

Abstract

The City of Springfield respectfully requests \$3 million from the State of Illinois' Downtown and Mainstreet Grant for an entire block development in the heart of downtown Springfield. The North Mansion Block Plaza (NMBP) sits in a corridor of downtown Springfield that can be a renewed vista and vantage point to the pulse of the entire City. The proposed plan will create an outdoor street-level event center and an urban square, including interactive plaza space. The activated park will be developed for special events, gatherings, concerts, and theatre productions for the region, along with being the backdrop for everyday enjoyment for residents and visitors alike. The project is an effort to activate a space for the benefit of all demographics along a commercial corridor that would stimulate the surrounding ecosystem towards revitalization. This cascading effect is precisely why this project and location have been chosen to spearhead an all-season, multi-use space.

Background and Need

Stakeholders have demonstrated a desire to develop and activate the plaza to transform downtown. Downtown Springfield is the historic central business district and heart of the City. With tourist attractions such as the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, Lincoln Home National Historic Site, Frank Lloyd Wright's Dana-Thomas House, a stretch of Route 66, the old and current State Capitol Buildings, and an assortment of local shops, one will find a variety of options for fun. With over one million visitors a year, tourism has an annual impact of more than \$460 million for Springfield and Sangamon County. Since 2016, over 30 new businesses have opened downtown, and downtown living is seeing a resurgence as more apartments are being built and restored.

Downtown features various visual and performing art options, including the BOS Center and Hoogland Center, regularly featuring music and theatre performances. These spaces are in addition to public art displays and galleries throughout downtown. Kidzeum of Health and Science provides a fun learning and discovery center for families. Downtown is also home to many local restaurants, microbreweries, and street festivals, creating a vibrant nightlife.

The North Mansion Block Plaza (NMBP) is located on the Jackson Street Corridor, the equidistant connector of the Lincoln Home area to the Capitol Complex. The block formerly held the Lincoln Hotel, the Roxy Theatre, and the YWCA. The State of Illinois originally purchased the majority of the block for the potential future location of the Federal Court House. The plans did not come to fruition, so in 2014 the City purchased the 2.35-acre block. In 2016/2017, the City contracted consultant Dan Senftner, Rapid City Main Street Square, for a community assessment of the block development. In 2018, the multi-million dollar Illinois Realtors Bicentennial Plaza and the underground Y-Block pre-development stormwater retention project were completed. The Bicentennial Plaza is a pedestrian entertainment corridor that connects 6th and 5th Streets on Jackson Street. The City integrated the plaza streetscape design along the Jackson Street Corridor to 4th Street, providing continuity with the Governor's Mansion and the Y-Block. In 2019, the block became an activated space for festivals. It was selected as the beneficiary site for the Levitt Concert Series, which uses music genres to bring together people of different ethnicities and income levels.

Heading into 2020, Springfield was on pace to have a record tourism year with 60% hotel occupancy from convention and tourism activity. In addition, with the State finally having a Governor and legislature with a balanced budget and the first Capital Plan in over a decade, the economy, momentum, and excitement for the future in the Capital City were high. The Coronavirus Pandemic devastated the Capital City, especially the downtown, on two fronts. With cancellations of conventions and limited tourism, hotel occupancy was below 30% having \$200 million lost travel expenditures and \$60 million convention cancellations, according to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Secondly, being the hub of state offices and hundreds of state employees working remotely, downtown foot traffic has never recovered to this day. Restaurants and merchants struggle to reduce daily state worker foot traffic and lack of tourism.

In 2021 and 2022, the Y-Block continues to be the beneficiary site for the Levitt Concert Series because of its widespread success and positive area impact. Coming out of the pandemic, the community support embraces the activated space and the potential vibrancy future outdoor downtown amenities will bring. Having a fully developed programmable ACE (Arts, Cultural, and Entertainment) area will spur the economic recovery and provide a much-needed outdoor quality of life amenity downtown. This will integrate the Y-Block along the Jackson Street Corridor and the 4th Street Corridor, and the Capitol Street Corridor providing continuity between Lincoln's Home, the Mansion, and the Capitol Complex. Once developed into a programmable, ACE space with over 100 activities year-round, it will create a vibrancy that will draw tens of thousands of residents and tourists. The continuous magnified foot traffic will provide innumerable support for downtown restaurants and merchants while spurring future development. When Rapid City developed its plaza, the Rapid City living space increased by more than 50 percent, with private investors putting their money in and occupancy rate reaching 100 percent. In addition, tens of millions of dollars have been invested in properties, and the development since Main Street Square became a reality.



