A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP:
SPRINGFIELD AND ITS MAYORS,
1945 TO THE PRESENT

By MICHAEL F. KONIG

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FOREWORD

In 1636, Springfield was first settled by William Pynchon as a trading post connecting the western frontier with the coastal "city" of Boston. More than 200 years later, in 1852, the growing town of Springfield was incorporated as a city, and Caleb Rice, the president of the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company was elected as the city's first mayor. Now, in 1986, as we help celebrate the 350th anniversary of the founding of Springfield, it is appropriate to look back at the city's history, as well as to look forward to what is expected to be an exciting future.

For the past fifteen years, the staff of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies of Westfield State College has attempted to serve the community and the state in various ways, all related to the task of preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the region. Beginning with publication of the Historical Journal of Western Massachusetts in 1972, the staff of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies has worked diligently to promote an interest in state and local history. In 1980, the Journal was expanded to a state-wide focus, with its name being changed to the Historical Journal of Massachusetts. For the past eight years, the Institute has sponsored annual conferences on Massachusetts history, and the conferences have been hosted by the American Antiquarian Society, the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, as well as by Westfield State College.

This book represents the continuation of the work of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies. In 1984, the Institute joined with the New England Historic Genealogical Society in publishing Joseph Carvalho's Black Families in Hampden County, 1650-1855. During the same year, the Institute and the University Press of America published James Gelin's Starting Over: Formation of the Jewish Community of Springfield, 1840-1905. In 1985, the University of Massachusetts Press published a collection of essays which originated in a four-part series of symposia on "Massachusetts in the Gilded
Age," which were held at the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library in Boston. The book, edited by Jack Tager and John W. Hkovic, is entitled *Massachusetts in the Gilded Age: Selected Essays.*

During 1986, the staff of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies has devoted its attention to assisting in the celebration of the 350th anniversary of Springfield. With the University Press of America, the Institute has published Stephen G. Weisner's book, *Embattled Editor: The Life of Samuel Bowles.* In addition, Martin Kaufman served as coordinator of a seven-part lecture series on Springfield's history which was funded by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the same grant will enable the Institute to oversee the publication of a book consisting of expanded versions of those lectures, as well as a large number of illustrations taken from a series of exhibits produced also as part of the grant. A third project related to Springfield's history is the publication of a book entitled *Shays' Rebellion: Selected Essays,* a book which includes David Szatmary's article on Springfield and Shays' Rebellion. That book, incidentally, was partially supported by the Springfield Armory National Historic Site, through the cooperation and interest of Larry Lowenthal, its director.

Finally, this book represents an attempt to focus on the very recent history of Springfield, utilizing the perspective provided by the various mayors of the city. Michael F. Konig, assistant professor of history at Westfield State College, and a member of the staff of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies, interviewed the five ex-mayors who were still alive in 1986 as well as the present mayor, and he prepared the following essays intending to describe the major political, economic, and social issues facing the city during the post-World War II period, from the perspective of the mayors and where appropriate, in the words of those mayors.

The staff of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies would like to express their appreciation to the foundations and corporations whose financial support over the years has enabled the Institute to not only remain in existence, but to increase its importance in preserving the historical heritage of the state and the region. Publication of this book was made possible through the generosity of the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, and especially through the community-spirited interest of Eva Dion, Community Affairs Director of Mass. Mutual. Since the first mayor of Springfield was none other than Caleb Rice, president of Mass. Mutual, it is certainly appropriate for Mass. Mutual to sponsor a study of the recent mayors of the city. In addition to Mass. Mutual, the staff of the Institute wants to express its appreciation to the Frank Stanley Beveridge Foundation for its continuing and most appreciated financial support.

Martin Kaufman, Ph.D.
Director
Institute for Mass. Studies
Westfield State College
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A study of mayoral leadership in a large urban area can truly be a "community effort." This is the proper description for this book on postwar Springfield and its mayors. The involvement of a substantial number of people from the Springfield area was absolutely essential for the completion of the work. Those to whom I am particularly indebted, I will acknowledge here.

Professor Martin Kaufman, Director of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies, provided essential editorial support and important assistance with matters concerning the final publication of this work. Joe Carvalho, Director of Genealogy and Local History at the Springfield City Library, was instrumental in helping to formulate the original conception of the project. The staff of the Institute for Massachusetts Studies, Lee Mangiaratti, Kristan Lachance, and Cynthia Tarnauskas, typed the manuscript copy. James O'Connell, Director of the Springfield Community Development Department, contributed significant information. *The Springfield Newspapers*, through the efforts of Donald White, provided several of the mayoral photographs, and Guy McLain and the staff of the Springfield City Library Genealogy and Local History Department provided the remaining illustrations.

Richard Allen, Assistant to the Mayor of Springfield, and the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs provided essential direction and support, and were responsible for the coordination of the mayoral presentations which will accompany this book's publication. I am also indebted to Mayor Richard Neal, whose enthusiasm and excellent working relationship with Springfield's past mayors, created an environment in which a study such as this would be appreciated.

The sponsor of the project, the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, again displayed its involvement and support for the Springfield community by making available its time, staff, and financial resources. This project is a testament to that company's whole-heartedly support and the efforts of its Community Affairs Director, Eva Dion.

Finally I must thank the mayors themselves. All were enthusiastic about the project, and therefore they were able to find time for the necessary personal interviews. In addition, they all provided helpful editorial comments regarding the manuscript. Their commitment to the betterment of Springfield has been and still remains evident.
INTRODUCTION

The year 1986 marks Springfield’s 350th anniversary. As such, the date offers an excellent opportunity for reflection on the past as well as for formulating programs for the future. The city’s recent history reveals what have been some of its greatest resources, among them are the industriousness of its people and the abilities of its leaders. These leaders, most conspicuously the mayors of Springfield, saw their abilities tested to the limit in a post-World War II urban environment that was changing at a remarkable pace. Responding to these changes, the mayors often acted decisively and positively and their efforts reflected the general desires of the city’s populace.

World War II profoundly affected urban America, as industrialized cities rebounded from the economic paralysis of the Great Depression. A major demographic shift occurred as defense industries, people, and dollars flowed from the urban northeast to the sunbelt and to the western areas of the nation. At the same time that industrial production increased, unemployment was almost completely eradicated. Yet the positive effects of the war must be balanced against some of the conflict’s negative social effects associated with an uprooted and almost transient wartime population.

Similar to many other industrialized cities, Springfield prospered during the war years. The Springfield Armory, located in the city since the Revolutionary War years, expanded its operations. At this facility, increased numbers of workers ran three continuous shifts producing war armaments. Lucrative defense contracts also kept the operations of such local firms as Smith and Wesson, Van Norman, and Indian Motorcycle operating at record levels. By the cessation of hostilities, the population of Springfield had undergone a notable increase.

While ushering in an era of general economic prosperity, the postwar years presented the nation’s cities with difficulties. The federal government’s relationship with urban America, which had begun during the New Deal, strengthened and took on new forms, primarily in the area of increased funding from Washington. But the initiative for guiding the direction of urban growth and the responsibility for improving the quality of urban life during these years shifted from the federal government back to the municipal governments. Thus, the cities themselves, Springfield included, were faced with the task of formulating programs to deal with a new set of urban problems unique to the postwar era. These included an increased need for welfare programs, slum clearance involving urban redevelopment and urban renewal, combating an acute housing shortage, and regenerating declining downtown areas. While these programs were funded to a large degree by the federal government, their success in a specific urban context depended upon the abilities of the various cities’ leaders.

As noted urban historian Zane Miller has demonstrated, those leaders who generated the greatest level of energy during the postwar years were a “new breed” of mayors. Men such as Raymond Tucker of St. Louis, Frank Zeidler of Milwaukee, and DeLesseps Morrison of New Orleans guided their respective cities with distinction during the difficult 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Springfield’s postwar mayors were cut from this mold. Like some of the more noted mayors of America’s largest cities, they came from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. They generally held college degrees, worked long hours, and devoted a large share of their time to important meetings, attending gatherings of neighborhood groups, negotiating collective bargaining agreements, and making public appearances at a variety of events. At the same time, they possessed a high level of intelligence, a sense of realism, and a commitment to detail and getting things done. In the process, they played a major role in helping to shape the development of Springfield during the last forty years.

This study was prepared from personal interviews with the former mayors of the postwar era who still reside in the Springfield area. In that sense, the perception of Springfield presented in the following pages represents to some extent the recent past as witnessed by the mayors. Not every observer will agree with this perception. Disagreement may reflect political, ethnic, and racial rivalries which have been important factors in the recent history of the city. Yet it was clear from the outset that the mayors attempted
to be objective in their appraisals of their administrations and in their analyses of important events which occurred during their years in office.

The account begins with the administration of Thomas J. O'Connor and proceeds through that of Richard Neal. Mayor O'Connor took office in 1959 and thus a gap exists between the years 1945 through 1959. For the most part, these years encompassed the several administrations of Richard Brunton. Mayor Brunton has died, but his mayoralty provides a convenient point from which to begin any discussion of post-war Springfield. Elected first in 1946, Mayor Brunton’s popularity sprang from a strong Democratic “grass roots” constituency. He served before the 1962 implementation of the Plan A Charter Amendment which eliminated partisan mayoral and city council elections in Springfield. The Plan A Charter also changed the election process for city council members from a district to an at-large format. Mayor Brunton has been described as a “people’s mayor” because of his concern for the working people of Springfield. A strong union supporter and dedicated to the concept that the mayor should be easily accessible to the city’s residents, Mayor Brunton conceptualized and initiated a number of programs and policies which were continued or completed by later mayors. These included the city’s first experience with federally-funded urban redevelopment and urban renewal programs, preliminary efforts at downtown revitalization, and measures which would improve Springfield’s educational, cultural, and recreational facilities.

If there has been one theme that has become apparent in this study, it is that of a consistency and continuity in policy and program orientation among the postwar Springfield mayors. In many instances, the mayors built upon programs begun by their predecessors, and as a result they hesitate to claim credit for successful long-term municipal projects. This theme of consistency and continuity does not, however, reflect the fact that political rivalries existed between the mayors and that their powers were substantially increased by the Plan A Charter Amendment. For example, mayors such as Charles Ryan and William Sullivan could act with a great deal more power than could mayors such as Brunton and O’Connor who served before the implementation of the charter amendment. Moreover, post Plan A Charter mayors also wielded much more control over the department heads of Springfield’s municipal agencies.

