SPRINGFIELD, MA

COURTHOUSE RELOCATION

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

AUGUST

2026

Kimley»Horn

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 5
2. Economic Context 7
3. Courthouses as Downtown Economic Anchors 12
4. Metro Center Employment and Market Activity 16
5. Potential Economic Implications of Relocation 25
6. Connectivity and Accessibility 31
7. Conclusion 33

Graphs, Maps, and Tables

Graph 1: Total Jobs, Metro Center, 2026 17
Graph 2: Retail Performance Trends, Springfield MSA, 2006-2026(YTD) 19
Graph 3: Retail Rent per Square Foot Trends, Springfield MSA, 2006-2026(YTD) 20
Graph 4: Office Performance Trends, Metro Center, 2006-2026(YTD) 22
Graph 5: Comparison of Office Vacancy Trends, 2006-2026(YTD) 23
Graph 6: Comparison of Office Rent per Square Foot Trends, 2006-2026(YTD) 23

Map 1: Springfield Metro Center, 2026 5
Map 2: Metro Center Businesses by Employment Density, 2026 18
Map 3: Distribution of Retail Space, Metro Center, 2026 21
Map 4: Distribution of Office Space, Metro Center, 2026 24
Map 5: Highest Development and Redevelopment Potential, Metro Center, 2026 30
Map 6: Comparison of Walksheds from Employment Cluster, Metro Center, 2026 31

Table 1: Downtown Employment Base by Major Industry, Metro Center, 2026 16

Executive Summary

The Springfield Regional Justice Center represents a major, long-term public investment that will influence economic activity within Springfield for decades. The new courthouse is expected to accommodate approximately 1,200 to 1,500 employees and visitors each day, including judges, attorneys, court staff, jurors, litigants, and members of the public. While construction and operation of the facility will generate economic benefits regardless of its location, the location of the courthouse will influence where its recurring activity, spending, and potential development impacts are captured. This assessment evaluates the potential implications of relocating this significant civic anchor from the established downtown core. This decision occurs within a downtown economy that remains vulnerable despite substantial public and private reinvestment. Downtown Springfield has experienced decades of economic restructuring and the loss of traditional commercial and employment anchors, followed by additional physical and economic disruptions. Current market conditions continue to reflect these challenges. A desktop review conducted for this assessment identified apparent retail vacancy approaching 27% and apparent office vacancy approaching 29% within the Metro Center, higher than regional market indicators alone suggest. In this environment, retaining existing businesses, filling vacant space, and concentrating recurring weekday activity within the established core remain important components of downtown revitalization.

The courthouse is part of that existing economic ecosystem. Downtown Springfield contains a substantial concentration of professional, governmental, service, hospitality, retail, and institutional establishments, with legal services representing the largest identified business cluster by establishment count. The existing courthouse generates consistent weekday activity in proximity to this legal and professional employment base and to the restaurants, cafés, retailers, and services concentrated in the downtown core. Relocation would not eliminate this activity from Springfield, but greater physical separation would change where courthouse-related spending and pedestrian activity are captured and over time, influence professional location decisions.

Key Report Headlines

1. *Springfield's state, regional, and local planning efforts consistently call for concentrating investment, activity, housing, and redevelopment in the core and strengthening connections among downtown's major economic anchors. Collectively, these policies recognize that the success of Downtown Springfield depends not only on individual investments, but on their ability to reinforce one another and generate sustained pedestrian, business, and development activity throughout the core.*

2. *Literature and peer research demonstrate that courthouse location matters: retaining judicial activity within a walkable downtown helps capture employee and visitor spending, support complementary businesses, and reinforce revitalization, while relocation outside the core can weaken these established economic connections.*

3. *Downtown Springfield's courthouse and concentration of legal and professional services function as an interconnected ecosystem; legal services represent the largest identified business cluster by establishment count, supporting the importance of the courthouse to Downtown Springfield's professional business base.*

4. *The core of Downtown Springfield contains the Metro Center's greatest concentration of retail and dining options, creating a mutually supportive relationship between businesses and the employees and visitors generated by major civic and professional uses.*

5 *Downtown Springfield's commercial market is already experiencing substantial pressure, with retail vacancy approaching 27% and office vacancy approaching 29% within the Metro Center. These conditions increase the importance of retaining recurring weekday activity that supports existing businesses, occupancy, and reinvestment.*

6 *The courthouse and Downtown Springfield's concentration of legal and professional employment function as an interconnected economic cluster. Moving the courthouse beyond a comfortable walk from this established employment base could diminish an important locational advantage of downtown office space and, over time, contribute to greater dispersion of court-related professional activity.*

7 *The courthouse generates a consistent base of up to 1,500 daily employees and visitors whose spending supports downtown businesses. Relocation outside the core would not eliminate this economic activity but would redirect a portion of courthouse-related spending and activity away from the restaurants, retailers, and services that currently benefit from immediate proximity to the court.*

8 *Moving the courthouse beyond a comfortable walk from this established employment base would diminish an important locational advantage of downtown office space and, over time, could contribute to greater dispersion of court-related professional activity.*

9 *A roughly 15-minute walk and limited pedestrian connections beneath the rail corridor separate areas north of the tracks from the concentration of legal offices, businesses, and amenities within the established downtown core, potentially reducing the extent to which courthouse users naturally circulate through downtown.*

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings suggest that the primary economic risk associated with courthouse relocation is not the loss of courthouse activity from Springfield, but its redistribution within the city. Downtown revitalization depends on concentrating enough employment, visitation, spending, and investment to support businesses and create momentum for additional redevelopment. Moving a major weekday activity generator away from the established core would weaken the direct relationship between courthouse activity and the businesses and professional services currently concentrated downtown, while increasing the potential for activity and investment to shift toward the Metro Center's periphery.

The significance of this shift is magnified by the permanence of the investment. With an anticipated 40-year base lease and potential extensions that could result in 60 years of occupancy, the courthouse will influence Springfield's geography of civic and economic activity for a generation or more. As the project advances, maintaining strong physical, pedestrian, and economic connections between the Regional Justice Center and the established downtown core will be critical. Investments that make it easier and more attractive for courthouse users to access Main Street, legal offices, restaurants, retail, and other downtown destinations can help mitigate the potential impacts of relocation and preserve the courthouse's longstanding role as an anchor of Downtown Springfield.

1. Introduction

The Regional Justice Center represents one of the Commonwealth's most significant long-term civic investments in Springfield. While construction of a new facility will generate substantial economic activity regardless of its ultimate location, the long-term economic effects of the courthouse will be strongly influenced by its relationship to Downtown Springfield. Courthouses are high-activity civic anchors that generate consistent weekday trips by employees, attorneys, jurors, clients, and members of the public. When integrated into a walkable downtown environment, that activity supports restaurants, professional services, retail businesses, office demand, and private investment. Moving this activity beyond the established downtown core—and particularly across a physical barrier such as the rail corridor—would weaken these direct relationships and redirect a portion of courthouse-related activity away from businesses that currently benefit from downtown workers and visitors.

The Springfield Metro Center serves as the study geography for this assessment as it encompasses the concentration of civic, commercial, professional, entertainment, and transportation activity potentially influenced by the location of the Springfield Regional Justice Center. However, the Metro Center boundary extends beyond the downtown commercial core, including areas north of the active rail corridor that function differently in terms of land use, pedestrian connectivity, and relationship to Downtown Springfield. Accordingly, this assessment distinguishes between the broader Metro Center geography and the established downtown core concentrated south of the rail corridor.

Map 1: Springfield Metro Center, 2026



While the broader Metro Center extends to both sides of the rail corridor, Downtown Springfield's primary concentration of commercial, professional, civic, dining, and entertainment activity is located south of the tracks. The rail corridor creates a meaningful physical and pedestrian separation between this established core and properties to the north. As discussed later in this assessment, actual walking routes are constrained by a limited number of rail crossings, meaning that locations that appear geographically close on a map may function as substantially more distant destinations within the downtown pedestrian environment.

The Metro Center is anchored by civic, employment, and entertainment destinations such as MGM Springfield, the MassMutual Center, government facilities, professional offices, restaurants, and other businesses that collectively support downtown activity. While the Metro Center extends to both sides of the rail line, the majority of its commercial and professional activity is concentrated within the established downtown core, where the current courthouse and the office space and services that support its functions serve as important economic anchors.

The Metro Center also hosts a relatively small residential community, with approximately 7,051 residents in 2025, essentially unchanged from about 6,919 residents in 2010 and slightly below its 2020 population. Residents of the Metro Center are comparatively young, with an average age of approximately 38.5 years, and the area is economically challenged relative to the broader Springfield region. The 2025 median household income in the Metro Center was approximately $18,320[1], compared with nearly $69,300 across the Springfield MSA, while educational attainment also trails the larger region. These characteristics reinforce the importance of downtown employment, institutional activity, and continued private investment to the economic health of the Metro Center and provide important context for evaluating how relocation of a major civic anchor could affect downtown businesses, workers, residents, and future revitalization efforts.

2. Economic Context

A review of recent state, regional, and local planning efforts demonstrates a consistent emphasis on strengthening Springfield's downtown core through coordinated public investment, infrastructure improvements, redevelopment of underutilized properties, expanded housing, and support for business and employment growth. Across these plans, Downtown Springfield is treated not as a collection of isolated projects, but as an interconnected economic district where major civic, transportation, entertainment, residential, and commercial anchors can reinforce one another. This policy context is important when considering the relocation of a major institutional use such as the courthouse, because changes in the location of daily workers and visitors can either strengthen or weaken the concentration of activity that these plans seek to build.

Downtown's Economic Evolution

Downtown Springfield's current economic conditions exist within a broader history of structural economic change across the city and region. Research by University of Massachusetts Lowell historian Robert Forrant documents the significant erosion of Springfield's industrial employment base during the latter decades of the twentieth century and the resulting challenges associated with replacing well-paying manufacturing employment with a sufficient base of new jobs. Forrant connects this long-term economic restructuring and shrinking revenue base with the fiscal pressures that culminated in Springfield's near-bankruptcy in 2004 and the Commonwealth's subsequent establishment of a Finance Control Board.

Downtown Springfield experienced its own significant changes during this period. The development of the Holyoke Mall at Ingleside reflected a broader shift in regional retail activity away from the traditional downtown, while the loss of downtown department stores and consolidation within the banking, insurance, and financial-services sectors reduced several of the commercial and employment anchors that had historically generated activity in the core. These longer-term changes were followed by additional disruptions, including the 2011 tornado and 2012 gas explosion, both of which affected the downtown and required substantial recovery and reinvestment.

Springfield's revitalization efforts have not occurred against a stable historical baseline; rather, they have sought to rebuild activity and investment following decades of economic restructuring and repeated disruption. Significant public and private investments have helped restore portions of the downtown, yet current office and retail vacancy indicate that the commercial core continues to face meaningful market challenges.

Within this context, established civic and institutional anchors take on added importance. The courthouse provides a consistent source of weekday employment and visitation that is already integrated into Downtown Springfield's commercial and professional ecosystem. Relocation would therefore represent more than the siting of a new public facility; it would redistribute a long-standing source of daily activity away from a downtown core that has experienced repeated losses of traditional economic anchors and continues to work toward sustained economic recovery.

Existing Local Economic and Policy Plans

Plans described below have been developed by or for the City of Springfield and include planning policies, challenges, or projects that may directly or indirectly affect, or be affected by, courthouse redevelopment within the Area of Impact.

Summary of Statewide Economic Development Context and Relevance to Springfield Revitalization



Recent Commonwealth economic development initiatives emphasize infrastructure investment, workforce development, site readiness, and equitable growth as foundational strategies for strengthening local economies. The state's economic development framework also provides funding pathways for communities such as Springfield to advance shovel-ready redevelopment sites and downtown infrastructure improvements. Viewed through the lens of downtown revitalization, these policies reinforce the importance of coordinating major public investments with existing centers of economic activity so that public spending can support broader private investment, employment growth, and redevelopment.

