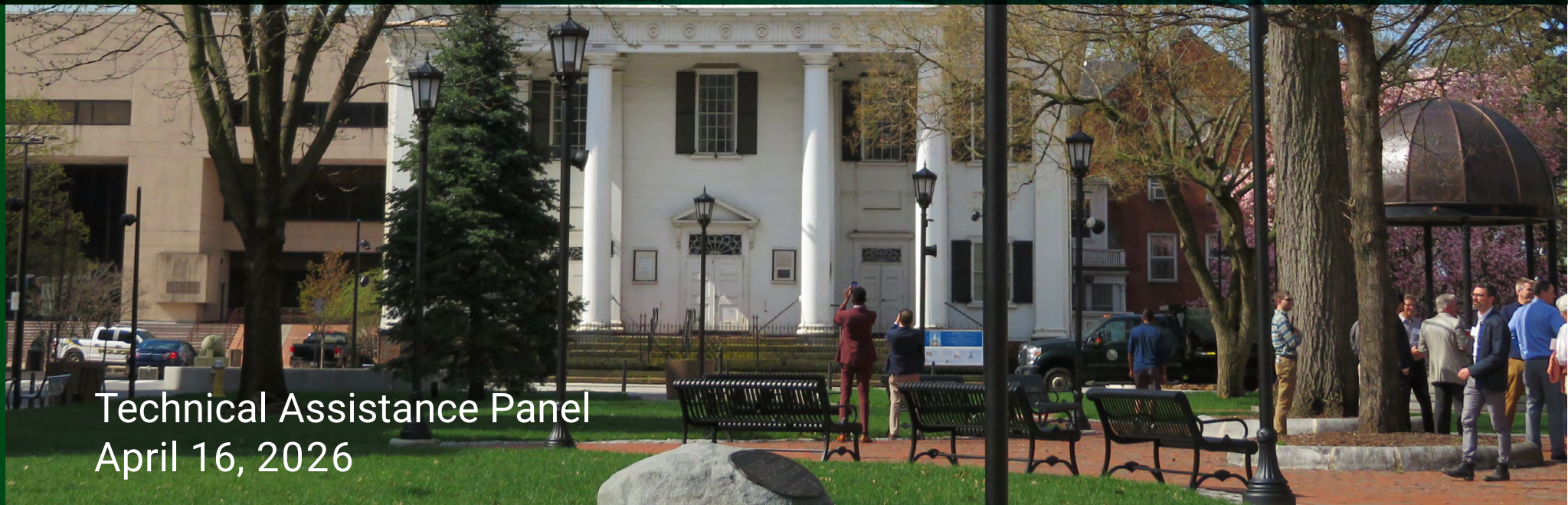




SPRINGFIELD COURT SQUARE

Springfield, Massachusetts



Technical Assistance Panel
April 16, 2026

About

Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising nearly 50,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and the Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries.

More information is available at uli.org.

ULI Boston/New England

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has over 1,200 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local and regional leaders and policymakers dedicated to creating better places.

ULI Boston/New England Leadership

Jonathan Greeley

ULI Boston / New England Chair
Principal, Economic Development
Amazon

Michelle Landers

Executive Director
ULI Boston/New England

Zakeem Pitter

Senior Associate
ULI Boston/New England

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

ULI and the TAP Process

This section provides an overview of ULI's District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) and includes a list of the panel members and stakeholders who took part in the information-gathering sessions.

Purpose of the TAP and Project Background

This section provides a brief synopsis of the TAP's purpose, including the questions the sponsor posed to help identify solutions. It also provides a snapshot of the City of Springfield, an overview of the study area, and the process by which the panelists arrived at their conclusions.

Stakeholder Input

This section offers insight into what stakeholders would like included in the redevelopment of the Downtown, including: ancillary attractions such as nightclubs and sports bars to encourage patrons of MGM Springfield, the convention center, and Symphony Hall to linger in the Downtown area following events; additional arts and performance space for smaller-scale theatrical and music events; additional recreational and open space; and a boutique hotel.

Assets & Opportunities

This section identifies factors that could contribute to a successful redevelopment of the Court Square district, including an abundance of cultural and entertainment attractions such as the MassMutual Center, MGM Springfield casino, the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, Symphony Hall, and the Quadrangle; strong demand for housing in the Downtown; regional connectivity via Union Station; and a City committed to revitalizing its Downtown and the Court Square district.

Challenges

This section outlines potential redevelopment challenges, including prohibitive costs to redevelop historic assets, elevated construction costs, and extended wait times for infrastructure upgrades.

Recommendations

In this section, panelists answer the questions posed by the City and present potential redevelopment scenarios for the Downtown. These include converting the Old First Church into an arts and cultural space; redeveloping the Juvenile Courthouse; and demolishing the District Courthouse and redeveloping it as market-rate housing with commercial space.

Funding Resources

This section provides a list of potential funding sources that could aid in the redevelopment of the Downtown.





ULI and the TAP Process

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Its mission is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Founded in 1936, the Institute has grown to more than 45,000 members, representing the full spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI membership includes developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, economic development professionals, and other related fields.

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has over 1,400 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local and regional leaders and policymakers dedicated to creating better places.

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges that benefit from the pro bono recommendations provided by the TAP members.