These important differences aside, the mayors of postwar Springfield have generally acted out of a mutual respect for each other, and a determination to reflect the desires of the people on almost every occasion. In this manner, the postwar mayors combined their own abilities with the industriousness and general optimism of the populace to utilize the city’s available political, economic, social, and cultural resources for the betterment of the community.
CHAPTER I

THOMAS J. O'CONNOR

The administration of Thomas J. O'Connor (1959-1961) marked the beginning of significant changes in Springfield's governmental structure. O'Connor was a graduate of Amherst College and the Georgetown University Law School, and before being elected as mayor he served three terms in the state legislature (1952-1956). He was exceptionally popular, carrying every precinct in his first primary election, and winning by a two-to-one margin. During the O'Connor administration, the city still possessed "a rather awkward and cumbersome" governmental apparatus. This apparatus encouraged political factionalism as well as tensions between the mayor and the City Council. This problem stemmed from the fact that prior to the Plan A Charter Amendment, which was approved by Springfield's voters in 1959 and went into effect in 1962, many of the city's key administrators and department heads were appointed not by the mayors but by the city council. In a sense then, the mayor was not able to select his own "team" with which he could work efficiently to govern the city. At the same time, the structure of Springfield government allowed many of these administrators and department heads to act with no direct accountability to the city's voters. The prospect of replacing experienced city personnel simply because they were appointed by the city council did not appeal to Mayor O'Connor when he took office. Yet the city might have been run more effectively prior to the Plan A Charter Amendment if the Springfield mayors had had their own programs and their own "team" rather than trying to work with department heads only accountable to the City Council.

These problems were redressed immediately after Mayor O'Connor's administration. During 1963 and the mayoralty of Charles Ryan, the Plan A Charter went into effect. This charter significantly increased the power of the office of the mayor and changed Springfield's bicameral form of city government to a unicameral one.
While Mayor O'Connor's term in office was not affected by the actual charter alteration, the groundswell of public support for the amendment grew to citywide proportions during his second administration. Organizations such as the New Springfield Committee, which was comprised of community leaders and claimed to represent much of the Springfield population, spearheaded the push for the Plan A Charter. Rather significantly, Mayor O'Connor gave the New Springfield Committee his full support.

While structural changes within Springfield city government occurred after Mayor O'Connor’s term, his administration was responsible for some significant reorganizations of various departments. The most notable reorganization occurred in the Springfield Police Department. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mayor O'Connor appointed a special commission and launched a drive against certain types of recurring crime and vice, most notably bookmaking and other types of gambling. His original commission ran into problems, however, and its members resigned. The commissioners stepped down because of unsubstantiated reports that officers on the police department vice squad were themselves involved in bookmaking. Mayor O'Connor appointed new commissioners and reassigned some of the officers to other divisions. The result was that the campaign against this small-time vice continued and notably reduced its existence in the city. In addition, the O'Connor administration developed a program whereby city employees were hired on the basis of their qualifications, and promoted on merit rather than on the basis of political patronage.

Perhaps the most difficult problems Mayor O'Connor's administration faced were related to the condition of Springfield's city finances. Prior to 1961, the city suffered from the fact that older homes and commercial properties were assessed at a much lower valuation than that for newer ones. The city assessors desperately needed to revalue these properties in order to assure that all property owners pay their fair share of the municipal tax burden. The need for revaluation caused a great deal of controversy in Springfield, as elsewhere in the state. At the same time, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court complicated the process by allowing many property owners to file for tax abatements. The fiscal problem completely disrupted city finances and the ability to effectively run the city. Property taxes soared and many residents sought to leave Springfield if they could find buyers for their properties. The problem of revaluation spanned the time-frame of both Mayor O'Connor's and Mayor Charles Ryan's administration. This issue was not resolved until after Mayor Ryan took office, and similar problems surfaced again during the administration of Theodore DiMairo. (See the chapter on Charles Ryan for more details about the revaluation controversy.)

An additional economic challenge the city faced during Mayor O'Connor's years in office was the movement of people and business from the downtown section of Springfield to outlying suburban areas. Much of this movement resulted in the loss of valuable tax revenue which had formerly been provided by the city's more affluent residents and businesses. At the same time, a suburban movement occurred within the incorporated limits of Springfield. Fringe areas such as East Forest Park began to draw residents and businesses from the central areas of the city. The result was a drain on the economic vitality of downtown Springfield. The situation had begun to reach a critical stage by the time Mayor O'Connor took office. Early in his administration, Mayor O'Connor could travel down Main Street and Tenth, Ferry, and Dwight Streets and see a number of empty stores as well as several homes which he described as "not fit for human habitation." He worried that the overall economic health of the city could not remain vibrant and strong if its core was dilapidated.

Mayor O'Connor felt that the best method for revitalizing the downtown area was to initiate a program of urban redevelopment and urban renewal, and he did so. By the late 1950s these programs, funded and administered in large part by the federal government, were some of the most widely-used responses by the nation's cities in dealing with their rundown or blighted areas. Urban redevelopment involved the demolition of buildings in blighted areas and the construction of new and better homes and business facilities. Urban renewal involved the restoration and renovation of dilapidated but still usable homes and business and commercial facilities. During Mayor O'Connor's administration, urban renewal played the more important role in Springfield downtown redevelopment.

Since the federal government financed and administered the great majority of urban renewal programs during the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was important for the O'Connor administration to develop
The economic program for downtown revitalization spread to other parts of Springfield. Mayor O'Connor, responding to the threat of several large companies leaving the city and the fact that Springfield Gas and Light Company was in desperate need of a new and larger location for its headquarters, sought to develop an industrial park within the city limits. Determining exactly where this industrial park would be located was a critical concern. Mayor O'Connor, aided by input from the private sector, decided that the ideal location was on the old Memorial Golf Course. Because the loss of this golf course would displace the recreational activities of many of the Springfield area's veterans, many of whom could not afford the cost of membership in a country club, Mayor O'Connor and other city and business officials agreed that a new Veterans Golf Course be constructed prior to the conversion of the Memorial Golf Course site into the industrial park. In actuality, the Veterans Golf Course and the new industrial park were constructed simultaneously. The Veteran's Golf Course became one of the city's most beautiful attractions, and the industrial park has proved to be a great economic success.

During the O'Connor administration, Springfield's urban renewal programs also spread to various neighborhoods within the city. The neighborhood which received the most attention was the North End, one of the oldest and most dilapidated in the city. In trying to establish the groundwork for urban renewal in this neighborhood, Mayor O'Connor met with residents at school PTA and various neighborhood meetings, and even went to private North End homes to assure residents that urban renewal would be in their best interests. Mayor O'Connor assured North End residents that the city was not going to leave them homeless, and that new housing would be available before they would be asked to leave their original residences. Mayor O'Connor also promised North End residents that their new housing facilities would be clean, have pest control, and be a pleasant atmosphere in which to raise children. In addition, Mayor O'Connor assured these residents that their moving costs would be covered by the city.

Urban redevelopment and urban renewal have often been criticized as being oriented only toward minorities. In the case of North End urban redevelopment, this was not the case. During the O'Connor administration, the North End had a significant white population which was clustered in the vicinity of local ethnic parishes such as the French enclave around St. Thomas Parish and the Irish enclave around Blessed Sacrament Parish.
It should be noted that many of the benefits of urban redevelopment and renewal for the residents of the North End proved short-lived. Problems appeared in later years within the new housing structures, which took the form of compact high-rise apartments. While federal funding paid for the construction of these facilities, it failed to provide many of the additional services which Mayor O'Connor had promised. Basic janitorial and social services could not be financed. Eventually the residents of these structures were dispersed to other areas of the city. The shortcomings of the urban redevelopment and renewal program cannot be solely attributed to Mayor O'Connor or the other mayors who followed him in office. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, urban redevelopment and renewal programs were unsophisticated and often social concerns were not as pronounced as development concerns. At the same time, the federal bureaucracy which funded and administered the programs was often slow, inefficient, and wasteful of available funding. Thus Springfield faced problems in the area of urban redevelopment and renewal which were common to other American cities of the time period. And the resulting physical environment among these cities was strikingly similar.

Yet it should be noted that urban redevelopment and renewal efforts reflected on the part of the O'Connor administration a genuine social as well as economic concern for Springfield. This concern took other forms. One of these was a program by which the city upgraded its facilities for the care of the mentally ill and the indigent at the Springfield Municipal Hospital. This was accomplished and a permanent staff of doctors was selected to administer this facility. In addition, Mayor O'Connor attempted to establish a permanent, fully-staffed psychiatric ward on the top floor of the same hospital and actively recruited potential staff members. But the process was very difficult and ultimately, because a qualified full-time psychiatrist could not be recruited to head the facility, the psychiatric ward never opened. Yet Mayor O'Connor justified his efforts in this direction by stating: “I think one way you can judge any society is how they care for . . . those who are least able to fend for themselves.”

When Mayor O'Connor assumed his office, he encountered one very critical problem, a shortage of safe and well-paved roads in some of the suburban areas of the city. Following World War II, areas within the city such as East Forest Park developed quickly as predominantly young married couples purchased homes in newly-constructed subdivisions. Oftentimes the builder would sub-divide land for the homesites and construct the houses, but failed to provide any access within the development except for a dirt road. Mayor O'Connor acted to change this situation. With the help of the Springfield Planning Department and the City Council, new rules and regulations were enacted which required builders to provide not only paved roads within subdivisions, but also curbstones, storm drains, and sewer hookups.

Yet these actions only applied to new subdivision construction. Upon assuming office, Springfield’s fringe areas had miles of unpaved roads which were almost impassable for ambulances and fire engines. This problem was illustrated by the fact that on one occasion, Mayor O'Connor drove out to investigate some of the poorly-paved suburban Springfield roads and became hopelessly stuck in a pothole! In response to this situation, Mayor O'Connor inaugurated yearly road construction programs which paved most of the city’s dirt roads and also provided for curbs and sewer service. Mayor O'Connor also demonstrated a sensitivity to Springfield’s young people when he developed a large-scale sports program for the city. He described this program as being conducive to “good fun and good health,” and it was free to its participants. Football, baseball, basketball, tennis, archery, and rollerskating were all made available and these programs continued after Mayor O'Connor left office.

Mayor O'Connor's administration also encompassed some of Springfield's most determined efforts to renovate Court Square. He sought to establish a “belt” of land running from the Connecticut River up to the Quadrangle that would include First Church, Court Square, and other public facilities. That physical configuration actually exists today. Mayor O'Connor developed this plan himself, but a Springfield Daily News city hall reporter found a similar idea for Court Square construction in an 1801 plan book for Springfield.

In regards to Springfield’s celebration of its 350th anniversary, Mayor O'Connor remarked that he would like to see Springfield win the “All American City Award” for its past and present achievements. Springfield narrowly missed winning this coveted status during 1986, but did receive “Honorable Mention.” The same situation occurred during Mayor O'Connor’s administration, when Springfield was awarded “Honorable Mention” status. At the time, the policy of combining public and private sector support for downtown
and neighborhood economic and social revitalization, a major tenet of the O'Connor administration, helped to convince the All American City jury that Springfield was worthy of recognition. He suggested that Springfield residents of today continue that cooperative partnership, and he is confident that this would eventually earn for the community the "All American City" status it deserves.

Mayor O'Connor thoroughly enjoyed serving the people of Springfield as their mayor. He stated: "I was never discouraged. There were always a lot of things to do and more things that I wanted to do." During Mayor O'Connor's administration, Springfield residents possessed the same type of enthusiasm. He also witnessed the same level of enthusiasm in the mayors which followed his administration, and he also praised the present mayor (Richard Neal) for his energy and motivation. According to Mayor O'Connor, the optimism and energy that the mayors and the residents of Springfield have exhibited is the city's best guarantee of future success.

