

How Resilient is Our Regional Economy?

A Peer Comparison of the Springfield Metropolitan Area's Resilience Capacity
Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, 2014

Abstract

The perception that recovery from the recent national recession has been slow to materialize puts into question the capacity of local economies to "bounce back" from economic strife: their economic resiliency. Economic resiliency is not indicative of a community or region's overall peak economic strength or market vitality, which are often the focus of economic development studies, but rather seeks to address a region's ability to restore itself to its typical growth patterns in a shorter period of time than peer communities or regions.

With this in mind, the SSCRPC looked at the economic resiliency of the Springfield Metropolitan Area based upon an index of factors developed by the Buffalo Regional Institute of the State University of New York. This Resilience Capacity Index (RCI) allows for the measurement of a region's ability to respond to economic stress based upon 12 equally weighted components that assess local Economic, Socio-Demographic and Community Connectivity capacities, and is intended to assess the ability of a region to recover more quickly from economic downturns and strife.

In terms of the Springfield metro area, and in comparison to the nation and four Illinois peer regions, the SSCRPC found that the Springfield area compares favorably overall, largely because of its strengths in several areas that measure Community Connectivity; particularly the measure of Civic Infrastructure. However, the study also finds that the region's resilience is negatively affected by palpable weaknesses in Socio-Demographic Capacity and Regional Economic Capacity. This is particularly noticeable in regards to measures of economic diversification, education, and business climate.

The study concludes that these areas of weakness should be addressed, and that the region should recognize its strong civic fabric and work to market and fully capitalize on it by translating this strength into improvements in the areas of weakness.

An Oak that grew on the bank of a river was uprooted by a severe gale of wind, and thrown across the stream. It fell among some Reeds growing by the water, and said to them, "How is it that you, who are so frail and slender, have managed to weather the storm, whereas I, with all my strength, have been torn up by the roots and hurled into the river?" "You were stubborn," came the reply, "and fought against the storm, which proved stronger than you: but we bow and yield to every breeze, and thus the gale passed harmlessly over our heads."

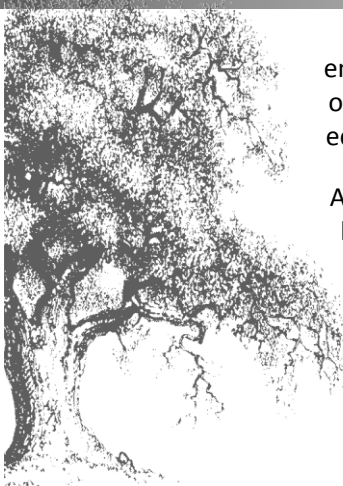
-Aesop's Fables. as cited by The Center for Ecoliteracy

Introduction

Understanding a region's economic health is critical to making informed decisions about important matters such as its potential for economic development opportunities, the significance of its demographic trends, and the appropriate blend of private

enterprise versus government services required to meet the region's needs. A major component of economic health, evidenced by the economic downturn of the last decade, is a region's economic *resiliency*, or its ability to "bounce back" from economic strife.

A nuanced look at a region's economic resiliency can inform local officials' decision-making about how to best target their resources for improving the community's prospects for responding to stress. Especially vis-à-vis its peers, a region must strive to make continual forward progress in



improving its economic health. This is particularly the case in the current environment of scarce resources, in which regions must ensure that any gaps in their economic resilience are minimized, rather than augmented.

It is important to note that being an economically *resilient* community does not necessarily equate to being an economically *vital* community overall. Economic resiliency does not fully capture a community's economic health. For example, a resilient community may be able to bounce back or respond to changes in order to restore its typical growth patterns in a shorter time than its peers, yet those growth patterns and the community's economic activity—even at their best—may not be as robust as those of a less resilient community when both are compared at peak activity.

Nevertheless, economic resiliency is a particularly relevant component of overall economic health given the slow recovery from the Great Recession that many communities are currently experiencing. Using an index developed based on a variety of components of economic well-being and community fabric, this report finds that the Springfield Metropolitan Area (MA), which includes the Sangamon and Menard counties, is more resilient than four of its peer metro areas, particularly in relation to its civic infrastructure. However, it notes that the MA has major weaknesses in its economic and socio-demographic capacities that merit further attention in efforts by local leaders to bolster regional resiliency