Majestic Vista Connecting History

The NMBP sits across from the country's third oldest active Governor's Mansion. The Mansion and grounds recently had a \$15 million upgrade. The block, as a 2.35-acre open grass field, is not the complimentary vista that the majestic "People's Mansion" on the hill deserves. The Block inclines from Capitol Avenue toward the Mansion. The Plaza design takes advantage of the topography contour creating a natural amphitheater vista setting for the Mansion.

Having landscape continuity and integration between the Bicentennial Plaza, the Jackson Street Corridor, the Governor's Mansion, and the Capitol Complex is essential. Massie and Massie is the landscape architectural firm that participated in all of the projects. Subsequently, we utilized Massie and Massie to design the North Mansion Block Plaza (NMBP). The Northeast Corner of the NMBP is one of the most unique corners in the United State's, Illinois' and Springfield's history. The NE corner is the axis point of the Old State Capitol and the Capitol. To accentuate this point, we propose having life-size statues of Barack Obama and Abraham Lincoln holding a stovepipe hat. The Obama statue would have his left arm stretched, palm facing upward-pointing toward the Capitol. The Lincoln statue would have his right arm extended, palm facing up, pointing toward the Old State Capitol. The statues would poise an awe-inspiring photo op for people while illustrating the connectivity from the Great Emancipator to the First African American President.

Along Capitol Avenue, the plaza's redevelopment will complete a portion of the Capitol Street corridor that leads to the Plaza. This provides continuity to the corridor, this will be further enhanced with the consolidation of the 3rd Street Rail Corridor with the 11th street railway. This will provide the opportunity for a pedestrian corridor that will connect North Grand with South Grand. Potentially, the corridor will have a solar trolley where pedestrians can jump on and off at stops throughout the corridor. The State of Illinois Capitol complex is undergoing a \$200 million upgrade which will complete the Capitol Street Promenade. The Capitol Street Promenade connects the east side of Springfield with City Center.