CHAPTER II
CHARLES RYAN

Charles Ryan, who served as mayor from 1962 to 1967, was born in Springfield and attended Classical High School. He received his undergraduate training at Georgetown University and received his law degree from Boston College. Prior to assuming his duties as mayor, he worked as an attorney in Springfield. Today Charles Ryan is a principal in the Springfield law firm of Ryan and White.

As indicated earlier, in 1959, Springfield's voters endorsed the Plan A Charter Amendment in a special referendum. Mayor Charles Ryan's administration marked the first mayoral term under the new charter. Specifically, the Plan A Charter increased the powers of the chief executive, specifically the mayor, and it significantly reduced the powers of the City Council.

At the same time, Mayor Ryan's election was the first non-partisan one in the recent history of the city. Prior to his election, a Democratic candidate ran against a Republican candidate in mayoral primary and run-off elections. Following the passage of the Plan A Charter, primary and run-off elections have occurred without party designation. During the primary election, Mayor Thomas O'Connor ran first, while Ryan, who like O'Connor was a Democrat, was second. In the November 1961 run-off election, Ryan defeated O'Connor.

Prior to his election, Mayor Ryan worked actively for the municipal administrative reforms encompassed by the Plan A Charter. The charter amendment effort was, as he declared, "a spontaneous movement with good representation and significant activity from virtually every segment of the community." Mayor Ryan and other community leaders formed the New Springfield Committee, a political organization created to amend the city charter.
Mayor Ryan, as did other members of the New Springfield Committee, believed that Springfield's old charter vested in the City Council an overabundance of powers. This, in conjunction with the fact that a majority of the City Council members were elected by wards, resulted in a situation where "substantial executive authority was being exercised . . . by people . . . who were beyond the reach of most voters." City Council members, who under the previous charter were not responsible to all of the Springfield voters, indirectly selected various municipal department heads and thus controlled a good deal of the executive operation of Springfield municipal administration. At the same time, certain administrative appointments which were made by the mayor required City Council confirmation.

The New Springfield Committee obtained the required number of signatures to place the Plan A Charter referendum on the ballot, and then created an organization of hundreds of Springfield residents to actively campaign for the amendment. This campaign involved debates and community rallies. In November of 1959, by a more than two-to-one majority, Springfield voters approved the Plan A Charter amendment which took effect with the installation of Mayor Ryan in January of 1962.

The City Council was transformed from a bicameral to a unicameral one, as a result of the changes effected by the Plan A Charter. Under the bicameral system, twenty-eight individuals were elected to the City Council. Of that twenty-eight, seventeen were chosen by ward. Following the charter revision, the City Council was reduced to nine members elected at-large. Following the charter revision, the mayor's office also gained sweeping powers with respect to the appointment of municipal department heads and virtually all board and commission members. The mayor could now make these appointments without having to obtain the concurrence of the City Council.

Eliminating the role of the ward bosses, these changes allowed for the appointment of better qualified individuals to various administrative positions. More importantly, the changes effected by the charter revision served to properly designate responsibility in Springfield municipal government affairs. According to Mayor Ryan, the charter revision provided the office of the mayor "the authority and the tools with which to do the job." If the mayor failed, it was immediately apparent to all; the mayor could not shift responsibility
for decisions to the City Council or to any of the aldermen. This increased mayoral authority reflected the faith Springfield voters placed in the individual whom they elected to that office.

The mayor also became a voting member of the School Committee. The Plan A Charter amendment altered that committee’s structure to include six members elected at-large, in addition to the mayor, who served as the chairman of the School Committee and as the seventh member.

The greatest economic challenge which faced Springfield during Mayor Ryan’s tenure in office was the revaluation issue. This issue was reaching its climax just as Mayor Ryan was being sworn into office. At that time most Massachusetts communities were not assessing their property for tax purposes at “full and fair cash value.”

In the case of Bettigole against the Assessors of Springfield, 1961, the Massachusetts Supreme Court injected controversy into the city’s attempt to revalue property holdings. In 1960, the city assessors began to implement a revaluation program which brought about significantly higher property taxes for virtually every owner of single-family homes and for most two-family homes in Springfield. But in the Bettigole Case, the Supreme Court ruled that the method used in the revaluation was illegal because it provided for higher tax ratios for business and industry and a lower rate for homeowners. The Supreme Court ruled that all of the tax bills for 1961 were invalid, and that new tax bills would have to be mailed. This gave Springfield residents an opportunity to file for abatements. Three weeks into Mayor Ryan’s term of office, nineteen thousand applications for abatement had been filed.

Mayor Ryan commented that “psychologically the city was in shambles,” as property taxes for homeowners as much as tripled between 1959 and 1961. Stated Mayor Ryan: “People would have left the city if they could have found a buyer. It was a very, very grim situation.” Accordingly, one of Mayor Ryan’s greatest economic-related tasks during his administration was the establishment of a stable and fair city tax structure.

Springfield faced an additional economic challenge in attempting to replace industry which had left the city during the 1950s. Building upon a program initiated by Mayor O’Connor, Ryan worked to complete the conversion of the Memorial Golf Course into an industrial park. Mayor Ryan’s administration was specifically responsible for providing the infra-structure for the park and also for marketing the newly-available industrial land.

Downtown revitalization also posed a serious economic challenge for the city. During Mayor Ryan’s administration, initial financial and construction agreements were reached in regards to the building of the Civic Center and Baystate West. The private sector of Springfield, led by Massachusetts Mutual, committed to the construction of Baystate West, and the public sector committed to the construction of the new Civic Center.

In November of 1964, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara notified Mayor Ryan’s office that the Springfield Armory was going to be closed. At that time, the Armory employed over two thousand people and its closure was “a severe economic blow to the community.” The city fought against the closure, not only from the standpoint of the local economic importance of the Armory, but also because this action appeared to be, in the words of Mayor Ryan, “a disastrous decision from the point of view of the United States.” Following the closing of the Armory, the city faced the challenge of finding a way to use the Armory buildings. During the administration of Mayor Ryan, a portion of the Armory site was redesignated for industrial use. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in response to the city’s initiative, then funded the establishment of Springfield Technical Community College, to be located on the Armory Square site.

One of the greatest of the city’s economic and social challenges during Mayor Ryan’s administration was the city’s efforts to establish the New North Urban Area. This area encompassed a portion of Springfield from the Boston and Albany railroad tracks to Memorial Square. One of the general criticisms of urban redevelopment and urban renewal is that much was torn down, but little is built. This necessitates the “forced removal” of residents and commercial establishments from blighted city areas undergoing renovation. Mayor Ryan agreed with Mayor O’Connor that care had to be taken in Springfield’s New North Urban Renewal Area to assure that adequate funding was secured for new residential building as well as for demolition. Yet problems still occurred.
In the case of Springfield, the Federal Public Housing Authority provided sufficient funds for the construction of new housing, but failed to include in its budget monies for janitorial and social services. At the Riverview Public Housing Project, which was located in Brightwood, many of Springfield's poorest families, who had previously been spread over nearly twenty square blocks of the city, were compressed into a small number of new high-rise apartments. These families suffered from a number of social problems, yet services designed to alleviate these problems were not provided. "After a very short time," commented Mayor Ryan, "it became obvious that this was not a good situation." In order to resolve some of the problems at Riverview, the housing units were intentionally depopulated by nearly sixty percent. This was accomplished late in Mayor Ryan's administration.

While implementing its urban redevelopment and renewal programs, Springfield also experienced difficulty in relocating commercial establishments in the New North Urban Renewal Area. Relocation payments and grants, which Mayor Ryan described as "fairly adequate amounts of money," were mainly paid to the area's small businessmen. Some of these recipients attempted to reopen their establishments in other parts of the city, but many simply ceased operation.

In viewing these factors, it is clear that Springfield paid a social cost for its urban redevelopment and renewal programs. It must be emphasized, however, that the same problems which plagued these programs in Springfield during the 1950s and 1960s existed in many other cities. Mayor Ryan placed Springfield's experience within a national urban context when he stated that "many mistakes were being made all around the country by well-meaning people and by intelligent people."

Factors beyond the control of Springfield's officials also limited the success of local redevelopment and renewal programs. During Mayor Ryan's administration, as well as those of Thomas O'Connor and Frank Freedman, the federal government bureaucracy established to administer these programs consumed much of the allotted federal funds. In addition, the federal government's planning process was painfully slow. Federal funding for local projects sometimes arrived as much as five or six years after redevelopment or renewal projects had been originally conceptualized. This interim period was particularly devastating to the neighborhoods which had been designated for renewal or redevelopment. Many residents and businesses began to vacate these neighborhoods. This "flight" resulted in the disintegration of already weakened neighborhoods before federal funds arrived and renovation began. Mayor Ryan declared that "it was just an enormous exercise in paper shuffling."

During the years of Mayor Ryan's administration, many American cities experienced racial disturbances and riots. In the summer of 1965, while the Watts section of Los Angeles and other major cities were literally burning from racial unrest, Springfield experienced its own racially-related problems. One July evening, a disturbance occurred at a local cafe. Police responded and arrested eight or nine individuals, all of whom were black. Some members of the city's black community complained that police brutality had been involved during these arrests. A "full-blown" crisis developed, with large numbers of people demonstrating on the steps of City Hall and demanding that the mayor fire the policemen involved. Mayor Ryan rejected this demand because the accused policemen were entitled to due process, and charges of police brutality had not been fully substantiated. Demonstrations at City Hall and even in the front of the mayor's home continued for a number of weeks. These demonstrations culminated in a march of Springfield residents who were opposed to Mayor Ryan's decisions; the route began in Winchester Square and ended with a rally in Court Square.

In order to relieve this tense situation, Mayor Ryan and a contingent of Springfield residents who were dissatisfied with his unwillingness to fire the policemen met in Boston with Governor John Volpe, Attorney-General Ed Brooke, and Lieutenant-Governor Elliot Richardson. This failed, however, after Governor Volpe unsuccessfully attempted to mediate the dispute. A march was scheduled after the failure of the mediation attempt. According to Mayor Ryan, a good deal of "provocative language" ensued. This could be attributed to both black and white extremists who had "fantasies . . . of attacking each other" during the march.

Mayor Ryan was determined to preserve for Springfield residents their constitutional right to protest and to march. He appeared on all three major Springfield television stations to reaffirm these rights and to issue a plea for calm. He also informed his viewers that he had asked the Governor to send in the National Guard and that he had
asked area liquor stores to close down. While Mayor Ryan had no power to enforce this last request, liquor store owners within a twenty-five mile radius shut down their operations on the day of the march. Mayor Ryan’s actions and the restraint demonstrated by Springfield residents insured that the march occurred without incident. The march signaled a lessening of racial tensions, which had been escalating for nearly sixty days.

There was a continuity of policies among the various post-war Springfield mayors and an appreciation and respect that each mayor demonstrated for the others. None of these mayors could claim to have accomplished long-ranging and positive changes for the city on their own. Each built upon the policies and programs of the others. Said Mayor Ryan, “I think that the common denominator . . . is that each one of them has an intense love for the City of Springfield. It’s not a sham; it’s not make-believe; it’s really the reason they ended up in the job in the first place.” Mayor Ryan further remarked, “. . . we were always mindful of the stewardship of our job and the short-term nature of the job.”

