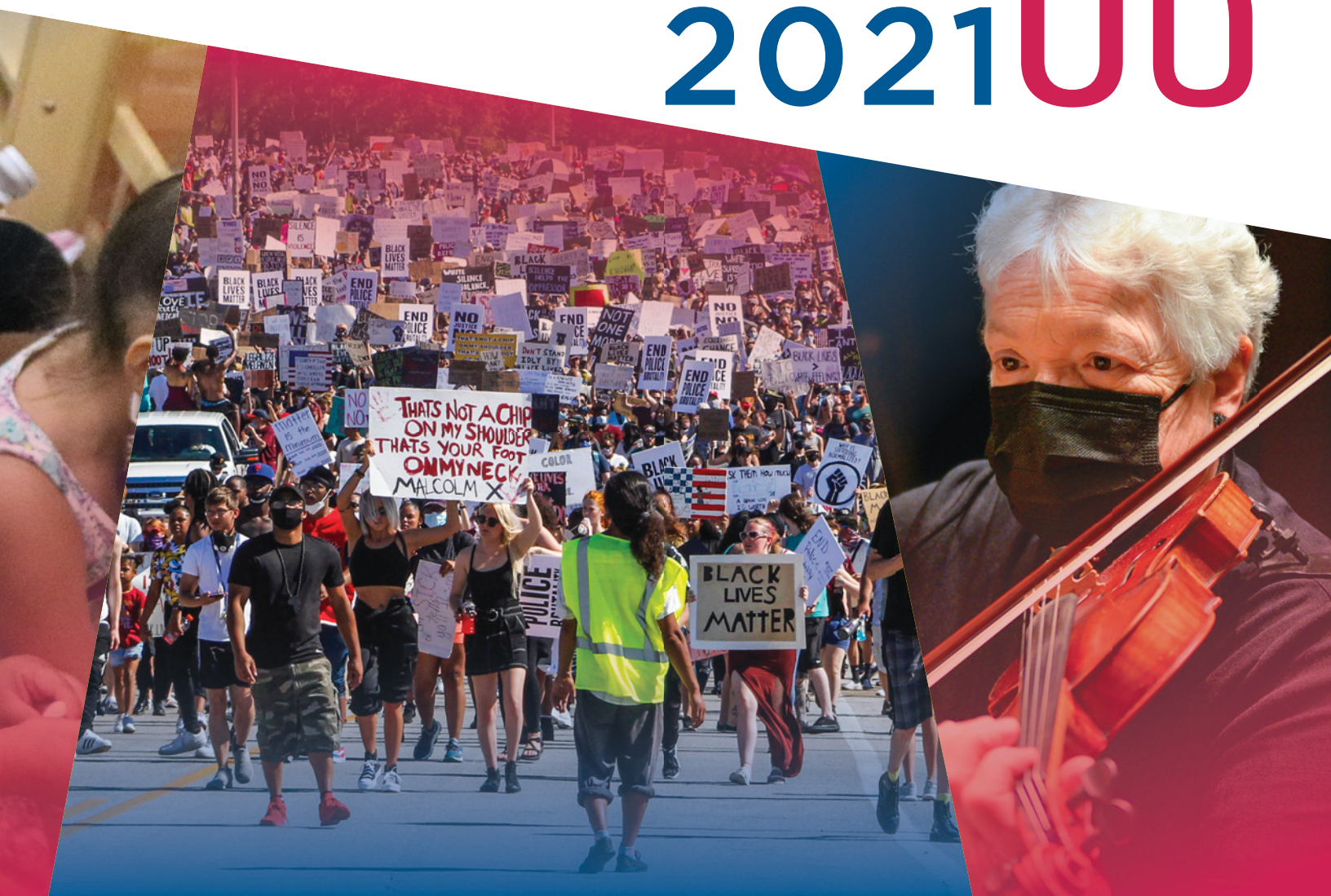




A REPORT FOR SPRINGFIELD & GREENE COUNTY

COMMUNITY FOCUS 2021



INTRODUCTION

Production & Support

This project was completed with support from the following organizations, whose leaders pledge to use the information in the report to guide their future decision making:

*COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
OF THE OZARKS*

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF SPRINGFIELD

*SPRINGFIELD AREA CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE*

*SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY
LIBRARY DISTRICT*

UNITED WAY OF THE OZARKS

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The **2021 Community Focus Report: A Report for Springfield & Greene County** is a summary of information compiled and evaluated by many individuals and subcommittees. Additional information, data and resources are available on the website dedicated to this report.

Please visit:

- SpringfieldCommunityFocus.org
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Welcome to the 2021 Community Focus Report

BY MOREY MECHLIN, STEERING COMMITTEE CHAIR, AND DR. JONATHAN GROVES, FACILITATOR

Fifteen years after the first Community Focus Report, the 2019 edition highlighted several improvements throughout the Springfield/Greene County area: A strong, growing economy; a vibrant arts community; a willingness to invest in schools, trails and infrastructure. Ongoing challenges such as poverty, child abuse and mental health issues remained, but the October 2019 event that shared the report highlighted case studies of success, as well as a sense of optimism.

As 2020 began, scientists identified a novel coronavirus that had begun spreading throughout the world. By March, health officials had declared the situation a pandemic, one that eventually inundated health systems and led to community shut-downs around the world, including in Springfield and Greene County. Since that time, the changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted every facet of our lives, physical, mental and spiritual.

To reflect this historic moment, the Community Focus Report's steering committee is presenting our community's biennial report card of strengths and challenges in a vastly different fashion.

In advance of this printed report, 11 white papers tracking the Community Focus Report's usual topic areas were released on a new website built by the Springfield-Greene County Library District. In addition to focusing on three specific Blue Ribbons and Red Flags for each topic, the papers also examined the pandemic's impact. We are grateful for the continuing commitment of the Library and the report's other supporting partners: the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, the United Way of the Ozarks, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce and the Junior League of Springfield.

Unlike previous editions, this printed summary centers on community health to understand how we coped and how we might regain our momentum post-pandemic. The Blue Ribbons and Red Flags from the white papers have been grouped by the Social Determinants of Health, defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as "conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life risks and outcomes."

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The report also includes an intentional focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, a major theme in 2021. Committee member Francine Pratt, director of Prosper Springfield, explains how to apply an equity lens to understand how issues and decisions may affect historically under-represented groups differently—often more deeply—and ask, "Who is kept out of participation?"

Since 2004, the Community Focus Report has provided a data-driven snapshot of our community to help us improve Springfield and Greene County. How we move forward is up to us as a collective community—among nonprofit organizations and churches, schools and government institutions, citizens as well as public leaders. No single group or area of expertise alone can eliminate all of our Red Flags; as this report reveals, there are connections and links, often not immediately apparent, that can result in unintended consequences. What may resolve a problem in one area might create another elsewhere.

The committee's hope, now as then, is that this report provides a starting point for conversation in our community, toward solutions that leverage our strengths to overcome persistent challenges and issues, together.

ENGAGE ONLINE

- ▶ For the 2021 Update white papers for each of the 11 topics covered in previous reports, along with podcasts, news updates and more, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.
- ▶ How do you define Springfield? Share your input on our community at sgfengage.org.



2021 COMMUNITY THEMES

The COVID-19 pandemic stretched our community in many ways—perhaps too many.

