



**William Francis Galvin**  
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**SECRETARY GALVIN PRESENTS 2015 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD TO  
COOMES BLOCK, MORSE BLOCK, AND SMITH CARRIAGE COMPANY / CARING  
HEALTH CENTER, SPRINGFIELD**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the Coomes Block, Morse Block, and Smith Carriage Company, Springfield, to receive a 2015 Massachusetts Historical Commission Historic Preservation Award.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is proud to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of this year’s awardees,” said Secretary Galvin. “The projects the Commission is recognizing this year are particularly diverse and represent the many creative ways that significant historic resources are being preserved across the Commonwealth. This sensitive rehabilitation and adaptive reuse project saved three historically significant buildings, strengthened a vital and diverse urban neighborhood, and will serve the city of Springfield for years to come.”

Secretary Galvin presented the award recently at the Massachusetts Archives Building, Dorchester. The Coomes Block, Morse Block, and Smith Carriage Company Building together comprise one of 11 projects, individuals, and organizations to be honored.

The Coomes Block, Morse Block, and Smith Carriage Company are three connected buildings that represent the southward expansion of downtown Springfield in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and are listed together in the National Register of Historic Places.

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The oldest, the three-story Smith Carriage Company Building (1890, modified 1924), displays Queen Anne and Renaissance Revival-style characteristics. First used as a storage and assembly facility for carriage and then auto parts, the building later served as an electrical and furniture warehouse.

Constructed in 1904, the three-story, Classical Revival-style Morse Block was originally divided into two storefronts at the street level, with the upper two levels serving at various times as a dance hall, bowling alley, and meeting space.

The early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Coomes Block is a good example of the period's classically ornamented commercial architecture. Originally configured as a retail storefront with offices above, the building housed various furniture companies from 1939 into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1980s, a local furniture retailer purchased all three buildings and created a single, flowing showroom and warehouse space on multiple levels.

Following the company's closure in 2000, the buildings stood vacant and suffered from deterioration and vandalism. In June 2011, as they awaited a planned rehabilitation, all three sustained significant tornado damage. The buildings likely would have been demolished, were it not for Caring Health Center's existing commitment to rehabilitating them for reuse as medical facilities.

Utilizing state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits, the restoration and adaptive reuse included structural repairs, masonry work, installation of new roofing and historically appropriate windows, restoration of historic trim, accessibility upgrades, and new electrical, mechanical, and fire-protection systems. In the Coomes Block, the project restored the configuration of display windows based on historic photos, and included patching and repointing of cast-concrete details and rebuilding the parapet with proper support.

Many of the Morse Block's historic window and door openings had been filled with cinderblocks. Nonhistoric storefronts, windows, masonry, cornice, and roof framing had all been severely affected by the tornado. The project team rebuilt the building's walls from the third-floor level, reopened doors and windows, and reconfigured the storefronts in a more traditional manner. The roof was replaced with a new truss system and insulated membrane. Damaged tin ceilings were restored to match the original pattern and profile in the community room, first-floor corridor, and patient waiting area.

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Prior to the project, Smith Carriage's pressed-metal cornice was corroded and its wood supports severely rotted. In areas of serious deterioration at the building's spandrels, the brick was replaced to match the surrounding area, and the cornice was repaired and secured to new backing. The building's aluminum storefront was replaced with double doors and display windows with transoms, echoing the configuration in historic photos.

A major challenge of adapting the three buildings for new use was to develop an accessible circulation pattern that preserved the existing floor plates, since they did not have consistent floor levels. The team used small ramps to ease the transitions between buildings, and created an interior elevator to access all public and clinical areas. The adaptive reuse of these buildings into a full-service, licensed community health center allowed Caring Health to provide much-needed medical, dental, and wellness services in an accessible, central setting. The center each year serves more than 13,000 patients, many of whom come from economically challenged backgrounds and suffer from high rates of chronic disease.

This is the 37<sup>th</sup> year of MHC's Preservation Awards program. Projects are considered annually for awards in the categories of Rehabilitation and Restoration, Adaptive Reuse, Education and Outreach, Archaeology, Stewardship, and Landscape Preservation. Individuals are considered in the categories of Individual Lifetime Achievement and Local Preservationist. Secretary Galvin serves as the chair of the 17-member Massachusetts Historical Commission.



*(left to right) Debbi Gottlieb, Dietz & Company Architects; Tania Barber, President/CEO, Caring Health Center; Secretary William F. Galvin; Jacqueline Johnson, COO, Caring Health Center; Christina Huebner Torre, Vice President, Caring Health Center. (Photo by Wyeth Lilley)*

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