Across these efforts, several consistent themes emerge that directly inform Springfield's revitalization strategy: the importance of aligning with state priorities; developing shovel-ready sites and local implementation capacity; leveraging innovation and clean-energy multipliers; and ensuring equitable, inclusive growth that benefits historically underinvested neighborhoods. Springfield's revitalization efforts will be most successful when framed within this statewide economic context—connecting local initiatives to the Commonwealth's larger vision for sustainable, inclusive, and innovation-driven prosperity.

Western Massachusetts Transformative Economic Development Strategy, March 2024

The Western Massachusetts Transformative Economic Development Strategy similarly emphasizes investment attraction, job creation, workforce development, infrastructure modernization, and the productive reuse of underutilized assets. The strategy specifically aligns Springfield priorities related to downtown redevelopment and economic diversification and reinforces Springfield's role as a regional economic and innovation hub. In this context, continued investment in the Metro Center supports a broader regional objective of concentrating economic activity in established centers with the infrastructure, institutions, and workforce necessary to support additional growth.

An Update of Residential Market Potential for the Downtown Study Area, September 2023

The 2023 residential market study identified substantial potential for additional housing in Downtown Springfield, with market-rate multifamily rentals representing the strongest area of demand. From a revitalization perspective, housing growth and employment- and visitor-generating uses are mutually reinforcing. Additional residents provide evening and weekend demand for downtown businesses, while major daytime anchors—including government and institutional uses—support restaurants, services, and other businesses during the workweek. Maintaining a strong concentration of both residential and employment activity therefore helps create the sustained, multi-period demand needed to support a more resilient downtown economy.

Northeast Downtown District Master Plan, October 2021



The Northeast Downtown District Master Plan focuses directly on activating an underutilized portion of the downtown through streetscape improvements, redevelopment of vacant and blighted properties, new residential development, and expanded public spaces intended to increase pedestrian activity. These recommendations reflect a broader principle that downtown revitalization depends on creating connected destinations and generating enough pedestrian activity to support businesses and continued investment. Strengthening connections among Union Station, Main Street, the Metro Center, and surrounding redevelopment areas is therefore central to the plan's overall economic development strategy.

2020-2024 Consolidated Plan, April 2020

Springfield's Consolidated Plan identifies vacant-property redevelopment, employment and educational opportunities, and small-business creation and lending among the city's major economic development challenges. These priorities reinforce the importance of maintaining a strong downtown customer and employment base. Regular daytime activity generated by workers, residents, government functions, and visitors can provide an important source of demand for small businesses while also improving the market conditions necessary to reposition vacant or underperforming properties.

Phase One Master Development Plan, March 2021

The Phase One Master Development Plan is perhaps the strongest policy document for the revised argument because it explicitly seeks to revitalize Springfield's downtown core and establish a mixed-use economic corridor connecting MGM Springfield, Main and Dwight Streets, the riverfront, and Union Station. The plan recognizes MGM as an important economic anchor supporting tourism and retail activity and calls for additional commercial and residential development to strengthen the broader downtown ecosystem. It also specifically identifies revitalization of the area surrounding the existing courthouse as part of that strategy. The underlying policy direction is clear: Springfield's long-term revitalization strategy relies on strengthening connections among major downtown anchors and concentrating activity along key corridors rather than allowing major destinations to operate independently of the core.

Headline Statement: Springfield's state, regional, and local planning efforts consistently call for concentrating investment, activity, housing, and redevelopment in the core and strengthening connections among downtown's major economic anchors. Collectively, these policies recognize that the success of Downtown Springfield depends not only on individual investments, but on their ability to reinforce one another and generate sustained pedestrian, business, and development activity throughout the core.

Notable Metro Center Economic Anchors

Downtown Springfield is supported by a concentration of major civic, employment, entertainment, and visitor destinations that collectively generate activity throughout the day and week. The economic value of these anchors extends beyond activity occurring within the facilities themselves. Employees, visitors, event attendees, and others also generate demand for nearby restaurants, cafés, retail establishments, professional services, parking, and other businesses. Maintaining proximity and walkable connections among these activity generators allows downtown to capture a greater share of this spending and creates opportunities for a single trip to generate activity at multiple destinations. This interaction is particularly important in a downtown environment where individual anchors may experience different peak periods; office and government uses provide consistent weekday activity, while entertainment, hospitality, and convention uses generate additional evening, weekend, and event-driven visitation.

MGM Springfield



MGM Springfield represents one of the largest economic and visitor anchors in the Metro Center and has generated substantial private and public investment since opening in 2018. The previous analysis estimated its local economic impact in Springfield at approximately $56 million annually as of 2023, in addition to local aid generated through casino-related taxes and funds. Beyond its direct economic contribution, MGM's location within the downtown core creates opportunities for visitors and employees to patronize nearby restaurants, businesses, entertainment venues, and services. Its value as a downtown anchor is therefore enhanced by the presence of other nearby destinations that generate complementary activity and help extend visitation beyond the casino itself.

The existing courthouse provides another significant source of downtown visitation, with court filings indicating approximately 1,500 employees and visitors on a typical weekday. While MGM Springfield attracts substantially greater overall visitation, the two anchors serve different functions within the downtown economy. MGM's visitation is influenced by entertainment, gaming, hotel activity, and weekend demand, while courthouse operations generate a predictable concentration of employees, attorneys, jurors, litigants, and other visitors during the traditional workweek.

This distinction is particularly important for downtown businesses that rely on daytime customers. Courthouse users are present during the same hours that downtown restaurants, cafés, professional services, convenience retailers, and other businesses are operating and are positioned within walking distance of these establishments. The courthouse therefore contributes a recurring weekday customer base that complements, rather than duplicates, the visitor activity generated by MGM Springfield and other entertainment-oriented anchors.

MassMutual Center and Convention Activity

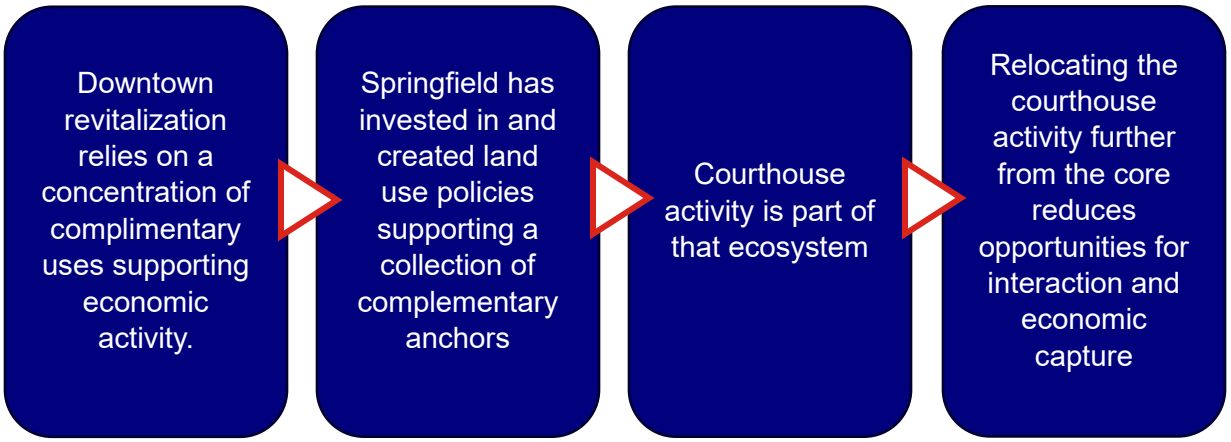
The MassMutual Center is another significant downtown activity generator, attracting visitors for concerts, conventions, sporting events, and other gatherings. Unlike daily employment uses, these events can produce concentrated periods of visitation that increase demand for downtown restaurants, hotels, parking, and entertainment businesses. The recent $80 million Convention Center Carpark, with 817 parking spaces and improved pedestrian connections to surrounding hotels, restaurants, and the arena, represents a substantial public investment intended in part to improve the downtown visitor experience and reinforce the economic ecosystem surrounding the MassMutual Center.

The MassMutual Center and MGM Springfield therefore illustrate an important component of downtown revitalization: major destinations create greater economic value when visitors can easily move between them and surrounding businesses. Investments that increase activity within this established cluster can help expand the customer base available to existing businesses and support additional private investment.

Focusing on the Core

Downtown Springfield's economic strength is derived not from any single destination, but from the concentration and interaction of multiple activity generators. Entertainment and convention destinations attract regional visitors, offices provide a weekday employment base, civic institutions generate recurring public activity, and restaurants, retailers, hotels, and professional services capture spending generated by these populations. Together, these uses create the mix of daytime, evening, weekday, and weekend activity necessary to support a vibrant downtown.

Within this ecosystem, the courthouse is particularly important as a source of consistent weekday activity. Its employees and visitors contribute to the daytime population available to support downtown businesses while its close relationship with law offices and other professional services generates frequent movement within the core. Increasing the physical separation between this activity and the established downtown business environment would reduce opportunities for these interactions, shifting a portion of an existing economic activity generator away from the businesses and investments that Springfield's revitalization efforts are intended to support.



3. Courthouses as Downtown Economic Anchors

Research examining the relationship between courthouses and local economic activity is composed primarily of case studies, planning studies, and descriptive economic analyses rather than a large body of standardized academic research. Nevertheless, the available evidence consistently identifies courthouses as important downtown institutional anchors. Unlike many visitor-oriented destinations, courthouses generate recurring weekday activity from employees, judges, attorneys, jurors, litigants, and other members of the public. When located within a walkable commercial core, these users create a predictable customer base for restaurants, cafés, retail establishments, parking facilities, and professional services. The previous analysis also identified research estimating that government workers can generate approximately $2,500 to $3,000 in annual spending per employee within their host downtowns.

The economic contribution of a courthouse is therefore influenced not only by the number of people it employs or attracts, but also by its physical relationship to surrounding businesses and complementary uses. Courthouses have traditionally supported clusters of law offices and related professional services, while their employees and visitors provide patronage for daytime restaurants, retail establishments, and parking facilities. Industry research on courthouse planning similarly identifies these relationships as among the principal ways courthouses contribute to downtown economic development. For Springfield, this distinction is particularly relevant because the existing courthouse operates within an established concentration of legal offices, government functions, restaurants, entertainment destinations, and other downtown businesses.

The longer-term effects of reduced downtown activity can extend beyond immediate consumer spending. Research examining downtown office-market disruption has found that reductions in worker presence and commercial demand can contribute to higher vacancy, reduced foot traffic, weaker leasing conditions, and declining commercial property values. These effects can also create fiscal exposure for municipalities where lower property income and valuations eventually translate into lower assessed values, although the magnitude and timing of property-tax impacts vary substantially by community and tax structure. For Springfield, these findings reinforce the importance of considering courthouse relocation not only in terms of near-term facility or occupancy costs, but also in relation to the longer-term market conditions of the downtown properties and businesses that currently benefit from courthouse-related activity. These broader market dynamics are reflected in the Nevada City courthouse analysis, which identified potential impacts not only to restaurant and retail sales, but also to downtown building vacancy, professional employment, and pedestrian activity following courthouse relocation. Nevada County has subsequently undertaken planning for reuse of the existing courthouse to ensure that the building continues contributing activity to the downtown after judicial functions relocate.

Proximity and Walkability Influence Economic Capture

A consistent theme across the research is that proximity matters. A review of existing literature on the topic concluded that the catalytic effects of civic facilities are strongest when courthouses are located within or adjacent to established downtown commercial cores, where employees and visitors can readily patronize surrounding businesses. The peer review reached a similar conclusion: locating courthouses in walkable downtown environments increases opportunities for spillover retail activity and complementary business formation, while investments in streetscapes and public spaces can further strengthen connections between courthouse users and nearby destinations.