A TAP consists of a group of diverse professionals with expertise in the issues presented in the sponsor's application. The Panel spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic, actionable recommendations to advance initiatives consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

An independent study by Rivera Consulting surveyed municipalities that received assistance from the TAP programs and reported a positive impact of the TAP process on communities. Eighty-two percent of participating municipalities said their behavior and approach to municipal planning and economic development strategies were affected; 67 percent said there were increased municipal investments related to the stated goals and recommendations of their TAP report; And 62 percent said at least one key developable asset addressed in their TAP report had been redeveloped, consistent with ULI Boston/New England recommendations. Learn more at: <https://boston.uli.org>

Panel Members

ULI Boston/New England assembled a volunteer group of members with diverse skills and expertise to assist the City of Springfield with this TAP.

Chairs

Kendin Carr, Investment Sales, Boston Multifamily

James Heffernan, Real Estate Attorney, Rich May, P.C.

Panelists

Justin Crane, Principal, Cambridge Seven

Elisa Livingston, Project Manager, HYM Investment

Luke Mitchell, Land Planner, VHB

Tarang Shah, Transportation Analyst, Kittelson and Associates

Scott Turner, Engineer, Fuss & O'Neill

Jon Williams, Senior Project Manager, Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

(Panelists donated their time)

ULI Boston/New England Staff

Michelle Landers, Executive Director

Zakeem Pitter, Senior Associate

TAP Writer: Mike Hoban, Principal, Hoban Communications

Stakeholders

The TAP also benefited from the participation of multiple stakeholders, including representatives from the City of Springfield, local nonprofits, consultants, and residents:

Tom Ashe, Director of Parks & Recreation, City of Springfield

Timothy Brangle, President and CEO, The Chicago Consultants Studio (via Zoom)

Chris Cignoli, Director of Public Works, City of Springfield

Sean Dolan, General Manager, MassMutual Center

Karen Finn, Executive Director, Springfield Cultural Partnership

Michelle Grout, Executive Director, Springfield Business Improvement District (SBID)

Linda Matys O'Connell, Vice President, Metro Center Association

Bob McCarroll, Officer-at-Large, Springfield Preservation Trust

Evan Plotkin, Commercial Building Owner, 1350 Main Street, Springfield

Domenic J. Sarno, Mayor, City of Springfield

Samantha Savoie, Marketing & Creative Services Director, SBID

Mary Kay Wydra, Executive Director, Greater Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau



Purpose of the TAP and Background

The City of Springfield engaged ULI Boston/New England to provide guidance on a redevelopment strategy for the cornerstone block known as Court Square, located in the heart of its Downtown. It should be noted that the ULI National Advisory Panel conducted a TAP in 2006 that set out recommendations for the entire city. ULI Boston/New England followed up with a two-day TAP in 2007, focusing specifically on Downtown revitalization.

This current TAP focuses on the approximately five-acre study area, which comprises the Old First Church, located at 50 Elm Street; the Commonwealth's Springfield Juvenile Courthouse; and the Commonwealth's Roderick L. Ireland Springfield District Courthouse, as well as the historic Court Square Park. The two courthouses are currently occupied but are scheduled to close. The church has been shuttered since 2018. The Juvenile Courthouse (built in 1874) and the Old First Church (built in 1819) are on the National Register of Historic Places, while the District Courthouse is being considered for demolition by the Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM). With the impending vacancies of the two courthouses, coupled with the already vacant Old First Church, the City of Springfield is seeking input on how to approach the transformation of this soon-to-be underutilized City block.

Panelists were asked to answer the following questions:

1. What development options are available and most feasible, including financial limitations, for renovating and rehabilitating the Old First Church? Being an architectural, cultural, and historical anchor point in Downtown Springfield, the City is seeking adaptive reuse ideas for this building.
2. In congruence with the Old First Church, what redevelopment options are available and most feasible for the adaptive reuse of the Juvenile Courthouse, and separately, what new construction development options are available and most feasible for the Roderick L. Ireland State District Courthouse – understanding that this building is likely to be demolished. The development options for the two courthouse sites should ensure synergy between the project ideas and the Old First Church. To elaborate further, the H.H. Richardson-designed Juvenile Courthouse would certainly be preserved (and would need a new reuse). The Hamden County Courthouse on the other hand – with a local reputation as a “sick” building – would be considered for demolition. Therefore, what could become of this parcel should that occur? What would be the best reuse for the Richardson Juvenile Courthouse building?
3. What are the most significant marketing, planning, and design restrictions for adaptive use of the Old First Church?
4. What are the most significant marketing, planning, and design restrictions for any proposals for new development of the overall site?
5. How can this land be better utilized to connect assets in the Downtown – MGM Springfield, Springfield Symphony Hall, City Hall, MassMutual Center, Riverfront Park, etc., to encourage visitors to explore multiple attractions?

City of Springfield Snapshot

The City of Springfield is the third most populous city in Massachusetts and is considered the urban, cultural, and economic center of Western Mass. Located along the Connecticut River, Springfield has a total area of approximately 33 square miles and borders Longmeadow and East Longmeadow to the South, Wilbraham to the East, Ludlow and Chicopee to the North, and is 24 miles north of Hartford, Connecticut. It comprises 17 distinct neighborhoods, including the Metro Center, the focus of this TAP.

History and Background

At the time of European contact and settlement, the Springfield area was inhabited by the Agawam tribe. In 1636, English colonist William Pynchon founded the City of Springfield after purchasing land

from the Native Americans, and named it after his hometown in England. Owing to its strategic position on the Connecticut River, Springfield developed into a regional trading hub. By 1775, the City supported several early industries, including a paper mill, a pottery works, and a rum distillery.

In 1777, the United States Armory and Arsenal at Springfield was established, becoming the nation's primary center for military firearms production until its closure in 1968. This institution anchored Springfield's emergence as a major center of metal manufacturing and spurred the creation of companies such as Smith & Wesson and Indian Manufacturing, which produced America's first motorcycle brand. Springfield also produced the first gasoline powered car in 1893.