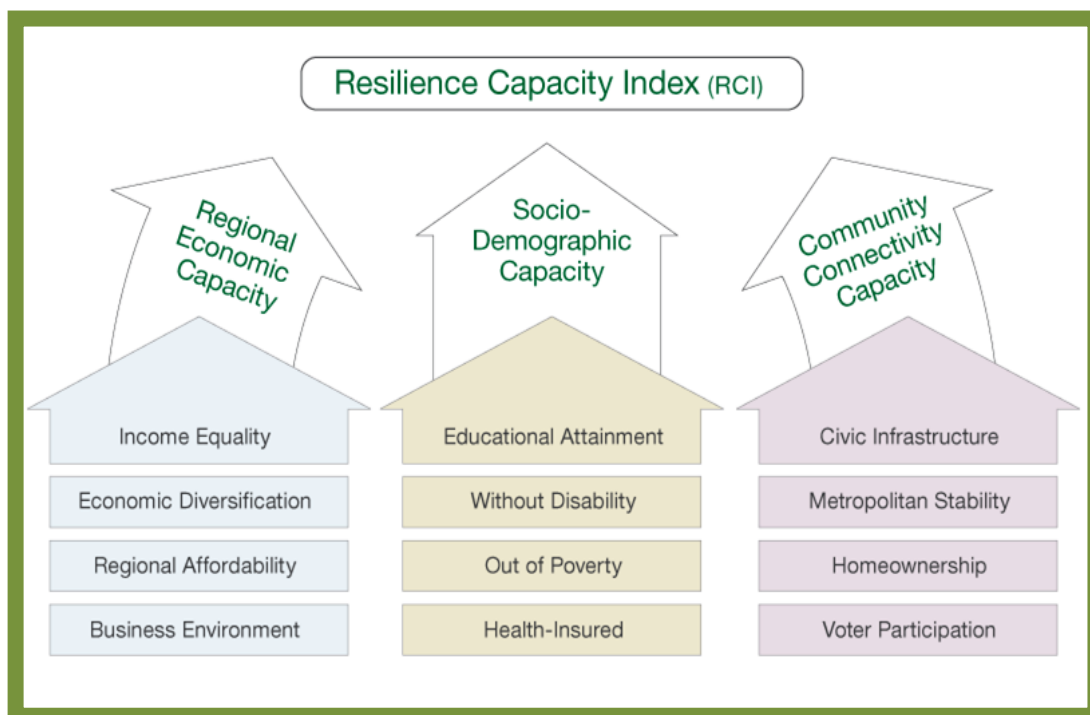
Resilience Capacity Index

Given the importance of economic resiliency, how are communities to measure and examine their own ability to bounce back? Because of its on-going role of advising, planning, evaluating, and leading in the greater Springfield region, the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSRPC) found resilience measurements to be of great interest.

The Resilience Capacity Index (RCI) is one tool used to measure a region's foundational ability to respond to economic stress, based on twelve equally weighted components that deal with economic, socio-demographic, and community connectivity capacities. Developed by the University at Buffalo's Regional Institute of the State University of New York, the RCI scores for a number of metropolitan areas were recently released by the Building Resilient Regions Network of the University of California's Institute of Government Studies. Using this index, the SSRPC endeavored to compare Springfield's scores with those of neighboring and peer metropolitan areas (MAs), including the Bloomington-Normal MA, Champaign-Urbana MA, Decatur MA, and Peoria MA. Following this comparison, a

discussion of various resiliency strengths and weaknesses, as well as the accompanying policy implications, is provided.

Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of the major indicators used in developing the RCI. As indicated in Figure 1, many factors go into determining an area's RCI. Each of the peers listed above demonstrates strengths in some



areas and weaknesses in others. For this reason, the SSCRPC finds the RCI useful for regions looking to target capacity-building and economic development efforts.

The RCI is based upon a statistical z-score, a measure of the number of standard deviations the individual case is above or below the median score. Positive numbers indicate that the MA is above the median on an indicator, negative indicate that the MA is below the median. Rankings for each z-score are also provided.

General RCI Comparison

Upon initial look, the Springfield MA (also referred to as “Springfield” throughout) compares favorably with its peers. It has the highest overall RCI of five MAs typically considered its peer communities, and ranks at or above the 90th percentile as compared to all MAs evaluated and all of its population class size. It is above the 85th percentile for those in its region, the Midwest, as classified by the U.S. Census Bureau. This is favorable for the Springfield MA.

However, the RCI includes such a variety of indicators that the overall community rankings have only limited utility in understand an MA’s true resiliency footing.

Table 1: Overall RCI Index				
Metro Area	Overall RCI	Overall RCI Rank (out of 361)	Regional Rank (out of 89)	Pop. Class Size Rank (out of 183)
Bloomington-Normal	0.41	68	33	29
Champaign-Urbana	-0.30	274	86	124
Decatur	0.15	154	66	65
Peoria	0.53	39	21	15*
Springfield	0.70	21	11	9

**Peoria’s class ranking is 15 out of 126, as it is in the medium population class.*

have only limited utility in understand an MA’s true resiliency footing.

While rankings on the RCI are favorable for the Springfield MA, some areas contribute more to this strength than others. Additionally, it should again be noted that the RCI represents only resilience, and not economic health as a whole, a factor that may impact economic development decisions.

Since the RCI is comprised of three larger sub-categories of capacity, including regional economic capacity, socio-demographic capacity, and community connectivity capacity, each should be given more detailed consideration in a review of the region. It is important to note that, of these three indicators, Springfield ranks far better in comparison to its peers in the area of Community Connectivity than in the other two capacity sub-categories. In this area, it far exceeds peers with a 1.77 index score, with the next nearest peer, Peoria MA, receiving a 0.65 index score.

