



Boston/
New England

Springfield TAP

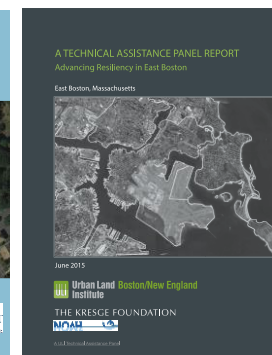
April 16, 2026

About ULI – the 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 Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI at the local level

Boston/New England District Council covers nearly all of New England with over 1,200 Members—developers, architects, planners, public officials, financiers, students, etc.



Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

ULI Boston/New England is committed to supporting communities in making sound land use decisions and creating better places. A TAP brings together ULI members with a range of professional expertise to provide focused, collaborative consultation to a local government or qualifying non-profit organization. **All panelists have donated their time to participate on the TAP.**

TAP Impact on Communities:

- **82%** said their behavior and approach to **Municipal Planning and Economic Development Strategies** was affected
- **67%** said there were **increased municipal investments** related to the stated goals and recommendations of their TAP report.
- **62%** said at least **one key developable asset** addressed in their TAP report had been **redeveloped consistent with ULI Boston/New England recommendations**

Final Deliverable – Written report (10 - 12 weeks) will be available at <http://boston.uli.org>

PANEL SPONSOR:



The Panel

Chairs

- **Kendin Carr**, Boston Multifamily
- **James Heffernan**, Rich May, P.C.

Panelists

- **Justin Crane**, Cambridge Seven
- **Elisa Livingston**, HYM Investment
- **Luke Mitchell**, VHB
- **Tarang Shah**, Transit Matters
- **Scott Turner**, Fuss & O'Neill
- **Jon Williams**, Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

ULI Staff

- **Michelle Landers**, Executive Director
- **Zakeem Pitter**, Senior Associate

TAP Writer

- **Mike Hoban**



The Process

Briefing Meeting

Panelists received briefing information from the City of Springfield regarding the study area including zoning, past studies, current conditions, etc.

