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Press Release

Regional Planning Commission Staff Selects Top Planning Events of 2011

The Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission's staff reviewed the events of the past year to identify those they believe will have significant impact on future local and regional plans and planning.

Springfield, IL, Jan. 26, 2011: It seems like a national past-time at the close of a year to identify the significant events that occurred during the previous 12 months. In keeping with this tradition, the staff of the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) selected 10 events which, from a regional planning perspective, were seen as having a significant impact on the area for years to come.

SSCRPC Executive Director Norm Sims explained that the list started out with almost 30 possible items under consideration, some seen as having a negative effect on planned growth while others were much more positive, but in the end 10 items were identified and ranked. Sims said, "The events selected are those we felt would be consequential to both the public and our partnering jurisdiction for many years to come, regardless of whether or not they were much in the public eye."

The 10 items selected are:

1. **Continuing discussions concerning possible High Speed Rail routes through Springfield.**

No project led to more public debate and discussion during 2011 than the route that trains – both passenger and freight – will be taking through Springfield. Consideration of the impact of additional rail traffic on the 3rd Street, 10th Street, and 19th Street rail corridors began prior to 2011, but continued into the past year with the City's project with Hanson Professional Services to study

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alternate routes and their impact. However, before the results of this study were released, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced that the City's Hanson study was being set aside and replaced by a new environmental impact study to be managed by IDOT. Uncertainty about the route that additional rail traffic will take has led to a number of new planning issues and efforts, including a study of what is known as Transit Oriented Development by the SSCRPC, and a conceptual design exercise to try and determine the form that such a development might take around the Springfield Mass Transit District's proposed multi-modal transit center.

2. **Release of 2010 Census data.** While it may seem mundane to some, the release of data from the 2010 US Census has a significant impact on Sangamon County and its many communities. While census data is used for local, state and federal political redistricting, it is also used to determine how some state and federal funding is distributed. In addition, Census data is an important component of land use, economic development, transportation, and other planning efforts, helping to identify demographic, social and economic trends affecting our communities. While the release of census data may not generate as much interest as the route that trains might take through Springfield's city-center, it has a significant impact that will affect local governments and their plans for the next 10 years.

3. **Scheels sporting goods store opens as first tenant in Legacy Pointe Planned Unit Development (PUD).** Although the plans for the Legacy Pointe PUD were approved prior to 2011, it was not until the past year that they began to come to fruition with Scheels opening as the first tenant in the area, and Quaker Steak and Lube as the second. Legacy Pointe continues as the most recent PUD established in Springfield, and the first one to take advantage of designation as a Business District. The growth of the Legacy Pointe area was largely possible due to the earlier extension of MacArthur Blvd. south, which opens up a larger area for commercial and residential

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development in and around the MacArthur/I-72 interchange. The expansion of development in this area will have a significant impact on the region for years to come.

4. **Continuing fiscal stress at the local, state and national levels.** Due to the lagging economy, all levels of government continued to be under significant political and fiscal stress during 2011. While this affected public service delivery as well as capital spending for such things as infrastructure improvement, it also affected local planning activities. Uncertainty is always an aspect of planning, but uncertainty at the state and federal levels about the status of some legislation and fund availability exacerbated the normal difficulties that local governments have when making and implementing plans. Even so, some significant new planning activities began in 2011, for example, plans by the state to widen I-55 as it runs to Springfield's east, plans by the City of Springfield to widen Stanford Ave., and continuing work by Sangamon County to develop a rural transit system.

5. **Implementation of the MacArthur Blvd. redevelopment plan through MACBAC .** With the extension of MacArthur Blvd. to link with I-72 on Springfield's south side and the planned development of the Legacy Pointe area, attention was drawn to the effect that this might have on the older segment of MacArthur Blvd. to the north which was experiencing a decline. This resulted in a project to plan for the redevelopment of MacArthur from South Grand to Wabash. During 2009-2010, the Planning Commission worked with local interests and a team led by the Lakota Group to develop a new plan and redevelopment strategy for the corridor. By the end of 2010 this planning was completed, and in 2011 the MacArthur Boulevard Action Committee (MACBAC) was established by Springfield's Mayor to coordinate and oversee implementation of the plan. One recent success in the redevelopment of this corridor occurred in 2011 with the announcement of a Hy-Vee grocery locating on the long vacant K-Mart site.

