

# Implementation



# I m p l e m e n t a t i o n

## **The Rationale for Commitment:**

Springfield's downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods form the heart of the city. While all cities depend on a healthy downtown to give identity and to tie together unique neighborhoods, in Springfield's case the downtown area is even more significant in that it also contains the state capitol and is the historic home of the nation's most revered president. As such, Springfield's downtown is vitally important not only to each and every town resident, but also to the state and the nation as well.

No other part of the city can be a substitute for the downtown. It contains many of the city's most precious historical resources. It is the location of the largest concentration of the county's total workforce. It contains a large amount of the city's property, sales and lodging tax bases. It is the community's most central and accessible location for meetings and events. It is the destination of the large tourist population visiting the city's attractions each year, as well as the city's business visitors.

Yet, as the years have passed, it has become more and more under-utilized. Today the major investments of the past in downtown buildings and infrastructure are under-performing assets. Prominent examples are the Masonic Temple and the Convention Center, but also include many office buildings, retail establishments and surface parking lots. These could be utilized much more intensively, with modest expenditures for redevelopment, to produce great benefit for Springfield's citizens.

Revitalizing Springfield's downtown will take a long-term commitment by the city's leaders and by a major proportion of the city's population. Especially, there must be a sustained commitment from the residents and businesses of downtown and in the adjacent neighborhoods. Progress in implementation of the R/UDAT recommendations (and other plans) will require a consistent focus over years. A sustainable effort is

essential. Some cities have found a future event or milestone helpful in assuring the needed focus. For example, Salt Lake City made many improvements during the past six to eight years aiming toward this month's hosting of the Winter Olympic Games. Seattle is still shaped by developments created in advance of the 1962 World's Fair. Can Springfield use the 2009 Lincoln Bicentennial as a beacon to guide and motivate implementation of its vision for a revitalized downtown?

## **Roles and Responsibilities:**

Who takes the lead? Who supports? Who pays? How do parties cooperate? It is clear that no one entity, public or private, can do it all. A partnership of common purpose must form to ensure effective implementation. It is appropriate for the mayor to be the convener of this partnership.

Key steps have already been taken. These include completion of the recent vision work (Springfield Strategy 2020), the R/UDAT and the follow-up team appointed by the mayor. Next steps must be to bring together the key players, find where there is agreement on actions, gain agreement on near-term priorities, and clarify roles and responsibilities.

Downtown Springfield, Inc. (DSI) and the surrounding neighborhood organizations are some of the most important stakeholders in the process. DSI's mission is "...to preserve, promote and enhance Springfield's historic central business district." Along with the neighborhoods, DSI must be the "keeper of the vision." DSI should continue and enhance its current work in promotion, education, business retention, communication, community relations, special events and image/design. DSI must work to focus the process of implementation, help assure downtown, neighborhood and city-wide political support, be a partner in planning, bring financial resources to the table for certain

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projects or initiatives (through special taxing or assessment measures, if needed) and, from time to time, be the “squeaky wheel.” The neighborhood organizations must stay involved to protect their interests, but should also recognize that their local interests will be enhanced by successful implementation of the larger downtown revitalization.

The city is the entity that will most directly implement the downtown actions. It has the requisite regulatory, police and financial powers. It is the elected representative of the whole of the citizens of Springfield. But the city must not be expected to do it all, pay for everything and absorb the criticism from a host of “backseat drivers” in the process. It must have legitimate assistance and, above all, political support from the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

The city commitment should come first from the mayor and city council. This need not be in a formal action like a resolution, but rather in actions and deeds. To ensure the city has a clear point of focus, it is suggested the mayor appoint a person to be the “coordinator of downtown projects,” who answers directly to her and is on an equal footing with other department heads. It is possible this could be handled by the Director of Planning and Economic Development if the existing workload allows, and if, despite the city-wide scope of this job, an unwavering focus can be maintained on the downtown. This position would then lead the city in its roles of coordinating intra-city activities, coordinating with state and federal agencies and managing implementation of downtown projects, using city staff, from getting funding approved through letting contracts for construction.

State agencies have great latitude to work independently in development and redevelopment in the city. But this does not serve its or the city’s long-term interests. An example of a process characterized by cooperation and partnership is the ALPLM Project. An informal partnership was formed, with initiative from the state Capital Development

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Board, including itself, the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, the state's Tourism and Historic Preservation agencies and the city (through the Department of Planning and Economic Development). The group worked together from project conception through funding and project planning and design. This is a model illustrating a success in inter-agency cooperation that, at least in spirit, should be carried out in future development efforts involving the state in Springfield.

