

ADVANCE NOTICE

[A newsletter of SPRINGFIELD'S progress on the ULI plan]



THE SPRINGFIELD ECONOMY IS ON THE REBOUND!

Over \$15 million worth of economic development projects underway.

Private sector is investing millions more in new construction all around the City.

Area companies have openings for skilled jobs that pay high wages.

The Springfield economy is back and that is good news for the entire region.

Victor Woolridge, Managing Director, Babson Capital Management, Chairman of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce

the city, the large amount of money being invested in city projects, and the level and type of infrastructure improvements in the works, these attendees were pleasantly surprised—but surprised nonetheless.

“One thing the ULI said was that we have a self-image problem,” said Garvey. “There are good things going on and we need to get the word out. I remember people being genuinely surprised at hearing the data.”

From there, an idea began to form. What if the city had an effective way to get that good news out there to the broader public? It wasn't long before the group collaborated to develop a media campaign called “The Springfield Economy is Back.” Garvey said the name evokes the ULI's message that Springfield has an important comeback story to tell.

Members worked together to develop advertisements for radio, television, and print, which feature Victor Woolridge, managing director of Babson Capital Management and volunteer chairman of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce. Woolridge, who was born and raised in the city and still lives here today, immediately connected with the concept behind the campaign.

“In Springfield, there's been so much negative news for so long, and consequently the attitudes of people in the area are negative,” said Woolridge. “There are positive things happening, and I think people should know about them. Hopefully if they're getting to hear positive information, they'll begin to think positively about the city.”

While the ads don't promise a comeback in the form of a return to the city's industrial past, they do highlight new economic activity efforts and construction. Woolridge said it's that forward movement that will eventually help Springfield to rebuild and regain its standing as a vibrant city.

“We're talking about incremental success stories,” he said. “In the aggregate, we hope this will build a very different image of what is happening in the city. It's a step-by-step, task-by-task process.” ●

“Springfield needs to collateralize the positive things happening and tell its story.” – ULI Panel Report

/AD CAMPAIGN highlights CITY'S GOOD NEWS/

When Chamber Board member John Garvey hosted a coffee hour discussion with business associates, the communications specialist found himself looking closely at Springfield's public image. As president of Garvey Communications in downtown Springfield, he was joined by a number of media sales representatives and vendors. When they heard about the high number of skilled jobs available in

/CHAMBER BOARD hosts DISCUSSIONS/

Springfield residents aren't the only ones with a stake in the future of the City of Homes. Members of the local business community are also invested in the city's long-term success, which prompted Russell F. Denver, president of the Affiliated Chambers of Commerce of Greater Springfield, to ask his nearly 50 board members to each host one “coffee hour” discussion in the community. These gatherings, aimed at bringing together colleagues and associates of the board, were designed to increase awareness of major redevelopment projects and other undertakings in the city. Thirty coffee hour sessions have been held so far, and 11 more have been scheduled.

Forming the basis for each discussion was the panel report by the Urban Land Institute (ULI). Representatives from the ULI visited Springfield in September 2006 and conducted many extensive interviews with stakeholders, including members of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce Board. Three months later, the ULI released its recommendations in a panel report that is now considered a roadmap for renewal in the city. The Chamber formally endorsed the ULI plan in March.

“We had been intimately involved with the work done during the ULI visit,” said Denver, “and that's why we felt it was important to get the word out about the ins and outs of the report that ultimately came out of it.”

Between eight and thirty-five employees of city businesses attended each gathering. Some brought together a broad range of small business owners, while others featured mostly senior management executives. In each case,

Denver joined representatives of the city's Office of Planning & Economic Development to offer a quick outline of the major tenets of the ULI plan and facts about the timing of major development projects.

“It's really critical for people to be aware of all the infrastructure issues coming up so that businesses can make adjustments where needed,” said Denver. He cites as one example the \$13.5M reconstruction effort on State Street, which is traveled by thousands of cars each day. “Because of the ULI plan and other development efforts going on, there's more that might be affecting businesses today.”

One of the most valuable things to come out of the coffee hours was the feedback offered by those in attendance, according to Denver.

“We'd originally wanted to give them an update, but we got feedback that was ultimately integrated into the plans once we brought their ideas back to various city offices and departments,” he said. “Now as projects go forward, they'll be able to be developed more smoothly.” ●

“The city of Springfield is at a turning point with respect to its future, and everyone—public officials, business leaders, community organizations, and residents—must be involved in the choices at stake.” – from the 2006 ULI Panel Report



/NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERS GATHER *for* DINNER *and* CONVERSATION/

From the beginning, ULI panelists have stressed that the condition of the city is of concern to everyone and that stakeholders across the board must band together to bring about change. That's why on August 1, the Springfield Chamber of Commerce hosted a dinner for neighborhood council members representing every corner of the city, briefing them on the ULI panel report and opening a dialogue among community leaders.