It affirmed our community's resolve and ability to collaborate and innovate, especially during the pandemic's first wave in 2020. Our medical professionals and public officials led the way through uncertainty as health care workers tirelessly treated the sick. Teachers, business owners and artists explored new avenues to reach others virtually. Neighbors developed creative ways to visit and support one another.

But the pandemic revealed deepening fissures, too, as we isolated ourselves and fragmented. A divisive national election season culminated in a Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Scientifically validated solutions championed by medical experts were dismissed by some in favor of unverified and dangerous misinformation spread through social media. Locally, our vaccination rate remained lower than the state's and the nation's going into the summer of 2021, and Springfield soon made unwanted national headlines as our intensive care units filled again.

As this printed report was being completed, the number of COVID-19 patients being treated in Springfield's hospitals had dropped from the highest levels of the pandemic. An exhausted

emergency corps was closer to relief as the percentage of Greene County residents 12 and older who were fully vaccinated surpassed 50%. But the divides had not healed.

Against this once-in-a-generation backdrop, the steering committee developed six key themes for the 2021 Community Focus Report, intended to capture the strengths and challenges of this moment. Our discussion considered the 66 Blue Ribbons and Red Flags from the series of topical white papers released online to identify these intertwined themes.

THE NEED TO REGAIN MOMENTUM

The number of households in poverty—an overall theme in the last two Community Focus Reports—had been dropping in recent years through the collaborative work of organizations such as the Community Partnership of the Ozarks, Prosper Springfield and the Council of Churches of the Ozarks. The City of Springfield's Forward SGF vision-planning process had increased civic participation as residents worked with public officials to plan our collective future. Businesses and the arts community were thriving.

The pandemic halted that progress, as shutdowns affected businesses and workers alike. Since March 2020, more than 600 Greene County residents have died of COVID-19 variants, among 43,000 and counting confirmed cases. Though support from federal, state and local governments temporarily helped stem the tide of closures and evictions, the community must recapture the drive, innovation and progress from 2019 to move ahead into 2022 and beyond.

Fortunately, local economic indicators are improving. Unemployment has dropped to pre-pandemic levels. Major construction projects are underway at Missouri State University, Springfield Public Schools and Drury University. And improvements to infrastructure, roads and trails continue, with the ambitious Grant Avenue Parkway project connecting Bass Pro Shops to downtown on the horizon.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

In the 2019 Community Focus Report, diversity emerged as a major theme, as Springfield Public Schools and others launched equity initiatives to ensure success for people regardless of background. In 2020, the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others inspired a

continuing national discussion on race that resonated locally with a large march of support through downtown.

An inclusiveness survey released by the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights in 2020 found that nearly 45% of the 2,276 respondents described Springfield as "not inclusive" or "not very inclusive," and almost half reported having experienced or witnessed discrimination, because of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or age.

These findings come as Springfield and Greene County have become increasingly diverse. The 2020 Census showed that 16% of the county's population—and 19% within the city limits of Springfield—identify as a race other than white only. The Hispanic population has grown to 5%, and the area's LGBTQ community continues to grow. The City of Springfield, recognizing the importance of this area, has hired its first director of diversity, equity and inclusion.

And using an equity lens to understand how historically under-represented groups may be disproportionately affected by organizational and institutional decisions is now critical to our community's collective success (see the essay by Francine Pratt on page 12).

COMMUNITY HEALTH

The steering committee reframed the printed report around this key topic, as our health system proved critical to our physical and mental survival during the pandemic.

CoxHealth, Mercy, Jordan Valley Community Health Center and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department have worked together to battle repeated COVID-19 waves, and all other areas covered by the Community Focus Report depended upon the success of our medical community. Initiatives such as Burrell Behavioral Health's Rapid Access Unit, highlighted in multiple Community Focus Report 2021 Update white papers, show how the health sector is exploring innovative ways to confront our Red Flags across topics.

Our community health goes beyond the emergency realm, however. Tackling upstream issues such as poverty and mental health remain important to dealing with addiction, domestic violence, suicide and other outcomes that profoundly affect the quality of life in Springfield and Greene County. And the pandemic revealed the need for trusted information

THEMES FROM PAST REPORTS

This is the third report in which the Steering Committee identified themes that emerged across the 11 topical chapters. These are the earlier sets of themes:

2017

- ▶ Mental-health assessment
- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Continued collaboration
- ▶ Sustainable funding for community needs
- ▶ Infrastructure investment
- ▶ Civic engagement

2019

- ▶ Community mental health
- ▶ Cooperation
- ▶ Diversity
- ▶ Economic opportunity
- ▶ Poverty and homelessness
- ▶ Social capital

For an archive of past reports, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.

networks—beyond the fragmented social media—to ensure a fact-based understanding of our local issues and challenges.

THE COMMUNITY'S CHANGING IMAGE

Our community continued to grow faster than much of the rest of the state, with Greene County's population expanding by 8.6% over the past decade. But that rate of growth is slower than cities seen as desirable places in which to live, such as Austin, Texas, or Nashville, Tennessee.

In recent years, leaders have put more focus on placemaking, developing distinctive amenities and offerings that not only bring skilled talent to the area, but keep such professionals, entrepreneurs and innovators here. Education, transportation, business, the arts, the outdoors—all play a role in creating an inviting place that people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives want to call home.

Those efforts, however, must be coupled with confronting the persistent issue of poverty, the growing rate of crime, and the increased incidence of issues such as domestic violence and addiction arising out of undiagnosed and untreated mental illness. And making sure wages keep up with the rising cost of living remains a vital issue.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

Since the first report in 2004, collaboration among our public and private institutions has been a reliable, consistent community theme for Springfield and Greene County. But collaboration at the institutional level does not mean consensus among individuals, as dissent over a variety of issues in recent months has made apparent.

For years, Springfield and Greene County—driven by nonprofits and the faith community—have provided a base of support to address problems and help those in need. Through many organizations, we have volunteered time and donated resources to build community. The region now finds itself at a pivotal moment as longtime community leaders retire, and the next generation rises.

ONGOING INVESTMENT

Success requires investment, and over the past few years, Springfield and Greene County

Community at a Glance

POPULATION

	2010	2020	CHANGE
Springfield	159,498	169,176	▲9,678
Greene County	275,174	298,915	▲23,741

RACE & ETHNICITY

GREENE COUNTY	2010	2020	CHANGE
White	91.2%	83.9%	▼7.3
Black/African American	2.9%	3.4%	▲0.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7%	0.7%	—
Asian	1.6%	2.1%	▲0.5
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	—
Some Other Race	0.9%	1.7%	▲0.8
Two or More Races	2.6%	8%	▲5.4
Hispanic or Latino	3%	4.8%	▲1.8

HOUSING

SPRINGFIELD	2010	2020	CHANGE
Total Units	77,620	84,016	▲6,396
Occupied	89.9%	90.5%	▲0.6
	2010	2019	CHANGE
Average Household Size	2.09	2.06	▼0.03
Owner-occupied Value	\$103,800	\$118,110	▲\$14,310
Median Rent	\$635	\$734	▲\$99

GREENE COUNTY	2010	2020	CHANGE
Total Units	125,387	136,450	▲11,063
Occupied	91.1%	92.4%	▲1.3
	2010	2019	CHANGE
Average Household Size	2.28	2.22	▼0.06
Owner-occupied Value	\$125,500	\$146,000	▲\$20,500
Median Rent	\$713	\$793	▲\$80

