Professional Report Proposal

Title: “Fighting Rust with Green: A Proposal for Green Infrastructure Development along the 3rd and 10th Street Rail Corridors, Springfield, Illinois”

I. The Topic
Many cities across the Midwest have experienced stagnating growth – if not outright population loss – over the last half-century. Springfield, Illinois is no exception to this. The population was placed 111,454 in the 2000 decennial census, while the population in 2010 was marked at 116,250, an increase of only 4.3%, less than half of the 9.7% growth in the total United States population\(^1\). As industries and local economies have evolved over the last few decades and certainly since the Great Recession, cities found in the Rust Belt and the general Midwest have had to learn to develop new local economies or create a vibrant quality of life in order to attract non-place-based enterprises.

Among other factors, changes in national transportation trends have had a significant effect on these communities. Trucking has replaced rail as a major mode of transportation of goods leaving many rail lines used or entirely neglected. On the other hand, with the current federal push for high-speed rail, rail routes between these major cities and regions have been designated as future high-speed rail projects to increase the usage of rail for freight and passenger traffic. As a result, more and more communities will be faced with the decision to either replace or redevelop their existing rail corridors. Happily, this evolution of transportation infrastructure provides an excellent opportunity to consider new possibilities in civic development. In this professional report, I will focus on the potential of redeveloping rail corridors as central elements of cities’ green infrastructure, while in the process boosting economic activity and turning these previously industrial land uses into community assets.

This professional report will focus on Springfield, Illinois, which is confronting just such a challenge, and opportunity. As a city on both major auto and rail routes between St. Louis, Missouri and Chicago, Illinois, Springfield boasts access to two major interstates as well as rail lines connecting the South, Southwest, and East. Partly because of its strategic location, Springfield has been designated as a recipient of MAP21 funds from the State of Illinois and the US federal government for high-speed rail development along one of two existing corridors. Of these two corridors, the 10th Street corridor will be expanded to accommodate additional lines and high-speed rail, while the 3rd Street corridor which crosses the city through the downtown area will be decommissioned entirely.

Specifically, this professional report will examine the possible economic benefits of pursuing a green infrastructure redevelopment strategy for the decommissioned 3rd Street and the orphaned parcels associated with the 10th Street expansion, and, drawing on literature reviews and exemplary case study research, investigate the possible challenges and best practices associated with such a redevelopment strategy of decommissioned transportation infrastructure in stagnating or shrinking Midwestern cities.

\(^1\) United States Census Bureau.
II Overarching argument
The forthcoming high-speed rail project will have two primary effects on land and parcels in Springfield: 1) the 3rd Street corridor will be completely decommissioned and 2) while the 10th Street corridor will be expanded, this will cause many portions of many parcels to be considered undevelopable. This provides the city with a unique opportunity to redevelop both the corridor and the “orphaned” parcels as green infrastructure assets to the community. In particular, a linear park would be the most feasible option because it could function as an economic development tool, connecting people through the length of the city and attracting more visitors to Downtown Springfield, where local amenities and features already exist to boost economic activity and tourism. Ideally, it would also encourage additional growth downtown and along its length as more people engage with the redevelopment and its locally contextual amenities as a recreational space or alternative mode of transportation.

III. Research questions:
1) How have Rust Belt cities addressed the changes in their transportation infrastructure systems stemming from negative or negligible economic and population growth, particularly within the context of the decline of manufacturing industries?
   - Specifically, how have Rust Belt cities approached the redevelopment or reuse of decommissioned railways?

2) What are the best practices associated with green infrastructure development of former transportation sites while considering economic development needs?
   - Specifically, what are the models and best practices for green infrastructure redevelopment on decommissioned railways while considering economic development needs?

3) How can principles of green infrastructure development guide the redevelopment of the decommissioned 3rd Street rail corridor in Springfield while providing for economic development opportunities?

IV. Prior Research
During time spent with the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) over summer 2013, I conducted research into linear parks after being made aware of the rail decommissioning decision for the 3rd Street corridor. White papers and informative briefs prepared by the local planning commission and local private consultants have begun exploring the feasibility and possible amenities of a linear park development along the 3rd Street corridor. I am in the process of researching feasibility analysis tools to make additional economic arguments for green infrastructure development as well as successful linear park development literature in planning, architecture, and landscape architecture journals.