All council presidents of the city's 17 neighborhoods were invited to bring a guest to the event, which took place at Red Rose Pizzeria. About 30 people, representing roughly 75 percent of neighborhoods, attended.

Serving as event facilitator was David Panagore, the city's chief development officer. According to Scott Hanson of the Office of Planning & Economic Development, the dinner offered a chance "to go over the ULI plan and where we stand with priorities, and to get neighborhoods to talk to one another and start to see common themes and opportunities to work together."

Several attendees said residents don't know as much as they could about other neighborhoods and suggested the development of a community bus tour or video. Quality-of-life issues were brought up repeatedly, with a focus on safety, noise, and curb appeal. In the future, neighborhood leaders plan to come together on a quarterly basis to address improvement efforts.

The ULI identified three types of neighborhoods in their panel report: those needing intervention, those requiring only conservation, and those that are transitioning up or down. During a discussion period, groups rated the needs of other neighborhoods, then shared notes. The results were sometimes unexpected. For example, some Upper Hill residents were surprised to learn that their neighborhood was viewed by other groups as needing intervention.

"This spoke to the issue of image and gave people an idea of how their neighborhood is perceived," said Hanson. "The goal is to get people to think outside their own boundaries and recognize that what happens in other neighborhoods affects them." •

"Neighborhood groups can be important partners with the city in developing revitalization strategies as well as local land use plans." – ULI Panel Report

UPDATE *on* ULI'S SHORT-TERM *project* GOALS

In their report, ULI panelists pinpointed a number of priority sites for redevelopment and recommended that initial efforts be focused in the Urban Core and South End. The following updates are drawn from the city's Web site:

SPRINGFIELD FEDERAL BUILDING RE-USE

The Federal Building is located in the heart of the central business district. Constructed in 1981, it contains five floors and 152,000 usable square feet. It will become vacant in the fall of 2007 when the new Federal Courthouse is completed on State Street. It is anticipated that the General Services Administration, which owns the property, will begin the disposal process in early 2008.

Project Status

The city is working with MassDevelopment on this and meeting with a number of groups to consider potential re-use of the building. Possibilities include institutional/higher education and arts/entertainment.

MAIN STREET IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

This project has been approved as part of the Court Square Urban Renewal Plan, which includes enhanced street lighting, sidewalk repair, curbing, brickwork, street trees, crosswalks, improved pedestrian safety, and resurfacing. With a budget of \$2.2 million, it is funded by Chapter 90 and city funds.

Project Status

This project kicked off on August 27, starting at the railroad arch on the north end of Main Street. Work will begin on one side of the street, with the section opposite the Hippodrome the first to be affected. The work zone will progress on that side of Main Street until complete, and then return to begin on the other side of the street. The project is expected to be completed before the onset of winter. The low bidder for the project was Ludlow Construction Company at \$2,092,853.

YORK STREET JAIL

This project involves the redevelopment of the former Hampden County House of Corrections, which is located on a 3.3-acre parcel along the Connecticut River. The complex is comprised of 16 structures, all of which are in a state of serious disrepair. The property was given to the city through a special act of legislature in 1997.

Project Status

The environmental site work is complete. The Finance Control Board approved a capital program in December 2006, with \$1.8 million dollars earmarked for the demolition of the jail in fiscal year 2007. North American Site Development Corporation of Waltham was the low bidder for demolition, at a price of \$1.24 million. Work on the project is expected to begin in October.

SOUTH END: GEMINI & HOLLYWOOD

The three-acre, city-owned Gemini site once housed a 100,000 square foot textile mill that burned to the ground in 2003. The city has secured \$200,000 for remaining Brownfield issues. This cleanup is expected to be completed in late fall 2008. Several of the four-story brick buildings in the Hollywood district are now boarded up.

Project status

Clean-up of the Gemini site is expected to get underway within weeks. Results of an April 2007 ULI technical assistance workshop are also expected to be delivered this month.

WEB SITE *Offers* CITY-WIDE INFO

The city's home page (<http://www.springfieldcityhall.com>) is a repository of information on everything from building codes and property tax history to building permits and the trash fee.

For detailed updates on Springfield's public and private development projects, issued monthly, click on the link to the Office of Planning & Economic Development.

COMING *up in* OUR NEXT *Issue*

- A profile of the city's new Neighborhoods Department.
- A look at what's happening with the State Street Alliance, a coalition of more than 50 businesses, neighborhood groups, colleges, and public and private non-profits who have raised funds to undertake a market study and revitalization strategy for State Street.