DEMOGRAPHICS

SPRINGFIELD	2010	2019	CHANGE
Median Age	33.3	33.1	▼0.2
Median Income	\$33,082	\$36,856	▲\$3,774
Families in Poverty	15.6%	14.2%	▼1.4
Families in Poverty with			
Children Under 18	27.7%	20.9%	▼6.8
High School Graduate	88.5%	92.4%	▲3.9
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	26.1%	28.5%	▲2.4

	2014	2019	CHANGE
Without Health Insurance	17.5	13.4	▼4.1

GREENE COUNTY	2010	2019	CHANGE
Median Age	35.6	36	▲0.4
Median Income	\$41,059	\$46,086	▲\$5,027
Families in Poverty	11.2%	9.7%	▼1.5
Families in Poverty with			
Children Under 18	19.6%	15.1%	▼4.5
High School Graduate	89.7%	92.9%	▲3.2
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	28%	31.2%	▲3.2

	2014	2019	CHANGE
Without Health Insurance	14.7%	10.7%	▼4

COST OF LIVING

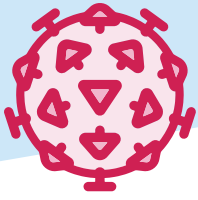
2020 INDEX	AVERAGE	GROCERY	HOUSING
St. Louis	88	101.5	71.3
SPRINGFIELD	88.6	101.5	72.4
Kansas City	95.2	93.8	87.6
(National average: 100)			

SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU; AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY; COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH

residents have supported numerous infrastructure initiatives: A \$168 million bond issue for Springfield Public Schools is adding new buildings and resources for more than 23,500 students and their families; the renewal of the ¼-cent capital improvements sales tax and ⅛-cent transportation sales tax ensure investments in roads and capital projects over the next 20 years; and the adoption of sewer-rate increases will support wastewater, stormwater and overall water quality protection efforts into 2025.

But investment is coming from other areas

as well. Ozark Greenways, TrailSpring and other organizations are developing miles of trails and outdoor recreation resources that proved critical to the community's well-being during the pandemic. Numerous nonprofits continue to inject needed resources and programs to help elevate residents out of poverty and personal struggle. And organizations such as the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and the United Way of the Ozarks help provide the financial structures to make community improvement possible for all.



IMPACT OF COVID-19

The pandemic impacted all 11 topic areas covered by the Community Focus Report. But our community developed innovative, creative ways to overcome challenges and obstacles created by the historic disruption to our lives.

In March 2020, Greene County and the City of Springfield issued orders temporarily halting the operations of many businesses and organizations; those orders were lifted in May. This section highlights solutions and effects in 10 areas. Community Health, the focal point of this report, will be reviewed on pages 7 and 8, and greater detail about the pandemic's effect on each topic area can be found in the 2021 white papers at springfieldcommunityfocus.org.

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The pandemic affected the area economy in significant ways. Unemployment rates temporarily skyrocketed in the first few months after mandated lockdowns began, reaching 9.2% in Springfield in April 2020, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While those rates have dropped to pre-pandemic levels, it's likely that many individuals have dropped out of the workforce in the interim due to issues such as safety concerns or lack of child-care options.

These reductions in workforce also are sure to exacerbate the existing skilled workforce shortage. Government relief efforts such as the Paycheck Protection Program, the CARES Act, the American Rescue Plan and other programs also have helped to soften the immediate blow. (See sidebar on page 5.)

Despite the pandemic's enormous impact, area businesses demonstrated an ability to innovate. Many stayed open by adapting and changing operations. Restaurants switched to carryout or delivery service; retail providers provided contactless and delivery-based options; manufacturers quickly picked up the ability to make personal protective equipment for community use.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

During the early months of the pandemic, 54.7% of child care programs in Greene County were temporarily or permanently closed. By January 2021, Greene County had lost 715 licensed spots from pre-pandemic numbers. The number has rebounded slightly; however, more than 400 slots were permanently lost due to closures and staffing issues.

The burden of caring for children weighs heavily on the backs of economically vulnerable women and women of color. Early childhood educators were some of the most vulnerable members of our society, particularly in the first days of the pandemic. They were on the front lines without benefit of health insurance, adequate protective gear or sick leave.

Developmental screenings of young children were down 75% from previous years, which translated to an inability to make referrals for delays. On the bright side, the child care community quickly determined how to continue serving and supporting families safely.

EDUCATION

Like its counterparts across the country, Springfield Public Schools experienced dramatic changes. For the remainder of the 2019–20 school year, students continued to learn at home through the SPS At Home online learning platform. To facilitate virtual learning, SPS ensured that every student had a device and adequate internet service.

Early in the pandemic, SPS staff completed wellness checks, connected families with support services, offered grab-and-go meals and provided child care for health care professionals and first responders. At the beginning of the 2020–21 school year, SPS offered families a choice between modified in-person or fully virtual learning options.

Enrollment for the 2020–21 school year was affected by the pandemic. The September 2020 total student enrollment count was 23,139 total students, down from 24,677 total students in September 2019—a decrease of 1,538 students.

PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY

During the pandemic, the Office of Emergency Management's Emergency Operations Center was activated both physically and virtually for a record 384 days. The EOC facilitated coordination for multiple agencies, departments, and organizations to respond to the historic circumstances. These efforts included regular media briefings, weekly informational calls with community partners and coordinating the acquisition and distribution of personal protective equipment throughout Greene County.

During the pandemic, Springfield-Greene County 911 Emergency Communications saw

a significant uptick in medical emergency calls, likely due to the desire to avoid hospitals for fear of the virus. While taking 911 calls, telecommunications adjusted their questions to gather more information about the caller's health and keep first responders safe.

During the City of Springfield's stay-at-home order (April 6–May 4, 2020), officers were responsible for enforcing ordinance restrictions. Those duties continued through the year, as officers responded to more than 1,500 calls for masking ordinance violations.

HOUSING

In March 2020, "home" became a different place. Those who had adequate housing were suddenly isolated and forced to decide whom to allow inside, affecting those who depended on caregivers. Others had to figure out how to work from home, and many had to create online learning environments for their children. The pandemic also created a real estate seller's market with demands for larger homes.

When news first came out about the dangers of COVID-19, those without homes became a priority. From April 2020 to April 2021, Community Partnership of the Ozarks helped place more than 1,075 vulnerable individuals in area motels to reduce potential exposure. Housing programs, emergency shelters and supportive services started taking extra safety precautions to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak.

An eviction moratorium, created to protect renters and tenants, depended on landlords and managers to be understanding while they were faced with their own expenses. These short-term solutions helped people maintain housing, but the long-term effects once federal assistance ends are yet to be seen.

TRANSPORTATION

After the stay-at-home order, Springfield's traffic volumes decreased more than 40% and did not return to "normal" until July of that year. Despite the reduced traffic, the Missouri Department of Transportation and the Highway Patrol reported increases in speeding and crashes.

City Utilities Transit was affected by COVID-19 with bus ridership at only 21% of the previous year's average. The CU transit division maintained operation of the farebox and use of the front door on its buses by adding temporary

barriers in the bus's operator (driver) area.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

During the early months of the pandemic, city and health leaders held thrice-weekly health news briefings, along with virtual town halls, to provide detailed information from local trusted sources. More people started watching and participating through multiple virtual channels, helping guide decisions. The City estimated that virtual channels increased citizen engagement by nearly 30% between 2019 and 2020.