During the early 20th century, manufacturing declined as companies moved their operations overseas, and Springfield's economy became increasingly service-based (banking, insurance, and retail). The City experienced a prolonged downturn through the second half of the century, but a series of long term civic and private revitalization efforts over the past decade has contributed to a significant rebound. Major initiatives include the redevelopment of Union Station, the \$1 billion New Haven–Hartford–Springfield rail expansion, the opening of MGM Springfield, and substantial Downtown market-rate housing investments by WinnCompanies and a planned project by McCaffery Interests. MassMutual, a Fortune

100 company; Merriam-Webster, a dictionary pioneer; and Big Y, one of New England's largest independently owned supermarket chains, maintain their headquarters in Springfield.

Springfield is home to five colleges and universities (Springfield College, Western New England University, American International College, Springfield Technical Community College, and the UMass Center at Springfield). The City also serves as the cultural and entertainment hub of Western Massachusetts, featuring attractions such as MGM Springfield, the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, Springfield Armory National Historic Site, Symphony Hall, and the Quadrangle – a complex of five major art, history, and science museums, including the Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum.

Demographic Data – According to the 2024 American Community Survey, Springfield's population was 154,886. The race and ethnicity breakdown is 51% Hispanic, 26% White, 15% Black, 3% Asian, and 4% mixed race. The City's median household income (MHI) is \$57,384, about 80 percent of the Springfield Metro Area MHI (\$71,402) and about half of Massachusetts' MHI (\$104,828). The population living below the poverty line is 23.8%, which is about 1.5 times the rate in the Springfield Metro Area (16.3%) and more than double the rate in Massachusetts (9.7%).

Approximately 54% of the housing units are owner-occupied. According to Zillow, the average home value as of April 1, 2026, is

\$298,985, an increase of 3.7% from last year but up from \$215,509 in 2021. Apartments for rent average \$1,000 per month for studios, \$1,350 for 1-Beds, and \$1,650 for 2-Beds.

The Study Area

The approximately five-acre study area comprises the Old First Church, the Juvenile Courthouse, the District Courthouse and the historic Court Square Park. There are currently no redevelopment plans for the three buildings, other than the probable demolition of the District Courthouse and the preservation of the historic structures, which are subject to restrictions. (It should be noted that DCAMM has made no definitive statement on the District Courthouse, although the expectation is that demolition will be strongly considered, given the structure's "sick building" history. In 2022, independent testing revealed dangerous levels of toxic and carcinogenic mold species)

The City purchased the church after the congregation disbanded in 2007 and was leased to a commercial tenant until 2018. The City used the building for various functions for a time, but all activity has ceased. A \$2 million stabilization fund currently exists for the church's exterior. The church and the Juvenile Courthouse are both located within the historic district on the National Register of Historic Buildings, but the District Courthouse is not and has no known restrictions.

There has been significant investment in the study area, including the \$7 million transformation of Court Square Park and the \$68 million transformation of 13-31 Elm Street, the historic former theater facing the park, which WinnCompanies redeveloped into 74 apartments (80% market-rate/20% affordable) in 2024. The apartments were leased before construction was completed, indicating strong demand for market-rate apartments in the Downtown area.

The TAP Process

The Court Square TAP was held on April 16, 2026. Panelists from the ULI Boston/New England District Council convened at “The Intersection”, a temporary civic/arts space on the ground floor of Tower Square, the Class A office building located in Downtown Springfield. They were greeted by the City of Springfield’s Director of Community Planning, Andrew Strniste, Chief Development Officer Tim Sheehan, and Deputy Development Officers Brian Connors and Tina Quagliato Sullivan, as well as Karen Finn, the Executive Director of the Springfield Cultural Partnership. Connors, Strniste, Sheehan, and Sullivan then led the group on a walking tour of the study area.

The tour began at Bruce Landon Way, which runs along the northern edge of the MassMutual Center and connects Main Street and Dwight Street. The property and street have become a venue for special events after the Massachusetts Convention

Center Authority made more than \$80 million in improvements and was granted the right to close it to motor vehicular traffic as needed to create a pedestrian-only way. The centerpiece of Bruce Landon Way is The Landing, a 12,900-square-foot event space that will be home to the Farmers Market and other outdoor gatherings, and connects Court Square to the Convention Center and other attractions. Panelists continued to the historic Court Square Park, which was renovated and completed in 2025. Panelists observed the historic buildings surrounding the park, including Symphony Hall to the left and City Hall to the right of the 275-foot-tall Campanile clock tower, which has been unoccupied for decades and requires over \$25 million to restore to working order. To the right of the church is 31Elm, a mixed-income (80% market-rate) apartment building. Panelists learned that the owners plan to open a 5,000-square-foot restaurant in the first-floor commercial space.

The tour proceeded to the Old First Church, where panelists conducted an extensive tour of the interior, observing the well-preserved nave and sanctuary, as well as the church’s grand organ, installed in 1958. The interior of the church features multiple gathering spaces of various sizes on both floors and in the Parish house. The largest of the gathering spaces features a commercial-grade kitchen and a proscenium stage. Due to time constraints, panelists were unable to view the entire interior.

The group then proceeded across Court Square Park to the District Courthouse and noted that the underground parking garage has a raised area between the District and the Juvenile Courthouses, creating a half-story barrier. Panelists were unable to tour the interiors of either courthouse, but were informed that while the Juvenile Courthouse is on the National Register of Historic Places, its interior is not subject to historic restrictions.