6. **First segment of Sangamon Valley Trail opens.** From a planning perspective, one of the most awaited events during 2011 was the opening of the first segment of the Sangamon Valley Trail. This

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first phase involved completion of the 5.5 mile middle section of the trail along with a 0.5 mile connecting path to Stuart Park near the northern terminus of the completed section. A trail head with parking and other amenities is found at Centennial Park at the south end of the completed section. Once completed, the Sangamon Valley Trail will be the longest multi-use trail in Sangamon County, taking users through parks, residential neighborhoods, farmland, woodlands, and providing spectacular views on the longest trail bridge in Illinois over the Sangamon River. When finished, the trail will be designated as an alternative route for the Route 66 Bike Trail as well. The entire length of the envisioned trail within Sangamon County is 33 miles, stretching from the Menard County line northwest of Cantrall to the Macoupin County line at Virden.

7. **Continuing adoption of new Comprehensive Plans by local communities** . While the development of long-range land use and development plans by cities and villages in Sangamon County may not make the daily news, they can have a significant impact on the area. The Village of Sherman's comprehensive plan, completed in 2010, has helped lead to new development in that community, including a federal stimulus project that provided road improvements leading to a Walgreens and County Market locating in the village. In 2011, for example, Williamsville completed its new comprehensive plan and the Village of Curran began work on one. The development and adoption of comprehensive plans brings a new level of planning to the region, and it begins to look like a trend that will continue into the future as communities react to change.

8. **Enos Park Neighborhood Master Plan begins implementation and CDC formed**. Outside of the American Institute of Architect's R/UDAT project that provided guidance for the development of Springfield's city center several years ago, there have been few planning projects that focused upon specific older areas of the city. This changed in 2010 with the development of the Enos Park Neighborhood Master Plan. This plan was developed by the neighborhood association in conjunction with Mansur Real Estate Group and the Lakota Group, with financial support from the City of Springfield. As with the MacArthur Blvd. plan, 2011 saw important and significant action to

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implement the Enos Park plan with the engagement of Mansur and Lakota to continue this work and the creation of a not-for-profit development corporation to lead redevelopment efforts.

9. **Citizens' Efficiency Commission begins work**. As previously noted, the poor performance of the economy has affected both local governments and their citizens. In response to this, interest grew in finding ways to make local governments in Sangamon County more cost efficient and effective. One step in this direction was the establishment of the Citizens Efficiency Commission by referendum in 2010. This 23-member group of citizens, appointed by the various local jurisdictions in the county, was organized following the April 2011 municipal elections, and began its work this past year. The Planning Commission anticipates that the findings and recommendations made by this group will significantly affect local government plans and planning in future years.

10. **Mini-park "bumpout" at 6th and Adams St. in Springfield**. It's been said that good things come in small packages, and that is particularly true of the small mini- or "pocket-park" created by the City of Springfield at the corner of 6th and Adams Street in Springfield's downtown. This small greenspace provides an oasis for visitors, shoppers and residents, and also shows how projects such as this one can be used to create new public spaces in urban areas in a cost effective way while reducing traffic speeds and impacts.

Some of the other events of this past year that were considered by the SSCRPC staff included: Vachel Lindsey bridge repaired and reopened; Springfield Metro Sanitary District's combined sewer overflow project; the opening of Southwind Park; the announced expansion and improvements being made to the Prairie Capital Convention Center; the energy efficiency projects completed by the County and a number of smaller communities this past year; and the project that began during 2011 to plan for the commercial redevelopment of portions of east Springfield along Dirksen Parkway.

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