United Way of the Ozarks, along with the City of Springfield, Greene County, the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and the Community Partnership of the Ozarks, also started the Have Faith Initiative. This effort brought together a broad array of faith leaders in Springfield and Greene County to coordinate their response to the pandemic.

The pandemic did affect overall volunteer levels, which were lower than previous years, as were donations when many fundraising activities were postponed or turned into virtual events. Many corporate budgets tightened during the pandemic, too, making donations a challenge. There's optimism, however, that volunteering in person is returning with safety measures in place.

ARTS & CULTURE

Fundraising for arts organizations shifted greatly during the pandemic. While the decline of corporate sponsorships continued, several organizations reported increases in individual donations. To date, donations are down just 1% compared to pre-pandemic giving. Organizations were making smaller asks and receiving smaller gifts, but patrons were deeply engaged in restarting the arts.

The decrease in sponsorships remains a concern. Just like uncertainty facing the arts and culture community, for-profit partners also are dealing with dramatic shifts in business. As emergency relief ceases, it is not assured that previous funding models are sustainable.

While virtual program shifts are highlighted as a Blue Ribbon, the technological infrastructure for many was so outdated that it required a major effort to make the change.

PARKS, RECREATION & LEISURE

During the most isolating parts of the

Federal support, nonprofits buoy residents

Throughout Springfield and Greene County, businesses, organizations and residents survived the pandemic the help of nonprofits and millions of dollars in government aid to protect payrolls, income, and housing. The support sustained many businesses and community organizations, and kept people in their homes.

Federal stimulus funds helped boost the economy and support renters, landlords and homeowners, but the lack of affordable and accessible housing continued to create barriers to those looking for rental housing. As the lockdown was slowly lifted, many returned to work, but others were left without a steady income; renters fell behind and utility bills piled up.

By the end of September 2021, agencies in Greene County had distributed \$5.1 million in Emergency Rental Assistance Funds out of about \$8.77 million available. Agencies including Catholic Charities, Community Partnership of the Ozarks, OACAC and Salvation Army administered federal, state and local relief funding for housing needs.

Businesses in the five-county Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area have been approved for more than \$377 million in Paycheck Protection Program loans as of May 31, 2021, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration, including more than

\$249 million to businesses in Greene County. The county received \$34.4 million in funding through the first coronavirus relief bill, the CARES Act passed in March 2020, that was awarded to small businesses, nonprofits, education and health care institutions, and government entities.

Nearly all arts and culture organizations in Springfield received some federal relief funding. However, the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant, approved by Congress in December 2020 to help eligible venues, only began distributing funding in summer 2021.

For nonprofit organizations, donations this year have been more solid than some expected. Nonprofits harbor some concern, however, that potential donors may assume funding available through the American Rescue Plan Act, the second relief package approved in March 2021, will fulfill budget needs. Most of those funds will go toward specific programming, however, not operations.

While passive parks use and outdoor experiences remained strong throughout the pandemic, overall parks revenue took a \$1.2 million hit, as memberships, program registrations and events were canceled or scaled back. Reimbursements from the City of Springfield, and \$1.17 million in CARES Act funding through Greene County, helped stabilize the Springfield-Greene County Park Board budget.

pandemic, local residents sought solace outdoors, and our area's park system proved an invaluable Blue Ribbon. The Springfield-Greene County Park Board worked closely with the Health Department to ensure visitor safety and eventually restore services and amenities. Parks throughout the system saw increases in usage.

Parks continued to partner with the Health Department to safely reopen family centers and sports programs by encouraging face coverings, screening for symptoms, checking temperatures and limiting capacity to prevent spread of COVID-19. After the city's emergency orders were lifted, a new normal remained in place as popular classes accommodate greater personal

space, and frequent cleaning continues on common touch surfaces.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Efforts of a number of local grassroots organizations integral to the preservation of the area's natural environment were hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, Ozark Greenways Inc. and others have traditionally incorporated hands-on learning, service projects, advocacy and activism in their work. But similar to other nonprofits, they canceled fundraising, education and promotional efforts, and face-to-face meetings, which foster member involvement.

About the Social Determinants of Health

For the 2021 Community Focus Report, the steering committee is focusing the printed version upon the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact upon the 11 areas usually reviewed for Blue Ribbons and Red Flags. Prior to this report's release, 11 detailed white papers were released for the topic areas through the Community Focus Report website to provide the usual biennial snapshot—with the acknowledgment that the historic pandemic made measuring progress from 2019 difficult, if not impossible.

With the overarching emphasis on public health, this printed version condenses the white papers' Blue Ribbons and Red Flags into the five Social Determinants of Health, defined by the World Health Organization as “the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes.” Many public agencies, including the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, group those factors into five categories:



HEALTH CARE ACCESS & QUALITY



ECONOMIC STABILITY



EDUCATION ACCESS & QUALITY



NEIGHBORHOOD & BUILT ENVIRONMENT



SOCIAL & COMMUNITY CONTEXT

This analysis begins with a specific focus on Community Health, which relates to the SDOH of Health Care Access and Quality.

For a complete look at the 2021 Blue Ribbons and Red Flags in each of the 11 topic areas of the report, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.



HEALTH CARE ACCESS & QUALITY

During the response to the pandemic, the public health system was center stage. Our community began to interact with public health on a personal basis. The pandemic has provided the opportunity for people to better understand the role of public health in keeping the community healthy.

Springfield's community health resources proved invaluable to the region. CoxHealth, Mercy Springfield and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department worked with the City of Springfield and Greene County to provide accurate information. “First Response,” a review of early leadership takeaways, showed how the Blue Ribbons of collaboration and communication across sectors supported an effective response early in the pandemic. As former health director Clay Goddard said: “I think that this will not be the last major public health crisis that we will face in our lifetimes. Nor is this the end of the coronavirus. We have learned a lot from this pandemic and the biggest takeaway is that when challenges arise, we must always be prepared to answer the call.”

In March 2020, our hospitals almost immediately shut down elective surgeries, procedures and screening tests at the beginning of the pandemic. The changes in service delivery throughout the pandemic led residents to delay or skip necessary care and preventive screenings. This trend could lead to a decrease in overall health of our community.

Due to the shutdown and quarantine/isolation of community members, mental health and well-being came even more to light. We know from previous pandemics that the negative mental-health effects can last from one to three years. On the upside, this has created a dialogue in our community, leading to a reduction in the stigma and an increased willingness to engage in conversations about mental health. Created in response to the pandemic, Burrell's Be Well

Community—a free public resource three days a week on Facebook—emerged as a unique and highly used resource to connect with one another.

“Community health” is an intersection of physical health, mental health, and interaction of economic and social/environmental factors. According to the 2021 County Health Rankings, Greene County ranks 42nd out of Missouri's 115 counties based on health outcomes and health factors (areas that influence health). This is up

from ranking 61st in both 2018 and 2019, but still lower than rankings in the 30s prior to 2018. This signifies progress, but a long way to go to reach our desired health levels.

Collaboration among health care partners was enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic as providers worked to control and contain the virus through multiple efforts. Community partners passed policies and ordinances to ensure the health of our community. In one initial effort, CoxHealth, Jordan Valley Community Health Center, Mercy and the SGCHD worked together to deploy a community testing site for COVID-19.

That collaboration continued throughout the response. The Mercy health system was the first in our area to receive vaccine, and worked with CoxHealth to share supply. While the logistics didn't work out,

this type of collaboration was evident on multiple fronts.

