

2016 Most Endangered Historic Places



YWCA BUILDING

421 E. Jackson Street, Springfield | Sangamon County



Credits: Landmarks Illinois

Sitting in the shadows of the State Capitol and the Governor's Mansion, Springfield's YWCA building features a modest design that belies its colorful history. Yet despite its history, its location in a National Register Historic District, and its designation as a local Landmark, the YWCA building is in danger of being demolished for new downtown development.

In 1909, popular evangelist Billy Sunday hosted a six week revival in the state capital where he admonished the men in the crowd by saying, "If there was a man in this town with a spark of decency in him this city would have a Young Woman's Christian Association." Though

Sunday's message was aimed at the men, the women of Springfield responded by founding a YWCA on their own. Within a few months, the Springfield YWCA swelled with more than thirteen hundred members. The group quickly outgrew its temporary home and began a successful fundraising campaign for a new building.

The YWCA Building in downtown Springfield survives as a testament to their strength and determination. Completed in March 1913 and designed by local architect George Helmle, the three-story building sports a handsome brick exterior accented by the stone water table wrapped around its base and a dentil cornice. Inside its walls, young women once enjoyed "religious, social, [and] physical recreation" and took "classes in domestic science, languages and the various arts." The building also served as a hub for public meetings and progressive activities in the region, which helped to establish its reputation as a place of "intense civic pride by the city of Springfield."

In 2007, citing declining membership and increasing maintenance costs, the Springfield YWCA sold the building to private developers after nearly a century of service. The developers planned to convert the building into condos but were unable to secure funding to move forward with the project. In 2014, the City of Springfield purchased the YWCA and the remainder of the block on which it sits, which was formerly occupied by the historic Abraham Lincoln Hotel but is currently used for surface parking. Initial efforts to redevelop the YWCA block stalled, yet the building was not mothballed and continued to suffer from water damage. After a local election and change in leadership, the City announced in January 2016 that the YWCA Building was damaged beyond repair and [would be demolished](#).

Local preservationists spoke out against the City's demolition threat and countered that the historic building is not beyond repair. In February 2016, the city [dialed back](#) its earlier demolition threat, announcing that it would issue a new Request for Proposals (RFP) for the YWCA and surrounding block. The new [RFP](#), issued in March, includes options for both demolition and reuse of the YWCA building.

The building is located within the expanded Downtown Springfield National Register Historic District, making it eligible for federal historic tax credits for rehabilitation. A [2014 report by Landmarks Illinois](#) estimated that the rehabilitation of the YWCA Building could generate more than \$216,000 in state and local revenue if the Illinois state legislature approves the [Illinois Historic Tax Credit bill \(SB 2217\)](#).

The new Request for Proposals for the YWCA Building has a deadline of April 30, 2016. Landmarks Illinois has marketed this RFP to developers and continues to seek additional reuse proposals for the YWCA Building.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have reuse ideas, rehabilitation resources, or know of a potential developer, please contact Landmarks Illinois Springfield Office Director Frank Butterfield by [email](#) or 217-836-2524.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

[North Mansion Block Project Website](#)

City of Springfield

[North Mansion Block \(including YWCA\) Request for Proposals](#)

City of Springfield

[Developers, Engineers, Preservationists Tour YWCA Building](#)

State Journal-Register, March 16, 2016

[YWCA Building](#)

Sangamon County Historical Society, January 24, 2016

[Mike Jackson: Demolishing YWCA Building is Short-Sighted and Premature](#)

State Journal-Register, January 22, 2016



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