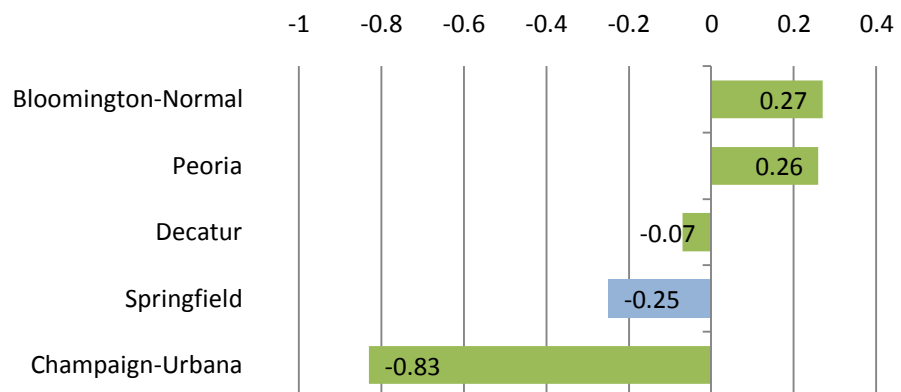
In contrast, Springfield ranks low fourth out of five peers on Regional Economic Capacity Index (-0.25) and Socio-Demographic Capacity Index (0.59). Only the Champaign-Urbana MA ranks lower than the Springfield MA in terms of regional economic capacity. The Decatur MA ranks fifth in terms of socio-demographic capacity. The Bloomington-Normal MA ranks first on the first two capacity sub-indexes, but fourth out of five in terms of the community connectivity index.

A visual depiction of Springfield's MA rank order in each of the three capacity subcategories is provided in the charts below, with additional analysis of the factors contributing to each ranking following.

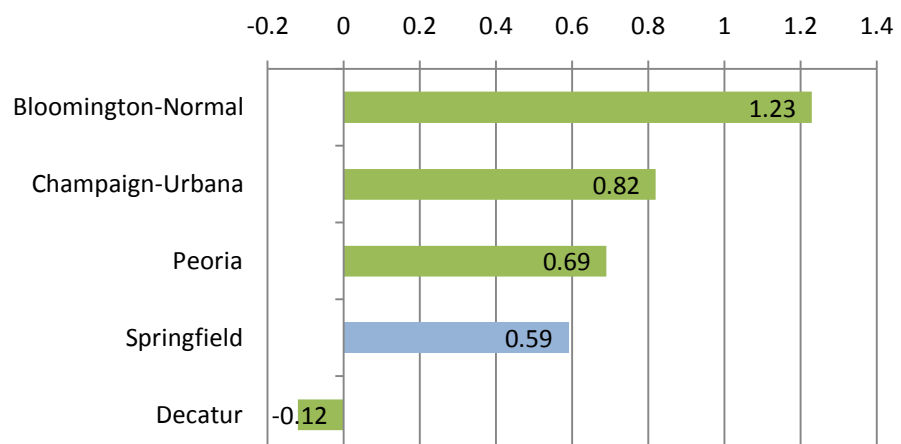
The usefulness of the RCI hinges partially on whether community leaders can use it in identifying areas where improvement may be needed. Accordingly, each of these sub-indexes and their component indicators will be broken down and discussed, with an eye toward targeting areas where Springfield MAs ranking could be improved relative to its peers.

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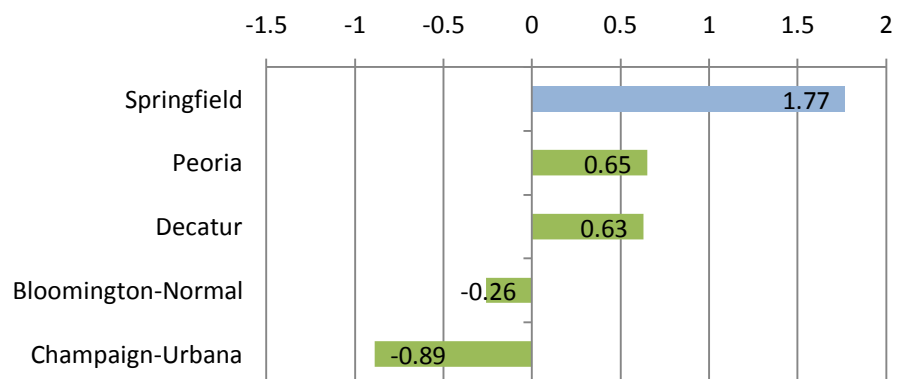
Regional Economic Capacity Index (rank order)



Socio-Demographic Capacity Index (rank order)



Community Connectivity Capacity Index (rank order)



Regional Economic Capacity Sub-Index

The components of economic resiliency most directly linked with typical economic indicators are those that deal with a region's existing economic well-being. The RCI contemplates these indicators under the banner of its Regional Economic Capacity Sub-Index. As noted above, the Springfield MA ranks fourth of five peer communities in this area and 271 out of 361 nationwide MAs, warranting a deeper analysis of strengths and weaknesses. The Regional Economic Capacity Sub-Index is comprised of four sub-indicators. These indicators are briefly described below, and more information on the basis for calculating these components of the index is available at <http://brr.berkeley.edu/rci>.