Many other organizations worked with the community health partners to respond to needs by providing housing, food, child care services, care for the ill and affected, and support for health care workers.

Amid the pandemic, new initiatives emerged. The Have Faith Initiative, which comprised leaders of the faith community, the health department, the City of Springfield and Greene County, met frequently to address spiritual needs.



BLUE RIBBONS

- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Health care infrastructure and recruiting efforts
- ▶ Tobacco prevention



RED FLAGS

- ▶ Mental health and substance abuse
- ▶ Access to medical care/dental care/mental health care
- ▶ Children's health
- ▶ Child abuse and neglect
- ▶ Lack of support for mitigating children's mental health issues
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Opioid proliferation

For more on these Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.

Outside of the COVID-19 response, collaboration is strong and thriving. Following 2019's Community Mental Health Assessment, which identified **access to behavioral health and substance-use services** as a key need for our area, partners from health care, behavioral health and the criminal justice system came together to launch Burrell Behavioral Health's Behavioral Crisis Center–Rapid Access Unit, a “Success Story” featured in both the Community Health and Public Order & Safety topical white papers.

In early 2020, community leaders and partners addressed broader health needs defined by the Community Health Needs Assessment. The 2021 assessment will include a larger service area and numerous new agencies. Through this process, partners will create an action plan to address community health needs. For instance, the Ozarks Health Commission in this assessment identified **children as our most vulnerable population for health disparities** based on socioeconomic class or demographic group. Greene County's 92,035 children ranked 70% more vulnerable than children in other counties.

Health care systems are our area's largest job drivers, employing approximately 22,612 employees between CoxHealth and Mercy Hospital Springfield; the entire health care sector, which offers every specialty listed by the American Medical Association, employs nearly 37,500 people for a \$4.5 billion annual economic impact. In 2019, Mercy Heart Hospital Springfield completed a \$110 million project to bring its cardiac services under one roof as the most advanced in the region. This hospital became critical in the care and recovery of some COVID-19 patients. Mercy's expanded Kids Emergency Room provides specialized emergency pediatric care.

Our **health care infrastructure** demonstrated agility during the pandemic. CoxHealth transformed the fifth floor of CoxSouth tower into a COVID-19 unit in a matter of weeks. In January 2021, Jordan Valley Community Health Center announced the expansion of a ninth location at Grand Street and Kansas Expressway. This site started as a community vaccination hub through a partnership between Jordan Valley and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department.

With a nationwide shortage of health care workers, our community is working to train health care providers. Enrollment in Mercy's College of Nursing and Health Sciences of

Southwest Baptist University is about 700 students. The Missouri State University Care Clinic provides education and offers hands-on training for students in health sciences degree programs at MSU. Cox College expanded and renovated its central Springfield campus to train more students. CoxHealth and Burrell Behavioral Health partnered with Ozarks Technical Community College to train and employ medical assistants and behavioral-health support professionals, respectively.

In the 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment, Springfield's high prevalence of tobacco use resulted in major concerns related to lung and cardiovascular disease and mental health. Community partners worked strategically on upstream policy-based approaches to **tobacco-use prevention**. In mid-2019, Springfield City Council passed the Tobacco 21 ordinance to prohibit tobacco and vape sales or provisions to anyone under 21.

It often takes multiple approaches to make significant changes. The Greene County Tobacco and Vape Prevention Coalition formed to decrease vaping among youth. Springfield and Greene County have seen a 2.9% decrease from 2018 to 2020 among students who reported using vaping products, according to the Missouri Student Survey.

The 2019 Community Mental Health and Substance Use Assessment spotlighted the need to address rising **mental health problems and substance use**. In October 2019, a dramatic spike in **opioid drug overdoses** led to as many in one 24-hour period as typically seen in a month. The fire, police and health departments, first responders, community health and substance-use recovery providers came together to respond. Better Life in Recovery trained the community on using Narcan, an emergency treatment for suspected opioid overdose. New resources also focus on follow-up support and long-term recovery resources for overdose survivors.

According to the 2021 County Health Rankings, Greene County residents average 4.9 days in a 30-day period in which they are mentally unhealthy. This is higher than the state (4.5) and national (3.8) averages. Community providers continue to collaborate to address mental health and substance use; Burrell psychiatrists, for instance, also work in Mercy's Marian Center, an inpatient behavioral health unit, and staff beds



BURRELL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Burrell Behavioral Health's Behavioral Crisis Center–Rapid Access Unit addresses several Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, including collaboration, access to mental health care and enhanced resources for public safety.

at CoxHealth's adolescent inpatient location at Cox North Hospital. Burrell also expanded its walk-in Connection Center in 2019.

Support for depression, anxiety and mood disorders includes increased awareness and assessment of perinatal mood disorders. The Maternal Mental Health Network was created in 2019 for mental health services directly related to maternal infant health in southwest Missouri. The 2019 Community Focus Report noted that 15.22% of Springfield adults reported being uninsured. Although **access to medical care** is still a Red Flag, the number of uninsured decreased slightly to 13.09% of adults aged 18-64, according to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

Access to care influences quality-of-life measures: Adults 18 years or older who reported having poor or fair health were at 17.4%, compared to Missouri as a whole at 18.1%. County Health Rankings reported Greene County's rate of patients to primary care physicians was 1,040 to 1. Missouri's overall rate of patients to primary care physicians is 1,420 to 1.

County Health Rankings also show our ratio of patients to dental providers at 1,300 to 1, with the overall Missouri patient-to-dental provider ratio at 1,670 to 1. A shortage of dental providers may stop residents from seeking routine dental care, or increase emergency room visits for non-traumatic dental complaints, making **access to dental care** an ongoing Red Flag. While Greene County's provider-to-citizen ratio for mental-health providers is better than the rest of the state, access remains a challenge amid a growing need even before the pandemic.



ECONOMIC STABILITY

A healthy community benefits from economic stability, a category that examines issues such as poverty, housing affordability and the availability of robust employment opportunities. If community members do not have the foundational ability to support themselves with a livable wage and live under safe, affordable shelter, other areas of their lives will suffer.

A consistent Blue Ribbon is Springfield-Greene County's **economic strength and growth**. Even during the worst economic effects of the pandemic, the area's unemployment rate remained lower than state and national averages; the Springfield MSA's jobless rate peaked in April 2020 but has dropped back to pre-pandemic levels.

Our historically strong economy makes our region **attractive for new and existing businesses** such as Amazon to expand operations. The region's economic power is harnessed from sources including health care, education and services. And a healthy **natural environment** also contributes. Hunting in Missouri represents a \$1.6 billion industry, according to the Conservation Federation of Missouri, while fishing activities create \$1.3 billion in economic output and support 9,840 jobs, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Greene County—the home and world headquarters of Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's—and

nearby counties excel as outdoor destinations. **Invasive wildlife and plant species** and **extreme weather**, however, threaten to disrupt our natural assets that support those activities.

Over the last decade, Greene County's **population growth** has been at or below 1% per year; growth of less than a half percent in three of the four most recent years with data available matches the national average, according to data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Greene County should be growing at rates closer to 3% to compete with the fastest-growing metro areas in the country recruiting talent to their cities.

Springfield and Greene County have a **shortage of skilled workers** in sectors, including education, health care and law enforcement, but recent improvements such as placemaking efforts and public buy-in on bond issues for Ozarks Technical Community College and Springfield Public Schools are helping. A continued focus on long-range planning efforts such as the Forward SGF initiative and large-scale projects like major infrastructure upgrades will be necessary to continue to attract talent.