Mayor Ryan offered some advice to Springfield residents on the occasion of the city’s 350th anniversary. He urged the people of Springfield to “appreciate that they are living in a very fine community, and a community which in many ways is a unique community.” He also commented that this community is fragile. There is no guarantee of success or even a continuation of post-war policies or programs which have been beneficial to the city. “The results of the next ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years are going to be only as good as the energy of the people,” he warned. While admitting that the mayor should play a prominent role in preserving the vitality of the city, Mayor Ryan stressed that the people of Springfield, in a variety of community activities, were the key ingredient for success. He concluded, “. . . if the people as a whole understand that and recognize their responsibility and undertake to live to it, then we’ll have a great city.”

CHAPTER III

FRANK H. FREEDMAN

The administration of Frank H. Freedman encompassed the years from 1968 to 1972. Mayor Freedman, who received his law degree from Boston University, was reelected twice and he resigned during his third term when he was nominated for a position as a United States District Court Judge. Following Mayor Freedman’s resignation, a special election was held in which William Sullivan was chosen as mayor. Before assuming the mayoral office, Freedman served as a member of the City Council from 1960-1967, and he was the president of the first City Council elected after the 1962 adoption of the Plan A Charter Amendment. As noted earlier, this amendment substantially increased the powers of Mayor Charles Ryan, and it also provided Mayor Freedman with more authority during his tenure in office.

During Mayor Freedman’s administration and those which followed, proposals were put forth which sought to change the at-large format for City Council elections established by the Plan A Charter, with a return to a district election format. These proposals occurred during the Freedman mayoralty because a minority of Springfield residents claimed that under the Plan A Charter, certain districts and neighborhoods were not sufficiently represented in city government. Yet these proposals always fell short because Springfield government, under the Plan A Charter, proved effective in meeting the demands of the rapidly-changing city. Plan A Charter government performed well in representing the majority of Springfield’s residents in important governmental matters and in encouraging increased competition among qualified citizens for City Council positions. Thus because Springfield municipal government was generally perceived as acting in the best interests of most of the city’s residents, no significant alterations of this governmental format, or any major reorganizations of the city’s departmental structure, occurred during the Freedman administration.
The greatest economic challenge which faced Springfield during these years involved financial issues related to the operation of municipal government. Particularly important in this respect was the protection of the citizens from “unnecessary or unusually heavy” taxation, while insuring that sufficient funding existed to meet the municipal employee payroll. This situation was complicated during Mayor Freedman’s administration by the fact that federal funds in the form of revenue-sharing grants were not yet in existence. The only funding from an outside source which was available to the city for meeting routine expenses was provided by the state in the form of the “Cherry Sheet” program. The city itself raised the greatest portion of its funding for daily operating expenses from municipal real estate taxes. Oftentimes, these taxes and other sources of income were not enough. As a result, Mayor Freedman had to perform a delicate balancing act in which he served as negotiator between the city and its municipal employees at collective bargaining sessions.

Mayor Freedman was determined that the five thousand municipal employees be properly paid, but he also recognized the need for compromise. His administration reorganized the municipal tax structure of Springfield so as to render it less burdensome. This reorganization, in turn, helped to encourage city residents to remain within the incorporated limits of Springfield, instead of escaping to outlying suburban areas in search of lower tax rates. At the same time, municipal employees were convinced to remain in their positions, working for the city while recognizing that they could not get the “last dollar” they were attempting to obtain through the collective bargaining negotiations.

Additional outside funding from the federal government eventually became available to Springfield, in the form of such programs as Model Cities, urban renewal, and urban redevelopment. These programs were some of the urban-oriented cornerstones of the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson “New Frontier” and “Great Society” agendas. These programs continued during the presidential administration of Richard Nixon, the administration which corresponded time-wise with Mayor Freedman’s tenure in office. During the years encompassed by the Freedman administration, the relationship between the federal government and the nation’s cities experienced a profound evolution. Cities became increasingly dependent upon federal funding for the support of redevelopment, renewal, and social welfare programs. While this relationship had been initiated during
In the years of the Great Depression and the New Deal, it had developed to such a level by the middle and late 1960s that these programs had come to vitally affect many aspects of the nation's daily urban life. In addition, urban renewal, urban redevelopment, and federally-funded social welfare programs were regarded by many as some of the most noteworthy examples of the emerging American welfare state.

Funding for urban redevelopment and renewal programs, as well as social welfare agencies, were usually delivered in the form of federal monetary grants and later in revenue-sharing monies. Mayor Freedman traveled to Washington, D.C. to "lobby and fight" for this funding. Here, Mayor Freedman met directly with Floyd Hyde, department head of Housing and Urban Development. These meetings were beneficial and did secure additional monies for Springfield, but more extensive federal grants and revenue-sharing monies were not available to Springfield until after he had left office.

The most significant federal funding source available to Springfield during Mayor Freedman's years in office came in the form of the Model Cities program. In some cases, while increasing the city's total revenues, Model Cities created difficult situations. During Mayor Freedman's administration, Model Cities funding was designated to improve the economic and social condition of the residents of Springfield neighborhoods such as Winchester Square. The program placed an emphasis on neighborhood conservation and local initiative. It provided Winchester Square and other designated neighborhood's residents with skills and certain benefits in the form of credit and experience derived from involvement in local revitalization and social welfare efforts.

Yet Model Cities was woefully underfinanced by the federal government and caused a number of serious problems. In Springfield, Model Cities engendered racial animosities, as whites complained that blacks were receiving special treatment and the "lion's share" of federal welfare monies. Mayor Freedman was placed in the difficult position of trying to please both racial groups and still deal with a federal bureaucracy that was painfully slow and uncertain as to its purpose. Still, Model Cities did record some successes in Springfield during these years. While the physical condition of Winchester Square did not improve (the physical regeneration of neighborhoods was not the goal of the Model Cities program), the skills provided many of the area's residents allowed them to improve their economic status and to eventually move to more affluent sections of the city. Of course, assessing the extent of this success is difficult. But that it occurred in Springfield on an appreciable scale must be assumed because after their participation in Model Cities social regeneration programs, a number of community leaders emerged to play important roles in the future.

Other federally-funded urban welfare programs of a smaller scale were also made available to Springfield residents during these years. Programs such as VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) provided employment skills and on-the-job training for Springfield's young people, and HEADSTART provided early childhood education intended to help inner-city youngsters begin school on an equal basis with the children of more affluent suburban families. These were often managed by a federally-appointed Model Cities program director. Unlike other urban areas, the presence of this federal official did not precipitate a rivalry with Springfield's government officials and, for the most part, these programs were implemented in an efficient and orderly manner.

During the Freedman administration, federally-funded urban renewal and urban redevelopment programs played a significant role in revitalizing Springfield's urban landscape. Mayor Freedman again traveled to Washington, D.C. where he petitioned the Department of Housing and Urban Development in order to assure that Springfield received its fair share of this type of assistance. Urban redevelopment and renewal took many forms within the city. Residential and commercial rehabilitation, as well as family-oriented assistance programs, were implemented. Funds were allocated for new senior citizen housing which was in particularly high demand. The most noteworthy of the commercial construction projects assisted by urban renewal and redevelopment funds was the erection of the Eastfield Mall shopping area. Urban renewal proved beneficial in helping to transform some of the blighted North End area into a more livable environment. Downtown redevelopment was also given a substantial boost by these federal programs.

Downtown revitalization was a major concern of the Freedman administration, as it had been with the other post-war Springfield mayors. Plans for the renovation and construction of the Baystate West Tower originated during these years. At the same time, the city
put forth a proposal and completed construction of the Civic Center and the adjacent parking garage. Mayor Freedman, under the auspices of the state-funded program Chapter 121A, negotiated and concluded a tax plan with Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company in regards to that company’s efforts to revitalize and enlarge the Baystate West Tower. This plan insured that Springfield residents would receive the proper tax values for the next forty years from Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company and from businesses located within the Baystate West Building, as the values of those businesses increased.

Mayor Freedman’s administration encompassed the years of the mid-to-late 1960s, years when many of the nation’s cities were engulfed in racial turmoil. In the summer of 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, the renowned civil rights activist and leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. Responding to this murder and frustrated because previous civil rights legislation had not significantly raised their economic and social standing in American society, black urban dwellers expressed their anger and frustration in riots. Actually, by 1968 black rioters were continuing a pattern of urban violence which had first exploded during the summer of 1965 in cities such as Los Angeles, Detroit, and Newark.

Riots broke out in various parts of Springfield during these years, and significant violence disrupted many of the city’s schools. Burnings occurred, oftentimes as the result of arson. People were injured, and as Mayor Freedman stated “blood flowed.” But it should be noted that this turmoil did not occur in Springfield on the same scale or with the same intensity as that which took place in many of the nation’s troubled urban areas. Still the racial disturbances occurred over a number of years, and encompassed the administrations of Mayors Ryan, Freedman, and Sullivan.

The racial disturbances in Springfield did not involve any minority leaders of national reputation. In that sense then, those racially-related incidents which occurred in the city were not given nationwide attention. In fact, one of the major problems that Mayor Freedman faced in quelling these disturbances was that no recognizable minority leaders or legitimate representatives emerged with whom he could deal or negotiate.

Yet Mayor Freedman still attempted to stave off racial unrest by addressing various neighborhood groups in different parts of the city. On one occasion, he and the white superintendent of the city schools addressed five thousand dissatisfied blacks in Winchester Square. On another occasion, he spoke to enraged white citizens in the southern section of the city. These citizens complained again that blacks were receiving the majority of social welfare funds, and that blacks were responsible for school violence. Finally, he enlisted the assistance of fifty local ministers, priests, and rabbis to reduce the racial unrest. Mayor Freedman remarked that in this final effort he attempted to determine if religion would help and “if it could be brought into the streets to keep the peace.” This final effort proved very helpful in defusing the passions which had been heated by racial animosities and by the poor living conditions to which many of Springfield’s blacks were subjected. These measures, combined with the general passage of time and the ending of the demonstrations of racial upheaval on a national scale, led to the lessening of racial disturbances in Springfield.

During the administration of Mayor Freedman, concerted efforts were made and significant successes attained by the city in supporting and upgrading Springfield’s cultural amenities. According to Mayor Freedman, even during his administration the Springfield Quadrangle comprised some of the finest cultural institutions and exhibits available in any city of comparable size. Yet these institutions, such as the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, the Museum of Science, the George Walter Vincent Smith Museum, and the Springfield City Library, endured a number of years of inadequate support in the form of funding. The City of Springfield provided monetary support to the Quadrangle from its general budget, but often this was not sufficient to support the costs of the cultural programs.