- **Income Equality**, based on the inverse of the Gini coefficient for income inequality, calculated by metropolitan area by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2009;
- **Economic Diversification**, based on degree to which a metropolitan economy differs from the national economy by the proportion of its jobs in goods-producing, service-producing, and government sectors, as calculated on the basis of 2009 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data;
- **Regional Affordability**, based on the percentage of households spending less than 35 percent of their income on housing, according to 2009 American Community Survey 1-year estimates; and
- **Business Environment**, based on the Indiana Business Center's 2010 Innovation Index, which measures economically dynamic regions as those with a proportionately high levels of small businesses, high levels of business churn (starts and stops), residential high-speed Internet connections, changes in the number of broadband holding companies, and ample venture capital availability.

Table 2 displays each of the peer MA's index scores and rankings (in parentheses) for these four sub-indicators. In terms of overall ranking, Springfield MA fares best in the area of Income Equality, ranking fiftieth out of 361 total metropolitan areas undergoing comparison, but worst in terms of economic diversification.

Metro Area	Regional Economic Capacity Index (Rank of 361)	Table 2: REC Sub-Indicators			
		Income Equality	Economic Diversification	Regional Affordability	Business Environment
Bloomington-Normal	0.27 (108)	0.27 (141)	0.21 (189)	0.91 (72)	-0.32 (203)
Champaign-Urbana	-0.83 (340)	-1.24 (325)	-0.62 (278)	-0.73 (282)	-0.74 (314)
Decatur	-0.07 (205)	-0.49 (248)	-0.82 (293)	1.26 (28)	-0.23 (174)
Peoria	0.26 (113)	-0.37 (241)	0.36 (162)	1.38 (21)	-0.34 (211)
Springfield	-0.25 (271)	1.06 (50)	-2.54 (351)	0.96 (61)	-0.49 (246)

In terms of the Income Equality sub-indicator, considerable amount of variety exists on this ranking even among the five peer communities undergoing comparison in this report. Springfield MA ranks highest among its peers for income equality by a considerable margin, followed by Bloomington-Normal and contrasted most sharply by Champaign-Urbana MA. While this is favorable for Springfield in terms of resiliency, positive rankings on the income equality scale do not necessarily equate to higher across-the-board incomes. To add nuance to this picture, Table 3 below provides mean and median household incomes for each of these metropolitan areas as of the 2010 U.S. Census. Springfield fares relatively well in a basic comparison of

income, falling second or third of five for mean, median, and per capita income. Along with a high ranking for income equality, Table 3 indicates that income is a strength for the Springfield MA.

Table 3: Household Income Data			
Metro Area	Mean Household Income (2005-2009 Estimate)	Median Household Income (2005-2009 Estimate)	Per Capita Income (2005-2009 Estimates)
Bloomington-Normal	\$69,797	\$55,812	\$26,969
Champaign-Urbana	\$59,148	\$43,884	\$23,695
Decatur	\$58,813	\$44,107	\$25,044
Springfield	\$65,351	\$51,001	\$27,843
Peoria	\$66,394	\$51,455	\$27,363

Source: ERSI Community Analyst Online, Population Summary Report, 2005-2009 American Community Survey Estimates

Springfield MA is also in the midrange compared to peers in the area of Regional Affordability, an indicator based on a comparison of income and housing costs. With the exception of Champaign-Urbana, all peer communities scored similarly well on this indicator. Champaign-Urbana's lower score may in turn be a product of its high numbers of college students, which leads to lower income levels without necessarily resulting in a corresponding lower-cost housing market.

Business environment, on the other hand, is an area in which all peer Central Illinois Communities demonstrated similar levels of challenge, with no peers making it into the top 100 MAs in this metric. On this index, Decatur scored slightly higher, and Champaign-Urbana scored slightly lower.

Some components of an area's business environment may be outside of the metropolitan areas' control. For example, Illinois ranks 31st out of the 50 states for its business tax climate (Table 4). This does not account for differences among peer MAs, but it may provide the Springfield MA with clues as to starting points for cultivating a favorable business environment. Among factors in the Tax Foundation's assessment of business climate, property tax is a good starting point, as it is the aspect over which local governments have most control.

Table 4: 2014 State Business Climate Tax Index						
	Overall Rank (of 50)	Corporate Tax Rank	Individual Income Tax Rank	Sales Tax Rank	Unemployment Insurance Tax Rank	Property Tax Rank
Illinois	31	47	11	33	43	44

Source: Drenkard and Henschman, 2013, "Background Paper No. 68: 2014 State Business Tax Climate Index," Tax Foundation.

Although property taxes cannot be directly compared from MA to MA because of varied assessment methods and the multiplicity of tax codes that exist within a single county, they can be statistically estimated in terms of average home value. As compared to peers, Sangamon County's overall property tax rates for the average residential tax code are generally lower (Table 5). Sangamon County's

estimated property tax bill of \$2,085 for a \$150,000 home is lower than that of many peers, suggesting that other factors are in play in the business environment sub-indicator ranking.