This relationship suggests that distance should not be considered solely in terms of miles or blocks. The economic interaction between an institutional anchor and surrounding businesses depends on whether trips between them are sufficiently convenient to occur as part of normal daily activity. A courthouse employee deciding where to purchase lunch, an attorney traveling between an office and a hearing, or a juror leaving the courthouse during a break is more

likely to interact with nearby businesses when those destinations are readily accessible on foot. As physical distance increases—or pedestrian barriers make trips less convenient—the likelihood of these incidental and repeat interactions can reasonably be expected to diminish.

This is an important distinction for the Springfield analysis. The economic concern associated with moving the courthouse away from the core is not that all courthouse-related spending will leave Springfield. Rather, relocation would redistribute a portion of the spending and activity currently captured by downtown businesses to a different geography.

Courthouses Provide Stable Weekday Activity

The literature also points to the particular value of courthouse activity because of its consistency. Entertainment venues, tourism destinations, and special events can generate substantial visitation, but that activity may be concentrated during evenings, weekends, particular seasons, or event days. Judicial and governmental functions instead generate recurring weekday activity throughout much of the year.

This distinction was explicitly identified in the Nevada City courthouse analysis. Professional stakeholders there reported that courthouse visitors helped diversify downtown economic activity and provided a source of demand that helped balance more seasonal tourism activity. This is especially relevant to Springfield, where major anchors such as MGM Springfield and the MassMutual Center generate significant visitor activity but do not necessarily replicate the consistent daytime customer base associated with courthouse employees, attorneys, jurors, and other court users.

Courthouses Can Reinforce Private Investment

Courthouses can also influence downtown economic development beyond immediate employee and visitor spending. The previous literature review found that major civic investments can signal permanence and institutional stability, potentially encouraging complementary private investment and redevelopment. This effect is particularly relevant for courthouses because judicial facilities represent unusually long-lived public investments.

The Springfield Regional Justice Center illustrates this permanence particularly well. The previous report notes that the facility is anticipated to operate under a 40-year base lease with two potential 10-year extensions, creating the potential for as much as six decades of courthouse activity associated with the selected location. Consequently, the location decision establishes not simply where current courthouse employees and visitors will travel, but where a major source of civic activity will be concentrated for a generation or more.

The research also suggests that the relationship can extend to surrounding real estate. Courthouses attract complementary professional uses—most notably law offices—and provide dependable activity that can support nearby commercial occupancy. The economic implications of relocation may therefore unfold gradually: changes in daily spending occur first, while longer-term effects could include changes in business location decisions, commercial vacancy, property investment, and the geography of the local legal-services industry.

Learning from Others: Peer Case Studies

Nevada City Courthouse, Nevada City, CA

The Nevada City Courthouse Economic Impact Analysis provides one of the clearest examples of the potential consequences of relocating a courthouse away from an established downtown. The courthouse studied was considerably smaller than Springfield's proposed facility, employing approximately 47 people and attracting

approximately 300 to 400 visitors per day. The study evaluated alternatives that retained the courthouse downtown against an off-site relocation scenario.

The analysis estimated that moving the courthouse would reduce downtown restaurant sales by approximately 8.4%, while total direct lost sales across restaurants, retail, and other downtown businesses were estimated at nearly $1.8 million annually, or approximately 5.8% of downtown sales. The study further cautioned that reduced business activity could contribute over time to additional vacancies and downward pressure on downtown rents and property values.

The Nevada City results should not be directly applied to Springfield; the communities, downtown economies, courthouse sizes, and spending patterns are different. However, the study demonstrates the economic mechanism relevant to Springfield: relocating a courthouse does not eliminate the economic activity associated with the facility, but it can redirect a substantial portion of that activity away from the downtown businesses that previously captured it.

Chicopee District Courthouse, Chicopee, MA

Chicopee provides a nearby Western Massachusetts example of the long-term implications associated with separating judicial activity from an established downtown civic and commercial center. Prior to development of the current District Court facility, court functions were co-located with municipal government at Chicopee City Hall, located at 274 Front Street in Market Square. City Hall has historically served as one of Chicopee's principal civic landmarks and remains at the center of municipal activity today. The City's historical records indicate that the original City Hall accommodated both the Police Department and courtroom, with those functions later moving into the adjoining City Hall Annex.

The current Chicopee District Court was subsequently established at 30 Church Street in Chicopee Falls, removing daily judicial activity from the traditional Chicopee Center/Market Square area. The relocation separated courthouse employees, attorneys, jurors, litigants, and other visitors from the businesses and civic uses concentrated around Front Street and Market Square. Although the economic effect of this relocation has not been formally quantified, the change illustrates how relocating a civic institution can alter the geography of daily activity within a community. Trips that once brought court users directly into the traditional downtown no longer necessarily generate pedestrian activity or spending within that same commercial district.

The Chicopee experience is particularly relevant because efforts to strengthen Chicopee Center have continued in the decades following the courthouse relocation. Current City initiatives continue to focus on economic development, neighborhood revitalization, redevelopment, and activation of Market Square. The City has established the Hub at Market Square as a community and business-oriented gathering space, while broader planning efforts have sought redevelopment of major properties, enhanced public accessibility, new commercial tenants, riverfront improvements, and even consideration of a Business Improvement District. These initiatives should not be interpreted as evidence that courthouse relocation caused the area's economic challenges; however, they demonstrate the continuing public effort required to generate activity and investment within the traditional center.

For Springfield, Chicopee provides a useful local illustration of the importance of considering the long-term geography of civic activity. A courthouse is not simply a destination for judicial proceedings; it generates recurring weekday trips that can reinforce nearby businesses and other civic uses when integrated into a downtown core. Once relocated, those trips become associated with a different geography for decades. Chicopee therefore reinforces a central consideration for Springfield: major civic facilities can provide their greatest downtown revitalization value when their employees and visitors remain physically connected to the commercial and institutional ecosystem the community is working to strengthen.

Civic Anchors are Most Valuable as Part of a Downtown Ecosystem

The peer examples reinforce that courthouse economic benefits are generally strongest when the facility operates as part of a broader downtown ecosystem rather than as an isolated destination. In Denton, Texas, more than 130 revitalization projects were documented around the courthouse square following its renovation, while planning efforts have continued to strengthen physical connections between the courthouse, civic space, and surrounding commercial blocks. In Santa Rosa, California, removal of a roadway that divided Courthouse Square was specifically intended to reconnect civic space with downtown businesses and surrounding offices, improving pedestrian circulation and opportunities for courthouse visitors to support restaurants and retail.

These examples highlight an important principle for Springfield: the economic value of a civic anchor is influenced by connectivity as much as by the facility itself. A courthouse that is embedded within an established network of businesses, offices, civic destinations, and pedestrian routes creates opportunities for repeated interaction among those uses. Greater physical separation can weaken those relationships even when the courthouse remains geographically close to downtown.

Summary

The literature and peer-community research indicate that courthouses can serve as durable downtown economic anchors, with benefits derived from consistent weekday visitation, employee and visitor spending, proximity to legal and professional services, and the stability associated with long-term public investment. Importantly, these benefits are highly dependent on location and connectivity. Courthouses located within walkable commercial cores allow surrounding restaurants, retailers, offices, and service businesses to capture a greater share of courthouse-generated activity, while available evidence from courthouse relocations demonstrates that moving judicial functions outside the core can redirect spending and weaken established economic relationships. For Springfield, the potential impact is particularly important given the scale of the Regional Justice Center, its projected 1,200 to 1,500 daily users, and the long-term nature of the Commonwealth's investment.

Headline Statement: Literature and peer research demonstrate that courthouse location matters: retaining judicial activity within a walkable downtown helps capture employee and visitor spending, support complementary businesses, and reinforce revitalization, while relocation outside the core can weaken these established economic connections.

4. Metro Center Employment and Market Activity

Downtown's economic vitality also depends on the concentration of employees who generate predictable weekday demand for restaurants, cafés, convenience retail, and services. Civic and governmental uses are particularly valuable in this regard because they represent stable, long-term sources of employment and visitation that are less susceptible to normal market cycles. The courthouse is a significant component of this ecosystem, drawing employees as well as attorneys, jurors, clients, and members of the public into the downtown on a recurring basis.

These users interact with the broader downtown economy differently than visitors traveling to a single-purpose destination. Attorneys may move between law offices and the courthouse several times during the day; employees and jurors may purchase lunch or coffee nearby; and visitors may combine court-related trips with other downtown services or businesses. The economic benefit therefore comes not simply from the number of people using the courthouse, but from the frequency and ease with which those users interact with the surrounding downtown environment.

Economic Activity

With more than 21,100 jobs, the Metro Center supports a diverse concentration of professional, governmental, service, hospitality, retail, and institutional establishments. As shown in *Table 1*, a review of approximately 1,140 business and organizational locations within the Metro Center indicates that legal services represent the largest individual employment cluster by establishment count, with approximately 156 identified locations, or nearly 14% of total establishments in the Metro Center. Personal and other services and health and social services also represent substantial concentrations, while hospitality and food services, real estate and property services, government, consulting and other professional services, retail, and banking and financial services each contribute to the broader downtown business base.

Law firms, individual attorneys, legal-support services, real estate businesses, financial institutions, consultants, accountants, and other professional services collectively represent a significant component of Downtown Springfield's business ecosystem. These businesses benefit from proximity to one another, to government functions, and in the case of legal and court-related services, to the courthouse itself. While these records should not be interpreted as 156 distinct law firms, they demonstrate the substantial presence of attorneys, law offices, and related legal activity within Downtown Springfield.

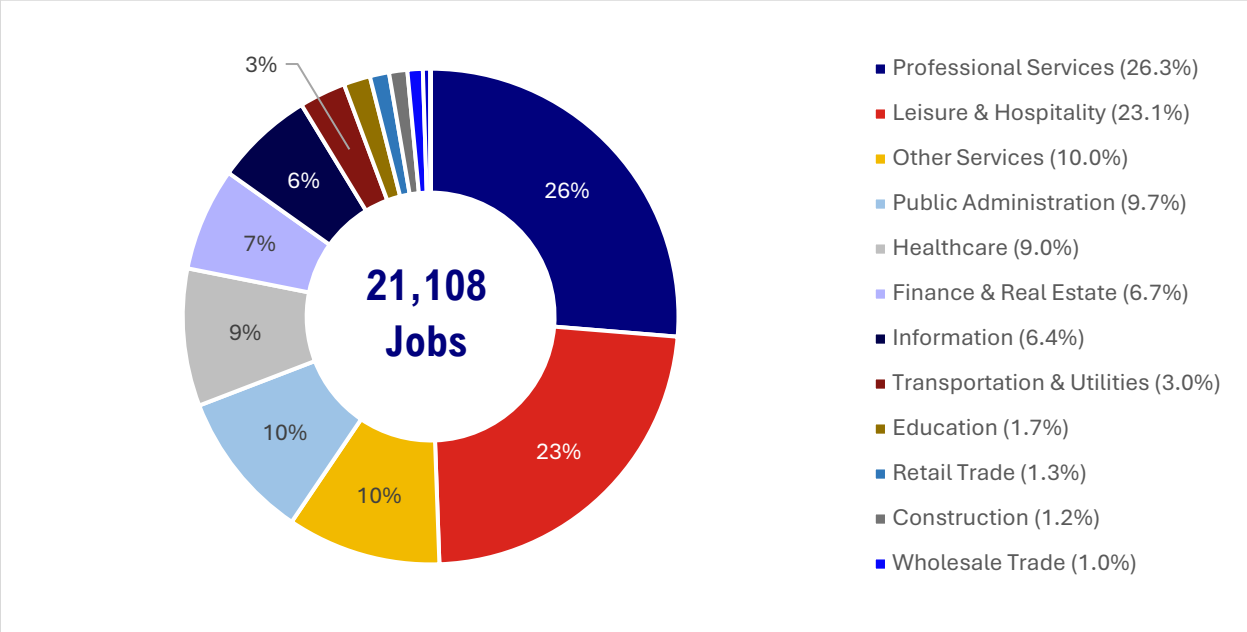
Table 1: Downtown Employment Base by Major Industry, Metro Center, 2026