Site Visit

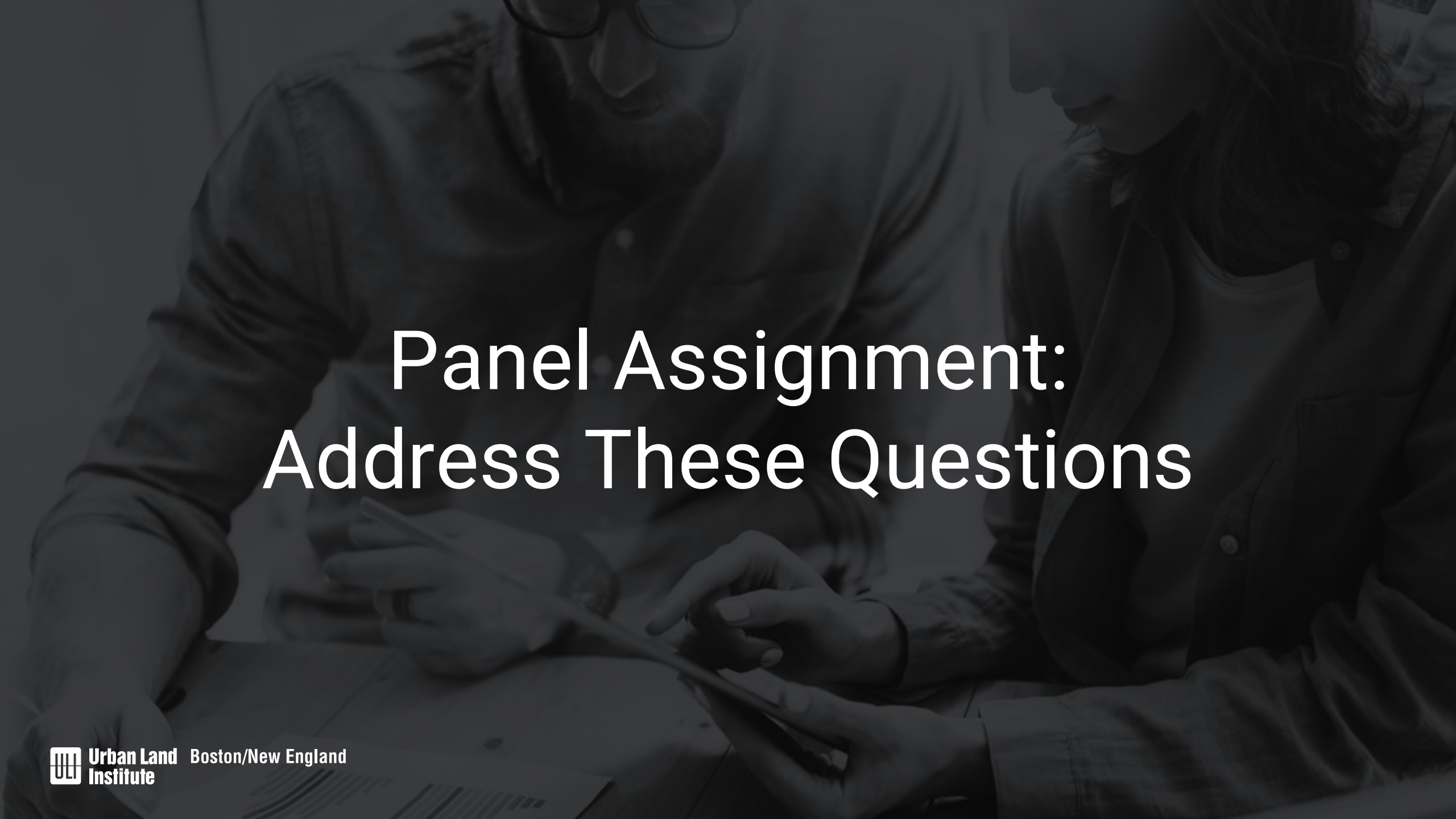
Panelists toured Tower Square to the MassMutual Center, across to Court Square Park and to the Old First Church. The panel toured inside the Old First Church and then to State Street passing the Juvenile Court House. Then up State Street to Main Street.

Stakeholder Interviews

The panelists interviewed community members and public officials to better understand the needs of the neighborhood and the community.

Charrette

The panelists met in a closed-door session to explore all possibilities related to the assignment and develop recommendations.



Panel Assignment: Address These Questions



Key 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 that there is synergy between 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?

Key Questions, continued

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 of 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.



What did we see?

Study Area

Justin



Study Area



Study Area



Study Area



Study Area



Study Area



Study Area



Study Area





What did we hear?



What did we hear...

- Lack of attractions to keep visitors in town after events at MassMutual or visiting casino
- Diminishments of cultural attractions in downtown/Loss of theater space
- Ample parking in downtown/car-centric culture
- Lack of retail
- Lack of nightlife attractions for young people
- Not enough green space for downtown residents
- Need for boutique hotel
- Lack of a variety of meeting spaces – large spaces at MassMutual but few breakout options
- Lack of artist studio spaces
- College students don't utilize downtown
- Perception of crime



Opportunities and Challenges



Assets

Luke

1. Lots of activity at MassMutual
2. Attractions like MGM Casino, Basketball Hall of Fame, Symphony Hall, Quadrangle, Riverwalk
3. Demand for residential in downtown
4. Regional Connectivity via Union Station
5. Proximity to Worthington Street
6. Court Square Park
7. Historic Building under city ownership
8. BID – mature and active
9. Springfield Cultural Partnership, Hope Center
10. City is open to development
11. General alignment regarding future of Ireland Court House (hall of justice)
12. Foot traffic from attractions and workers during day
13. Ample Parking
14. Operational capacity for cultural assets
15. Community precedent for fundraising and operations of cultural (Hope Center)
16. Zoning is flexible

Challenges

Luke

1. Connectivity between attractions, Court Square, River
2. Utilities
3. Cost/Restrictions of Rehabilitation of Old First Church
4. Cost of construction
5. Thin margins on new construction – challenging ROI
6. Remediation of site/demolition costs
7. Elevated highway – separates downtown from riverfront
8. Complicated ownership



Recommendations



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

Historic restrictions make reuse options extremely limited.