Table 5: Property Tax Comparison	
County (associated MA)	Estimated Property Tax on a \$150,000 Home
McLean (Bloomington-Normal)	\$3,045
Champaign (Champaign-Urbana)	\$3,000
Macon (Decatur)	\$3,015
Sangamon (Springfield)	\$2,805
Peoria (Peoria)	\$3,000

Source: Tax-Rates.org, *The 2014 Tax Resource*.

Therefore, turning to other indicator components, sales tax ranks, venture capital availability for business start-ups, and on-going improvements in the service culture of local units of government related to permitting and business start-ups are all beneficial steps that can be taken to ensure that a strong business environment is in place to aide in economic resiliency. Improved broadband infrastructure and residential internet capacity are also likely to improve business environment in terms of the index components used in constructing the Resilience Capacity Index.

Like all “hard,” data-based indicators, business environment may also have “soft,” cultural causal factors. In terms of business climate, cross-sector understanding and relationships are also critical to resiliency. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce provided

insights discussing this relationship in a 2013 report entitled *Enterprising Cities: A Force for American Prosperity*. “The worst of the budget crisis, and the recession, may well have passed in some states, but deep-seated structural issues threaten the future of municipalities, counties, and cities for the long term. How they respond to this challenge—including adjustments to employee compensation and pension plans—may determine whether they can continue to grow in the decades ahead” (2).

This report highlights strong relationships between local governments and businesses—essential to a strong business environment—as critical to alleviating regional vulnerabilities and strengthening economic resiliency. A shift in culture leading to improved rapport between the business community and public sector is this report’s proposed solution to the concerning cycle of negative relationships between business and government, which may be at play in the Springfield MA region, due to its low Business Environment scores. “What may prove most critical would be the development of a greater understanding among business leaders about the positive ways government can impact economic growth, and among the public...about the importance of growing the private sector” (8).

These insights are directly linked to the final concerning Regional Economic Capacity sub-indicators; Springfield MA’s lack of Economic Diversification. Springfield MA scored a full 1.5 index points lower than any of its peer communities in this area, and ranks number 351 out of 361 total nationwide MAs on this metric. It is well-known that the Springfield MA relies heavily on government and the medical community as its lead industries. Since this index component is based on the difference from the national average in proportion of industries that are good-producing, service-producing, or government, Springfield’s low score in this area is expected. While its low score in this area is largely a product of its position as state capital, current trends in state government, along with Springfield’s struggles after the recent economic recession, suggest that it may be unwise for the Springfield MA to continue to rely solely on its public administration industry, without additional diversification, to bolster its flexibility and ability to respond to economic change.

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Lack of economic diversification due to high percentages of industries that are government and service-producing in the area, while potentially inhibiting to resiliency, can also point to the opportunities for diversification that make sense for the Springfield MA. The Springfield 2020 Plan for economic growth, for example, identifies the healthcare industry as one that should be expanded as an area of focus. Though healthcare is largely a service-producing industry, supporting good-producing industries that contribute to healthcare, which is a targeted economic growth area, could be expanded to increase economic resiliency within economic growth patterns that fit regional needs and capacities. The 2020 Plan also identifies numerous other areas where diversity could be expanded.

To summarize, a deeper look at the first of three sub-indices that make up the RCI, Regional Economic Capacity, provides a more mixed perspective on Springfield MA's resiliency than its raw RCI ranking initially did. The ability to bounce back from economic downturn is at least in part contingent upon a community's income factors and economic environment. While Springfield has some strengths in terms of income equality and affordability, some factors like an adverse business environment and little economic diversity could inhibit its ability to regain economic footing after a downturn.

To counter some deficiencies identified in this area, measures should be taken to address regional economic capacity, beginning with economic development efforts that push for expanded economic diversification and then moving toward targeting more a favorable business environment. Some such measures that can be taken to encourage such improvements include: working to reduce property, corporate, and sales tax rates; providing adequate infrastructure; and cultivating customer service-based mentalities in local government bodies that interact with the business and development communities.

Socio-Demographic Capacity Sub-Index

The second of three sub-indices making up the RCI is the Socio-Demographic Capacity index. As with the Regional Economic Capacity Index, the Springfield MA ranks fourth out of five in this area when compared to peers. However, all of the Central Illinois peer communities under consideration have much more robust scores on this sub-index than on the Regional Economic Capacity Index, ranging from number 14 among 361 metro areas to number 200 (Table 6). Four components make up the Socio-Demographic Capacity index:

- ***Educational Attainment***, measured as the percentage of the population aged 25+ with a bachelor's degree or higher divided by the percentage of the same population without a high school diploma equivalent;
- ***Without Disability***, based 2009 American Community Survey estimates of disability status;
- ***Out of Poverty***, the percentage of the population with prior-year income above the federal poverty line; and
- ***Health-Insured***, based on 2009 American Community Survey reports of having health insurance.