Downtown Employment Cluster	Establishments	Representative Uses
Legal Services	156	Law firms, attorneys, courts and legal-support organizations
Personal & Other Services	142	Personal services, membership organizations and miscellaneous services
Health & Social Services	135	Health providers, social-service organizations and related services
Hospitality & Food Services	77	Restaurants, cafés, hotels and food-service establishments
Real Estate & Property Services	77	Property management, brokerage, leasing and real-estate services
Construction, Manufacturing & Trade	74	Construction firms, manufacturers and wholesale/trade businesses
Government & Public Administration	71	City, county, state and federal offices
Consulting & Other Professional Services	64	Business consulting, technology, marketing and other professional services
Retail	64	Shops, convenience/grocery and other consumer retail
Banking & Financial Services	61	Berkshire Bank, TD Bank, M&T Bank, wealth management and financial advisory firms

Source: ESRI BAO, Data Axle, Kimley-Horn

The 21,108 jobs in the Metro Center represent a wide range of industries with positions in Professional Services (26.3%) and Leisure and Hospitality (23.1%) making up the largest shares. These two industries are integral to the local economy across the Metro Center, and include legal services, accounting, advertising and public relations, and most consulting services, as well as dining, entertainment, and nightlife, anchored by MGM. Other influential industries include Public Administration, Healthcare, and Finance and Real Estate (*Graph 1*).

Graph 1: Total Jobs, Metro Center, 2026

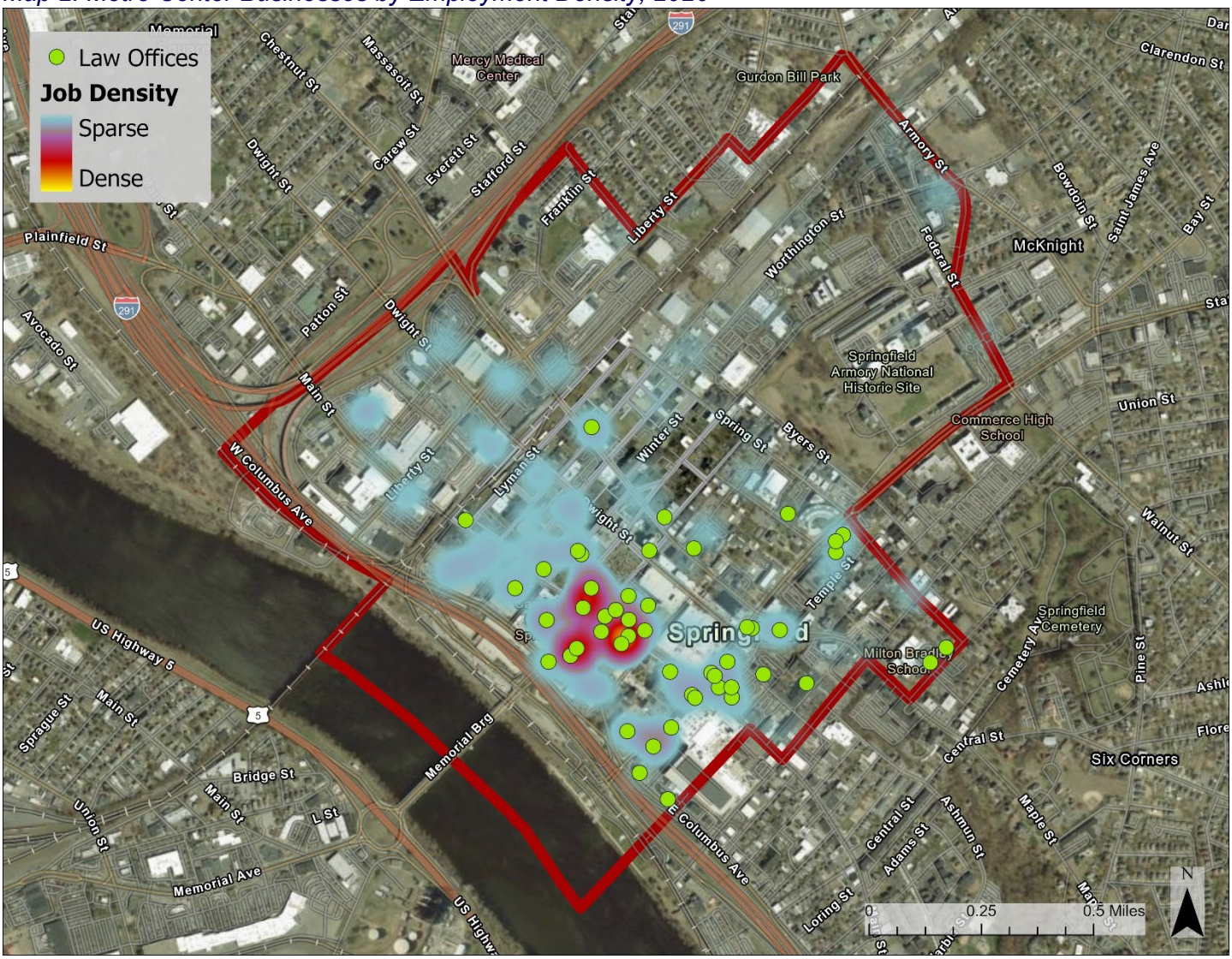


Source: ESRI BAO, Data Axle, Kimley-Horn

The proximity between a courthouse and law offices is critical to the efficiency and accessibility of the justice system. Locating law offices near the courthouse streamlines daily operations, reduces travel time for attorneys, clients, and staff, and enables timely filing of documents and attendance at hearings. This convenience lowers costs, improves coordination, and ensures that legal services are more accessible to the public. This proximity also fosters a professional ecosystem, encouraging collaboration and creating a supportive legal environment that strengthens both the delivery of justice and the vitality of the surrounding downtown area.

As shown on *Map 2*, many of the legal professionals within the Area of Impact are concentrated in office buildings along Main Street, creating an established cluster of court-related professional activity in the heart of the Metro Center. The proximity of these offices to the existing courthouse supports efficient movement between court proceedings and workplaces and reinforces the locational value of downtown office space for attorneys and other legal professionals. Relocating the courthouse beyond a comfortable walking distance from this cluster would diminish this locational advantage and could, over time, reduce the attractiveness of downtown office space for businesses whose work is closely tied to court operations. Maintaining close proximity between the courthouse and the existing legal-services cluster would preserve these functional relationships while ensuring that courthouse employees and visitors continue to contribute to activity within the Metro Center.

Map 2: Metro Center Businesses by Employment Density, 2026



<u>Headline Statement</u>: Downtown Springfield's courthouse and concentration of legal and professional employment function as an interconnected ecosystem; moving the courthouse outside the core could disrupt these relationships and redirect daily activity away from downtown businesses.

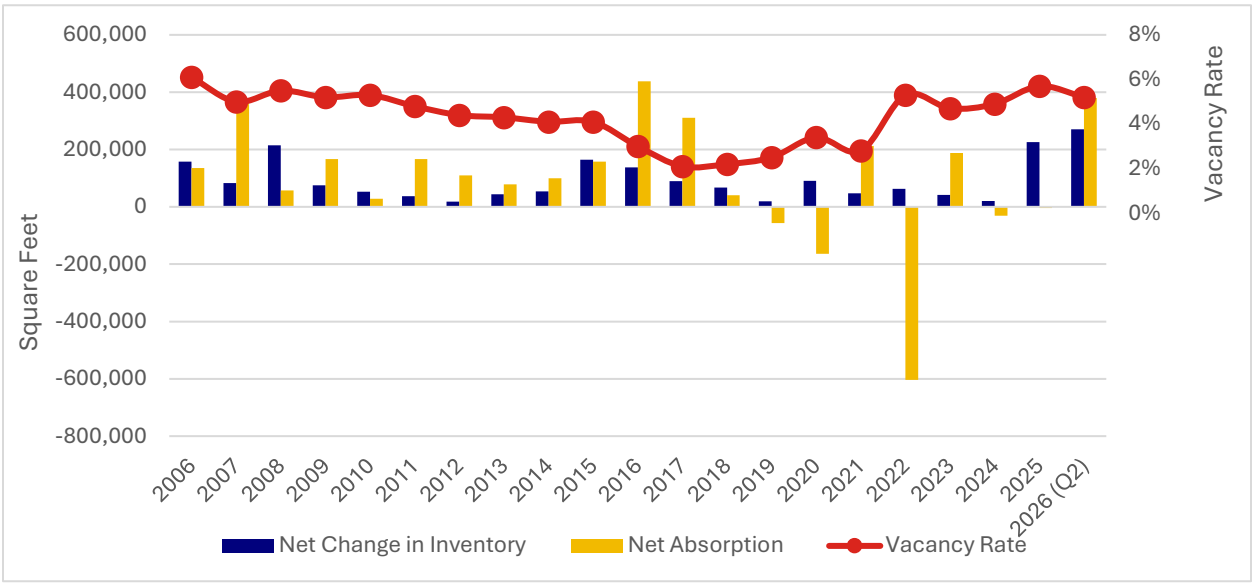
Real Estate Activity

Performance trends for retail and office real estate sectors are provided below. CoStar provides a useful baseline for understanding commercial inventory and longer-term market trends. However, listing-based data do not consistently capture all vacant or functionally unoccupied space within the Metro Center. To provide a more current assessment of Metro Center conditions, CoStar data was supplemented with a building- and storefront-level desktop review using leasing information, business listings, and other publicly available sources. This review identified vacancies not reflected in CoStar's reported figures. The resulting estimates are intended to provide a more current indication of market conditions.

Retail

The Springfield MSA contains almost 28 million square feet of retail space. As shown in *Graph 2*, new regional deliveries averaged approximately 96,179 square feet per year since 2006. More recently, deliveries have increased, averaging over 120,000 new square feet per year in the last five years, most of which came in 2025 and the first half of 2026. Absorption has fluctuated, peaking in 2016 with a net total of over 437,000 square feet of retail space absorbed. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an abrupt slowdown of retail absorption, resulting in several years since 2020 that more retailers moved out of space than into space – a net negative.

