



THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

MAYOR DOMENIC J. SARNO

HOME OF THE NATIONAL BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

August 18, 2008

Paul Maidment
Forbes.com
c/o Heather Struch
Forbes.com
90 5th Avenue
New York, NY 10011

To the Editor:

Reading the recent Forbes article about the ten fastest dying cities led us to think about Mark Twain, less about the man and more about one of his quotes: "The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated." In the case of Springfield, Massachusetts and inclusion by Forbes of the city in its deathwatch, we would argue that Forbes not only exaggerated but also miss-read the vital signs.

Don't get us wrong. There was a time not too long ago that the Forbes article might not have been too far off. Springfield had a budget deficit of \$41 million. All of the city's union workers were working without contracts. There was little if any investment in the city's infrastructure. And these facts were the tip of the iceberg that might very well have sunk the city. Given this history, one might argue that Forbes missed its window of opportunity to shroud the city.

Since then the State created the Springfield Finance Control Board and working with local elected officials Springfield has had a balanced budget for the past three years, adequate reserves, signed union contracts, a new police commissioner, a brand new superintendent of schools and \$500 million in private investment committed over the course of the next three years. Springfield is on its way back.

So then if that's not the answer, what did the Forbes article use as criteria in establishing their top ten list? Population loss, migration, GDP and unemployment are identified in the short article. But honestly, we can't find any logic in the analysis. Let's start with GDP. The author cites Springfield's 1% growth in GDP over the years 2001 to 2005. Boston (the hottest market in New England) only increased by 1.7%, while a litany of other cities across the region and the country had GDP equal to, or lower than Springfield (a couple experienced negative growth). Meanwhile the Brookings Institute recently ranked Springfield in the top 100 cities for most GDP growth per job for the years 2001 to 2005. Who's right? Who's wrong?

Then there's the population data. Let's look at some cities that lost population.

Cities that lost population that didn't end up on the list of the dying

Philadelphia	- 64,311
Boston	- 10,000

Cities that lost population that are dying fast according to Forbes

Cleveland	-50,000
Buffalo	-41,000

One city that gained population that is supposedly dying anyway

Springfield	+2,643
-------------	--------

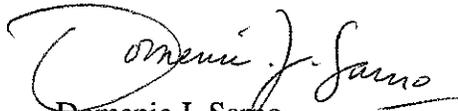
We're particularly puzzled by this one.

Migration data is even more baffling. Consider Boston. Although it's a tough number to find, Boston experienced a net migration of 68,000 during the four-year period in question, but that didn't qualify them for the deathwatch. We'd like to point Forbes to the work of Ed Glaeser, Director of Harvard's Rappaport Institute, who argues that population reduction will be required for older industrial cities if they are going to adapt, compete and thrive in the 21st century.

Finally, there is unemployment. It's true we went from 3% unemployment in 2000 to 5.1% in 2007. (Bear in mind that the Brookings Institute cites average unemployment in the 100 largest metro areas of 5.6% for the same period) But back to Springfield, while unemployment peaked in 2003, we've experienced a steady decline each year. So we've been heading in the right direction and what do we get? Bad press based on misinterpreted data.

We're sure Forbes will not be removing Springfield from their list of fastest dying cities any time soon. But I hope my letter will prompt a visit from the article's author. Or better yet, we invite him to contact the Urban Land Institute, the Brookings Institute and the Donahue Institute. These organizations have spent some quality time analyzing Springfield. We suggest he get their take on Springfield and get back to us.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Domenic J. Sarno". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Domenic J. Sarno
Mayor
City of Springfield

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David B. Panagore". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

David B. Panagore
Chief Development Officer
City Of Springfield