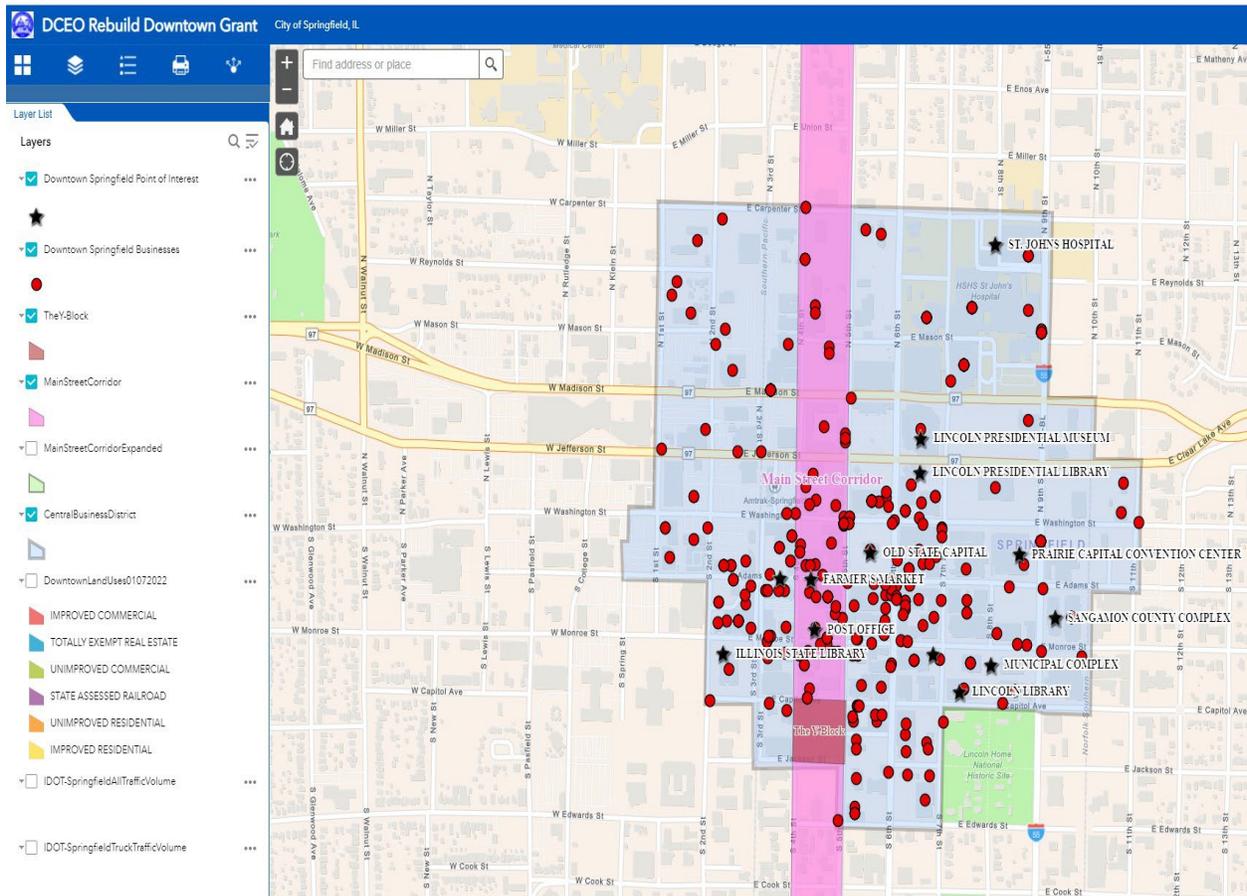
Enhancement of the 4th Street Corridor

The 4th Street Corridor from Lawrence Street to Carpenter Street will be the busiest redeveloped downtown corridor like 5th and 6th Streets. The corridor is anchored to the north by the Mid-Illinois Medical District that has two level one trauma hospitals in Memorial Health and HSHS St. John's Hospital. The Medical District is also home to Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, the Springfield Clinic, and the recently completed state-of-the-art \$30 million YMCA facility. The City provided \$5.9 million toward the project, resulting in IDNR receiving the former YMCA development-ready site north of the Dana Thomas House. It also provides the opportunity for the Dana-Thomas House to return to its original setting

This spring, the City will convert the one-way corridor to two-way traffic. The conversion will make 4th Street more pedestrian-friendly by slowing down traffic that will complement the fourth street side of the child and pet-friendly Y-Block Plaza. Additionally, the City will demolish the dilapidated 4th Street ramp parking garage this spring. Plans are being drafted for a potential modernistic replacement SMART Ramp that will include vehicular charging stations. The 4th

Street Ramp will provide parking for events and the future sight of the \$15 million University of Illinois (UIS) Innovation hub. The UIS Innovation Center will advance the regional economy by working with industry, government, and other partners to build a robust and inclusive human capital and innovation pipeline. The Center, located in downtown Springfield near the Illinois State Capitol, will be a modern space designed to inspire an innovative culture, strengthen community connections, and build a more robust regional economy. Activities and programs will attract entrepreneurs to develop and launch businesses and support the development of evidence-based, impact-driven programs aimed at advancing the region's social and economic well-being.

The City has invested approximately \$10 million in the area over the past decade for infrastructure improvements. Indicated on the map below, the 4th Street Corridor has potential for expanded use and redevelopment. For an interactive view, the following [link](https://arcgis/0jOy1z) (<https://arcgis/0jOy1z>) lands readers on the 4th Street Corridor map that highlights current appropriation and mix of economic drivers in the public and private sectors.



Historical Significance

A pedestrian walkway links the Lincoln Home National Historic Site to the Illinois Governor's Mansion and the Illinois State Capitol along the Jackson Street corridor, on land owned by Illinois REALTORS®. Formerly a parking lot, the area has been transformed into a showcase of

Springfield's history and ties to Abraham Lincoln. The North Mansion Block Plaza serves as an access point for Springfield residents and visitors when visiting downtown. The block formerly housed the Lincoln Hotel, Roxy Theatre, and YWCA and was a vital economic driver of downtown Springfield. The site is located directly south of the Illinois Governor's Executive Mansion; four blocks east on Jackson Street are the Lincoln Home, a national historic site. Three blocks to the west sits the State Capitol, one of the tallest in the country. This landmark structure's West Wing recently underwent an award-winning restoration. In effect, the block could act as a southern anchor for the downtown district and a focal point for a historic trail that has been naturally traveled for more than a century.