V. Methodology
1) Examine local planning and strategic documents
   - Springfield Comprehensive Plan
   - Conversations with planning commission about County comprehensive plan in process
   - Downtown Springfield, Inc. mission statements and efforts to boost downtown activity
- Local historic tourism initiatives including the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
- SATS (Springfield Area Transportation Study) initiatives to increase non-auto transit
- SSCRPC white papers on high-speed rail impacts

2) Build literature on linear parks through articles and case study comparisons
   - Literature: what makes a successful linear park; etc
   - Case studies: highlighting Canal Project in Indianapolis
     - Trying to locate additional examples of places more like Springfield

3) GIS analysis of linear park amenity development/impacted neighborhoods along 10th Street
   - Site suitability analysis for linear park amenities (3rd Street)
   - Current state inventory of nearby Downtown blocks for possible improvements (3rd)
   - “Orphaned” plots (data SSCRPC) & possible pocket parks, community gardens (10th)

4) Fiscal argument for developing green infrastructure
   - Getting more people downtown to generate economic activity
   - Parcel value and proximity to green space (GIS maps)
   - Envision Tomorrow tools like iTree, etc.
     - Financial feasibility study assignment in Financing Public Services? To find out more info

5) Document policy obstacles and opportunities to linear park development
   - Public art issues
   - Liability issues
   - Maintenance/operating cost issues

6) Document funding sources & explore the financial feasibility of proposed development
   - Green space development
   - Brownfield redevelopment
   - Quality of life/economic development grants
     - Trendlines “Financial Resources for Local Economic Development”
   - Private
     - Southwind donors, for example

7) Explore implementation strategy options
   - Partnerships with varied entities:
     - Parks Dist.
     - Downtown Spfld Inc & their events
     - New Childrens Museum
     - Downtown Farmers Market
     - Springfield Tourism
       - Gifted Lincoln funeral train car at Amtrak Station
     - Local arts:
       - Hoogland Center for the Performing Arts
       - Local artists for public art
       - Partnering with art programs at local colleges, high schools, and universities

8) Proposed designs for linear park and community pocket parks/community gardens
   - Sketchup
   - Adobe CS6
   - ArcGIS
VI. Anticipated Findings
In the process of creating a redevelopment proposal for the 3rd Street corridor, I expect to find that a linear park development would complement many current planning and development efforts in the city. I also expect this project to prove to be financially feasible, and provide another means of economic development.

VII: Organization/Chapter outline
Introduction (8-10 pages)
- Rust Belt cities, changing economies and industries, opportunities for redevelopment
- Springfield and high-speed rail
- The challenge: how best to utilize the opportunity; focusing on Downtown area
- Research Questions
- Methodology
- Table of Content
1) Theory/literature around shrinking and static cities
   - “If you’re not growing, you’re shrinking.”
   - Shrinking cities theory
   - Land development in the Rust Belt
   - Evolution of transportation, effect on Rust Belt cities
     - Historic connection between rail and Rust Belt
2) Planning Practice with Green Infrastructure and Economic Development Best Practices
   - Green Infrastructure
     - Linear park feature typologies
     - Opportunities and benefits of rail corridor redevelopment
     - Challenges and opportunities within local regulatory framework
     - Funding challenges and opportunities
   - Implementation strategies based on case studies
     - Given the specific challenges and opportunities of the Springfield context, what are applicable case studies, what are the takeaways?
       - Looking for rail corridor redevelopment, downtown redevelopment, smaller cities
       - Fiscal considerations taken by municipalities
       - Importance of phasing a green infrastructure project like a linear park or pocket parks or community gardens
3) Springfield, the local context
   - Economic development history in Springfield
   - Rail history
   - Current plans for the rail
   - Limitations/opportunities of the site(s)
4) Focusing in: the Downtown corridor of the rail redevelopment project
   - History
   - The local flavor
   - Descriptions of the area
   - Current amenities, features of Downtown (maps)
   - Current conditions of Downtown area (maps)
5) Analysis and recommendation
- Design recommendations
  - Types of amenities and where
    - Justification of types and where
  - Connectivity of proposed and existing features (maps)
    - Justification of types of amenities and where they should be located (maps)
- Economic feasibility study to evaluate the design
- Conclusion: strategies, funding sources, public-private partnerships

VIII. Timeline

Date: Now: Email IRB for exemption, or in case of interviews, submit application.
Date: Complete field research in Springfield by this date.
Date: Complete document research/collection secondary data by this date.
January 20: Submit complete outline of the PR and present data for discussion.
February 1: Submit chapter 1 draft.
February 15: Submit chapter 2 draft.
March 1: Submit chapter 3 drafts.
March 15: Submit chapter 4 draft.
April 1: Submit complete PR, including chapter 5 and Introduction
April 20: Submit revised PR (second draft)
April: 25: Submit revised PR (third draft), if needed
May 1: Go to Grad School for format check.
May 2: LAST DAY TO SUBMIT ELECTRONICALLY

VIII. Bibliography
Literature Review
  - Shrinking Cities
    - Economic Development
  - Green Infrastructure
    - Related to transportation infrastructure

Case Studies


IX. Schedule of Completion Dates for Deliverables
Early December: Proposal submitted (by last class day of Fall semester), complete bibliography
Mid-late January: Introduction, Chapter 3 (Springfield context) rough drafts
Mid-February: Chapter 1, 2 rough drafts
Late March: Chapter 4, Chapter 5 rough drafts
Mid-April: Complete rough draft, edited from feedback from earlier submissions
Beginning of May: Final draft