The tour continued along State and Main Streets, and panelists observed a mix of thriving businesses and vacant storefronts. Panelists also observed the McCaffery Interests’ Clock Tower redevelopment, which will deliver 99 housing units across four historic buildings on State Street.

Panelists returned to The Intersection, where they interviewed the stakeholders listed in the previous subsection in two separate panel discussions. The panelists then engaged in an intensive, closed-door charrette to develop recommendations based on stakeholder input and research conducted prior to the discussions. That evening, panelists presented their observations and recommendations in an open public forum at The Intersection.



Stakeholder Input

Lack of Ancillary Attractions – While MGM Springfield and the MassMutual Center’s conventions, sporting events, and musical performers draw visitors to Springfield, stakeholders acknowledged that there are few reasons to linger in the Downtown area following events. There are no sports bars or dance clubs Downtown, and most venues close by 10 PM.

Loss of Arts and Culture Venues – Stakeholders stated that Downtown has lost a significant number of performance spaces, including the Hippodrome (Paramount Theater, which was recently purchased by a new owner) and the City Stage (which was recently transformed into the Hope Center for the Arts), in recent years, and lacks a true theatrical and performance venue that can accommodate smaller-scale performances. Permitting for outdoor events is also difficult, and the process is not available online.

Venue-Centric Parking Culture – Although there is ample parking in Downtown Springfield, visitors tend to park only at the venues they are visiting rather than use public parking and explore the district’s other attractions.

MGM Casino has Not Fulfilled its Promise – Stakeholders stated that MGM Springfield has not provided the boost to the local economy that was envisioned when it opened in 2018, and has fallen short on other obligations. For instance, the project promised 3,000 jobs, but had 1,632 employees at the end of the fourth quarter

of 2025 (although some of the shortfall can be attributed to a slow post-pandemic rebound). Much of the facility’s outdoor plaza retail space remains unoccupied. MGM has failed to redevelop the historic eight-story building at 101 State Street at the corner of State and Main streets, as promised. Springfield’s 2021 Master Development Plan states that “the MGM complex has yet to foster important catalytic economic development and vibrancy outside the confines of the casino district.”

Lack of Retail – There is no full-line grocery store or department store in the Downtown area where people can purchase everyday items, and no pet supply store. A Big Y Express market opened in Tower Square in 2023 to help serve some of that need. There are also a number of empty storefronts in the district, which stakeholders largely attribute to a lack of civic intent by absentee ownership. Ground-floor commercial vacancy Downtown ranges between 25 and 30 percent, according to [city estimates](#).

Lack of Nightlife Attractions for Young People – Despite five colleges and universities located in Springfield and 20 others within a 15-mile radius, there are few attractions that draw young people to the City.

Insufficient Green Space – There is a lack of green space in the Downtown. Springfield experiences a significant urban heat island (UHI) effect, with densely built-up areas like Metro Center exhibiting higher temperatures

than surrounding, greener suburbs due to heat-trapping asphalt and limited tree canopy.

Lack of Recreational Space – There are no athletic fields, basketball courts, or playgrounds in the Downtown area, and just one small playground at the Riverfront Park.

Need for a Boutique Hotel – Stakeholders expressed a need for more hotel space – specifically a boutique hotel – as the BID reports that the Marriott and Sheraton hotels average 74%-76% occupancy.

Lack of Smaller-Scale Meeting Spaces – The MassMutual Center accommodates large gatherings, but there were conflicting perspectives on options for breakout spaces. MassMutual states that the lack of space is causing the Center to lose business to the Hartford and Providence convention centers.

Lack of Artist Studio Spaces – Make-It Springfield, a community maker space, offers workshops, equipment, and supplies, as well as free open studio hours for public access, but there is a shortage of low-cost studio space for artists to lease. It was suggested that the City could develop a program to make vacant storefronts available for artists to lease.

Perception of Crime – While data from the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) indicate a 15% decline in overall crime, a persistent perception of the Downtown as “unsafe” persists.



Assets & Opportunities

The MassMutual Center – The MassMutual Center is a multipurpose arena and convention center located in Downtown. The venue features 100,000 square feet of convention space and is a year-round draw for sports and entertainment fans, including the Springfield Thunderbirds (who averaged 6,200+ fans per home game in 2025-2026), and hosts the Downtown Springfield Farmers Market, free outdoor concerts, and community events.

Additional Attractions – MGM Springfield, the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, Symphony Hall, the Quadrangle (home to five world-class art, history, and science museums, including the Amazing World of Dr. Seuss museum), and the Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway collectively draw well over a million visitors to Springfield each year.

Strong Demand for Housing in Downtown – Stakeholders reported that newer Downtown properties are often leased before construction is complete, citing ThirtyOne Elm, an adaptive reuse development with 74 apartments and 13,000 square feet of retail and commercial space that was completed in 2024.

Regional Connectivity via Union Station – The intermodal transportation center offers rail service through Amtrak and commuter rail service along the Springfield – New Haven Corridor through CTrail, as well as local (The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority) and long-distance buses (Greyhound and Peter Pan), and a 377-space parking garage, dining, retail, and office space.

Proximity to Worthington Street – The Worthington Street area is home to a dining district and is undergoing revitalization by the City. Springfield has invested more than \$3.2 million in the corridor, including outdoor dining facilities, small-business assistance, and interior buildouts for commercial tenants. The former City Stage theater has been transformed into the Hope Center for the Arts – an arts education hub that also hosts touring entertainment in its 500-seat theater.

Court Square Park – The historic Court Square Park was recently renovated and offers green space and seating for visitors in front of the Old First Church in the heart of Downtown.

The Old First Church – The City owns this historic building and can determine its future uses.