Town Branch Sewer District

A 150-year-old brick arch, the Town Branch Sewer District storm and sanitary sewer run beneath the property's southwest corner underlie the central portion of the City. Through its collection system, it serves an area of approximately 1,800 acres. The District contains some of the oldest sewers in the City — some dating as far back as 1865. The project is located within an urban watershed served by an 84-inch brick arch combined sewer, constructed in the 1860s, that is susceptible to surcharging due to unrestricted urbanized development over the past 150 years. In the planning stages of the streetscape design, it was determined that this project's location would provide an ideal opportunity for the City to begin addressing the flooding issue.

In 2017, the City joined with the Governor's Office, Illinois Realtors Bicentennial Plaza group to address the sewer surcharging and flooding by installing an underground detention system. The system is located on a portion of the vacant city-owned block immediately north of the Jackson Street project, a recently demolished YWCA site. A network of 2,300 feet of five-foot diameter pipes was constructed in an 11-foot-deep excavation, designed to hold 340,000 gallons of stormwater at maximum capacity. Packaging the stormwater improvements with the streetscape enhancement (<https://www.cmtengr.com/project/jackson-street-corridor-and-streetscape>.)

The Jackson Street project team was committed to being good stewards of taxpayers' money. Budgeted at \$2.7 million, the lowest competitive bid came in at just over \$2.4 million, and ultimately, the final construction costs were just under \$2.3 million. Despite the unknown conditions imposed by a 150-year history of prior development in the area, the project came in under budget.

The YWCA

The historic block was home to some of Springfield's most significant landmarks, and the whole block was sold to a developer in 1976 who did have the means to complete a proposed court complex. The YWCA, built in 1913 by local architect George Helmle, the YWCA building became a place of "intense civic pride by the city of Springfield," where women gathered and progressive activities took place. Inside its walls, young women once enjoyed "religious, social, [and] physical recreation" and took "classes in domestic science, languages and the various arts." The building also served as a hub for public meetings and progressive activities in the region, which helped establish its reputation as a place of "intense civic pride by the city of Springfield." The YWCA

remained a mainstay for women's programs for several decades more – the group had more than 3,000 members at the building's 50th anniversary in 1963. In recognition of the significance of its former use, the Women's Art Area will be placed on the site.

Economic Impact

Entering 2020, the City of Springfield was coming into one of its strongest years financially, and for its Convention & Visitors Bureau, it was set to be the most successful season on record. However, in early 2020, our nation encountered the first health pandemic in 100 years. The City's municipal government navigated through this unprecedented time, assisting residents and businesses through shutdowns and modified work environments. As we worked through the pandemic, the City assisted its brick and mortars, especially downtown, because the majority are locally owned and operated and did not have the capability for online ordering or sales. The City worked to give them the ability to have curbside and front door pick-up. As people gravitated outside, the City closed off streets downtown to create alfresco dining and makeshift parklets for the restaurants, cafes, and bars.

In December of 2020, the City provided \$5,000 in small business grants awarded to 126 local businesses throughout Springfield that experienced economic hardships due to COVID-19. A large majority were awarded to downtown, a low-to-moderate Census tract. In addition, the City awarded 2021 \$79,000 to nine businesses to build portable outdoor seating downtown.

The pandemic did not only impact those buying locally. The loss of over \$100 million in tourism dollars decimated our downtown businesses. It was difficult to recover from nearly one year of shutdowns with the cancellations of events like the Old Capitol Art Fair, Route 66 Mother Road Festival, and its various music festivals.

When downtown businesses were asked, "How has your business revenue changed since COVID-19, 75% of the businesses said sales decreased by 75%. Three businesses uprooted and moved out of downtown and out to the west part of Springfield due to government and businesses working remotely and the decline of foot traffic. Four businesses downtown shut their doors. Over 80% of downtown businesses said they had to reduce their hours.