Graph 2: Retail Performance Trends, Springfield MSA, 2006-2026(YTD)

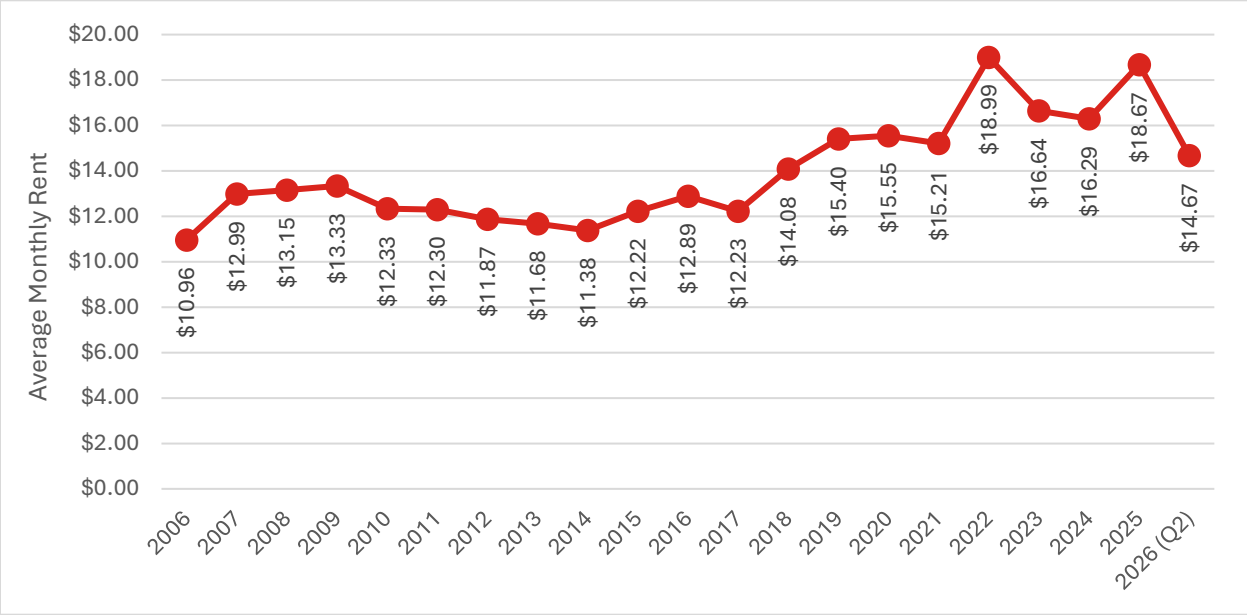


Source: CoStar, Kimley-Horn

Retail vacancy rates in the Springfield MSA have typically ranged from 2.0% to 6.0% over the last 20 years (*Graph 2*). It is notable that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the retail vacancy, which was at a two-decade low, has increased as more retail businesses have moved out of existing space than moved in. As of the second quarter of 2026, retail vacancy across the Springfield MSA was approximately 5.2%, near the upper end of the region's historical range. The supplemental desktop review performed for the Metro Center identified apparent retail vacancy approaching 27%. While this estimate is not intended to represent a comprehensive physical occupancy survey, it indicates that retail conditions within the Metro Center are materially more challenged than the regional vacancy rate alone would suggest. This distinction is important when considering the potential effects of courthouse relocation. In an environment already characterized by substantial apparent vacancy, the recurring weekday customer base generated by courthouse employees and visitors represents an important source of demand for downtown restaurants, retailers, and services.

The average monthly rent for retail space across the region has increased by 33.9% since 2006, reaching $14.67 per square foot in the second quarter of 2026. This comes following record high retail rents in 2022 and 2025 at $18.99 and $18.67 per square foot, respectively, indicating that average monthly rates are beginning to stabilize following post-COVID shocks. From a longer-term perspective, retail rents in the region have been relatively static, showing minimal change in the time between 2007 and 2017 (*Graph 3*).

Graph 3: Retail Rent per Square Foot Trends, Springfield MSA, 2006-2026(YTD)



Source: CoStar, Kimley-Horn

According to CoStar, there are approximately 1,307,600 square feet of retail space in the Metro Center as of the second quarter of 2026. This figure represents the physical stock of properties classified as retail and includes vacant space, including some storefronts that have remained unoccupied for extended periods Approximately 26,000 square feet of new retail space has been constructed since 2020, while approximately 86% of the Metro Center's existing retail inventory was constructed prior to 1970. Most retail space is concentrated to the south and westper. Dining, nightlife, and entertainment businesses are the most common tenants, many catering to the concentration of office workers located near Main Street.

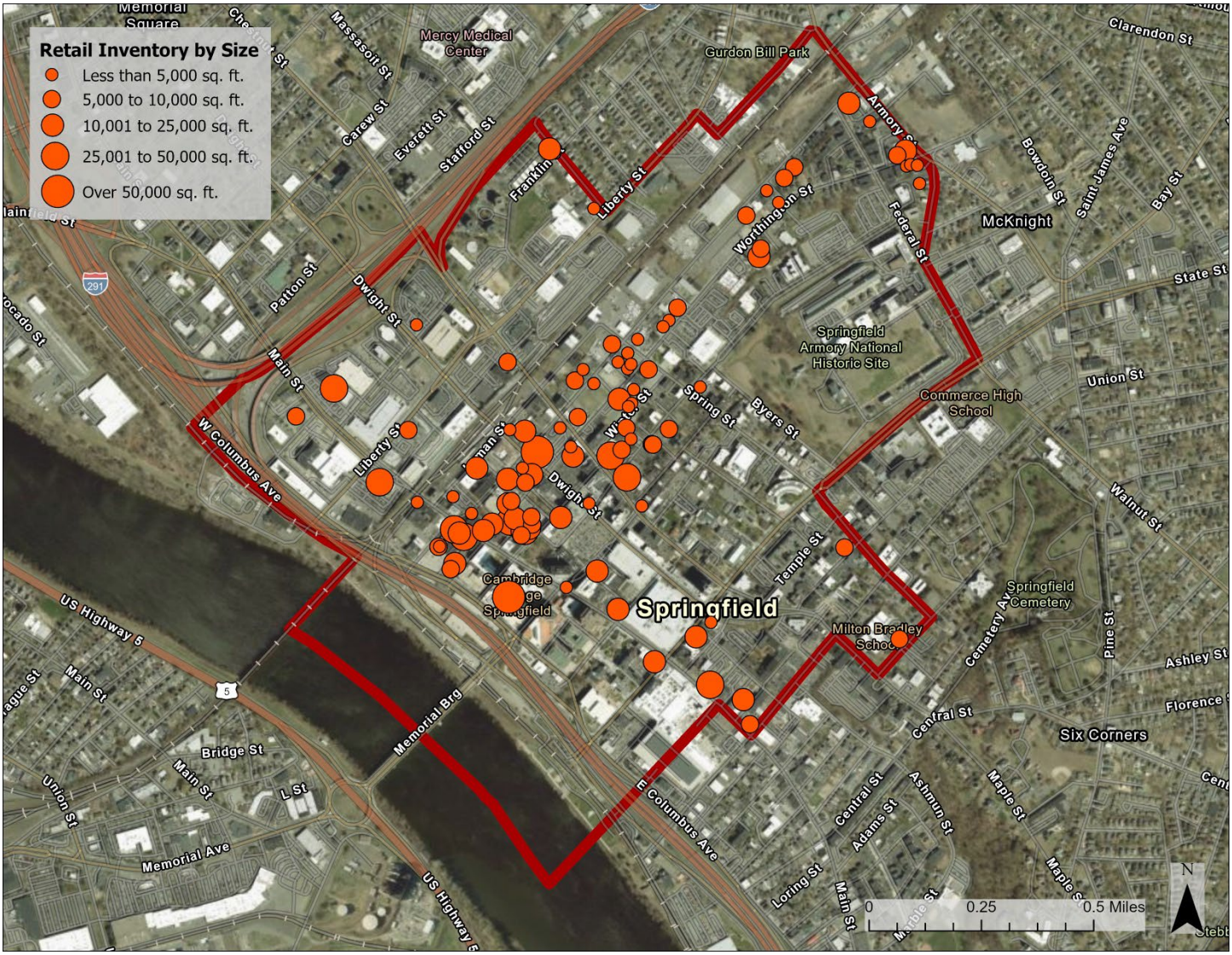
As shown on *Map 3*, retail and dining establishments within the Metro Center are concentrated primarily in the established downtown core, particularly along and around Main Street and adjacent commercial corridors. This concentration provides office workers, courthouse employees, attorneys, jurors, and other visitors with convenient access to restaurants, cafés, shops, and services throughout the workday. These businesses benefit from a steady daytime customer base, while their proximity contributes to a more functional and attractive environment for downtown employees and visitors.

Courthouse activity is particularly well suited to supporting this ecosystem because it generates recurring weekday visitation in addition to permanent employment. Court users may purchase coffee or meals before and after proceedings, visit restaurants during breaks, or patronize other nearby businesses while already downtown. The ability of downtown businesses to capture this activity is closely tied to proximity and walkability. As the courthouse becomes more physically separated from the concentration of retail and dining options, these incidental trips become less convenient,

increasing the likelihood that courthouse-related spending occurs elsewhere or is captured by businesses closer to the new facility.

This relationship is important in both directions. Downtown retail and dining benefit from courthouse-generated customers, while the courthouse and surrounding professional employment benefit from convenient access to these amenities. Maintaining major employment and civic uses within a walkable commercial core helps create the concentration of workers, visitors, services, and spending necessary to sustain an active downtown throughout the business day.

Map 3: Distribution of Retail Space, Metro Center, 2026



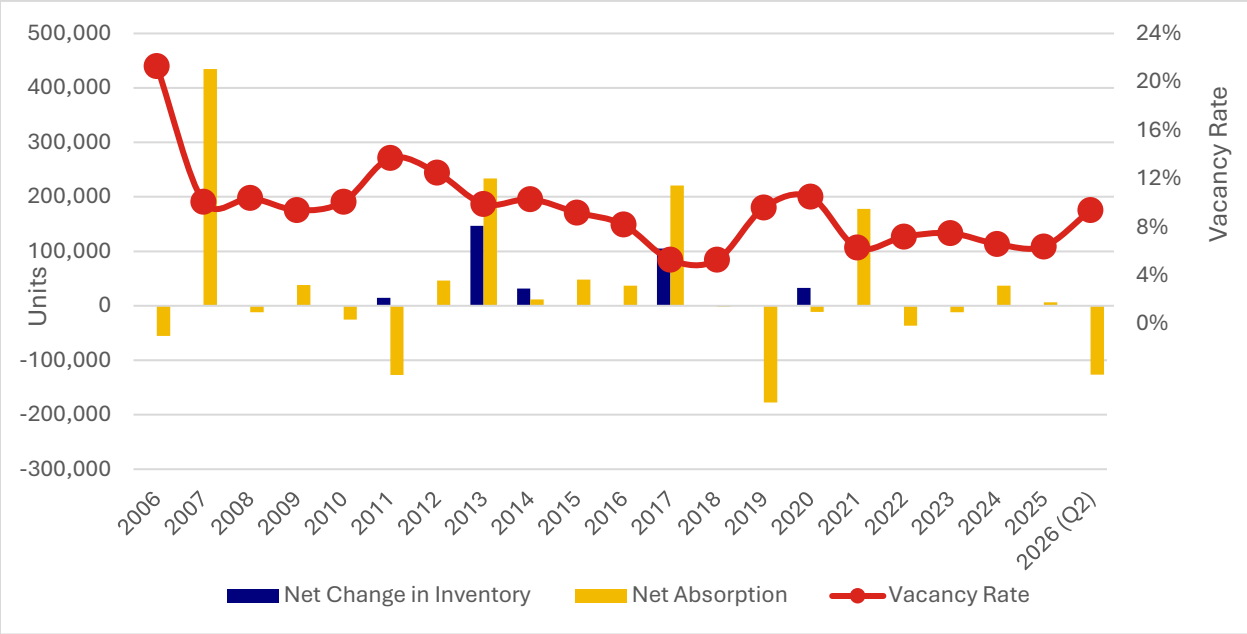
Source: CoStar, Kimley-Horn

<u>Headline Statement</u>: The core of Downtown Springfield contains the Metro Center's greatest concentration of retail and dining options, creating a mutually supportive relationship between businesses and the employees and visitors generated by major civic and professional uses.

Office

The Metro Center has an estimated 4.2 million square feet of office space, largely focused on or near Main Street. This represents approximately 25.6% of the total in the MSA. Approximately 331,372 square feet of office space has been built in the Metro Center since 2006, with new space completed in 2017 and 2020. As shown in *Graph 4*, net absorption has varied over the years, reflecting changing economic cycles. Since 2006, leasing activity has been net positive; however, since 2022, more tenants have vacated space than moved in.