Besides our natural environment, other catalysts for growth in recent years have been the revitalization of downtown Springfield and other areas, such as the Galloway area in southeast Springfield, and the grant-funded Grant Avenue Parkway project that will connect downtown with the Bass Pro Shops/Wonders of Wildlife campus.

The labor shortage did help address a continuing Red Flag in our region: **The need to raise wages**. Greene County has made strides in recent years, with annual average wages increasing by 10.2% from 2016 to 2019, to just over \$46,000, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. This is on par with the 9.9% growth in St. Louis County and outpaces the 8.7% rate in Jackson County. But the 2019 median household income of \$46,086 in Greene County remained below St. Louis County (\$67,420) and Jackson County (\$55,134), according to



SPRINGFIELD AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

In November 2020, Ozarks Technical Community College broke ground on the Plaster Center for Advanced Manufacturing, which will address the Red Flag of a skilled worker shortage by serving as a regional hub for education and training.

the U.S. Census Bureau.

The community's strong education system at all levels, a Blue Ribbon, has been critical to bring people to the area and allow residents to educate themselves up the income scale.

Springfield does face a **critical shortage of safe, decent and affordable housing**, a recurring Red Flag. According to annual counts conducted by Community Partnership of the Ozarks' Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness, approximately 500 people experience homelessness in our community on any given night. The pandemic exacerbated the local need for additional housing when construction slowed and costs increased. It has led to an increasingly competitive housing market. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the five-year rolling average of Springfield residents living in owner-occupied housing dropped to 42.3% in 2019 from 46.2% in 2015. The region also faces a shortage of accessible housing and opportunities for renters with evictions or low credit scores.

Though the pandemic's economic toll has affected people's ability to meet their daily needs, **federal and state assistance** has helped households and businesses. A moratorium on evictions also helped keep struggling people in their homes. Amid the uncertainty, **local collaboration**—a consistent Blue Ribbon across sectors—continued to be a bright spot for our community. At the time of publication, more than \$10,855,000 in federal assistance funds had been allocated to local social service agencies through the City of Springfield, Greene County and Missouri Housing Development Commission.

BLUE RIBBONS



- ▶ Economic strength and growth
- ▶ Welcoming startup environment for new businesses
- ▶ Natural environment as economic engine
- ▶ Influx of financial assistance for housing from pandemic recovery funds
- ▶ Collaborative spirit in housing

RED FLAGS



- ▶ Skilled worker shortage
- ▶ Continued need to address wages
- ▶ Lack of sustained population growth
- ▶ Lack of safe, affordable housing
- ▶ Aging housing stock
- ▶ Housing instability for lower-income residents
- ▶ Gap in economic disparity
- ▶ Extreme weather events
- ▶ Invasive species and diseases
- ▶ Concerns about water sources

For more on these Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.



EDUCATION ACCESS & QUALITY

COMMUNITY
FOCUS
2021

For education access and quality, Blue Ribbons outweigh the Red Flags, although the issues and challenges overlap with those of other areas. Education is struggling to recruit and keep talent, especially through pandemic-related disruptions. We also faced continuing achievement gaps with regard to race, ethnicity and household income.

Springfield and Greene County offer a **strong education system** at all levels. The area's universities form part of the backbone of the community, with more than 50,000 college students preparing for life after school, and businesses are eager to tap into this large, in-demand labor pool.

Springfield is **investing in children** as a community priority, and Springfield Public Schools **continues to deliver projects** funded by the Proposition S bond initiative. The district finalized construction on all 33 secure entrances, and construction was completed of the Adah Fulbright Early Childhood Center, Delaware Elementary, Sunshine Elementary, Boyd Elementary and Williams Elementary. Administration continues to meet with the Community Task Force on Facilities twice a year to provide updates.

Other educational resources include Ozarks Technical Community College's construction of the property-tax-funded Plaster Center for Advanced Manufacturing and Technology, and the Springfield-Greene County Library District's programs to support the literacy needs of families.

Additionally, the Darr Family Foundation, the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and the Musgrave Foundation have committed more than \$1 million over five years to support early learning and professional development in child care, private preschools, Springfield Public Schools preschools and elementary schools.

Springfield's commitment to implement

brain-based, trauma-informed programming is beginning to pay dividends. More than 1,500 local educators are now trained in **Conscious Discipline**, a recognized evidence-based approach. The Council of Churches of the Ozarks' Early Childhood One Stop has refined its Conscious Parenting component, teaching how to support their kids' classroom instruction.

Sustaining these efforts requires a **long-term, viable funding stream**, and our local legislators have continued to propose enabling legislation that would allow citizens to vote on a sales tax initiative.

SPS continues to stress the importance of high school **graduation rates**, emphasizing under-resourced and under-represented students. During the 2019–20 school year, the four-year graduation rate improved to 93.6%, the highest on record, with notable graduation-rate increases for those students.

Expanding learning opportunities have become a vital part of our area's education offerings. For the 2019–20 school year, SPS students earned 4,505 high school credits using virtual courses. The virtual learning team increased course offerings to more than 200 options including a comprehensive high school, alternative programming, Advanced Placement courses, middle-school options, and elementary summer programming during Explore.

Along with the newly opened Adah Fulbright Early Childhood Center, Campbell Early Childhood Center and Shady Dell Early Childhood Center, SPS has provided dedicated space for 600 preschoolers in 2020–21.

The Springfield Board of Education unanimously adopted a new strategic plan Focus Area centered on equity and diversity. As a result of recommendations from the Equity and Diversity Council, the district hired a position responsible for coordinating and recruiting a diverse workforce.



BLUE RIBBONS

- ▶ Strong education system
- ▶ Conscious Discipline as a parenting alternative
- ▶ Investing in children
- ▶ High school graduation rates
- ▶ Expansion of learning opportunities
- ▶ Progress on educational resources
- ▶ Examining long-term viable funding streams for Early Childhood efforts



RED FLAGS

- ▶ Education achievement gaps
- ▶ Pandemic-related learning challenges
- ▶ Teacher shortage and recruitment challenges

For more on these Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.



SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The improved four-year graduation rate at Springfield high schools—a record 93.6% for the 2019–20 school year—is a Blue Ribbon, with notable increases for under-resourced and under-represented students.

Club Encore, the district's after-school tutoring program for students in reading and math, saw participation of Black, Hispanic/Latinx and students who receive English Language Learner services increase slightly from the prior year. Additionally, 352 students participated in Empowerment Groups, which allow students in fourth through eighth grades to focus on identity development, academic and cultural enrichment, and engage with diverse community members. SPS partnered with Equal Opportunity Schools at Central, Hillcrest and Parkview high schools to ensure under-represented and under-resourced students have equitable access to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. A total of 160 under-represented students at those schools were identified for upcoming AP course enrollments.

Despite the investment, student **achievement gaps** exist, especially for under-resourced and under-represented students. **The pandemic magnified these gaps** as school leaders and teachers attempted to engage with students and families in virtual, in-person and hybrid learning options. During COVID-19 school closures statewide, SPS partnered with other districts by providing access to virtual course content with 33,410 course enrollments utilized.

A **teacher shortage and recruitment challenges** are affecting progress. Applications for certified positions in 2020 dropped about 35% from 2019. The 2019 totals, however, include both Launch and Explore certificated applicants, whereas the 2020 totals for certificated applicants are limited to regular teaching positions.



