelines for appropriate infill construction within historic districts including reasonable height limits and setback requirements to retain a uniform distance to the sidewalk.
- Include demolition delay provisions based on the city inventory.
- Require a super majority of the City Council to override the recommendations of both the Historic Sites Commission and the Planning Board.

4. The city of Springfield should add a full time preservation planner to the Building and Zoning Department staff. At the minimum an intern position should be created to assist the Springfield Historic Sites Commission with administrative preservation duties.
5. The Springfield Office of Planning & Economic Development actually offers some excellent financial incentive programs for properties located within the Tax Increment Financing district. They are:
 - Downtown Residential Assistance Program
 - Downtown Facade Improvements
 - Building Rehabilitation Loans
 - Downtown Accessibility (Elevator) Loans

Note: Information on these existing incentive programs is available from the City of Springfield Office of Planning & Economic Development (phone number: 217-789-2377).

These are all excellent tools for preservation and the TIF has strong and secure funding for all these programs. Unfortunately, they are woefully under-mar-



H i s t o r i c P r e s e r v a t i o n



keted and under-utilized. In partnership with Downtown Springfield Incorporated, the City's Planning & Economic Development office needs to pursue an aggressive marketing plan for these programs to property owners and potential developers throughout the district. The city should also consider ways to expand these valuable tools to other historic areas of Springfield.

Other incentive programs to consider:

- Planning incentives that would pay for architectural feasibility studies (current programs offer consultation only. This recommendation would take that one step further to assess feasibility);
- Construction incentive for life-safety improvements such as sprinklers;
- Exemptions for building department fees for historic preservation renovations;
- Availability of parking in well designed and strategically located parking deck structures.

6. Develop a comprehensive, enjoyable education program for the community that celebrates the history, both cultural and architectural of Springfield. Include the Lincoln story and related architecture, but feature as equally important the story of other Springfield celebrities such as Vachel Lindsay. Springfield certainly recognizes Lindsay as a native son who loved Springfield, but he is often overshadowed by the Lincoln presence and focus. Again, Springfield is a historic place, not just a historic site. The program could include lectures, walking tours, home tours of neighborhoods and "find the architectural element" contests. Also include Springfield's important government history in its development. The state is never forgotten in Springfield, but its positive contributions to the development of the city are often overlooked.



*Infill project and rehabilitation opportunities
along the 6th Street corridor*



*Sixth and Monroe
...new mixed use development
and site faces Springfield Arts
Center*



R/UDAT

Springfield, Illinois

2002