In response to this monetary shortage, Mayor Freedman developed a fund-raising program for the Quadrangle, appointing a director to augment city budgetary support. Actually this program was designed to decrease the cultural institutions’ dependence on city funding. The fund-raising program was very successful and yet the city continued its monetary support with no decrease. This support reflected the pride which Springfield residents possessed for the city’s cultural offerings, and for the quality of life such offerings provided. In addition, Springfield’s residents supported facilities for
cultural programs such as the Municipal Auditorium and also patronized the emerging Springfield Symphony Orchestra, one of the finest for its size in the nation.

In regards to Springfield’s celebration of its 350th anniversary, Mayor Freedman commented that Springfield has “had a great history,” and that there was no reason why its successes should not continue. He predicted that the city would continue to flourish and would move forward. Mayor Freedman marched with pride in the 350th anniversary parade. Mayor Freedman stated: “Springfield has had some great days and attained some fine achievements, and great days are still to come.” He concluded, “I hope to march in the next parade marking the 375th Springfield anniversary.”

CHAPTER IV
WILLIAM SULLIVAN

William Sullivan, who followed Frank Freedman in office, had previously served for six years in the state legislature, as well as holding the position of city clerk from 1959 to 1973. While no significant changes occurred within the framework of Springfield city government during Mayor Sullivan’s administration (1973-1977), the city did begin to play an increasingly important role within the structure of state governmental affairs. Mayor Sullivan represented the city in the Massachusetts Municipal Association, an organization of Massachusetts cities and towns which lobbied in support of urban interests at the state governmental level. While he served in office, this organization was only in “its infancy.” Today, the Massachusetts Municipal Association has grown with increased representation from each member city and town to become a vital force within the state. These representatives include mayors, selectmen, and councilmen who help keep the cities and towns apprised of state legislation which might have a significant impact on urban affairs. Mayor Sullivan described this organization as “very successful” in promoting efficient municipal government within Massachusetts.

While Mayor Sullivan’s administration did not witness internal governmental structural changes or reorganizations, it did represent a concerted effort toward social and economic improvement within the Springfield urban environment. By the time of Mayor Sullivan’s administration, the major welfare programs which provided direct relief to Springfield residents were funded and administered in large part by the state. Yet the mayor did have an unofficial voice in the activities of the programs as they pertained to the city. He described the relationship between the state and the city with regards to the provision of the welfare programs as “positive” and he was particularly supportive of the strict and efficient accountability of the state welfare programs.
Yet this did not mean that the Sullivan administration did not take the initiative to provide important social programs for Springfield’s residents beyond the range of state welfare capabilities. During Mayor Sullivan’s administration the city contracted with twenty private social service agencies for the provision of a variety of human services. This was crucial for the city as well as the agencies, as many of these agencies had previously been funded by the United Way and were beginning to run short of money due to the growing need. Through the use of Community Development Block Grants, the city was able to step in and continue these services. These contracts augmented state programs as well as other types of federal welfare assistance channeled to the various cities. Springfield’s elderly and handicapped particularly benefitted from these services. The city obtained vans used for the transportation of these individuals, as well as establishing a fifteen cent “Busing Plan and Ride System” and expanding “Golden Age Centers” for elderly recreation. In addition, the Sullivan administration oversaw the construction of the Williams Street and Hunter Place elderly housing projects and laid the groundwork for another housing facility for the elderly and handicapped. The implementation of the first phases of the Municipal Hospital restoration constituted a capstone to the social service efforts by the Sullivan administration. This hospital was oriented toward care for the elderly and handicapped, and today is the site of a highly-regarded rehabilitation program.

The cooperative relationship between the city of Springfield and the federal and state governments which spawned and financed many of these social programs required constant attention. Mayor Sullivan and his representatives traveled to Washington, D.C. and to Boston in order to adequately represent the interests of Springfield. In addition, the efforts of U.S. Congressman Boland insured that the city receive federal funding for physical rehabilitation and social welfare programs. Some of the most important social and economic betterment programs which required federal and state assistance were urban redevelopment and urban renewal, the Model Cities program, and the Comprehensive Employment Training Act.

Urban redevelopment and renewal were particularly vital. Building upon programs initiated by Mayors O’Connor, Ryan, and Freedman, and financed by Community Development Block Grants, Mayor Sullivan’s administration was able to essentially complete six urban renewal projects. The Sullivan administration also oversaw
four park improvement projects which included Pynchon Plaza, Riverfront Park, and the Armory Commons Park. These renewal and redevelopment efforts were also responsible for the renovation of older buildings for use as neighborhood centers in both Memorial Square and in the city’s South End. Other major projects which were in part financed by federal government renewal and redevelopment monies were the construction of the Baystate West Building and the Springfield Civic Center. Federal funds associated with urban renewal and redevelopment were absolutely essential in helping to continue the transformation of blighted or “sick” areas of the city, such as parts of downtown and some of the neighborhoods.

The Mayor also commented on what he felt was an inaccurate assessment of the goals and policies of the various Springfield post-World War II mayors with regards to downtown versus neighborhood revitalization. He felt that the postwar mayors were unfairly criticized for being more concerned with “Main Street” than with revitalizing the city’s blighted neighborhood areas. Echoing the statements of some of the other mayors, Mayor Sullivan stated that “[a]s goes Main Street, so goes the neighborhoods.” A vital and resurgent downtown then, would help to spawn neighborhood rehabilitation.

In fact, resurgence in some of Springfield’s neighborhoods was apparent during the Sullivan administration. Focus was placed mainly on the renovation of such neighborhoods as Winchester Square, and the city’s North End and South End areas. A Model Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation was reorganized in order to efficiently utilize the federal funds which in many instances financed the neighborhood redevelopment efforts. At the same time, the mayor’s office established contracts with various neighborhood councils, which encouraged citizen participation in these redevelopment efforts. The city would provide funding, office space, and staff for these councils. Eight of these neighborhood councils which were supported by the Sullivan administration are still in existence.

Yet the scope of redevelopment and renewal in Springfield was limited by the extent of available federal funding and by the sometimes inefficient federal bureaucracy empowered to administer these programs. Some areas of Springfield which desperately required renovation did not benefit from these programs because of these shortcomings. It should be noted that such problems plagued not just Springfield but many of the nation’s cities as they worked with the federal government to improve blighted conditions.

Despite these criticisms, federal government support went beyond the funding of urban redevelopment and renewal and could be, at times, well-conceived and positive. Such was the case with the federal government’s attempt to reduce unemployment in Springfield through the Comprehensive Employment Training Act. The CETA program hired unemployed or underemployed persons and trained them in the public sector for future employment in business or industry. In most instances those residents of Springfield most needful of such on-the-job training did receive CETA positions. Often, when CETA city employees had completed their training, they were allowed to remain in their positions if no employment opportunities were available in the private sector. Most CETA positions were entry-level and scattered through the various municipal departments. The CETA program allowed the city to fill or create positions for which it had had a longtime need. These positions included office assistants and positions within the Public Works and Parks Departments.

As with other urban-oriented federal government programs, CETA had its limitations and shortcomings. The federal government policy of creating all CETA positions as entry-level did not benefit those individuals who had lost their middle- or even top-level jobs because of downturns in the local economy. These individuals were often faced with the discouraging prospect of accepting an entry-level CETA position when their employment experience and capabilities qualified them for much more. The very nature of the CETA program led to a good deal of disappointment. Often, the private sector hesitated or was unable to hire CETA-trained workers. As stated earlier, these workers often remained in their public sector positions beyond their two-year training period. The city hired and retained more CETA employees than it could train and more than it could afford over a long period of time without federal assistance. Eventually, federal CETA funding was reduced and even phased out completely, and many Springfield residents lost their municipal jobs and joined the rising nationwide criticism of the CETA program.

Mayor Sullivan, like the other postwar Springfield mayors, regarded downtown revitalization as one of the key goals of his administration. His efforts in this area were often built upon programs initiated by the mayors who had preceded him. At the same time, Mayor Sullivan’s efforts “planted the seeds” for downtown revitalization which was to be more fully implemented during the administrations of Theodore Dimauro and Richard Neal. Public and
private cooperation was especially vital in this process. Private funding was important because, during the Sullivan administration, federal funds could not be applied to downtown commercial projects. In addition, Urban Development Action Grants, which became some of the chief vehicles for funding downtown revitalization during the administration of Mayor Dimarco, were not yet available to Springfield during the Sullivan years. As a result, the city worked closely with such private agencies as the Springfield Chamber of Commerce and especially that organization’s chief representative for downtown affairs, Paul J. Greeley. Late in Mayor Sullivan’s administration, Springfield Central was formed. This privately-funded and civic-oriented agency was often termed the “Now Gang” because of its fast-moving efforts for downtown revitalization. Led by such prominent community representatives as former Mayor Charles Ryan and supported by many of the large and small businesses of Springfield, the organization sponsored festivals, exhibits, and presentations to bring people back into the downtown area. As such, Springfield Central was an important factor in solidifying public and private efforts toward downtown economic and social redevelopment.

While a final and comprehensive Downtown Master Plan for central city revitalization was later prepared during Mayor Dimarco’s administration, much of that plan’s orientation and specific goals and policies were conceptualized during Mayor Sullivan’s tenure in office. This was especially true in the area of historic preservation. Springfield’s residents possessed and still possess a tremendous sense of appreciation for the historical resources of their city. The Springfield Planning Department, directed by such individuals as Steve Pitkin, Terry Tornek, and David Moriarty, called to the attention of Mayor Sullivan that the architectural structure of many of Springfield’s older downtown buildings was historically significant. The department advocated that these structures should be preserved, and the mayor concurred. The Downtown Master Plan reflected this commitment to historic preservation, and during the administration of Mayor Sullivan, building facade improvement grants for five historically-significant downtown structures were approved. In addition, the city secured historic preservation grants for twenty townhouse structures in the area of Mattoon Street.

Mayor Sullivan’s efforts toward downtown revitalization went beyond this to include a major renovation of the District Court Building, laying the groundwork for the construction of the new downtown federal building, as well as providing curb ramps for the handicapped along Main Street.

Yet not all of the city’s efforts in this area were successful. One of Mayor Sullivan’s and Springfield’s greatest disappointments was the failure of the so-called “Mondev” retail and office building downtown project. Mondev, a Canadian corporation, proposed to construct this project in downtown Springfield in conjunction with the Springfield Institution for Savings. Insufficient city funding, as well as the inability of Springfield to obtain a necessary federal grant, meant that this well-planned project was scrapped. Again, Urban Development Action Grants were not available to the city during these years. The Mondev Corporation required additional “up-front” money and S.I.S. could not provide the required amount. During these years the city incurred another jolt when Forbes and Wallace, a leading department store, ceased operations. A local holding company tried to keep Forbes and Wallace in business, but it failed.

In both of these cases, federal funds were not available, city coffers could not fill the resulting void, and important concerns for downtown vitality were lost. Mayor Sullivan blamed this situation on the city’s budgetary dependency on real estate taxes. Federal funds through revenue sharing sometimes helped to alleviate the financial shortages, but Mayor Sullivan’s administration, like that especially of Mayor Freedman, continually faced problems in meeting the city’s budgetary requirements.