- Community Art Center
 - Theater
 - Community and cultural uses
 - Maker/Studio space
 - Breakout meeting/reception space – alternative to casino and hotels
-
- Identify operator and build partnership before fundraising and planning
 - Consider an addition for ADA access and utility modernization and potential additional program space

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 that there is synergy between 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

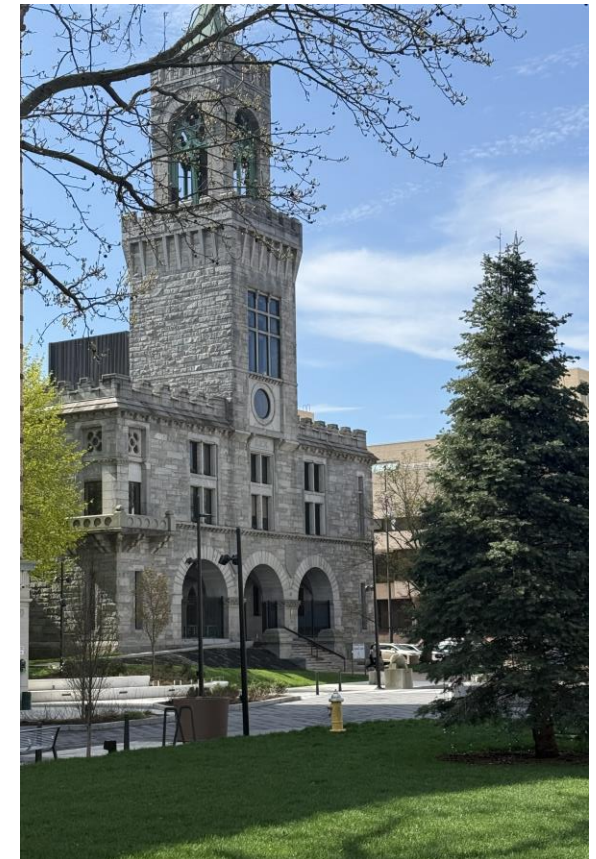
While attractive, this building is a challenge for reuse.

Could be a viable retail/food hall site - challenges with ground floor access, loading.

Housing should be considered, though redevelopment would be expensive.

Could be an amenity space for new construction.

City could pair this building with new development opportunity.



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Ireland State District Courthouse – Hall of Justice

Best case scenario – City acquires a vacant site and master plans site. Leaving **flexibility**, site could support one or more multifamily building with possible ground floor retail like an urban grocery store or restaurant.