Graph 4: Office Supply and Net Absorption, Metro Center, 2006-2026(YTD)

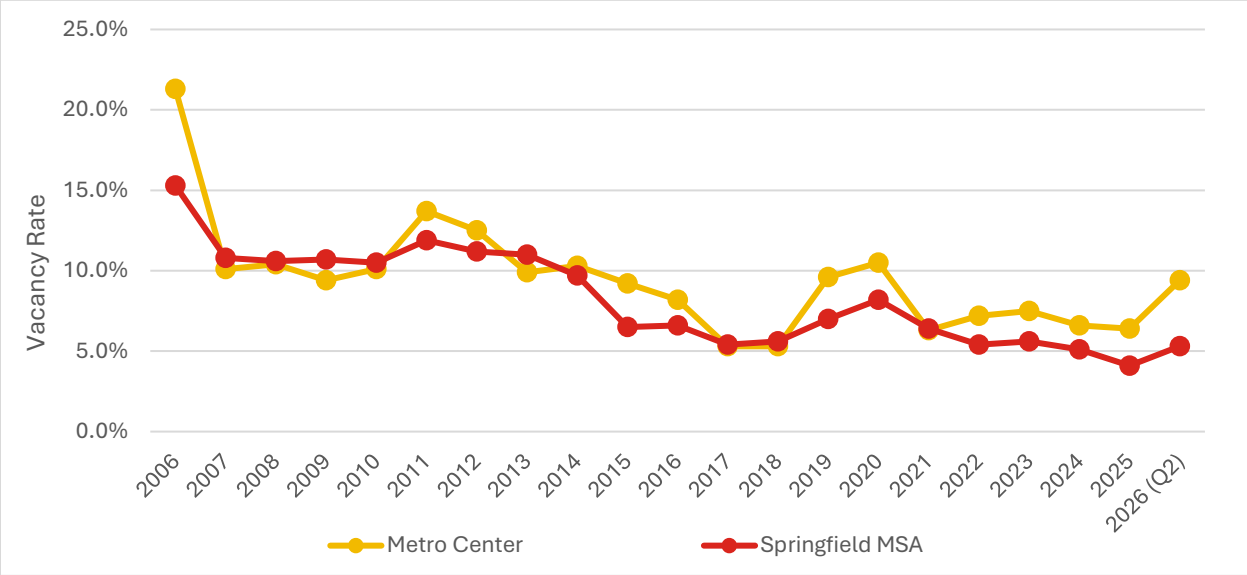


Source: CoStar, Kimley-Horn

Current conditions suggest substantially greater office-market weakness within the Metro Center than regional vacancy statistics alone indicate. CoStar does not consistently capture all vacant or underutilized office space within the downtown inventory. A supplemental desktop review identified apparent office vacancy approaching 29% in the second quarter of 2026. While this estimate should not be interpreted as a formal building-by-building occupancy survey, it is substantially higher than the vacancy reported across the broader Springfield MSA and indicates a challenged downtown office market.

This existing level of vacancy is particularly relevant to the courthouse relocation decision. The courthouse provides a locational advantage for legal and court-related professional firms currently concentrated in the downtown core. Relocation would therefore occur within an office market already contending with substantial vacant space, increasing the risk of additional pressure on tenant retention and future leasing decisions.

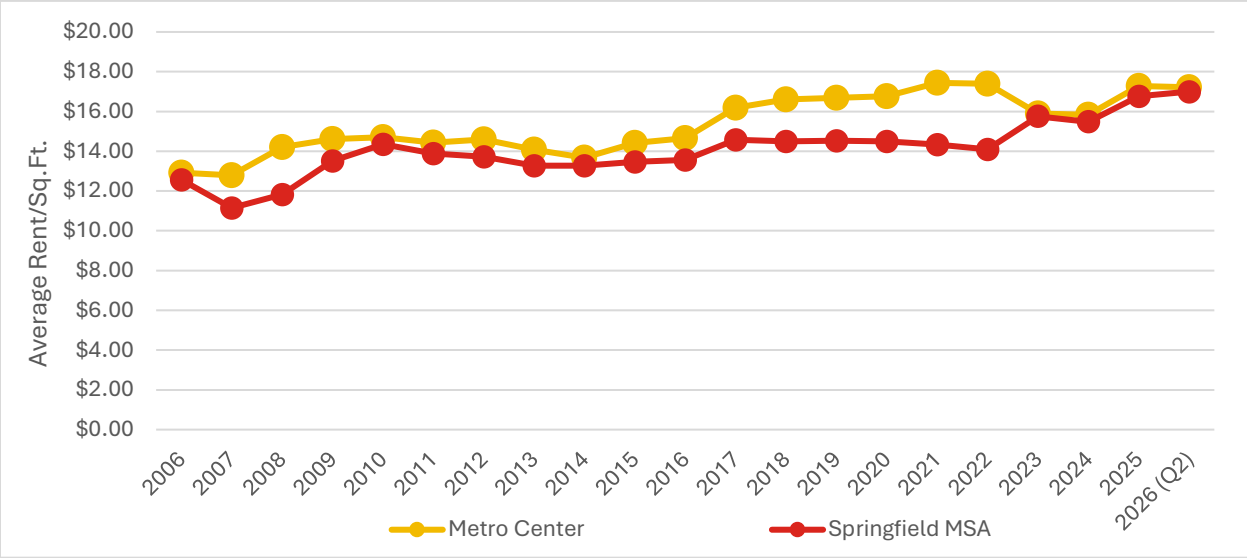
Graph 5: Comparison of Office Vacancy Trends, 2006-2026(YTD)



Source: CoStar, Kimley-Horn

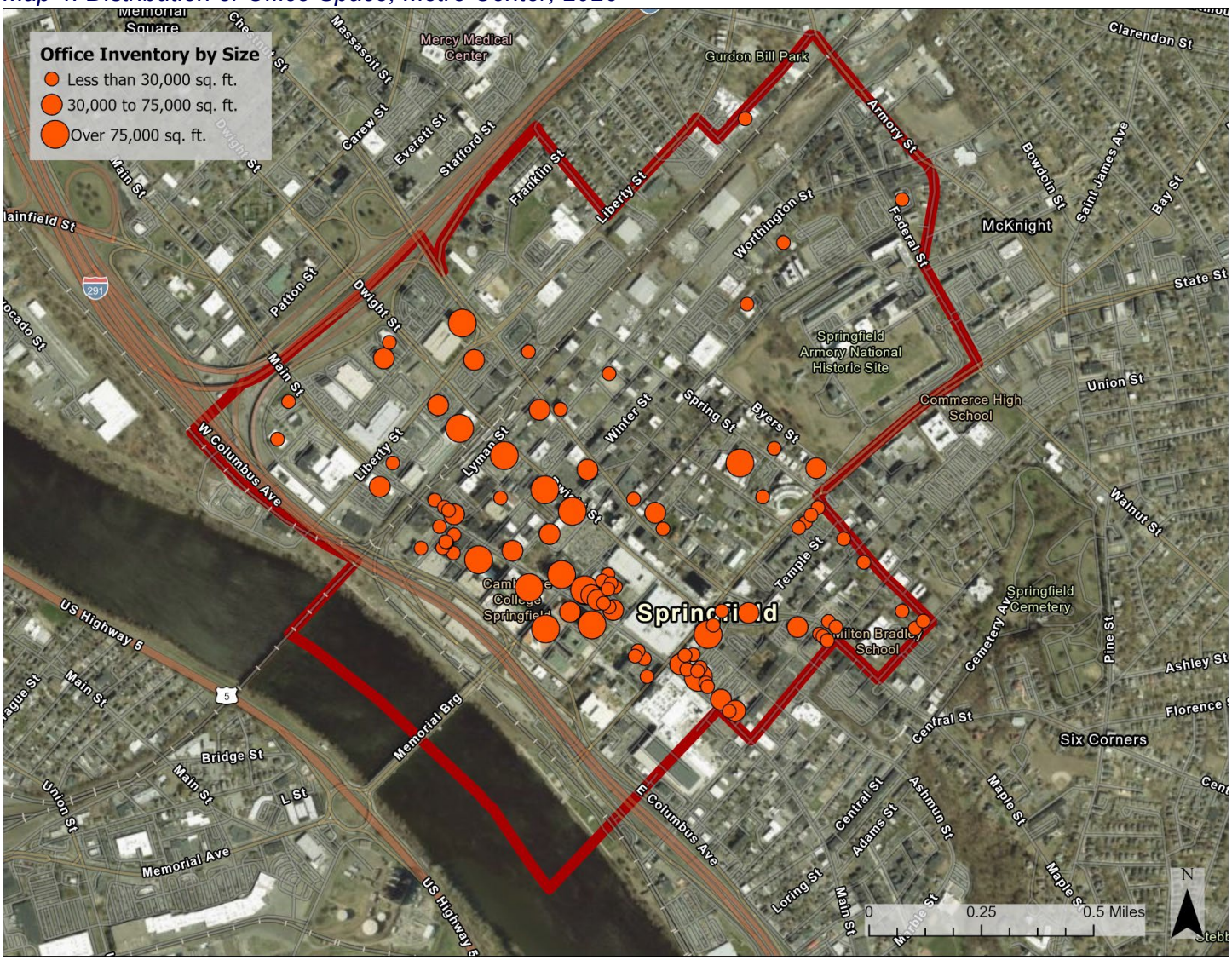
Average rents per square foot for office space were at a premium in the Metro Center for much of the past 20 years, though both the Metro Center and the MSA have seen increases in rent during the same period. (*Graph 6*). Office rents remained relatively static in the Metro Center between 2006 and 2016, before increasing through the balance of the analysis period. While both geographies experienced some rent disruptions from COVID, they have each recovered. As of the second quarter of 2026, average asking office rents in the Metro Center and Springfield MSA were approximately $17.22 and $17.00 per square foot, respectively. These rates are reported on a gross basis and therefore include operating expenses and real estate taxes paid by the property owner. As a result, the reported asking rents should not be interpreted as net revenue available to support debt service, tenant improvements, or other capital investment. In an office market already experiencing substantial vacancy, this distinction further illustrates the financial pressures facing downtown property owners.

Graph 6: Comparison of Office Rent per Square Foot Trends, 2006-2026(YTD)



Source: CoStar, Kimley-Horn

Map 4: Distribution of Office Space, Metro Center, 2026



Source: CoStar, Kimley-Horn

<u>Headline Statement</u>: Office vacancy within the Metro Center approaches an estimated 29%, reflecting substantial existing pressure on the downtown office market. Average asking rents of approximately $17 per square foot are reported on a gross basis and therefore do not represent net revenue available to property owners for debt service, tenant improvements, or reinvestment.

5. Potential Economic Implications of Relocation

Loss of a Major Downtown Activity Generator

The Springfield Regional Justice Center is expected to accommodate approximately 1,200 to 1,500 employees, attorneys, jurors, litigants, and other visitors each day, making it one of the Metro Center's more significant and consistent weekday activity generators. Unlike entertainment venues or special events that generate activity during particular evenings, weekends, or event periods, courthouse operations create a recurring population throughout the traditional workweek. When located within the downtown core, this activity contributes to the concentration of people necessary to support restaurants, cafés, retail establishments, parking facilities, and other services.

The economic significance of this activity extends beyond employment within the courthouse itself. Courthouse employees and visitors make purchases before, during, and after their time at the facility, while attorneys and other legal professionals frequently move between court proceedings, offices, restaurants, and other downtown destinations. The previous analysis recognized that this population represents a potentially substantial source of consumer spending. Even relatively modest expenditures, when multiplied across hundreds or thousands of daily users and approximately 250 working days per year, can translate into millions of dollars of annual economic activity. The literature reviewed for this assessment similarly found that government workers can represent a dependable source of downtown spending, with previous research estimating annual expenditures of approximately $2,500 to $3,000 per worker within their host downtowns.