Springfield Business Improvement District (BID) – The Springfield BID is the oldest Business Improvement District in Massachusetts and has been actively involved in the city's revitalization, with a focus on economic development. The BID covers 26 blocks that serve as a hub for culture and entertainment.

Springfield Cultural Partnership – The nonprofit connects artists, institutions, and audiences to strengthen the city's cultural economy and creative ecosystem.

HOPE Center for the Arts – The new state-of-the-art performance space opened in 2026 and also offers free youth arts programs in music, dance, theater, and media.

Willingness for Redevelopment – The City is committed to revitalizing its Downtown and the Court Square district.

Consensus on the Ireland Courthouse – There is general agreement among city government officials that the courthouse should be demolished.

Ample Foot Traffic in District – The attractions in Downtown Springfield, combined with the presence of office workers in the city, provide Court Square with sufficient foot traffic to support additional development.

Ample Downtown Parking – Public parking is abundant, with 7 parking locations (4 covered garages and 3 open lots) near desired attractions. The Springfield BID reports approximately 9,000 parking spots available in the Downtown area.

Operational Capacity for Cultural Assets – As evidenced by the precedent set by the recently opened Hope Center, there is enthusiasm and a range of available fundraising channels for the arts in Springfield.

Flexible Zoning – The City has shown a willingness to change zoning to encourage new development in the district. For instance, the City Council voted unanimously to rezone roughly 26 different parcels of land from industrial to business near Union Station for residential development.



Challenges

Lack of Connectivity to River – Despite its proximity to the Connecticut River (a 5- to 10-minute walk), Court Square remains physically and visually isolated by the I-91 corridor and the active rail line. While the elevated highway allows for passage, the dual-barrier effect creates a significant “disconnect” from the city’s primary natural asset. Bridging this gap requires navigating high-cost engineering challenges and substantial capital investment.

Utilities – Massachusetts has a significant, well-documented backlog in utility infrastructure as of early 2026.

Cost/Restrictions of Rehabilitation of Old First Church – In addition to the cost of renovating the church, potential uses may be limited by the various historic commission restrictions.

Cost of Construction – Before the Iran war, overall construction costs rose at a 12.6% annualized rate during the first two months of 2026, according to an analysis of economic data by Associated Builders and Contractors.

Thin Margins for Developers – While construction costs are similar to the Greater Boston market, achievable rents are significantly lower, compressing ROI for new construction projects.



Demolition and Remediation Costs – Demolition and potential remediation costs will be high for the Ireland Courthouse, although federal or state grant money may be available to defray some of those costs.

Complicated Ownership – While the state and the City own several of the properties in the district, private building owners control the majority of properties, which may impede a cohesive strategy for Court Square.



Recommendations

Question 1

“What development options are available and most feasible, including financial limitations, for renovating and rehabilitating the Old First Church? Being an architectural, cultural, and historical anchor point in Downtown Springfield, the City is seeking adaptive reuse ideas for this building.”

Given the limited reuse options for the Old First Church due to historic preservation restrictions on both its exterior and interior, combined with the stakeholders’ desire for additional arts and culture venues, the panel recommends repurposing the church to meet those needs.

While Springfield has a number of strong cultural organizations, stakeholders indicated that the City is in need of mid-sized venues that can accommodate performers and

events that don’t require the capacity of the MassMutual Center or Symphony Hall, but are too large or not appropriate for a nightclub or bar setting. Constructing a cultural center within the existing building’s framework, in line with its historic preservation requirements, would address both challenges.

The panel envisions a venue that could accommodate theater, dance, and musical performance; artist studio/maker space; and, with the commercial kitchen located within the building, community gathering, conference/ breakout meeting space, or a wedding/ banquet hall. Constructing such a space will require substantial time and community resources, so it is vital that the City seek out partnerships with other organizations to fully explore what the community desires and to assist with fundraising. A local precedent for this model is the [Hope Center for the Arts](#), which transformed the former CityStage theater into a multidisciplinary arts hub for youth, using a combination of private and public donations, including a \$5 million federal grant. The panel stresses that the process of building partnerships should begin as soon as possible, rather than beginning construction and finding an operator later.

Additionally, the panel recommends that, given the property’s historic considerations, a side addition be built to comply with ADA requirements and to house essential modern infrastructure that would be too invasive to install within the landmarked interior. The addition would provide elevator access, upgraded HVAC systems, and other utilities



necessary to make the space viable for 21st-century public use.

Question 2

In congruence with the Old First Church, what redevelopment options are available and most feasible for the adaptive reuse of the Juvenile Courthouse, and separately, what new construction development options are available and most feasible for the Roderick L. Ireland State District Courthouse – understanding that this building is likely to be demolished. The development options for the two courthouse sites should ensure synergy between the project ideas and the Old First Church. To elaborate further, the H.H. Richardson-designed Juvenile Courthouse would certainly be preserved (and would need a new reuse). The Hamden County Courthouse on the other hand – with a local reputation as a “sick” building – would be considered for demolition. Therefore, what could become of this parcel should that occur? What would be the best reuse for the Richardson Juvenile Courthouse building?

Juvenile Courthouse

Panelists were unable to access the building during the tour, but based on available information, formulated two potential pathways for the adaptive reuse of the Juvenile Courthouse.