Allow height

Allow limited or no on-site parking

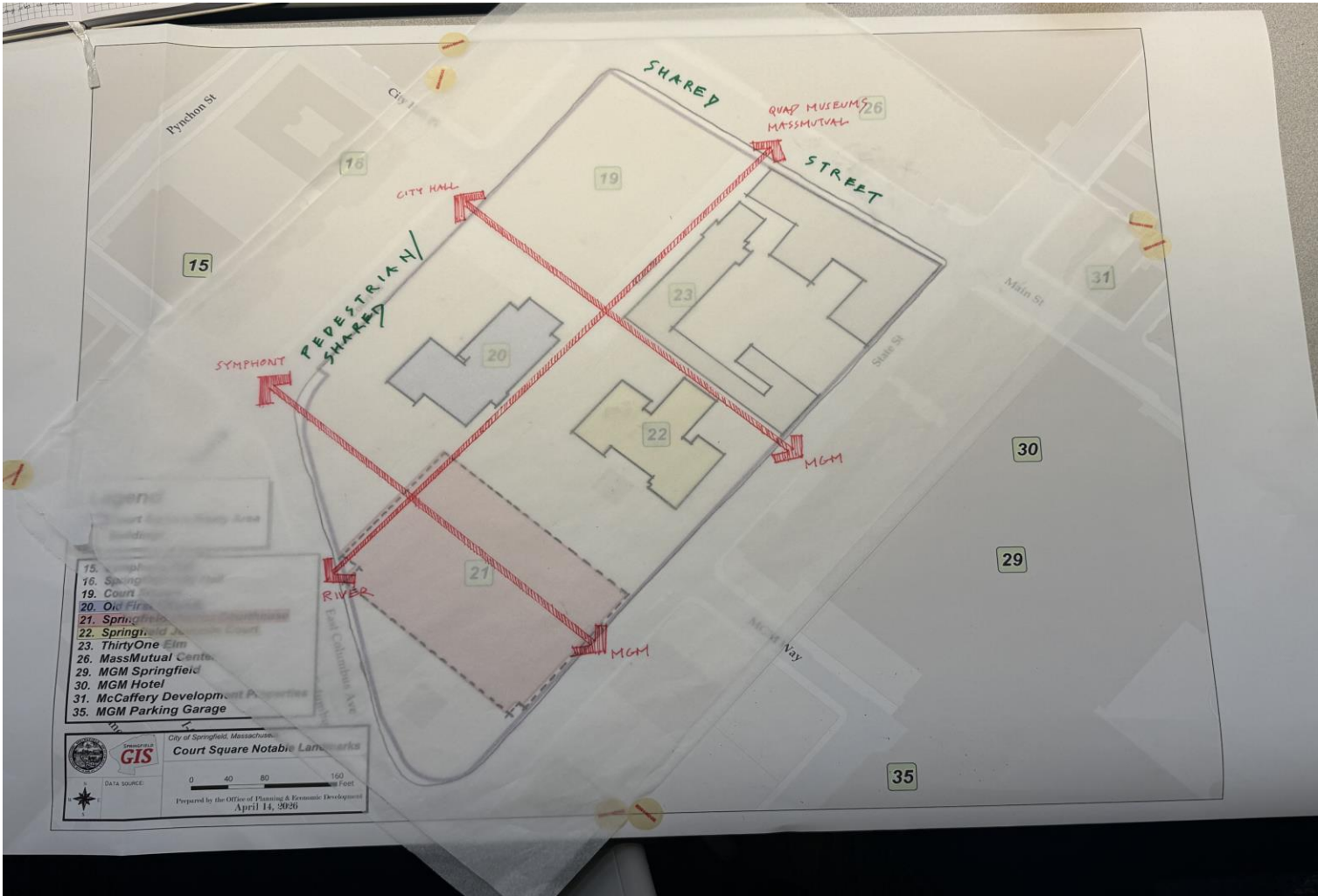
Utilize unused areas for additional green space