Importantly, relocating the courthouse outside the downtown core does not mean that this economic activity disappears from Springfield. Rather, it changes the geography in which that activity occurs and the businesses best positioned to capture it. When courthouse users are within a comfortable walk of Main Street and the concentration of downtown restaurants, shops, offices, and services, these businesses can benefit from trips that are incidental to the primary courthouse visit. Increasing the distance between the courthouse and the commercial core introduces additional time and inconvenience into those trips. As a result, courthouse users may be more likely to patronize businesses closer to the new facility, make purchases as part of their automobile trip to or from the courthouse, or forego discretionary trips altogether.

This finding is consistent with the prior assessment in October 2025 of the Dwight Street courthouse alternative. That study similarly recognized that relocating the courthouse would redistribute, rather than eliminate, courthouse-related spending and activity. The economic implications differ, however, based on where that activity is redistributed. The Dwight Street site remained within the established downtown pedestrian network, south of the rail corridor, in proximity to the existing legal and commercial core and with direct pedestrian access to Union Station. By contrast, relocation across the rail corridor would shift courthouse activity beyond this established network, where longer walking distances and limited crossings reduce the likelihood that courthouse users will continue to circulate through and support the downtown core.

Given the existing real estate conditions within Downtown Springfield, the supplemental review identified apparent retail vacancy approaching 27% within the Metro Center, indicating that the downtown commercial environment is already experiencing substantial market pressure. In this context, the courthouse represents more than another downtown destination. Its recurring weekday population provides a dependable source of customer activity for restaurants, cafés, retailers, parking facilities, and other services at a time when maintaining commercial occupancy and supporting existing businesses are already significant downtown challenges.

There is also a cumulative dimension to the potential impact. The proposed Justice Center is anticipated to operate under a 40-year base lease, with two additional 10-year extension options. Consequently, even relatively small changes in the daily spending behavior of courthouse users could become meaningful when repeated over several decades. The location decision therefore determines not only where 1,200 to 1,500 people travel today, but where a substantial source of recurring civic and economic activity will be concentrated for a generation or more.

Headline Statement: The economic risk associated with courthouse relocation is not the loss of courthouse activity from Springfield, but the potential redistribution of millions of dollars in recurring consumer activity away from the downtown businesses that currently benefit from proximity to the court.

Disruption of the Downtown Legal and Professional Ecosystem

Courthouses and legal offices have a naturally interdependent relationship. Attorneys and other legal professionals frequently travel between their offices and court proceedings throughout the workday, making proximity an important consideration for firms whose practices involve regular court appearances. Locating these uses near one another can reduce travel time and associated costs, improve coordination, and make it easier for attorneys and staff to move efficiently between their offices and the courthouse.

Springfield currently benefits from this relationship. Legal employment and law offices are concentrated within the Metro Center, particularly in professional office buildings along and near Main Street. The previous analysis identified approximately 156 legal services locations within the Metro Center, the majority located in the central core less than a ten-minute walk from the current courthouse, demonstrating an established cluster of legal services surrounding the downtown courthouse environment. This concentration creates a mutually reinforcing relationship: the courthouse provides an important reason for legal professionals to locate downtown, while the concentration of attorneys and related services strengthens the downtown's role as Springfield's civic and professional center.

Proximity Creates Value

For court-oriented businesses, the value of a downtown location extends beyond traditional office-market considerations such as rents, building quality, parking, and visibility. Access to the courthouse itself is an amenity. An attorney located within a short walk can attend a hearing and return to the office without moving a vehicle, finding parking, or allocating significant additional travel time. That convenience becomes particularly valuable when multiple courthouse trips occur during a workday or when schedules change unexpectedly.

The existing concentration of legal professionals therefore functions as a legal district within the Metro Center. The courthouse, law offices, supporting professional services, restaurants, and other amenities operate in close proximity, allowing multiple activities to occur as part of a single downtown trip.

Relocating the courthouse beyond a comfortable walking distance from this cluster changes that relationship. The issue is not that attorneys would be unable to reach the new courthouse, but that the courthouse would become less seamlessly integrated into their normal workday. Trips that can presently occur on foot may increasingly require driving, parking, additional travel time, or other transportation arrangements.

Potential Impact on Office Vacancy Rates

Greater separation from the courthouse would diminish one of the locational advantages currently associated with office space in the downtown core. Over time, firms with significant court-related practices may increasingly weigh proximity to the new courthouse against the benefits of remaining within the existing legal-services cluster. This consideration is particularly important given current market conditions with apparent office vacancy approaching 29% within the Metro Center. In an already challenged leasing environment, weakening the functional relationship between the courthouse and downtown legal offices increases the risk of additional pressure on tenant retention, lease renewals, and future location decisions.

Headline Statement: The courthouse and Downtown Springfield's concentration of legal and professional employment function as an interconnected economic cluster. Moving the courthouse beyond a comfortable walk from this established employment base could diminish an important locational advantage of downtown office space and, over time, contribute to greater dispersion of court-related professional activity.

Increased Vulnerability for Downtown Core Retail

The courthouse represents a significant and consistent source of weekday activity within Downtown Springfield. The new facility is projected to accommodate between 1,200 and 1,500 visitors and staff each day, including judges, attorneys, jurors, court employees, and residents conducting court business. When this activity is concentrated within the downtown core, these daily users provide a recurring customer base for nearby restaurants, cafés, convenience retailers, parking facilities, and other services.

While this assessment does not attempt to forecast exact spending by courthouse users, even modest purchases illustrate the scale of economic activity associated with the facility. Assuming an average of 1,300 daily users, expenditures of just $10 per person on coffee, meals, convenience purchases, or other services would represent more than $3 million in potential consumer spending annually. At an average of $15 per person, that amount could approach $5 million annually. These figures are illustrative rather than predictive and should not be interpreted as spending that would be lost entirely if the courthouse relocates. Rather, they demonstrate the magnitude of recurring consumer activity whose geographic distribution can be influenced by courthouse location.

The diversity of courthouse users also contributes to a broad range of downtown demand. Attorneys, judges, and professional staff may support restaurants and professional services, while jurors, court employees, and members of the public may patronize cafés, fast-casual restaurants, convenience retailers, and other businesses before, during, and after their courthouse visits. Importantly, many of these purchases are convenience-oriented and highly sensitive to proximity. A lunch or coffee trip that is easily made on foot is less likely to occur within the downtown core when it requires a longer walk, crossing a physical barrier, moving a vehicle, or making a separate trip.

Relocation of the courthouse outside the established core therefore does not necessarily reduce the total amount of courthouse-related spending occurring within Springfield; it changes which businesses are best positioned to capture it. Rather, relocation would redistribute a portion of the spending and activity currently captured by downtown businesses to a different geography. Given Downtown Springfield's existing vacancy, longstanding market challenges, and history of economic disruption, replacing this dependable source of recurring weekday demand would present a challenge. This

redistribution is particularly important because the courthouse provides dependable weekday demand that complements the evening, weekend, and event-driven activity associated with other major Metro Center destinations.

Over the long term, reduced access to this recurring customer base has implications beyond individual transactions. Consistent pedestrian activity and daytime spending help support business retention, commercial occupancy, and property reinvestment while contributing to perceptions of an active and vibrant downtown. Moving 1,200 to 1,500 daily courthouse users farther from the core risks shifting a meaningful source of this activity away from the businesses and commercial properties that Springfield's broader revitalization efforts are intended to strengthen.

Headline Statement: The courthouse generates a consistent base of up to 1,500 daily employees and visitors whose spending supports downtown businesses. Relocation outside the core would not eliminate this economic activity, but could redirect a meaningful share away from the restaurants, retailers, and services that currently benefit from proximity to the court.

Shifting Revitalization Outside the Core

Downtown Springfield contains a significant inventory of vacant, underutilized, and potentially redevelopable properties. These sites represent opportunities for new housing, commercial activity, and other investment, but they also highlight an important challenge for downtown revitalization: the number of potential development opportunities exceeds the amount of near-term market demand available to support them. In this environment, the location of major public investments can influence where limited private development interest and investment are most likely to concentrate.

To evaluate development and redevelopment potential within the Area of Impact, each parcel was scored across a set of criteria designed to identify properties most likely to transition in the near- to mid-term. The scoring system assigned values from 0–5 for each factor, and the results were combined into a final index on a 0–100 scale. Higher scores indicate parcels that are “ripe” for reinvestment, while lower scores represent properties that are more firmly established or less feasible for redevelopment. The criteria included:

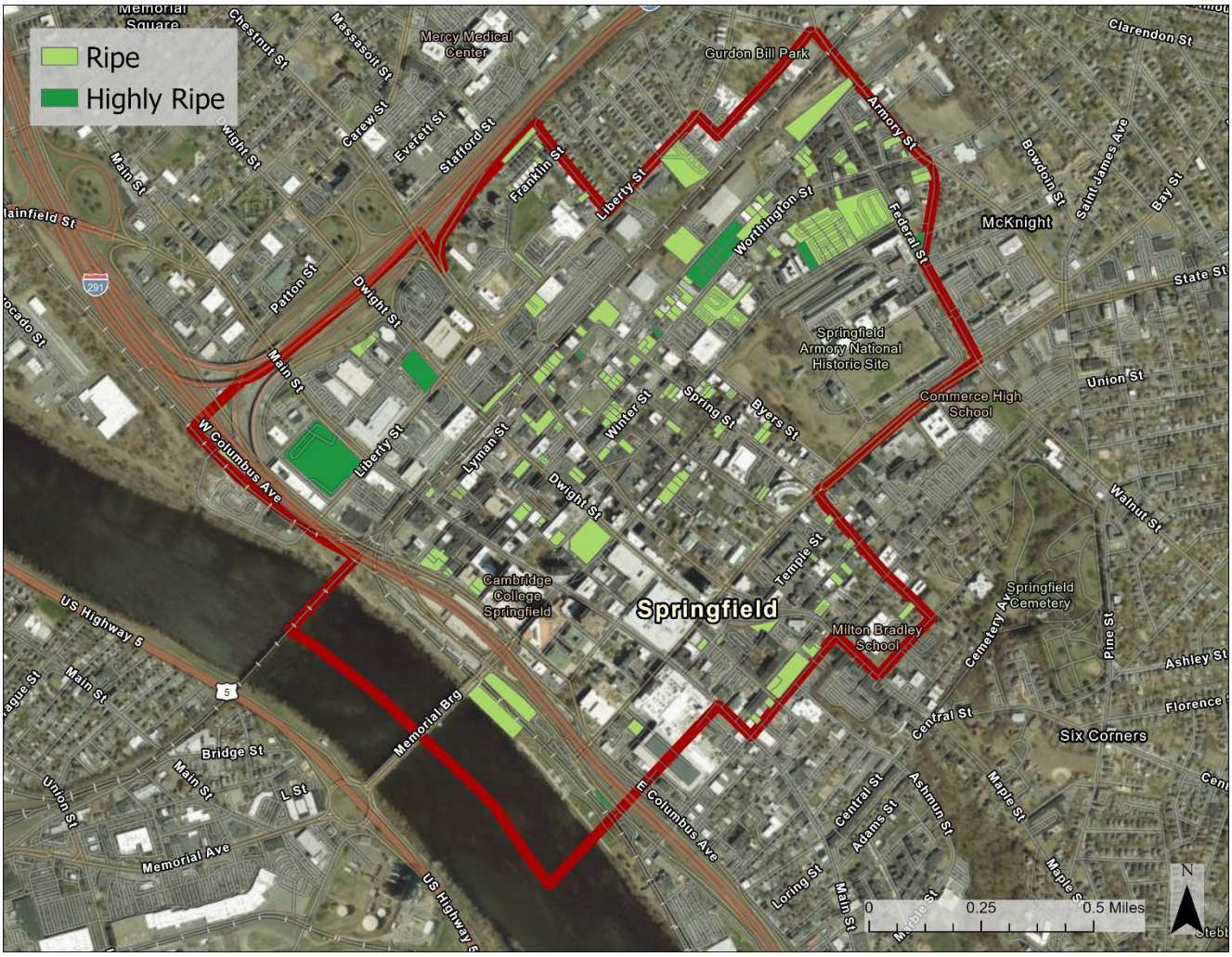
- **Land use type**: Vacant parcels and surface parking lots scored highest, while residential and institutional parcels scored lowest, reflecting relative feasibility for redevelopment
- **Building-to-land value**: Parcels where the building value is low compared to the land value scored higher, signaling underutilization
- **Ownership**: Privately owned parcels were scored higher than publicly owned parcels, since private properties are more likely to redevelop in the near term
- **Vacancy**: Parcels with higher vacancy rates scored higher, indicating reduced stability and stronger redevelopment potential
- **Development momentum**: Parcels within a 500-foot buffer of new projects delivered within the past decade scored higher, reflecting the role of nearby reinvestment in signaling market readiness
- **Compatibility**: Parcels were evaluated on how closely their current uses align with a downtown-style environment. Uses less consistent with this environment scored higher, reflecting greater potential for future transition.