Generally speaking, the socio-demographic capacity index looks at the human capital factors that can allow a regional economy to bounce back. Employee wellness and an educated workforce are essential to economic resiliency. Springfield's most advantageous ranking among the socio-demographic indicators is its relatively high proportion of residents that have health insurance. Perhaps due to the strong presence of the medical community in Springfield, or the large percentages of those employed by government or healthcare industries, which are likely to provide employee health insurance, the Springfield MA is in the top thirty nationwide in this area. Having health insurance provides a foundation for social, physical and economic security. The University of California Berkeley, in presenting the RCI, cites a 2010 study by Cutter and Burton, which notes that "health insurance coverage in a crisis is both a proxy for the general capacities useful for effectively responding to and recovering from a stress, and also a particular capacity to address specific results of that crisis" (Institute of Governmental Studies, "Resilience Capacity Index: Sources and Notes").

Metro Area	Socio-Demographic Capacity Index (Rank of 361)	Table 6: SDC Sub-Indicators			
		Educational Attainment	Without Disability	Out of Poverty	Health-Insured
Bloomington-Normal	1.23 (14)	2.73 (9)	1.30 (35)	-0.17 (229)	1.07 (49)
Champaign-Urbana	0.82 (48)	1.80 (16)	1.48 (23)	-1.00 (313)	0.99 (55)
Decatur	-0.12 (200)	-0.21 (175)	-0.33 (233)	0.11 (174)	-0.03 (201)
Peoria	0.69 (61)	0.31 (80)	0.94 (61)	0.52 (105)	0.98 (57)
Springfield	0.59 (75)	0.58 (61)	0.12 (171)	0.45 (108)	1.22 (28)

As compared to its peers, Springfield also ranked moderately well on the percentage of its residents that are above the federal poverty line. This ranking, however, is not as favorable as the health-insured percentage overall, since all five peer communities scored lower on this metric than most did on health insurance when placed in comparison to all MAs nationwide. Even the peer comparisons in Central Illinois must be taken with some caveats for this metric. For example, both Bloomington-Normal and Champaign-Urbana had high percentages below the federal poverty line, and therefore ranked low in comparison to peers. However, this does not take into account the fact that a large number of college students live in each community, which may have artificially impacted poverty-level scores.

This is confirmed in part by the income data above. Bloomington-Normal and Champaign-Urbana both have a greater gap between their mean and median income levels for households, perhaps pointing to the fact that more outliers, potentially in the form of a large student population, are statistically bringing income levels lower.

Educational attainment varies across peer metro areas as well. Bloomington-Normal decidedly leads in this ranking, as the ninth ranked MA in the country. Champaign-Urbana follows as 16th-ranked. This is not surprising, again given the presence of major institutions of higher education in those communities. Education levels can

benefit a community's ability to respond to economic downturn by allowing workforce flexibility. When residents are well-educated, they have more resources available to them in terms of job prospects upon losing employment, as well as more capacity to advance during the situations of under-employment that can follow economic down-turns. Springfield MA is third among peer communities and 61st nationwide in this ranking, followed by Peoria and Decatur. While this is a reasonably competitive footing, additional emphasis on school district strength, workforce development training, and actions that strengthen Springfield MA's competitive footing as a "campus town" would be beneficial in continuing to expand upon existing strengths in education attainment and ensure that lack of education does not make the Springfield MA more susceptible to challenging economic times.

Finally, in terms of persons with disabilities, Springfield ranks fourth among five peers. Higher proportions of persons with disabilities can present economic challenges either by limiting the number of persons in the community that can be actively engaged in the workforce, or potentially limiting the career mobility of those members of the workforce. This suggests the potential for less economic mobility in its workforce and may lead to greater resiliency challenges. It also has policy implications for local officials related to public transit, ADA services, and other factors that may be put in place to assist this population in having opportunities to contribute to the regional economy where possible.

Community Connectivity Capacity Sub-Index

Of the three sub-components of the RCI, Community Connectivity is the index on which the Springfield MA far outstrips its peers. The Community Connectivity Index compares factors that are significant to the social fabric or civic engagement of a community, based on the correlation between these factors and a community's ability to respond to economic turmoil through understanding, investing in, and taking care of community needs. Factors included in this sub-index are:

- **Civic Infrastructure**, based on the number of civic organizations per 10,000 people, as counted through the 2008 County Business Patterns NAICS codes;
- **Metropolitan Stability**, the annual average percentage over a five-year period of a metropolitan area population that lived within the same metropolitan area a year prior;
- **Home Ownership**, the percentage of owner-occupied units among total occupied units in the area; and
- **Voter Participation**, based on 2008 voter turnout data in terms of participating voters as a percentage of the population aged 18 or older.

Table 7, below, displays Springfield MA's rankings and index scores on these Community Connectivity indicators. In this area, Springfield MA ranks second of all 361 metropolitan areas considered in constructing the RCI.

