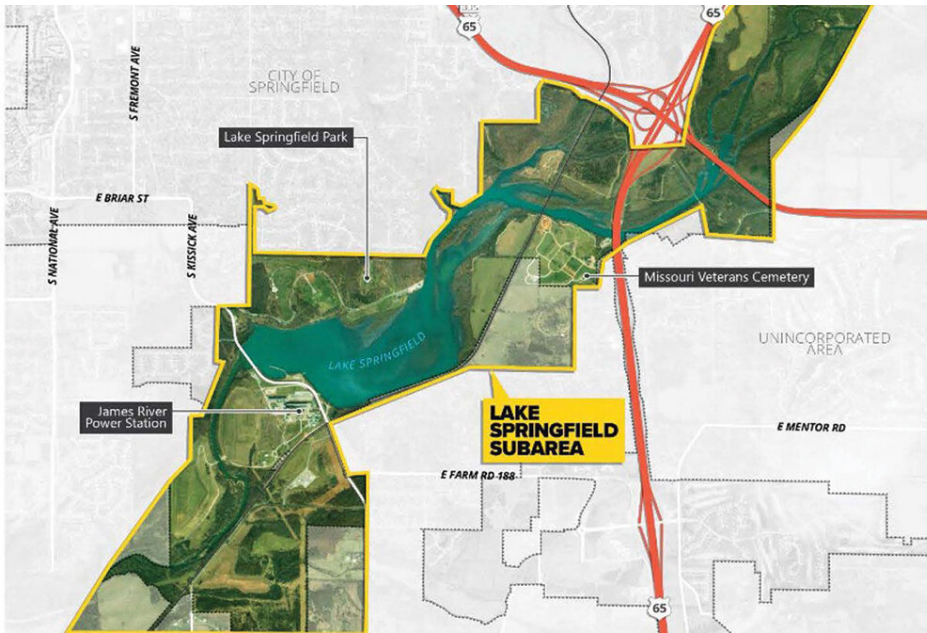




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A map first unveiled in 2022 shows the potential development area under the Lake Springfield plan. Now, more private acreage could be added to the mix.

Lake Springfield project grows in scope with land talks, transportation study

More acreage could join discussion



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Dean Thompson: Private acreage fits the vision for Lake Springfield plan.

The Lake Springfield economic development project, which includes the possible development of private acreage around the interchange at U.S. Routes 60 and 65, is growing in scope with new land discussions underway and a transportation study expected to launch in early 2026.

Dean Thompson, vice president and chief economic development officer for City Utilities of Springfield, one of the central organizations involved in the Lake Springfield initiative, said an undisclosed property owner has been approached about adding roughly 165 acres to the potential development.



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That would bring total acreage available in the plan to around 1,765, including 1,000 acres owned by CU and 600 private acres owned by businessman Larry Childress and family.

“Both properties fit the long-term vision of using public-private partnerships to enable the intersection of nature, recreation and economic development,” Thompson said via email.

Springfield Business Journal was first alerted to the potential expansion of private acreage in the Lake Springfield initiative during the publication’s 12 People You Need to Know live interview series on Oct. 21, when Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce economic development leader Jonas Arjes was interviewed by SBJ Executive Editor Christine Temple.

Arjes, who serves as the chamber’s senior vice president of economic development, said in the interview that the Lake Springfield initiative would provide myriad offerings that would be useful from an economic development standpoint.

“That, to me, is a lot of quality of place, quality of life, housing, multiuse, commercial, maybe possibly some office-type plays in that area,” he said.

Transportation study

Those involved with the project have identified interchange adjustments to highways 60 and 65 as necessary for the project, particularly when it comes to accessing the currently undeveloped private land.

The Ozarks Transportation Organization has been engaged to conduct a transportation study of the 60/65 corridor, with work still in its early stages, said Sara Fields, executive director of the metro planning organization.

She said that “a study is needed to fully identify the solutions that will be most impactful.”

Pending partnership approvals, the study is expected to start in the new year, Fields said. The cost would be between \$500,000 and \$1 million, she said, noting plans to use federal funds and money from project partners.

“We are still determining the representative funding splits,” Fields said.

At the table

By all accounts, the Missouri Department of Transportation must be involved for the project to work.

Childress told SBJ in February that MoDOT initially approved an interchange that would serve his family’s acreage on Route 65, north of the 60/65 interchange, 15-20 years ago, followed by approval around a decade ago for a “dogbone” style interchange at the Farm Road 189 intersection.

Further complicating the issue is a project identified by MoDOT to remove certain access points along Highway 60, including one that connects to the Childress land. A group of business owners have openly opposed the plans by MoDOT, which has pointed to safety concerns and freeway considerations as the primary reasons for the work.

In the SBJ 12 People You Need to Know interview, Arjes said MoDOT is a key partner in the talks.

“We need MoDOT to be our friend, because in this scenario, MoDOT needs to be a partner at the table to make a lot of those things happen,” Arjes said. “You have infrastructure needs that way exceed the capabilities of just the local partners.”

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- ☐ Yes
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Arjes noted that three meetings had been held as many recent months, “and we’ve got good momentum.”

“They’re willing participants at the table, and they’re listening and they’re asking for input,” Arjes said of MoDOT. “Right now, that’s all we can ask for.”

MoDOT Director Ed Hassinger said the department is embracing a collaborative spirit with OTO and local partners involved in the Lake Springfield project.

“We certainly look out for the safety of people traveling on our roadways first and making sure they operate and can facilitate the economic development needs that are really more driven by the region,” he said, characterizing the talks surrounding the Lake Springfield and 60/65 area as preliminary. “We’re kind of at 30,000 feet. We know there are existing problems; there are huge opportunities. How do we bring all those together and get consensus?”

“Consensus is the toughest thing to get. You’ve got to have a good plan and good process.”

Plan recap

Stakeholders involved with the Lake Springfield project first unveiled plans to the public in 2022.

Those plans were expanded upon the following year, when officials said the \$1 billion-\$1.2 billion vision for the land called for ecological improvements and recreational, cultural and natural amenities for Lake Springfield and the surrounding area, according to past SBJ reporting. The area was identified as a redevelopment opportunity in the city’s Forward SGF comprehensive plan.

The plan addresses the ecological needs of the lake, which was artificially formed by damming James River in 1957 for use by CU as a cooling water source for steam generators at the James River Power Plant, which provided electricity for the city through the burning of natural gas and coal. It was decommissioned in January 2021.

Over nearly seven decades, silt has built up in the lake, and officials estimate the lake is on track to become a wetland in 20-50 years, according to past reporting.

The plan recommends dredging up portions of the lake into islands that would be joined by an elevated boardwalk trail, with space for kayakers and canoers to glide underneath.

The plan separates the land into zones where recommended uses include a retreat conference center, corporate challenge areas and a cultural education center, with trail connections throughout, according to past reporting.

Moving forward, Thompson said details on the implementation phase for each area of the project are expected to be unveiled next year.

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