In this respect then, the major progress in Springfield downtown revitalization attained during the Sullivan years was in the area of establishing priorities and, in a sense, “sowing the seeds” for central city renovation which occurred on a larger scale during the Dimarco and Neal administrations. These later administrations had the benefit of increased federal funding in the form of Urban Development Action Grants, which became available after 1979.

Yet despite this handicap, the Sullivan administration made significant strides beyond its downtown contributions, especially in the area of social and economic improvements. For example, during the Sullivan years the city created a Housing Abandonment Task Force. This task force made significant attempts to protect Springfield’s older stock of housing, especially apartments. Mayor Sullivan also appointed a consumer protection officer, established a dog control
unit within the police department, and recommended stiffer rules and regulations prior to the granting of alcoholic beverage licenses. His administration also supported an alcohol detoxification center at Municipal Hospital, which has been regarded as very successful.

The Sullivan administration also worked to preserve and enhance Springfield’s recreation facilities. These facilities have been continually regarded as tremendously important to the overall quality of life for Springfield’s residents. Mayor Sullivan commented that one of his greatest commitments in this area was his efforts to protect the city’s green open space and park locations. He stated that this commitment was vital “for a city to progress.” During the Sullivan years the city improved and provided lighting for the tennis courts at Forest Park and also built lights on the baseball diamond at Blunt Park.

Even more dramatic was the commitment of the Sullivan administration to the preservation and improvement of Springfield’s cultural amenities. During these years the city carried out significant improvements to the Springfield Library and Museum facilities at the Quadrangle. In addition, the city established the Springfield Armory Museum Incorporated to operate the museum before it became the Springfield Armory National Historical Site. Mayor Sullivan stated: “We [Springfield residents] were very fortunate. As far as cultural amenities were concerned we had to make sure we kept what we [had] and maintained what we [had].” Finally the Sullivan administration inaugurated “Campanile Days” and opened the Campanile as a tourist attraction.

Mayor Sullivan commented that during his administration the city changed the name of the Municipal Auditorium to Symphony Hall. He said: “I was sitting at a banquet with Reverend Frederick Field Driftmier, who was a very popular clergyman at Trinity Church. He was sitting next to me and said, ‘You know, we’ve got a great symphony and nobody recognizes it, I think the auditorium should be called Symphony Hall.’” Sullivan stated: “A few days or weeks afterward, I called in the planning department and asked them to put it together.” As a result, the name change was effected and Mayor Sullivan remarked, “Now, it sounds as though it was always called Symphony Hall.”

When describing his administration and comparing it to those of Springfield’s other postwar mayors, Sullivan commented that “every mayor has a crisis,” and that these crises were often detrimental to the progress of the city. One of his crises was the racial balance question with regards to the school busing program. During the 1970s the United States Supreme Court held that cities could be forced to bus minority children to schools in predominantly white areas in order to assure that these children receive the best education possible. Originally Mayor Sullivan, as did many mayors of other cities, opposed the attempt to attain racial balance by busing children out of their neighborhoods, for fear that such a situation might erupt in violence similar to that which had occurred in Boston. But abiding by the Supreme Court’s decision, Mayor Sullivan worked with prominent Springfield clergymen, businessmen, community leaders, and the entire school system to convince the city’s residents that it was necessary to implement the busing program. Combined with a desire by the majority of Springfield residents to avoid violence, this concerted effort insured that the program was implemented in a comparatively calm atmosphere. Sullivan stated: “We had some threats the first day of school,” but, “after that was over, we were ready to go back and work on the city.”

A second crisis situation developed when riots broke out within the Puerto Rican community in the city’s North End. During these riots a number of row houses were burned down. Mayor Sullivan commented that these riots occurred when two Puerto Rican Springfield residents were shot and killed by the police. The two were in the process of committing a crime at the time of the shooting and they were armed with hardware weapons. A short time later, riots reoccurred in the North End and even in front of the Springfield Police Station. Some officers were injured during another disturbance in front of the central fire station.

Mayor Sullivan said that he responded to these situations by asking the Federal Justice Department to intervene, but also by attempting to hold public meetings with the residents of the North End. At these meetings the Puerto Rican community expressed its desire to obtain more city jobs and to have members of their community appointed to important city commissions.

During these tense situations, Mayor Sullivan realized that in his official position he often had to stand alone and make difficult decisions for what he perceived would be the betterment of the community. “When it comes down to it,” he declared, “the mayor is alone
... you've got a school superintendent, you've got a police chief and other department heads...[but] they're not making the final decision." He concluded that the mayor could only make such decisions, however, by listening attentively to the advice of his various subordinates as well as that from the community as a whole.

In commenting about Springfield's 350th Anniversary Celebration, Mayor Sullivan maintained that the city's attitude should not focus on the past, but on the future, and that the celebration should be upbeat. He stressed that times have changed and that recent events and developments will alter the character of Springfield. He affirmed that downtown will continue to rebound, but its impact on the entire community will be much different than it was previously, when it constituted the only major retail and commercial service area in the city. Mayor Sullivan described the future for Springfield as "bright" and he predicted that new programs will be the key to realizing the city's full potential. These programs, he believed, should be a major aspect of the anniversary celebration.

CHAPTER V
THEODORE DIMAUR

Theodore Dimauro's mayoral administration encompassed the years from 1978 to 1984. Theodore Dimauro attended St. Michael's College and Boston College Law School, as well as New York University Graduate Law School. Prior to his tenure as mayor, Dimauro served on the Springfield School Committee and the Springfield City Council.

As with the administrations of Frank Freedman and William Sullivan, no significant changes in the structure of Springfield city government or reorganizations of municipal administration structures or procedures occurred during his tenure in office. Yet during the Dimauro years various interest groups—primarily certain minority groups working through their neighborhood councils and at least one of the Springfield newspapers—put forth proposals to alter the Springfield "at large" method of selection of the City Council to a "district" election format. These interest groups maintained that district elections would insure greater input at the neighborhood level in Springfield city government. But according to Mayor Dimauro, Springfield city government had a proven record of responsiveness to the neighborhoods. The district method of selection was opposed by most city officials and by the majority of the city's populace because this format would undo the administrative reforms established by the passage of the Plan A Charter Amendment (see chapters one and two for details on these reforms).

Yet during the administration of Mayor Dimauro, Springfield municipal government faced a major task in reordering its finances because of the passage of Proposition 2½. Massachusetts voters had approved this proposition which limited property taxes in the Commonwealth. It should be noted that Massachusetts voters were not alone in their desire to reduce the levels of taxation. Voters in cities
and states in many sections of the nation had enacted similar types of statutes. The effects of Proposition 2½ were to reduce revenues from property tax sources, and therefore make the effective operation of Springfield city government difficult and create fiscal shortages for important municipal service agencies. Specifically, Proposition 2½ limited the ability of the city to float bonds for various projects. After its passage, bonding could not be utilized as a method of circumventing the limitations imposed by Proposition 2½. Some worthwhile projects, most specifically street and infrastructure improvements, which were normally underwritten by bonding, had to be reduced in size and scope because monies previously allocated for debt payments were needed for general operating expenses.

In the face of the reduced funding caused by Proposition 2½, the city still managed to meet its employee payroll. No employee was laid off, but several hundred positions were eliminated through attrition. Positions which were vacated due to retirement, death, sickness, or voluntary termination were not filled and many were eliminated.

The resourcefulness of the Dimauro administration helped to ameliorate this difficult situation. For example, Mayor Dimauro initiated an improved cash management program with the assistance of a professional provided by Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. Through improved practices, Springfield increased the earnings of its cash flow by over two million dollars per year. This increased revenue saved many jobs and services. In addition, through more aggressive tax collection procedures, Mayor Dimauro improved tax collections from 93% to 98%. These collection procedures brought in an additional four million dollars. The city also pursued old tax delinquents more aggressively and either collected the old taxes or foreclosed on the involved properties and sold them for the needed monies. The Dimauro administration also used the “boot” to collect parking fines and this secured several hundred thousand more badly-needed dollars. The city also began to apply for the suspension of driver’s licenses to collect delinquent auto excise taxes. This was a particularly interesting program because a number of Springfield residents had never before paid these taxes. Under Mayor Dimauro’s direction, the city also implemented a program of single mailing (rather than separate) for water and sewer use bills. Because of this program, postage costs for the city were reduced by over twenty thousand dollars.
The city also reduced its expenditures by eliminating free ambulance service. This service was awarded to a private contractor who would collect reimbursements from health insurance companies. Private business also raised several hundred thousand dollars for more sophisticated communications between hospitals and emergency medical technicians at the scene of emergencies. Most likely, many lives were saved because of these practices. In addition, the State of Massachusetts responded significantly with increased monetary support to assist the daily operations of Springfield municipal government and this funding, together with the above-mentioned collection practices, allowed the city to sustain all of its municipal services. Special state monetary grants went beyond funding operating expenses and also assisted in the construction of such noteworthy structures as Stage West, the Basketball Hall of Fame, Civic Center and Symphony Hall improvements, Court Square improvements, thirty-three neighborhood parks (which required two million dollars in funding), and two industrial parks.

The federal government was an additional source of outside funding for the City of Springfield. Mayor Dimarco's close working relationship with Congressman Edward Boland was especially vital in securing these federal monetary resources. Since the administration of Mayor Thomas O'Connor, Congressman Boland had demonstrated an untiring concern and labored diligently to insure that Springfield received its fair share of available federal funding. Federal funds were instrumental in the support of a major Symphony Hall renovation, federal revenue-sharing funds were made available for use by police, fire, and other municipal departments, and federal assistance in the form of community development funds provided monetary assistance for park improvements, new sidewalk construction, tree planting and trimming, and the building of new parking lots.

Particularly beneficial were federal monetary subsidies provided in the form of Urban Development Action Grants. These federal grants were helpful in funding the construction of downtown commercial, industrial, and financial facilities such as the Bank of Boston building, the Springfield Institution for Savings building, and renovations for Center Square, the Market Place, and Morgan Square. They were also vital in the funding of certain North End industrial, commercial, and residential development and redevelopment projects.

Urban Development Action Grants, which served a similar func-

tion in many American cities, did not represent a new departure in city/federal relations. Since the era of the New Deal, the nation's cities, Springfield included, had become increasingly dependent upon federal funding for the operation of their local governments and their social welfare programs. Urban Development Action Grants, therefore, represented a logical extension of this relationship. Today these grants have been reduced and threatened with extinction by the federal government through the implementation of President Ronald Reagan's "New Federalism" program and the need to reduce the federal budgetary deficit. According to Mayor Dimarco, the UDAG funding was excellent for its time, but in some cities it was abused. The fate of the UDAGs has also been that of private tax-free revenue bonds and tax credits provided by the federal government for historic preservation. Both of these forms of funding were used during the Dimarco administration to assist developers.

During the years of Mayor Dimarco's administration, the city was so successful in meeting its financial challenges and efficiently utilizing federal and state funding that representatives from Springfield were invited to other cities having financial difficulties to describe their experiences and offer assistance.

Mayor Dimarco maintained a close relationship with the Springfield populace during his administration. One of his most important objectives was the securing of dynamic community participation in his administration's programs and decisions. This was especially true in the neighborhood revitalization projects which his administration sought to implement. These projects resulted in four thousand Springfield housing units being renovated, forty miles of sidewalks being constructed, thirty-three neighborhood parks being improved, and facade grant improvements to the neighborhood commercial centers.