Metro Area	Community Connectivity Capacity Index (Rank of 361)	Table 7: CC Sub-Indicators			
		Civic Infrastructure	Metropolitan Stability	Home-ownership	Voter Participation
Bloomington-Normal	-0.26 (257)	0.32 (98)	-1.36 (331)	-0.13 (222)	0.12 (179)
Champaign-Urbana	-0.89 (324)	0.15 (122)	-1.71 (337)	-1.74 (338)	-0.27 (247)
Decatur	0.63 (52)	1.13 (35)	0.60 (108)	0.35 (137)	0.44 (133)
Peoria	0.65 (49)	0.35 (92)	0.92 (45)	0.92 (60)	0.42 (138)
Springfield	1.77 (2)	4.71 (2)	0.65 (93)	0.55 (105)	1.17 (38)

The starting point for an in-depth analysis of this sub-index is the Civic Infrastructure indicator. Springfield MA's index score in this area is strikingly almost four times that of its nearest peer. Looking more carefully at the data comprising this index, including the NAICS code utilized in developing the index and the types of groups within code specifically selected for the RCI, one finds that "voluntary health organizations, social advocacy organizations, social organizations, business associations and professional organizations, labor unions and political groups, but excludes religious organizations and grant-making organizations" contribute to this index Institute of Governmental Studies, "Resilience Capacity Index: Sources and Notes").

Arguably, this index score may be somewhat inflated for Springfield. As the state capital, Springfield has a proliferation of lobbying and political groups whose purpose is state government, rather than local improvement. These state-oriented groups do not all have a targeted impact on community well-being within the Springfield MA. It is

The Springfield MA is rich with both professionals and retirees who have firm understandings of how to navigate organizational and political environments to achieve community objectives.

therefore reasonable to assume that the index scores in this area may not validly reflect Springfield's actual resiliency as would initially be presumed from such a high ranking. On the other hand, even if lobbying organizations are not directly purposed for improving the Springfield MA as one might expect a civic group to be, professional or voluntary involvement in these groups may impact how community members choose to solve community problems or challenges, along with their capacity to do so. High scores in this area are a positive for the Springfield MA, because they may represent a greater capacity among residents to address social problems through civic engagement. The Springfield MA is rich with both professionals and retirees who have firm understandings of how to navigate organizational and political environments to achieve community objectives. This capacity is a strong resource for the area that should be continually cultivated and utilized in accomplishing objectives, which can in turn contribute to Springfield's long-term resilience.

Springfield's second-highest indicator in terms of Community Connectivity is voter participation. Again, this is unsurprising, given its unique role as state capitol, and the associated strong party organizations and political affiliations that permeate the area. To further explore this component, the RCI is based on 2008 general election data. Because of high presidential vote turn-out among younger voters in 2008, it could be expected that voter turnout was unusually high in communities like Bloomington-Normal and Champaign-Urbana, which house high percentages of college students, which would inspire these votes to be considered with caution. However, no discernible pattern surfaces to support this hypothesis in reviewing historical changes in turnout data from one general election to another (Table 8). While turnout declined after the 2008 election, this was not tied to any particular type of MA included in the peer group.

Table 8: General Election Voter Turnout Trends			
County (associated MA)	Change in Voter Turnout (2000-2004)	Change in Voter Turnout (2004-2008)	Change in Voter Turnout (2008-2012)
McLean (B-N)	11%	2%	-7%
Champaign (C-U)	5%	-1%	-5%
Macon (Decatur)	18%	6%	-3%
Sangamon (Springfield)	8%	-1%	-4%
Peoria (Peoria)	4%	5%	-6%

Source: Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections at <http://www.uselectionatlas.org/>, also utilized in RCI development.

Nevertheless, these communities' voter participation index appears to be low, given their high education levels. One might speculate that, while the students living in these MAs contribute to their population over 18, students' transient lifestyles may have led them to be absentee voters or non-voters at higher levels, contributing to this outcome. These caveats included, Springfield's high ranking can be considered a positive for the area.

The Springfield MA ranks second among its peers in terms of metropolitan stability. Again, the large proportions of student residents in the Bloomington-Normal and Champaign-Urbana areas may be contributing the Springfield's relatively high rankings in this area. To examine this component more deeply, the SSCRPC's recent 2010 Census Analysis notes that, while population in the MA may be stable, growth rates appear to be declining. While stability can lead to resilience, without an accompanying influx of workforce talent producing growth, it is unlikely to be an economic engine for increased growth. While residents in the Springfield MA may be remaining within the MA rather than moving away, the metropolitan stability indicator should be treated with caution, given local concerns related to long-term population decline (Landis, 2014, "Springfield population tops 117,000").

Among its peers, the Springfield MA also ranks second on the homeownership index. Home-ownership, as compared to renting, allows a workforce to have increased stability in the event of downturns. Increased ownership of homes in a metropolitan area can also contribute to economic well-being by causing more single-family household starts, which have a greater positive impact on the economy (Badkar, 2014, "Here's How"). Springfield MA's reasonably positive rankings on metropolitan stability and home-ownership should be viewed favorably, with an eye for policies that continue to bolster these factors related to long-term resilience.