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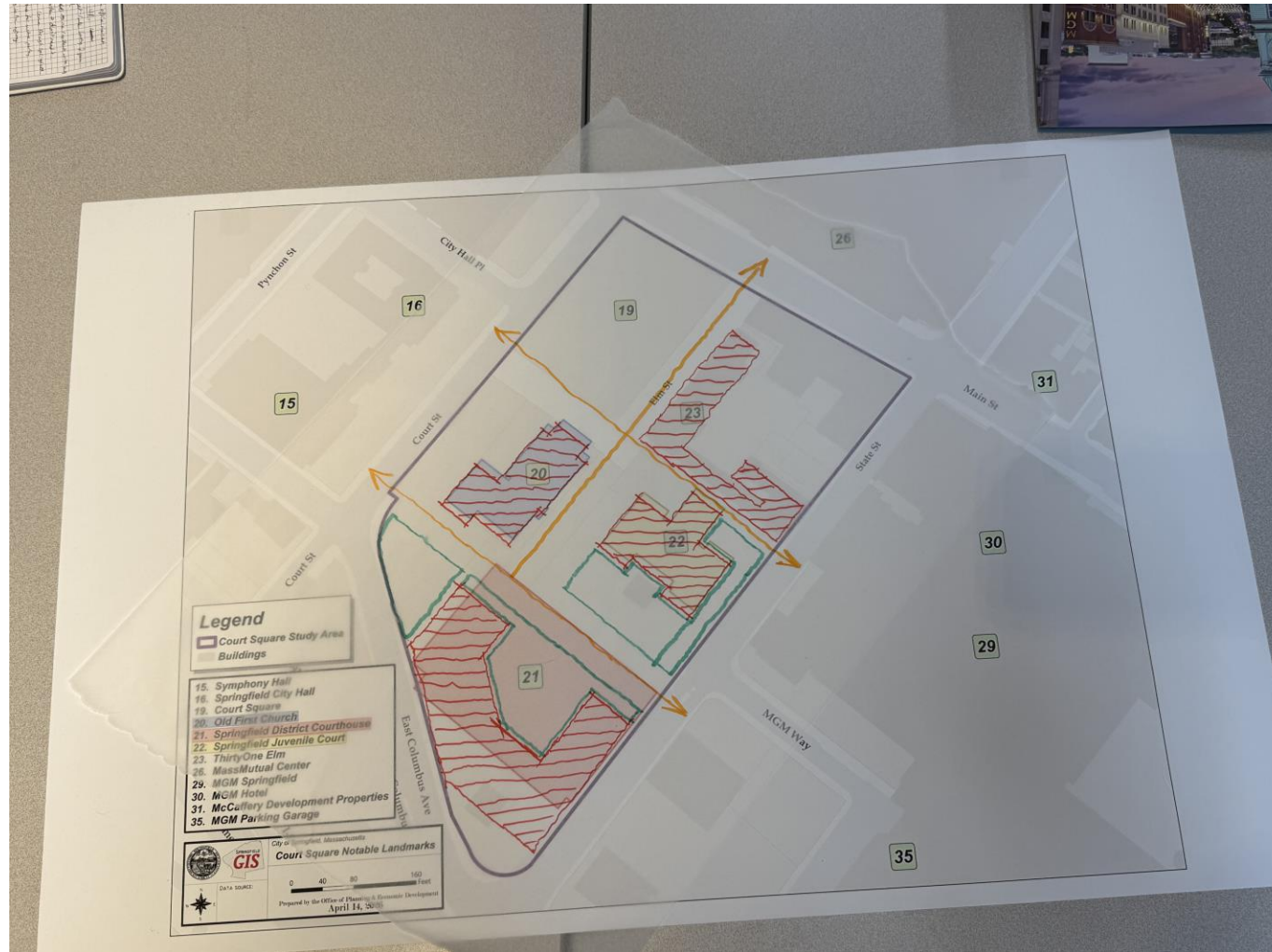
Remove parking garage

Extend Elm Street to East Columbus Ave as a pedestrian corridor

Study Area



Study Area



Study Area



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

Exterior and Interior historic restrictions make alternative uses extremely challenging.
ADA requirements will be a major investment.

The restrictions make economic return virtually impossible.

City should explore public-private partnership with non-profit operator – must identify a local champion(s) for capital raising.

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

Remediation requirements unknown – possible hazardous materials

Utility infrastructure unclear

Underlying soil conditions unknown

City should conduct site readiness measures (with possible funding from MassDevelopment)

Building upgrades (Church and Juvenile court) could trigger energy upgrades (meeting 2021 energy stretch code)

Working with floorplates in existing buildings

Marketing barriers

- Retail vacancy
- Perception of crime is an issue
- Highway infrastructure, though it makes the site accessible
- Commercial

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.

Establish corridor from Pynchon Park through Bruce Landon to Court Street

Encouraged mixed-use developments blended with greenspace

Maintain view corridors between attractions to encourage walkability

Eliminate vehicular access to current courthouse parking

Think "big" about ways to access riverfront park as the Connecticut River could be a major attraction. A well-maintained, activated park could be the amenity that keeps people in downtown.



Photo of Burlington VT: Sydney P. Hayes, Free Press

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.

- Make East Columbus and Hall of Fame Ave one lane and modify geometry to expand open space area
- Narrow State Street
- Raised crosswalk, curb extensions and bus boarding islands on Main Street
- Add wayfinding throughout area



Source: City of Boston

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.

Open-space possibilities

- Dog parks
- Mini-forests
- Playgrounds and play areas
- Riverwalk may have space for basketball/pickleball and other large-space uses

Q&A

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