Mayor Dimarco was appreciative of community input in regards to these programs, which directed millions of dollars to various neighborhood housing projects. The advice and suggestions of the residents of the communities affected by these projects, played a vital role in the ultimate project strategy. By participating in the planning process, the residents of the involved communities were better educated as to the realistic constraints and opportunities confronting city governmental leaders. Yet it should be noted that in some instances the desires of community residents conflicted with
revitalization objectives of city hall. In these cases, animosity developed and Mayor Dimauro believed that important city programs were hindered.

One of the controversial occurrences of Mayor Dimauro’s administration with regard to neighborhood revitalization was the continued decay of the residential areas of Springfield’s North and South Ends. An influx of Hispanics into the North End resulted in the French ethnic enclave moving out of this neighborhood. The North End then began to deteriorate and absentee landlords caused many apartment building demolitions. Caught in a critical housing shortage, Hispanics migrated to the South End. In response, the original Italian inhabitants of the South End migrated. These migrations occurred while ambitious residential renovation and rehabilitation programs were taking place and many families, because of these programs, were also forced to move. Some Hispanic families eventually returned to the North End. Others moved to the neighborhood of Hungry Hill and some, of course, remain in the South End. Today, the Hispanic community continues to grow at an even faster rate than during the administration of Mayor Dimauro. Mayor Dimauro attempted to address the surging population growth by creating hundreds of new units for housing the Hispanics. Many buildings in the North End were rehabilitated and saved for Hispanic families and single family homes were also constructed on vacant lots.

Mayor Dimauro’s “people-oriented” community participation programs also resulted in other long-run benefits to the city. Mayor Dimauro created the Mayor’s Office of Cultural and Community Affairs (MOCCA) as well as the city’s first grants manager position to oversee millions of dollars in grant monies. His administration was the first to establish a “Critical Path Committee” to expedite municipal projects. While the relationship between the municipal government and the Springfield business community was positive when Mayor Dimauro took office, during his administration it became a model for others because the mayor encouraged dialogue and shared his decision-making. Mayor Dimauro was also instrumental in changing the mind-set of many of the city’s municipal employees. During his administration, no one was allowed to say “we have never done this before” or “we can’t do it.” Mayor Dimauro’s approach was to “find a way to do it.”

In 1982 Springfield was designated a “clean city” by the “Keep America Beautiful Committee.” During Mayor Dimauro’s administration the city also received an international award from “Save the Children” for a local program called “Checca.” This program was designed to educate and inform children about health issues and to assist them in making correct decisions to promote a healthy life. The program was staffed by adults but run by the children themselves. More focus was placed on child abuse and alcohol and drug abuse prevention than ever before.

Such municipal agencies as the Mayor’s Office of Cultural and Community Affairs, the Employee Assistance Program for City Hall workers, the Office of Handicapped Affairs, and the Municipal Labor Relations Department were all established or their activities enhanced because of Mayor Dimauro’s community participation orientation.

Another major concern of the Dimauro administration was the continued revitalization of downtown Springfield. Mayor Dimauro believed that “a vibrant downtown would radiate vitality throughout the rest of the city.” Therefore, he concentrated much of his administration’s urban redevelopment and urban renewal efforts towards the preparation and implementation of a Downtown Master Plan. This plan was cooperatively drafted by the City Planning Department, a privately-funded and civic-oriented agency named Springfield Central, and architects Anderson and Notter. The Downtown Master Plan attempted to address the major tasks required to renew and revitalize the central city.

The Downtown Master Plan called for an open planning process in which city planners and planning consultants received input from business leaders, small merchants, and various community organizations. In order for the plan to be realized, cooperation between public and private interests was vital. Mayor Dimauro commented that his office played an important role in encouraging local businessmen to commit their time and their resources as they had in the past to the downtown revitalization efforts. This was especially important in the area of funding. As had previous mayors, Dimauro directed the municipal government to obtain and utilize available funds from the federal government for central city improvement. Again, Mayor Dimauro’s close working relationship with Congressman Boland and Boland’s own commitment to Springfield’s downtown improvement helped secure vital federal support. The most important source of
federal government revenue for downtown improvement came in the form of Community Development Block Grants and Urban Development Action Grants. Private funding for downtown revitalization, according to Mayor Dimarco, was also of vital importance. This funding came from a variety of sources, including some of Springfield’s leading financial institutions which combined resources to form a considerable mortgage pool for various projects.

Mayor Dimarco realized, as had previous mayors and city officials, that an attractive downtown environment was essential to bring more businesses and development into the city. He supported the Downtown Master Plan’s attempt to upgrade downtown streets, to refurbish parks, and restore old buildings. At the same time Dimarco realized that easily accessible and inexpensive parking was necessary to attract more downtown shoppers. One of his most important contributions in this area was his successful attempt to secure adequate funding for downtown parking facilities. Programs of parking ticket validation by downtown stores and businesses could have been and might still be more effective today in attracting downtown shoppers if more Springfield residents realized that such validation programs existed.

According to Mayor Dimarco, a revitalized downtown was the most visible attribute in attracting new business, industry, and population to Springfield. A vibrant and attractive downtown would convince prospective residents of the overall economic, social, and cultural vitality of the entire city. “You don’t place your money on a run-down looking race horse, only on one which appears healthy,” Mayor Dimarco declared, in this case relating the “race horse” to downtown Springfield.

In reference to horses, one of Mayor Dimarco’s most interesting contributions to the downtown revitalization program was the use of mounted policemen. While police records indicated that the central city was no more dangerous than any other neighborhood, Mayor Dimarco realized that prospective patrons were still concerned about their personal safety while downtown. He responded to this concern by supporting an enhanced security program which increased police visibility by assigning downtown beats and even placing police officers on horseback. The mounted police were especially helpful in providing an increased perception of security by downtown patrons.

Many Springfield residents and Mayor Dimarco himself consider one of his greatest accomplishments to be the vital role he played in the passage of the high school referendum which resulted in the construction of Springfield Central High School. The passage of this referendum succeeded only after five years of effort by city officials. Mayor Dimarco stated that he strongly supported the construction of Springfield Central High School, because he believed a new major educational facility represented one important facet of an improved overall quality of life for Springfield’s residents. He realized that quality teachers and educational programs were as necessary as new facilities, but he maintained that new school construction would help to convince more affluent residents that quality education could be obtained within Springfield as well as areas located beyond the city’s boundaries. New school facilities combined with quality education would help to convince more residents to remain. Springfield’s tax base would then be preserved and divestment and residential flight to outlying areas prevented.

Central High School was built despite the tremendous difficulties imposed by Proposition 2½. Mayor Dimarco was responsible for guiding its building campaign to victory. He was assisted by the Springfield newspapers, the Roman Catholic Bishop, the Episcopal Bishop, an association of Rabbis, the Council of Churches, local teacher’s organizations, and the business community. While the campaign for the building of Central High School proceeded, Springfield’s state legislators convinced the state to raise its contribution from 75 to 90 percent of the total building costs. Of the twenty-two million dollars required for construction, Springfield itself had to only raise 2.2 million. Mayor Dimarco takes particular pride in leaving this new educational institution as a legacy of his administration.

On the occasion of Springfield’s 350th anniversary, Mayor Dimarco remains optimistic about the city’s future and its ability to provide quality housing, education, and employment for its residents. Yet he maintains that in the area of employment, special consideration must be given those blue collar workers in the city who have been displaced in their jobs because of automation. According to Mayor Dimarco, Springfield must remain committed to the plight of these important residents as well as to those who have benefited from the influx of more highly technical businesses and industries into western Massachusetts.
CHAPTER VI

RICHARD E. NEAL

Mayor Richard Neal is a native Springfield resident. He received his undergraduate college training at American International College and his Master’s Degree in Public Administration from the University of Hartford. Prior to his election as Mayor of Springfield in 1984, Neal served from 1973 to 1977 as the Special Aide to Mayor William Sullivan, and from 1977 through 1984 he served three full terms on the Springfield City Council.

A major policy emphasis of Mayor Neal’s administration has been to eradicate the perception that the city’s leaders are more interested in downtown revitalization than in the needs of the various neighborhoods. Mayor Neal believed that this perception has developed because of the “high drama” and widespread publicity often associated with large-scale downtown renovations. Taxpayers therefore are aware of the substantial capital investment in downtown, and are convinced that their tax dollars were not being used to improve living conditions in their own neighborhoods. In order to demonstrate that it is a misconception, Mayor Neal has made concerted and visible efforts to improve conditions at the neighborhood level. Neighborhood meetings, conducted by the Mayor and his aides, have served to reduce the number of complaints emanating from the neighborhoods. Regular visits by representatives of the mayor and by the mayor himself to classrooms of neighborhood public and private schools have also served to dispel some of the negative feelings from the various sections of the city.

Yet substantial attitudinal changes can only be accomplished through a broad-based neighborhood revitalization plan. Mayor Neal has initiated such a plan which includes a large-scale commitment to neighborhood housing rehabilitation. Under Mayor Neal’s direction, the city established a ten million dollar housing rehabilitation fund.
According to Mayor Neal, this fund will "fill in the gaps" that will be created in the future by monetary reductions in the city's Community Development Block Grant allocations from the federal government. A portion of the ten million dollars will be made available to Springfield residents in the form of low interest loans for housing construction and improvement. In addition, these funds will finance the construction in the city's South End of twenty-five condominiums designed to meet the needs of the professional population of the city. In 1984, Mayor Neal launched a six million dollar fundraising campaign to improve the physical facilities and support the programs of the Springfield Library and Museums Association. Two million dollars of this total was raised directly by the city and has been designated specifically by the mayor for the improvement of neighborhood branch libraries.

Mayor Neal's neighborhood improvement program has also involved the restoration of various local triangles and terraces. Throughout the city there are green and open spaces at such locations as traffic crossings and median strips. These spaces are referred to as triangles. Mayor Neal has been the first Springfield official to commit funds, over $300,000 in the last two years, for the renovation of triangles as well as green terraces on residential streets.

Currently a Winchester Square Revitalization Plan is being prepared by the city. The Winchester Square neighborhood has posed a special problem for several of Springfield's postwar mayors because of its geographic position within the city and because of its generally dilapidated condition. Of course, Winchester Square is located near the middle of the city and constitutes a major access route to Wilbraham Road and State Street. Traffic moves through this neighborhood very quickly. In order to better promote badly-needed commercial and retail activity in the neighborhood, the revitalization plan is utilizing input from Winchester Square residents as well as the advice of the chief executive officers of several major companies in the city. According to Mayor Neal, the revitalization plan would provide what is most needed in Winchester Square—jobs.