The same basic model of cooperative planning, etc. should characterize Springfield's projects involving federal agencies as well.

## **Financing downtown revitalization:**

Bringing life to downtown Springfield and raising the standard for the quality of infrastructure and amenities is the subject of this and other plans. Doing this successfully will take an investment of public and private funds over a number of years. At first, public money must "prime the pump."

As downtown is perceived as a more desirable area, private money can be expected to readily flow into private improvements.

All the "partners" noted in the previous section, DSI, the city, state and federal government will need to contribute to the public funding, recognizing the varying roles and available resources of each.

DSI presently funds a significant part of its efforts through membership contributions from its 135 members. These efforts should continue. It is possible for DSI to use additional measures to raise more funds for downtown projects that specifically benefit its members and/or residents and businesses in the downtown area. These include special taxing districts that levy a property tax, such as a Business Improvement District

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(BID), park district, parking district, or the like. DSI could also promote creation of a special assessment district for a project that benefits specific properties (like sidewalk improvements). A basic requirement for DSI is to participate in funding downtown revitalization to a sufficient extent to demonstrate its commitment and to maintain credibility as a partner in the process.

The city's financial condition is strong, reflecting recent years of effective financial management and prosperous conditions in the region. Also, as a home rule city in Illinois it has a number of funding options it can legally employ. The city's financial participation in implementing downtown revitalizations is a matter of commitment by this city. It has the legal and financial wherewithal if it chooses to use it.

An important source of the funding can be the downtown Tax Increment Financing District (downtown TIF) funds. These will flow until 2017 at a rate of \$2.5 million/year, plus or minus, and must be used in the TIF district. They cannot be used for new construction, or certain other items such as marketing. They could be used, if approved by the city, for maintenance activities downtown, residential and commercial building rehabilitation, general public improvements (street, sidewalks, signage, landscaping, etc.) and projects such as the rehab of the Masonic Temple for use as a performing arts venue. TIF funds may also be useful in implementing some portion of the Capitol Street corridor improvements and those associated with Jackson Street discussed previously in this plan.

Another source of city funds for use in programs designed to stabilize the neighborhoods surrounding downtown are Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. These are used in this way presently and can be spent outside the downtown TIF. There is a TIF in Enos Park as a source of funds for some neighborhood projects in that neighborhood.

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Funds to pay for the new transit center should come from federal and state grants. Federal funds of 70 per cent to 80 per cent should be sought with a state grant for the balance. The city will have to take the lead in these applications.

Funds for new parking ramps should come from parking fees charged to users. These can be used to repay parking revenue bonds issued through the city's parking enterprise fund. With somewhat increased rates (see above), new ramps (above ground) can be self-financing.

The Convention Center is an under-performing public facility. A primary purpose of convention centers is to generate sales and hotel/motel tax income for the city and state. The city derives half its general fund revenue from these two sources. The existing Springfield center may be deficient in some physical aspect of the facility and/or in its process of booking conventions. Its ability to generate sales tax revenue may suffer from the lack of exciting places for conventioners and exhibitors to go in the downtown, and in which to spend time and money. Yet, if the downtown is to be revitalized, better spending opportunities will arise and so maybe some modest additional investment in the convention center can be justified. A "quick and dirty" economic analysis could determine the payback in terms of new city tax dollars for a proposed new investment in modernizing the center. This should be prepared by the city budget and management director using assumptions and projections provided by the convention center staff. If there would be a payback in no more than three to five years, the city council and mayor might want to support a bond issue of the Convention Center Authority to be repaid from its own property tax income plus some increase in the hotel/motel tax. The taxes would return to today's level when bonds were repaid.

It is expected that improvements to the "vista" block are to be paid by the state. An

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economic impact study for the ALPLM shows new city sales taxes of some \$3 million annually. This justifies the city's commitment of funds to the project to date, and perhaps some moderate level of additional commitment if needed to ensure the total success of the project.

Relocation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street rail tracks may be required as a safety measure when high-speed trains connect St. Louis to Chicago. This is a project that may be anticipated and one for which funding requirements and sources are uncertain. At this time the aldermen could serve to do this. It could be staffed by the city's Downtown Coordinator and the DSI Executive Director.

Follow-up: Implementation will take actions by a variety of entities on dozens of fronts over 5, 10, 15, 20 years. It must be a sustained effort. The effort must feed on success so it can become self-fulfilling. Immediately, the project that absolutely must be considered successful is the ALPLM. It cannot be seen as coming up short. This must be a major priority for Springfield: Make sure it's great and say so loudly!

The R/UDAT team, or a portion of it, might be invited back in 3 years or so as a milestone.

The 2009 Bicentennial can serve as a future milestone.