The first option would be City-led. Based on stakeholder input, there is a need for additional attractions in Court Square to encourage patrons of the MassMutual Center, Symphony Hall, and the casino to linger in the Downtown and to attract students from the numerous colleges in the Springfield area. The panel suggests redeveloping the Juvenile Courthouse into a mixed-use property with a food hall on the first floor and offices on the second. The City recently [commissioned a study](#) on demand for a Food Hall in Springfield that indicated consumer demand for a mid-sized food hall. Panelists suggest the food hall could reflect Springfield’s cultural diversity (the City of Springfield’s population is approximately 50% Hispanic, according to the 2024 U.S. Census) and include a nightclub built in the high-ceilinged courtrooms. The concept has been tried successfully in Boston, where the Charles Street Jail was transformed into the Liberty Hotel featuring the *Alibi Bar & Lounge*, and the Moakley Courthouse hosts the cocktail lounge, *Marcelino’s Seaport* on the first floor. This approach would give the City greater control over the project, but redevelopment of a historic building will be expensive.

The second option is to include the Juvenile Court in the RFP for the Roderick Ireland Courthouse, which will presumably be demolished and redeveloped. The RFP would require the developer to preserve and adapt the historic Juvenile Court for reuse. This approach would cede control of the project to the developer, but would relieve

the City of any financial burden. Examples of similar developments are the Courthouse Lofts in Worcester, MA, where the developer converted the former Worcester County Courthouse into 118 mixed-income apartments and transformed the courtrooms into amenity spaces for residents, and Overlook at St. Gabriels in Boston where Cabot, Cabot, and Forbes redeveloped a former monastery into apartments and utilized the chapel spaces into community amenities. At the Springfield site, a developer could build mixed-income residential housing in addition to the Juvenile Court and redevelop the Juvenile Court into amenity space for the new building. Additionally, the city could require the developer to reserve a portion of the Juvenile Court to be developed for public use, such as a café, public meeting space, or flexible coworking space.

Regarding the sequencing of the redevelopment of the three buildings, the panel recommends deferring the adaptive reuse of the Juvenile Court until the other buildings are substantially complete. This will allow the community to reassess its evolving needs. In the interim, the Juvenile Courthouse can serve other community functions, such as a flexible co-working space for neighborhood residents.

Roderick Ireland Courthouse – Hall of Justice

Given the designation of the courthouse as a “sick building” and its unappealing brutalist architecture, panelists recommend full demolition of the structure, providing the

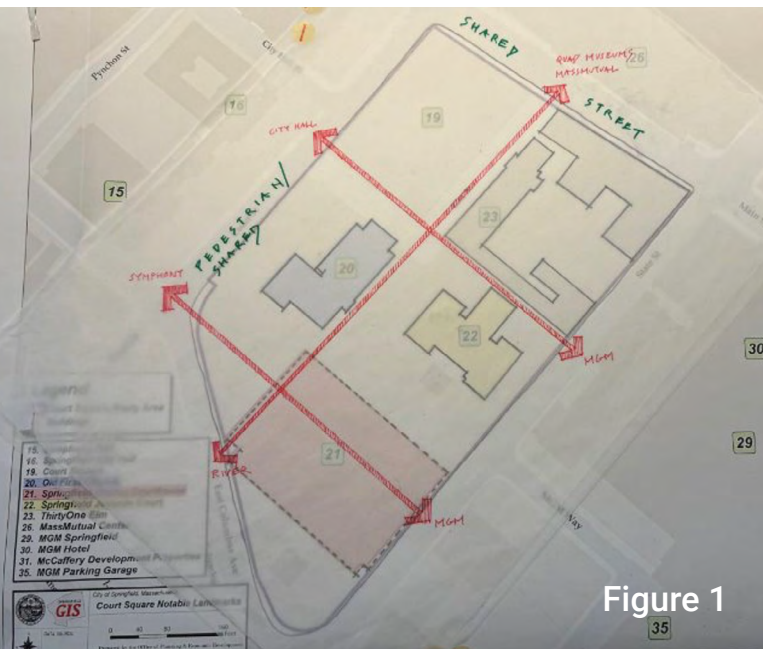


Figure 1

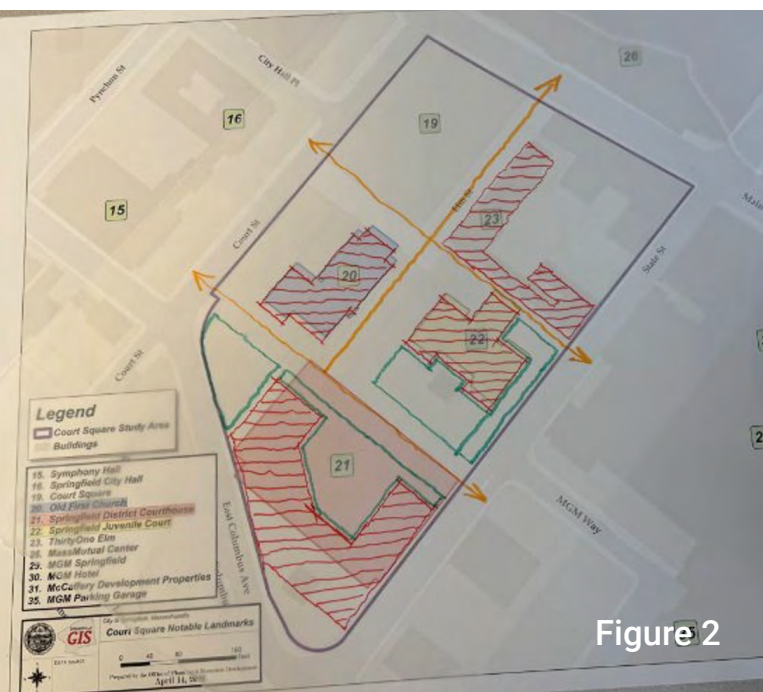


Figure 2

City with a blank canvas for master planning. The cost of demolishing the courthouse would likely make any private development infeasible. The City of Springfield is also unable to absorb demolition costs into the city or redevelopment authority budgets. This parcel would be best positioned for redevelopment and positive economic contribution to the area if the City were able to take control of a development-ready site, or at least a site that had been cleared of the current courthouse building.