NEIGHBORHOOD & BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Our neighborhoods and green spaces play a crucial role in community health. Crime, transportation, and air and water quality all contribute to the determinant of neighborhood and built environment.

Public agencies and organizations working in these areas expend much time and resources on efforts too numerous to list here. The Community Focus Report white papers on Housing; Transportation; Natural Environment; Parks, Recreation and Leisure; and Public Order and Safety offer greater detail to this broad outline.

Rising crime in Springfield has emerged as a concerning Red Flag. But **collaboration among our public agencies** and our community—a Blue Ribbon in so many areas—is a key asset to confronting the issue.

Since the last Community Focus Report, local **civic engagement** has been robust, especially to help guide Springfield's growth. In spring 2019, the City of Springfield launched Forward SGF, an extensive public process to identify community priorities and focus efforts for a 20-year comprehensive plan. While initially strong engagement waned as the pandemic ramped up, Forward SGF is back on track to gather additional input this year.

Engagement around national issues that

affect Springfield and Greene County also has been high. In summer 2020, thousands gathered locally—inspired by similar demonstrations nationwide—to protest racial injustice in response to the death of George Floyd, a Black man killed by a white police officer during an arrest. This social justice movement led to Springfield Mayor Ken McClure creating the Equity and Equality Initiative in 2021, which will include a strategic vision for the city. In 2020, Prosper Springfield created the Equity and Prosperity Commission, which will develop an action plan with new goals for poverty reduction.

Springfield-Greene County citizens continued to invest the community by renewing the ¼-cent sales tax for capital improvement projects and the ⅛-cent transportation sales tax in 2019, extending the sunset provision to 20 years, which will improve project-planning timelines. They also approved a \$168 million school bond issue in 2019 and adopted sewer-rate increases in 2016 that support wastewater, stormwater and water-quality protection efforts into 2025.

With those investments, as well as integrated planning among institutions and local organizations, **clean air and water** remain a Blue Ribbon.

Preserving green space for parks, trails and natural areas has been a Red Flag since 2011, with little progress made. However, investment has come through grants, donations and volunteering—including a \$4 million donation in 2021 to four Springfield-based environment groups. Other amenities such as the Springfield Art Museum and the National Park Service's Wilson's Creek National Battlefield saw major investments and upgrades.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, **parks and trails** became essential to maintaining a sense of normalcy. In



CITY OF SPRINGFIELD

SGF Yields, a program to alert motorists to be mindful of marked crosswalks, is intended to address the Red Flag of traffic safety and make Springfield more accommodating to pedestrians. Placement of heart-shaped traffic signs and neon yellow "Mr. Walker" statues are already proving effective.

an employee-driven job market, these experiences help attract new talent to Springfield and enhance quality of life for current employees. But **reinvestment in the parks system** is challenging, with funding for new projects more reliant on grants and donations.

Sports tourism remains a recession-resistant Blue Ribbon for Springfield, which serves as a hub for sports competitions as well as professional teams.

Continued collaboration is credited for new and expanded public-safety resources throughout Greene County. A new collaborative to assist first responders is Burrell Behavioral Health's Rapid Access Unit, designed to deal with crisis-level mental health or substance-use needs. And efforts are underway to reconvene the Greene County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee to improve the criminal justice system's efficiency.

The Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management is working to ensure community and individual disaster preparedness, cited as a Red Flag in the 2011 Community Focus Report. **Enhanced technology**—including upgrading the Trunked Radio System, a cooperative effort between City Utilities, Greene County and the City of Springfield—helps first responders work more effectively.

Since 2019, Springfield has seen great strides in **multimodalism**, where different transportation modes complement one another, and **improvements to roadways**. But **traffic safety** is still a Red Flag, with more injury and fatality crashes in 2020 than 2019.

Transit is another recurring Red Flag. When compared to peer cities, CU Transit, City Utilities' bus system, provides more comprehensive service in hours and coverage, but it is not as convenient as other forms of travel.



BLUE RIBBONS

- ▶ Civic engagement
- ▶ Clean air and water
- ▶ Forward-looking public institutions
- ▶ Expanded resources for law enforcement and public safety
- ▶ Enhanced technology for public safety
- ▶ Collaborative efforts in public safety
- ▶ Transportation multimodalism
- ▶ Collaboration, engagement and advocacy for transportation
- ▶ Improving major roadways
- ▶ Collaborative efforts for parks and recreation
- ▶ Trails and connections
- ▶ Sports tourism



RED FLAGS

- ▶ Traffic safety
- ▶ Consistent funding for transportation
- ▶ Public transit options
- ▶ Parks, trails and infrastructure funding
- ▶ Green space preservation
- ▶ Public safety staffing shortages
- ▶ Rising crime

For more on these Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.



SOCIAL & COMMUNITY CONTEXT

COMMUNITY
FOCUS
2021

Understanding the social and community context is critical to evaluating community health.

Connecting points within Springfield and Greene County—such as those found in our arts community—are important contributors to strengthening social bonds necessary to drive civic participation. And prior to the community-wide shutdown in March 2020, arts and culture organizations were reporting **strong audience engagement**. New programs, returning favorites and more complex projects all spurred a sustained growth in attendance and ticket sales and momentum that officials hope can be regained once the pandemic is over.

The impact of the **prolonged shutdown** and capacity limitations during the pandemic will be felt for years to come in the arts and culture community. Attendance rates across the arts and culture community dropped 52%. Along with the disappearance of ticket sales, most organizations also canceled fundraising events and galas—which are especially important as **arts organizations face chronic funding challenges**, with or without a pandemic.

The arts and culture community shifted to **virtual delivery** as the pandemic took hold in 2020. New facilities did open, including the Springfield Little Theatre's Judith Enyeart Reynolds School for the Performing Arts. And though the pandemic limited interactions, citizens of Springfield and Greene County continued to build social capital in the community through

volunteerism and support of local organizations, nonprofit collaborations, voter activity and civic input on important local issues.

There were successes, such as the new Volunteer Leadership of the Ozarks group, a collection of nonprofit volunteer managers from various organizations that meet quarterly to compare best practices. Leadership Springfield also continued to provide many volunteer opportunities through its training curriculum.

Nonprofit leaders are optimistic that volunteerism will meet or exceed pre-pandemic levels once people feel it is safe to help in person. United Way has also been working on ways to help people understand how local government and community organizations work to build trust and help citizens feel more engaged.

The area's sizable faith community contributes to strong community engagement through collaborations with nonprofits and with the Council of Churches of the Ozarks, an ecumenical organization that includes 72 member churches and more than 4,000 active supporters. According to its 2020 annual report, volunteers and programs served more than 81,200 people across 49 Missouri counties.

Increased voting services and strong collaborative education efforts encouraged voter engagement. To help educate voters prior to the November 2020 election, members of the League of Women Voters distributed 20,000 voting guides to more than 250 locations in Greene, Christian and Webster counties. The League also extended its Vote411.org online registration option to the primary as well as the general election and conducted more than 50 voter registration drives, including several with the Springfield-Greene County Library District.

Despite these efforts, **low voter turnout** continues to be a challenge. Greene County's adult population is estimated at 237,000, yet only 168,458—about 71%—were actively registered for the November 2020 election. Among those registered as active voters, meaning the



SPRINGFIELD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Springfield Symphony Orchestra adjusted to capacity and distancing requirements both on stage and off, greatly reducing in-person attendance but opening performances up to a virtual audience.

address of the voter is current, 85% turned out in person or by absentee ballot to cast a vote during the pandemic. That means nearly 40% of Greene County adults did not vote.

