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Retrospective Park Forwards Springfield's Future Featured

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A representation of what the park will look like from aerial view upon completion.

You may have noticed some change in downtown Springfield where the Savoy Lounge used to be, off of State Route 40. The Chamber of Commerce is building a park that will be called the National Road Commons. Mike McDorman, President and CEO of the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce hopes the park will be, "A catalyst for revitalizing Springfield's urban core." It is the first of four to five more phases in stimulating economic growth in office, shopping, restaurants and residential loft opportunities. Although Springfield has felt the effects of the economic downturn, members of the chamber are hopeful for the future. "We have to come together around this renaissance," McDorman encourages us.

The park will be an urban green space. McDorman describes it as, "A place to mingle or walk through on your way to a restaurant, retail store or special event. It's meant to create an environment conducive to pedestrian traffic. It will create appeal and connection to downtown." The style will be consistent with the rest of downtown, with an area defined by planted trees. There will be a marble basin fountain and a pergola with swings – a decoratively covered seating area. A tiered green space area will work with the natural slope of the park running from south to north.

Not only will the National Road Commons add a pleasant atmosphere, it will also hold significance. The name is indicative of State Route 40, also known as The National Road. McDorman explains, "[The National Road] made Springfield in the early 1800s. We hope it will remake Springfield over the next 20, 30, 40, 50 years." The historic "Madonna of the Trail" statue will be moved from Snyder Park to the southeast corner of the National Road Commons and will serve as the cornerstone of the park. The statue was the first of 12 commissioned in 1928 by the National Old Trails Road Committee, led by future president Harry S. Truman. Found in select places across the country, the statues honor the pioneer women who cofounded the early United States. "It is a significant statue because it speaks of how America grew up. It represents how the pioneers moved westward along the trail. Future generations will be able to see what the National Road meant," affirms McDorman. "Madonna of the Trail" also ties in the idea of the renaissance of Springfield because we can find new beginnings by seeing where we came from.

Planning began in 2005. Steps had to be taken. Funding was secured in 2006 through our state representatives and senator. The Chamber of Commerce worked with an engineering firm on the design. Negotiating with three property owners, land was acquired. Construction had a rough start, but contractors finally broke ground in November of 2010. Completion is expected to be at the end of August and a dedication ceremony will take place in early September.

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