The City could then issue an RFP for a mixed-use development on the site that includes adaptive reuse of the Juvenile Courthouse. The RFP should be flexible regarding zoning

and height, and emphasize that there should be little to no parking to maximize green space. Due to the cost of construction and the limits of market apartment rents, the most likely scenario for development would be stick-built construction of four to five stories above a one-floor podium with high ceilings to support a grocery store, restaurants, bars, or other uses. The zoning should be flexible enough to accommodate multiple building configurations or projects of greater height. The focus of the RFP should be on flexibility rather than rigid requirements to better connect with the surrounding Court Square district and the nearby riverfront.

Potential Redevelopment Scenarios

Section 1. In developing these redevelopment scenarios, the panel focused on 'desire lines' – the intuitive paths pedestrians naturally take – over prescribed walkways. By formalizing these routes, these plans can replace the uninviting pedestrian experience with an activated public realm that aligns with natural human movement and restores connectivity across the site at a scale consistent with historic city blocks in Downtown Springfield.

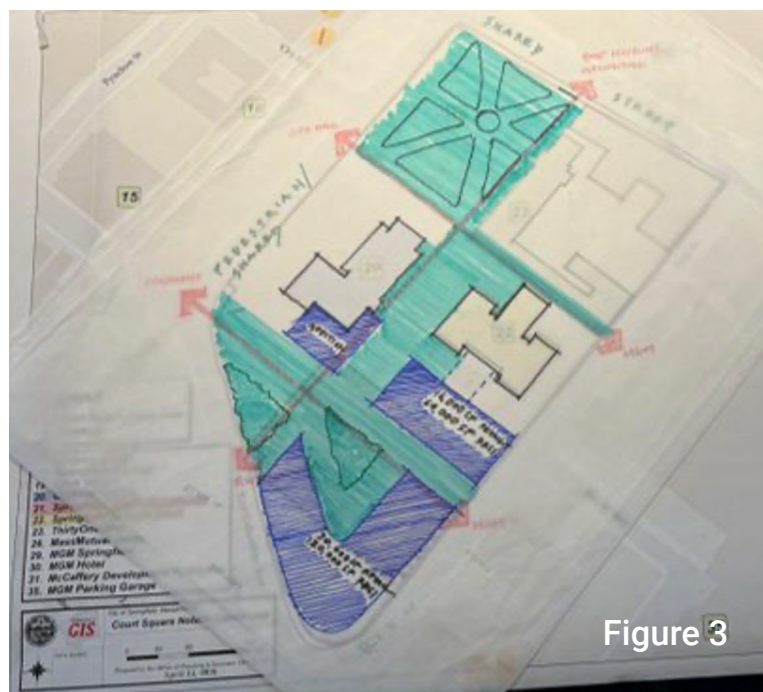


Figure 3

Panelists recommend structuring East and West connectors (Figure 1) to encourage patrons of MGM Springfield, Symphony Hall, and the MassMutual Center to activate the district and to support future retail, dining, and other activities within the site, potentially transforming the district into a cultural hub. The first step in the process is to ensure that pedestrians can walk through the site unencumbered, establish sightlines that allow people to see the district's assets, and create a safe environment. Doing so will require the removal of the below-grade parking garage at the Hall of Justice, the 5'-tall concrete retaining wall that impedes circulation and sightlines. Panelists also endorse the City's plans to designate a portion of Main Street to implement "tabletops" (raised crosswalks/intersections) to slow traffic to improve pedestrian safety, or to create a pedestrian-only section between the Symphony Hall and the Old First Church to draw people to the site. When the parking garage between the two courthouses is eliminated, there will no longer be a need for auto access, and it can be redeveloped into green space. For vehicles that need access to the venues in that section, parking will be available exclusively via valet.

The riverfront is an especially attractive section of the waterfront, featuring the Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway, the restored, historic South Springfield Railroad Station, and both at-grade and below-grade crossings of the railroad tracks for pedestrians and cyclists. Panelists

recommend reinforcing circulation to the river by establishing a north-south pedestrian corridor through the site. While Interstate 91 creates a visual and physical barrier to access to the Connecticut River, there are opportunities to improve the State Street underpass through public art, placemaking, lighting, paving, wayfinding, and signaling.

Section 2 – How Should the Site Be

Designed? Much of the study area is already defined by the two historic structures that will undergo adaptive reuse (the Old First Church and the Juvenile Courthouse), as well as Court Square. As previously stated, the panel recommends redeveloping the Roderick Ireland Courthouse site into market-rate apartments with first-floor commercial/retail space. The courthouse parcel fronts State Street, which extends under the elevated Interstate 91 to the historic South Springfield Railroad Station, and beyond that, the Connecticut River, which is visible from the courthouse.

If the redevelopment of Court Square is to be truly transformative, then road programming, including prioritizing a line of sight from the courthouse redevelopment site to the river to make the riverfront feel accessible, should be included in any plan.

The panel also recommends prioritizing open space on the site. Panelists learned from the stakeholder session that MGM Springfield has not proven to be the catalyst for activating the Downtown that was originally envisioned. Including open space that could

host outdoor dining or a beer garden in any design concept may spur interest and encourage casino patrons and visitors to other area attractions to explore the district more fully. The panel also suggests including a playground in the open space at the courthouse redevelopment site.