The results of this scoring model are displayed on Map 5, which provides a parcel-by-parcel view of relative redevelopment potential. This abundance of opportunity creates an asset and a challenge. While Springfield has numerous sites capable of accommodating future development, market demand is not unlimited. New housing, retail, office, and mixed-use projects must compete for tenants, residents, financing, and development capital. As a result, revitalization is likely to be more effective when public and private investments reinforce one another geographically, building sufficient concentration and momentum to support additional projects. Dispersing activity across too many locations can instead dilute demand, leaving individual projects and districts without the critical mass necessary to catalyze broader change.

In a market with substantial existing office and retail vacancy, development surrounding a new courthouse north of the rail corridor would not necessarily represent wholly new demand. New commercial space, restaurants, professional offices, and other uses would compete within the same broader market for a finite pool of tenants, customers, investment, and development capital. As a result, activity generated around the new courthouse could occur in part at the expense of occupancy and reinvestment within existing downtown properties rather than functioning solely as additive economic growth. From a downtown revitalization perspective, this creates a risk of dispersing activity before the established core has achieved sufficient occupancy and market strength. Concentrating major public investments within or directly connected to the existing core provides a greater opportunity for limited market demand to reinforce existing businesses, fill vacant space, and support continued reinvestment.

Headline Statement: Moving the Regional Justice Center away from the established downtown core would create the potential to shift some economic and development momentum toward the fringe of the Metro Center while substantial redevelopment capacity remains within the core.

Map 5: Highest Development and Redevelopment Potential, Metro Center, 2026

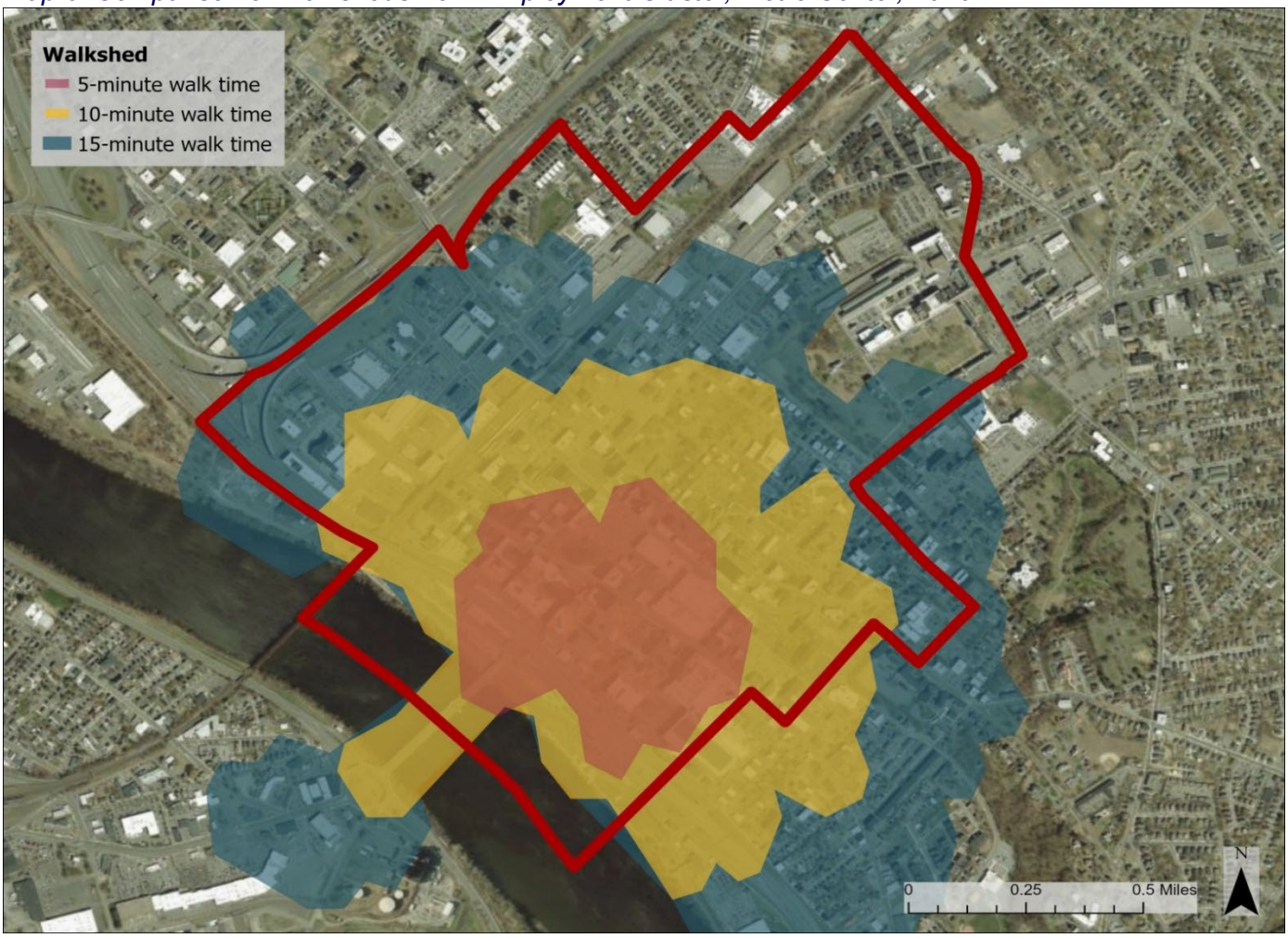


6. Connectivity and Accessibility

The economic relationship between the courthouse and Downtown Springfield depends not only on geographic proximity, but on whether employees, attorneys, jurors, and visitors can comfortably and conveniently move between the courthouse and the businesses and professional offices concentrated in the downtown core. As shown on *Map 6*, much of the established downtown core, including the concentration of legal offices along and near Main Street, is more than a 15-minute walk from areas on the other side of the rail line. This represents a meaningful change from the existing courthouse, where legal offices, restaurants, services, and other downtown destinations are concentrated within a much shorter and more convenient walk.

Walking time alone, however, does not fully capture the degree of separation. Pedestrian accessibility is also shaped by the configuration of the street network and by physical barriers that affect the route a pedestrian must actually travel. This distinction is particularly relevant in Downtown Springfield, where the active rail corridor creates a substantial physical barrier and concentrates north-south pedestrian movement through two underpasses. As a result, destinations on opposite sides of the rail corridor may be relatively close in straight-line distance while requiring longer and less direct routes through the actual pedestrian network. The underpasses themselves function primarily as transportation infrastructure rather than pedestrian-oriented connections, which can further affect the comfort and convenience of walking between the two areas.

Map 6: Comparison of Walksheds from Employment Cluster, Metro Center, 2026



Source: ESRI BAO; Kimley-Horn

These conditions are especially important because many courthouse-related trips are discretionary or time-sensitive. An attorney deciding whether to return to an office between proceedings, an employee choosing where to eat lunch, or a juror looking for coffee or a restaurant is influenced not simply by whether a destination can technically be reached on foot, but by the time, convenience, comfort, and perceived safety of the trip. A 15+-minute walk requiring passage beneath the rail corridor presents a substantially different experience than a less than 10-minute walk through an active downtown environment. As these barriers increase, courthouse users may be more likely to drive, remain closer to the courthouse, or patronize businesses elsewhere rather than walk into the downtown core.

From an economic development perspective, the distinction is significant. A courthouse can remain geographically close to downtown without functioning as fully within the downtown pedestrian ecosystem. Greater walking distances, less direct routes, and the physical separation created by the rail corridor would reduce the ease with which courthouse users naturally circulate through areas where Springfield has historically concentrated legal employment, restaurants, retail, and other downtown activity. Over time, this could weaken the courthouse's role in reinforcing the concentration of weekday activity within the established downtown core.

Headline Statement: A roughly 15-minute walk and limited pedestrian connections beneath the rail corridor separate areas north of the tracks from the concentration of legal offices, businesses, and amenities within the established downtown core, potentially reducing the extent to which courthouse users naturally circulate through downtown.

7. Conclusion

The Springfield Regional Justice Center represents a significant long-term investment in the City and Commonwealth. The question examined by this assessment is not whether the new courthouse will generate economic benefits, but where the long-term benefits associated with its daily operations will be concentrated and how relocation may affect the established Downtown Springfield economy. Today, the courthouse is part of an interconnected downtown ecosystem of civic, professional, commercial, entertainment, and institutional uses. Its employees, attorneys, jurors, and visitors provide a consistent source of weekday activity that complements Springfield's other major downtown anchors and supports nearby restaurants, retailers, professional services, and other businesses.

The potential redistribution of this activity is particularly important given Downtown Springfield's existing market conditions. Decades of economic restructuring and repeated disruption have already challenged the downtown commercial base, and the supplemental market review conducted for this assessment identified apparent retail vacancy approaching 27% and office vacancy approaching 29% within the Metro Center. Against this backdrop, the courthouse represents a stable source of weekday activity within a commercial environment where business retention, occupancy, and reinvestment remain ongoing challenges. Relocating courthouse activity farther from the established downtown core would alter these relationships. Courthouse-related activity would not disappear from Springfield, but its relocation would change the geography in which recurring spending and visitation are captured, reducing the direct relationship between courthouse activity and the downtown businesses that currently benefit from its proximity. Greater separation from the concentration of legal offices would also diminish one of the locational advantages associated with downtown professional space, increasing the risk of longer-term effects on tenant retention and location decisions. The rail corridor further influences this relationship by increasing walking distances and limiting the number and quality of pedestrian connections between areas on opposite sides of the tracks.

These potential impacts are especially important because downtown revitalization depends on concentration and connectivity. Springfield has numerous vacant and underutilized properties capable of accommodating reinvestment, while market demand and investment capital remain finite. Major civic investments can help focus that activity and reinforce existing businesses and development momentum, or contribute to its geographic dispersion. The courthouse's anticipated 40-year base lease, with options that could extend occupancy to 60 years, means that even incremental changes in spending, pedestrian activity, office-location decisions, and investment patterns could become meaningful when repeated over decades.

Ultimately, the economic implications of courthouse relocation extend beyond the operations of the facility itself. The location and connectivity of a major civic anchor influence how effectively its employees and visitors interact with surrounding businesses, professional services, and other downtown investments. Maintaining strong physical, pedestrian, and economic connections between courthouse activity and the established downtown core will therefore be important to limiting potential disruption and preserving the courthouse's longstanding contribution to Downtown Springfield's economic ecosystem.