Discussion and Conclusions

Applying the Resilience Capacity Index as a tool for peer comparison can be helpful to regional policymakers and administrators in understanding the strengths and weaknesses associated in the Springfield Metropolitan Area's ability to "bounce back" from economic downturns. This is an essential topic, given recent economic challenges. While the Springfield MA faces significant challenges in terms of its economic and socio-demographic capacities, its community connectivity is strong in areas that, according to those who compiled the Resilience Capacity Index, will assist it in having the social capital needed to recover from economic downturn.

Springfield MA's ranking in comparison to its national and regional peers suggests that it should especially target the creation of a better business climate while emphasizing economic diversification, develop improvements in its education system to bolster educational attainment, and work to retain its residents and assist them in finding owner-occupied

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housing that meets their needs. These concepts stem from the three RCI sub-indexes, which in turn point to areas of particular strength and weakness for the Springfield MA.

Also important to the Springfield MA is to ensure that areas which it perceives as strengths are not underutilized in attempting to respond to economic needs in the community. Springfield should recognize that it has a strong civic fabric, and work to market and fully capitalize on the vast and impressive stores

of human and social capital available in the community. Working to translate strengths in this area into improvements in other areas of the RCI through the leveraging of this talent is also a strategy that may benefit the long-term resilience of the Springfield MA.

While the RCI represents a useful tool and provides beneficial guidance for appropriate target areas for regional improvement, it is not the only resource that should be utilized in understanding and cultivating regional economic capacity, resilience, and strength. Its weaknesses stem from the fact that, while it measures a community's ability to "bounce back," it does not look at the level of economic strength to which each community is returning. In other words, the RCI does not necessarily provide a robust comparison of communities' objective economic footing, but rather looks at measures intended to discern whether they can retain whatever level of strength they have. The RCI should be coupled with other, more typical, economic indicators for a full picture of economic wellness, vitality, strength, and resiliency.

Another weakness of the RCI is that it has limited ability to address the nuanced situations of different communities that may lead to somewhat skewed RCI rankings in certain areas. Without an in-depth analysis pointing out the pros and cons of being a university community or a state capital, the RCI may not be able to capture a complete picture. Future research may consider efforts to weight the different components of the index and offer MAs opportunity to tweak these weights as deemed relevant to control variables necessitated by their local situations.

Nevertheless, the SSCRPC considers the RCI among many important resources it has explored and will continue to monitor for purposes of benchmarking the Springfield Metropolitan Area against peers and ensuring that all available efforts are taken to promote the on-going health and resilience of the region. The Regional Strategic Plan developed by the SSCRPC in draft form as of November 2013 details the importance of creating a “vital cycle” of regional growth. Examining resiliency is one way to ensure that communities are working to ensure that they are engaging in the “Capacity Building” step of this vital cycle, which calls for communities to put structures in place that make it easier to pursue other goals in the face of adversity, rather than more challenging.

This peer comparison also represents a useful application of the RCI in order to test its long-term validity. Empirical analysis of whether the RCI has true predictive capability in terms of communities’ ability to respond to economic difficulties would be a useful step for future research, adding to the insight gained from this brief analysis. Future discussion would also benefit from further analysis of the state context influencing all of these peer communities, particularly in light of the challenges facing the state of Illinois.

While this report has emphasized attributes of the City of Springfield while discussing the Springfield MA, due to its role as the largest population center in the area, the SSCRPC finds it important to note that the RCI’s insights are the relevant to the smaller communities in Sangamon County as well. These smaller Sangamon and Menard County communities are also a part of the metro area and contribute to the RCI indicators. Moreover, as many of these communities depend on the Springfield for economic activity and function largely as “bedroom communities,” their economic resilience is directly tied to that of Springfield.

In some respects, this broad relevance highlights yet again the largest resilience strength of the Springfield MA—its connective capacity. As the Aesop’s Fable cited above points out, the inability to bend, or a lack of resiliency, can be

the greatest weakness of a strong, “oak tree” economy. Among species of oak, however, those with the greatest capacity to withstand wind forces are the “live oaks” that grow in the American South, which utilize interlocking roots to withstand pressure and to weather even severe hurricanes for optimum longevity.

Where the Springfield MA suffers on other resilience factors, and as in the case of the live oak, its intertwined roots—its community and civic fabric—are the greatest resource it has in withstanding economic strain and functioning to its full resilience capacity.

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This report was compiled by Amy Uden, Associate Planner for the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, as part of the SSCRPC's performance benchmarking series under its Strategic and Comprehensive Planning Portfolio.

The Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) serves as the joint planning body for Sangamon County and the City of Springfield, as well as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for transportation planning in the region. The Commission has 17 members including representatives from the Sangamon County Board, Springfield City Council, special units of government, and six appointed citizens from the city and county. The Executive Director is appointed by the Executive Board of the Commission and confirmed by the Sangamon County Board. The Commission works with other public and semi-public agencies throughout the area to promote orderly growth and redevelopment, and assists other Sangamon County communities with their planning needs.

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