However, COVID-19 has helped people feel more comfortable gathering outdoors and enjoying activities in the open air in all seasons. The North Mansion Block Development will allow downtown to have a new outdoor attraction that will bring people to the area 365 days a year. As more families choose to drive to their next vacation destination and locals seek new events, the development of this activated green space will provide the economic boost our urban core has been looking for and needs. Strategic integration and a robust incentive package align with regional and state economic development plans such as the Springfield - Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, Springfield/ Sangamon Growth Alliance, the State of Illinois, and public and private entities. This alignment allows the layering of funds for economic development. The addition of the park will further enhance downtown Springfield as a destination and support its position as the premier financial hub in Central Illinois.

Fifty-four thousand seven hundred fifty-two workers support 1,546 businesses each day within Springfield. Springfield is also home to the state capital, and this positions Springfield as the central point in a statewide network of power and influence. This centrality has historically helped spawn many local industries that remain important to today's economy.

Funding will create a street-level downtown event center and urban square, including interactive plaza space that compliments the Jackson Street Corridor and the Capitol Avenue Corridor. Like in Rapid City, private investment will generate foot traffic that will spur private investment with a mix of commercial and private investment. A successful Downtown Plaza will bring new vibrant energy by hosting hundreds of events each year. The park is strategically located to catalyze new development in the downtown district and will be open all year for community festivals, events, and family fun. Partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors provided input toward developing the plan to shape the physical and cultural character of the space. Funding will enable the City to uplift public and private spaces, rejuvenate streetscapes, improve local business viability and public safety, and bring diverse people together to celebrate and socialize in a central, multipurpose location.

The City plans to create an interactive plaza that includes preferred amenities that will establish a transformational anchor to an emerging cultural district that attracts a large and diverse group of citizens and tourists to the City's heart. This development will provide an attractive place for residents by building on Springfield's unique historic fabric and growing downtown arts and entertainment culture.

North Mansion Block Concept includes these key features:

- Upper activity terrace with lawns and access drive along northside (Capitol Ave.)
- Trees along Capitol Ave. for screening
- Presidents Obama and Lincoln statues in NE corner plaza
- Market pavilion (outlined) could be constructed in the future on the upper terrace
- Amphitheater seating (seat walls and sloped lawns) south of the upper terrace
- Restrooms and storage under plaza (outlined), access from the fountain plaza to the south
- Open air/tent reception space on the upper terrace and lower fountain plaza
- Fountain plaza and multi-use activity area south of the amphitheater with splash pad, ice skating, and open lawn activities
- Art area honoring women in SE corner, art area in the SW corner
- The kid-friendly area on the west side (4th St.)
- The dog-friendly area on the east side (5th St.)
- Portable performance stage on Jackson St. or within the block depending on the event
- Food truck locations around the perimeter and on the upper terrace
- Sidewalks and ramps meeting ADA standards

- Café with rooftop terrace (outlined) could be constructed in the future

In its present state, the plaza has had a significant impact on the local community with programs sponsored by the City of Springfield, Downtown Springfield, Inc., the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, the Springfield Black Chamber of Commerce, and the Springfield Arts Council. Since 2019, the Levitt AMP Springfield Music Series, a 10-week series of free and live music presented by PNC Bank, has been held on the NMBP. The purpose of the event is to bring together people of different demographics and ethnicity and demographics. The concerts showcase a diverse lineup of high-caliber talent from across the country performing on the vacant block north of the Illinois Governor's Mansion. In 2021 attendees were encouraged to support local restaurants by picking up takeout to events, and local beverages were available on-site. The proposed design includes space to expand mobile food truck service along the perimeter and on drivable lanes throughout the plaza.

The Model

As mentioned previously, Consultant Dan Sentfner of Rapid City, South Dakota, visited city leaders to discuss the future development of the NMBP. Mr. Sentfner lead the multimillion-dollar public plaza redevelopment in downtown Rapid City that revitalized their downtown. Mr. Sentfner's recommendation created open conversations among stakeholders who support the redevelopment plan.

Additional attractions presented in conjunction with the free music series include the Juneteenth Celebration Committee/Springfield Black Chamber of Commerce co-hosted the first night of a weekend-long celebration of Juneteenth, commemorating the last slave becoming free June 19, 1865. Local businesses created pop-up markets, and food vendors lined the outer perimeter.