Another important phenomena is effecting neighborhood revitalization. Springfield is currently witnessing a population increase, especially in its central business district. A vital link has developed between the increase in downtown residential population, downtown revitalization, and the creation of decent housing in the neighborhoods. For example, Mayor Neal is attempting to initiate a program whereby a portion of the Urban Development Action Grant payoff funds from the Monarch Place central business district project will be utilized for neighborhood housing and park rehabilitation. According to Mayor Neal, such programs are necessary to "formally link the neighborhood progress with the downtown progress." Mayor Neal asserted "...it's not downtown versus the neighborhoods of Springfield; it's downtown and neighborhoods. But most importantly, downtown is everybody's neighborhood."

Mayor Neal's downtown revitalization program has been an extension of the central business district improvement projects initiated by previous Springfield mayors, with an added relationship to neighborhood improvements. In addition to his commitment to downtown residential development, Mayor Neal should be credited with having initiated the ambitious Monarch Place project. This project has been one of the more interesting events related to recent efforts toward Springfield's downtown rehabilitation. When Mayor Neal took office, the city had already received an Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) for the old Forbes and Wallace parcel. Yet Mayor Neal regarded that grant as inadequate for the construction of a large-scale development on this parcel. As a result the city "tested" the open market in order to obtain the "maximum feasible" development of the critically-located property, which was advertised as the "best possible parcel in all of Western Massachusetts." The Monarch Capital Corporation responded to the request for proposals, and indicated that it would construct a 350,000 square-foot office tower and a 311 room hotel, with adequate on-site parking. Mayor Neal realized that such a tremendous project would contribute immensely to the ongoing transformation of the central business district. As it rises to supremacy in the Springfield skyline, Monarch Place constitutes the largest real estate development in the city's history and the largest in the history of Massachusetts outside of Boston.

While the development of Monarch Place required significant commitments by the private sector, federal financing through Urban Development Action Grants remained a vital factor. Although they are called grants, UDAGs are in actuality loans to prospective developers, and these loans are eventually paid back to the city. UDAGs allow the developers to borrow at a reasonable and fixed rate of interest and provide support for the long-time financing required for
large-scale development. In essence, UDAGs have the ability to render the development of office and hotel facilities in downtown Springfield as competitive and attractive as similar developments in Boston. Yet development opportunities through the utilization of UDAGs will become increasingly limited. Cities in the southwest have recently become eligible for UDAG financing; competition for these grants will increase, and less money will be available. In response, Mayor Neal's administration has initiated steps toward the preparation of a new Downtown Master Plan. Such a plan will help to insure that significant and positive central business district regeneration occurs despite possible reductions in federal support.

During Mayor Neal's administration, city officials determined that the Downtown Master Plan adopted by Springfield during the mayoralty of Theodore DiMauro had been largely completed. In response, the city retained the services of an urban planning consulting firm from New York City, The Project for Public Spaces, to prepare a new downtown plan. After a series of public hearings to understand the community's desires for future downtown renovation, this consulting firm will present a new set of downtown planning alternatives to city officials. One key aspect of this new plan will be a continued emphasis on downtown/neighborhood linkages as well as historic preservation.

Throughout his administration, Mayor Neal has considered Springfield's Riverfront area as one of its most precious resources. In a sense, the mayor has regarded the area as one of the "last frontiers" of developable land in the city, and has sought to protect this area by creating a Riverfront Zone. Such a zone would enable the authorities to prevent the establishment of used car lots, factories, and other unsightly types of development in what should be the most beautiful area of the city. Mayor Neal hopes to be able to establish a strip of public parks in the Riverfront area, as well as restaurants and attractive residential condominium structures. An appreciation of the natural beauty of the Riverfront would be combined, thus, with attractive opportunities for economic development. Mayor Neal's proposal, however, has been opposed by the South End Business Association and Citizens Council because of the possible negative effect the Riverfront Zone would have on property values in the area. Yet Mayor Neal has vigorously continued his support of the proposal and has resubmitted the plan to the City Council.

Increasing the opportunities of employment for Springfield's residents has also been a major concern of Mayor Neal, and a significant increase in jobs has occurred during recent years. The majority of these employment opportunities have developed within the insurance and banking businesses as well as within the legal profession. In a sense, this increase reflects the transformation of Springfield's economic base from a wage-earning working-class orientation to one which is more service-oriented and professional. At the same time, employment opportunities have been improved through training programs sponsored by such agencies as the Massachusetts Career Development Institute. Established in 1970 and largely funded by the federal government, this agency has provided a number of Springfield residents with job-related skills. Mayor Neal has designated an increased proportion of available federal monies to the Institute in order to fund a new literacy program.

During his tenure in office, Mayor Neal has worked to increase the number of small businesses in Springfield and in Western Massachusetts. With money from UDAG and Community Block Grants, the city has established a Small Business Development Fund. This fund assists businesses that cannot secure a bank loan or borrow money by conventional means. Many small businesses face this dilemma. While loans from the Small Business Development Fund have primarily benefitted service-sector related activities, they have not been restricted to these types of enterprises.

At the same time, Springfield has invited the Western Massachusetts Development Corporation into the city in order to facilitate economic development. The increased involvement of this agency within Springfield reflects the growing importance of the city within the economic affairs of Western Massachusetts. Today Springfield is emerging as the most important financial center of this region and its influence in financial affairs extends into northern Connecticut. This status has, in part, been derived from the merger of the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company with the Bank of New England. Because of the existence of established companies such as Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, the influence of newly-emerging concerns, as demonstrated by Monarch Place and the expanding banking community, and because of easy access provided by Interstate 91, Springfield is fast becoming an attractive area for northern Connecticut residents seeking financial services.
In addition, the city has extended its economic influence through a cooperative arrangement with the City of Chicopee. Mayor Neal has worked closely with Chicopee Mayor Richard Lak in the early developmental stages of the Chicopee River High Technology Park. This positive working relationship between the two mayors has been necessary and especially effective because the development site is located within Chicopee but is owned by the city of Springfield.

At the center of his economic regeneration program for Springfield and the surrounding region, Mayor Neal has established the Mayor’s Economic Development Cabinet. The task of the cabinet has been to assess the city’s programs of economic development. Most specifically, this organization recommended that the Western Massachusetts Development Corporation be invited to play a more active role in Springfield’s economic affairs.

The support of Mayor Neal’s administration for educational opportunities has encompassed vocational as well as elementary and secondary school training. In 1984 the city established the Putnam Vocational Training Center. This center required considerable commitment in the form of capital investment because of the equipment required for vocational training. In fact, this outlay has been slightly higher than the entire cost of building the new Central High School! As stated earlier, the mayor and his representatives have made visits to public and private classrooms in the various neighborhoods. Mayor Neal has been motivated to make these visits in order to make teachers and students aware that his office and the city administration in general, are providing the greatest amount of support possible. Mayor Neal stated: “By visiting every classroom in the public and private schools in the city, we’re letting the teachers know we care—letting students know who you are and that you do care.”

The relationship between the Mayor’s office and the various social service agencies within Springfield has been positive. During his tenure in office, the city has attempted to augment the services provided by these agencies through its own Human Services Department and through the School Department. For example, a voluntary fluoride program has been established in the public schools for the first time, as well as a better quality dental testing program. In addition, the city’s Public Health Department has increased its efforts to supply elderly residents with cancer testing. Springfield’s ability to provide more and better prenatal care for those who are indigent or outside the mainstream of economic life will increase dramatically when the Smith Clinic at Municipal Hospital opens in the near future.

Mayor Neal’s concern for health care in Springfield extends to his support for Municipal Hospital. The hospital has posed a challenge to several of the city’s postwar mayors because of deficiencies of its medical facilities, and the situation reached a critical point in recent years when its Medicaid certification was threatened. Mayor Neal responded to this crisis by soliciting aid from a task force assembled from temporarily-loaned staff of the area’s privately-owned and operated health care facilities, Mercy Hospital and the Baystate Medical Center. In addition to this staff, which was made available for six months, a new senior administrator for Municipal Hospital was appointed. This revamped administration brought more effective management. The hospital’s certification to serve Medicaid patients was also protected as the city allocated the facility increased funding for capital improvements and high-quality staffing. In addition, an energy savings plan was initiated to make the hospital more cost-efficient. In contrast to previous years, Springfield’s Municipal Hospital has become a solid health care institution with especially excellent facilities for providing care of the elderly.

During 1985, Springfield was considered for the prestigious “All-American City Award.” Among the numerous cities which were evaluated, Springfield finished among the top nineteen and earned “Honorable Mention” status. Yet Mayor Neal was somewhat frustrated that Springfield did not earn the “All American City” designation. The city’s programs in economic development, housing rehabilitation, and downtown renovation were comparable to several of the communities selected for that designation, and the reason for the decision may have involved Springfield’s Plan A strong mayor form of government. Several of the “All American” cities did not possess a municipal charter which allowed for a strong mayor. The mayors and even the city managers were largely ceremonial positions within these municipal governments.

There have been criticisms that strong mayor forms of municipal government, which feature at-large elections for city council, preclude meaningful district or neighborhood representation. These criticisms may have influenced the All-American City committee with regards to Springfield. If true, this is difficult to understand in light of Mayor Neal’s repeated overtures for input from the city’s
various neighborhoods in regards to community planning and municipal policy. Mayor Neal realizes that the Plan A Charter has benefitted the city and he has wholeheartedly supported the strong mayor form of municipal government as the best means of representing the broad interests of the city's residents.

Similar to other post-war mayors, Mayor Neal perceives his position as one which serves to channel into positive programs, the energies and talents of the diverse Springfield population. The mayor stated: "I think that the best parallel you could draw is the conductor of an orchestra—that the Mayor really has to know about all of the different instruments or groups that contribute to make things sound good."

Mayor Neal has been appreciative of the support he has received from his colleagues within Springfield municipal government. He has described the Springfield City Council and the Springfield School Committee as "excellent and exceptional" working partners in their relationship to his office. At the same time he has praised Congressman Edward Boland as being "extraordinarily helpful" because of his seniority in the United States House of Representatives Appropriations Committee. Congressman Boland has provided Springfield with an enormous access to federal funding. Mayor Neal declared: "To have a sensitive ear and a sympathetic ear in Washington really is very conducive to smooth relationships with the federal government. That is very, very important." Mayor Neal has also taken great pride in the quality of individuals hired for city governmental positions during his tenure in office. He stated, "I'd like to think that this is a golden age for the City of Springfield—not only in terms of economic growth, but just as importantly in terms of the quality of people that we've attracted to this administration."

In reference to Springfield's observance of its 350th anniversary, Mayor Neal maintains that this occasion should celebrate the diversity of the city's population. "I've often thought that Springfield is a great example of what Yankee ingenuity and immigrant labor could do," he exclaimed. He also describes the pride and initiative of the community's residents as the "fuel" which powers the city's engine of vitality and prosperity. Mayor Neal attributes the general feeling of optimism related to the 350th celebration in part to Springfield's Clean City Program. This program, which has been associated with the nationwide Keep America Beautiful campaign, has brought Springfield national recognition. In fact, during Mayor Neal's administration, Springfield has been designated as a Keep America Beautiful City. The Clean City Program has demonstrated the unselfishness and the ability to sacrifice on the part of the Springfield community and has instilled a pervasive belief that productive programs can and are being accomplished. Mayor Neal was pleased that during the 350th celebration the City of Springfield has "come together" as never before.