Question 3

What are the most significant marketing, planning, and design restrictions for adaptive use of the Old First Church?

Given the historic restrictions on the interior and exterior of the Old First Church, panelists feel that the logical reuse of the property would be as a performance and cultural space (see Question 1). The adaptive reuse would require ADA compliance measures (an elevator and other accessibility measures), in addition to building stabilization and MEP upgrades. The panel also recommends expanding the rear section of the Old First Church to accommodate the new elevator and electrical transformer. This expansion may also include the construction of a side road off Court Street.

Revenue from ticket and food and beverage sales will generate some income for the space, but will not be sufficient to offset the building's construction and ongoing maintenance costs. While grants from the Commonwealth and the City are invaluable, to ensure the venue's long-term viability, the City needs to partner with one or more nonprofit organizations.

Question 4

What are the most significant marketing, planning, and design restrictions for any proposals for new development of the overall site?

There are many unknowns associated with this project. First, it is unclear whether the Commonwealth will be responsible for demolishing the Ireland Courthouse. Following the demolition, soil assessments will also be needed to determine whether remediation is required, which can be costly. Due to the proximity to the Connecticut River, the Court Square area also has an elevated groundwater table.

Panelists were unable to tour the Juvenile Courthouse, so it is unclear what challenges the adaptive reuse of the property's interior will present or what the floorplates will accommodate.

It should also be noted that building the necessary infrastructure for any redevelopment project is likely to be a lengthy process. Developers often face challenges with the complex Massachusetts regulatory landscape, local permitting issues, and an extended infrastructure backlog for the utilities.

To reduce developer uncertainty, the panel recommends the City conduct comprehensive site-readiness testing, including Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs). Using test pits during the Phase II process will provide the necessary data for developers to underwrite development costs accurately. Mass

Development often funds site-readiness measures for municipalities.

The adaptive reuse of these historic structures must take into account the significant energy upgrades required to comply with the Massachusetts Stretch Energy Code, which can affect project costs and be constrained by preservation requirements.

Marketing Barriers: The elevated retail vacancy rate in the Court Square block is currently a problem. However, it may be attributable to landlord neglect and a perceived crime problem in the area.

The highway infrastructure serves as a double-edged sword for the site. It provides high visibility and a welcoming gateway for those entering the city and creates a marketing opportunity by replacing the courthouse's brutalist design with a modern structure. However, the highway also acts as a physical wall and railway barrier, cutting the district off from the riverfront.

Question 5

How can this land be better utilized to connect assets in the Downtown – MGM Springfield, Springfield Symphony Hall, City Hall, MassMutual Center, Riverfront Park, etc., to encourage visitors to explore multiple attractions?

The redevelopment of Court Square presents a prime opportunity to connect the many destinations of Downtown Springfield. The panel recommends establishing a corridor

from Pynchon Park through Bruce Landon Way to Court Street that will accommodate leisurely strolling, biking, and other forms of recreation that encourage social interaction.

The entire site should be redeveloped as a mixed-use project with open space throughout. For instance, Court Street offers ample opportunities to create green space and amenities that encourage people to linger rather than pass through. The design of the redevelopment should allow for clear sightlines to some of Springfield's destinations and increase visibility across the various parcels. The panel also recommends removing the courthouse parking, which currently creates a barrier between the site and MGM Springfield, Symphony Hall, and other attractions. This could create a pedestrian walkway augmented by open space that could also accommodate outdoor dining.

Additionally, Court Street should be extended to the area under the highway to create an East-West connection to the museums and other attractions, and to connect the river to the Downtown, which itself could become a major attraction.

The panel also recommends reconfiguring both East Columbus Avenue and Hall of Fame Avenue to single-lane roadways and modifying the geometry to increase open space. East Columbus does not appear to have traffic levels to warrant more than one lane, and the reconfiguration would allow for additional open space or new development.

Hall of Fame Avenue has higher traffic but a more efficient flow due to better signalization. A study should be conducted to explore this option further and discuss the possibilities for the newly created open space.

There are safety concerns with the high-speed traffic exiting Interstate 91 onto State Street, so the panel recommends narrowing the lanes, installing raised crosswalks, boarding islands, and curb extensions to slow traffic and create a safer pedestrian environment. The City of Boston has had success with this model (see rendering to the right) that shortens crossing distances, makes streets more accessible, increases greenery (landscaping and tree cover) in the district, and enables the installation of much-needed wayfinding. This also aligns with the theme of making the district more appealing.

The redevelopment of Court Square will create additional opportunities for open space and should be considered a vital part of any strategy. Developers should consider which design could complement the existing green space and consider adding a dog park or a mini-forest. If the existing Riverfront Park becomes part of the redevelopment, there may be space for a playground, basketball and pickleball courts, or other large space uses.





Funding Resources



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Community One Stop for Growth – The Community One Stop for Growth combines 12 of the Commonwealth's most popular community-focused economic development and housing grant programs into a single application portal and collaborative review process.

- **HousingWorks Infrastructure Program** – The HousingWorks Infrastructure Program (HWIP) is a competitive grant open to municipalities for a variety of infrastructure projects associated with housing development. This grant program awards funds based on the project's nexus with housing, transportation, infrastructure, and community development needs.
- **MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program** – Funds predevelopment, planning, and site preparation activities and helps municipalities and nonprofits accelerate private-sector investment through grants for studies, permitting, and infrastructure, with grants typically ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000.

Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP)

Complete Neighborhoods Partnership – A multi-year initiative offering technical assistance and resources to help Massachusetts communities create walkable, mixed-income, and dense neighborhoods. The Town of Montague has been working with MHP and this program since 2023.