The Outdoor Farmers Market is robust, serves as a farm-to-table incubator for small businesses, and three vendors have moved to brick and mortar establishments. The Market supports small farms and local growers by providing a venue to sell their goods in the heart of Springfield. The Market strengthens the local economy by giving the public access to fresh, healthy foods at reasonable prices while supporting budding entrepreneurs. It has launched numerous successful brick-and-mortars, including Custom Cup Coffee, Buzz Bomb Brewing, and Three Twigs Bakery. The Market also encourages healthy lifestyles, celebrates the diversity presented by farmers and makers, and serves as a community gathering place. Currently, there is a vendor waiting list for both the summer and winter outdoor markets due to space limitations.

Old Capitol Farmers Market, presented by HSHS St. John's Hospital, is the most popular Market in Central Illinois and the largest downstate producer-only Market. The Market has been voted Best Reason to Go Downtown, Best Produce Selection, Best Farmers Market, Best Public Art, & Best Free Entertainment. Many underserved Springfieldians used Supplemental SNAP benefits to purchase fresh, healthy, nutritious products; in 2021, SNAP Sales were \$45,165.00.

The Outdoor Farmer's Market also offers other programs:

- Commercial Tent (available for vendors who do not qualify under "producer-only" to product test items and introduce themselves to the public)

- Community Tent (available for nonprofits)
- Food Donations
- Power of Produce Club
- SNAP & SNAP Match –
- Family Fitness
- Music at the Market
- Chef Demos

The Department of Agriculture, the Illinois Farm Bureau, and Illinois Grape Growers and Vintners Alliance (IGGVA) hosted the Illinois Products Holiday Market on the NMBP north of the Governor's Mansion as part of Springfield Holiday Walk. Twenty-four vendors attended and included regional favorites such as The Homestead Bakery, Jon Ellis Woodworking, Peter's Produce Smoked Cheese and Goods, JoJo Jewelry, and ES Meats. Illinois products and entertainment by local music artists complemented a holiday workshop where ornament crafts were available for decorating.

Tentative Project Timeline

- Project design 6 months
Massie Massie and Associates project plans and bid documents, including sub-consultants for architecture, civil and structural engineering
- Bidding, review, and contracting 3 months
- Construction 12 months
- Close-out 1-2 months

Capacity/Community Support

In addition to the commitment of funding, a 501(c)3 oversight organization will be formed, including the neighboring block's stakeholders. The 501(c)3 organization will oversee its development, provide oversight of the activated plaza, and seek out grants and other revenue sources. This board will consist of the long-term residents surrounding the block, including the Illinois Municipal League, Illinois Realtors, INB, The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, along with Downtown Springfield, Inc. (DSI). This board will also be active in helping raise funds to assist in the growth and sustainability of this development, and help identify an entity to oversee event programming. In partnership with DSI, the Chamber of Commerce will provide scheduling and program development through their offices, with salary support provided by the City of Springfield.

Operation/Maintenance of the Redevelopment

The City of Springfield will provide assistance through the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau. In addition, the City of Springfield Public Works Department will maintain the grounds, i.e., trash removal, lawn care, restroom cleaning, sanitation, and set up and teardown of temporary seating. Usage fees will be charged for groups to pay for these services, and users will be required to provide clean-up and teardown of their property in all public spaces in addition to their usage fee.

Letters of Support

Letters of Support from stakeholders are included in our proposal attachments. The following organizations represent educational, medical, business, not-for-profit, and government agencies:

- **HSHS Illinois – Allison Paul, DNP, RN, NEA-BC**
- **Memorial Health – Edgar J. Curtis, President & CEO**
- **Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln – John Stremsterfer, President & CEO**
- **The University of Illinois at Springfield – Karen Whitney, Interim Chancellor**
- **INB – Sarah Phalen, President & CEO, INB, NA**
- **Illinois Realtors – Jeffry T. Baker, CEO**
- **Downtown Springfield, Inc. – Kayla Graven, Executive Director**
- **Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance – Ryan McCrady, President**
- **Illinois Municipal League – Brad Cole, Executive Director**
- **The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce – Mike Murphy President & CEO**