It's important to increase public awareness about updating addresses in voter records after a move within the county, or **risk becoming an inactive voter**, a status that continues to be an issue. An inactive voter is so defined if mail is returned from an address and the voter, after direct follow-up from the Greene County Clerk's office, does not update their address of record after 30 days in the voter registration file.

Community leaders express concern about the **impact of misinformation and divisive discourse** on community engagement. This concern applies especially to confidence in election integrity and to community health related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Widely shared misinformation about COVID-19 via Facebook and other social media platforms has led to public divides over masking and vaccination requirements, even as trusted local sources have continued to share science-based information to help citizens make informed decisions.

Related to this issue is the decline in locally owned media. The few reporters left in local newsrooms are expected to cover wide swaths of the area with little time to specialize in or provide regular coverage of niches such as the arts sector.

Strides have been made to improve **diversity and inclusion in the arts and culture community**, but a great deal more must be done to address this Red Flag identified in the 2019 Community Focus Report.



BLUE RIBBONS

- ▶ Strong audience engagement for arts
- ▶ Virtual delivery for arts
- ▶ Collaboration in arts
- ▶ Robust civic engagement
- ▶ Interest in volunteerism and nonprofit support
- ▶ Improved voter outreach and education efforts



RED FLAGS

- ▶ Prolonged shutdown affecting arts engagement/participation
- ▶ Chronic funding challenges for arts
- ▶ Need for more diversity and inclusion in the arts
- ▶ Low voter turnout
- ▶ Difficult to identify active voters
- ▶ Misinformation affecting citizen participation

For more on these Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Through the Lens of Equity

BY FRANCINE PRATT, PROSPER SPRINGFIELD



Intentional and action-oriented are the two strategies that come to mind when I think about how the Community Focus Report was developed this year. The report's steering committee used a concept from the Inclusive Excellence Model (created through the Association of American Colleges and Universities), which included an opportunity for me to review most of the white papers drafted for the project through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Race and ethnicity are one viewpoint. However, there are several others, such as individuals with disabilities, veterans, previously incarcerated, LGBTQ+, Pell-grant eligible and other intersections. Lived experiences were very important for this report as well as acknowledgement of the importance to recognize and share how diversity, equity and inclusion affects our quality of life in Springfield.

In almost every area of the report, diversity, equity and inclusion are key themes just as in previous reports. So, what makes this report different? The difference is the willingness to have conversations about who is impacted, how we write about the impacts and how we recognize that words matter. Through collaborative conversations, the report and its white papers included an intentional focus to understand causes, effects and impacts of how historical practices affected access to resources and services for Blue Ribbons and Red Flags.

Viewing issues through an equity lens and thinking about it consistently can be a new concept for community leaders in the private, public and social sectors. There are strategies, however, that can align with businesses and organizations to consistently view issues through this lens: the Inclusive Excellence Model with the Targeted Universalism concept.

Inclusive Excellence focuses on business and operational needs that are reviewed based on four main areas of focus:

- Access, success and equity
- Learning and development
- Organizational climate
- Organizational commitment

Targeted Universalism uses a concept of inclusiveness of everyone with a shared universal goal. Quantitative and qualitative data are used to understand how individuals in a community currently perform in relation to the goal. Strategies are developed for short- and long-term focused solutions to support different groups within the community to reach the shared goal. For example, our community has two goals—reduce the poverty rate by five percentage points and increase education

KEY METRICS

Chart 1: Poverty in Springfield

	2014	2019	CHANGE
Total population	25.7%	22.9%	▼2.8 points

Chart 2: Poverty in Springfield by Race/Ethnicity

	2012	2019	CHANGE
White	22.7%	21.8%	▼0.9 points
Black	45.8%	32.6%	▼13.2 points
Asian	28.6%	40.9%	▲12.3 points
Hispanic	42.8%	27.2%	▼15.6 points

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

beyond high school to 60% by 2025.

The focus has been poverty reduction first. Chart 1 above has the impact to the poverty rate reduction, which is the universal goal. Chart 2 has the poverty rate reduction by race and ethnicity. With disaggregated data, the community can better see the disparities for each population group. A Targeted Universalism approach was used to develop focused solutions to support the results for the different groups. As one can see, the use of disaggregated data provides a more accurate picture to address, develop and/or understand what is needed to consistently become more inclusive.

Steady and consistent progress, using data, is made through systems alignment that benefits everyone who calls Springfield home. Once there is an understanding with valid data, a business or an organization can then review practices, policies and procedures to ask the question: Who is kept out of participation based on how a business or organization operates?

Some may say everything should be equal. However, when we only focus on equality, some members of our community may still not reach the intended outcome for all. Equality is giving each person the same thing whether they need it or not to reach the intended outcome. Equity focuses on providing what is needed based on the needs of each individual to meet the intended outcome.

Springfield benefits with better job creation, business investment and a growing workforce when the community can create a pipeline from birth to career to meet people where they are in life. When we respect each other's differences, and value anyone and everyone, we can turn more Red Flags into Blue Ribbons.

Moving Forward, Together

BY TAJ SULEYMAN, CITY OF SPRINGFIELD

Expanding the table of conversation driven by fidelity, consistency and genuine efforts via a culturally inclusive and sustaining approach has been a personal mission in my professional and academic career. As a formal refugee who was resettled with my family in Salt Lake City, Utah, I looked forward with exhilaration to pursuing the “American Dream,” like many immigrants before me who chose to believe in the globally marketed notion that there is a chance for everyone to excel in this land.

Soon, I began realizing there are limitations to accessing opportunities in my new unfamiliar home, due to social and systemic barriers.

My upbringing in Lebanon, where my exposure to diverse religions, ethnicities and experiences instilled a belief that there is always a room for everyone at any table. This inspired me to continue learning with deep appreciation and openness about any perspective presented before me.

My gratitude of being a contributing voice to the Springfield community is at the forefront of my professional position as the director of diversity, equity and inclusion for the City of Springfield. I see that the fabric here is made of collaboration, integrity, humility, hospitality and philanthropy. These attributes have modeled the ongoing conversation to improve the equitable quality of life for all residents.

While this collective effort has been progressing to address urgent challenges impacting our community, I acknowledge the prospects of growth by asking, who’s missing from the table? And how many tables are presented to address which areas will thrive on community growth and development?

As the director of DEI for the City of Springfield, I’m tasked with developing a strategic plan in collaboration with our national and community partners. This collaboration will advance our efforts to support what we already are working

on in the community, concomitantly intensifying on equitable community engagement, in order to develop a stronger community leadership capacity by leveraging what already is working and adding more inclusive definitions to leadership.

For instance, the Community Focus Report has been so essential in bringing awareness, inviting more inclusive and equitable outcomes across community organizations to overcome disproportionality when addressing intersectionality assure that our current and future generations represented by diverse demographics are empowered, engaged and valued. An effective additional tool would be ethnography and interpretive methods of research to complement and enhance the report’s existing data-collection efforts.

I appreciate the room for creativity and innovation to revitalize our systems, our structures and ourselves to be better and do better for our community members as whole — especially those who have historically been underserved and underrepresented. It is important to engage “identity” as an asset to implement a positive change in the community.

By utilizing an integrated process, we can:

- ▶ Create a space to build an inclusive and collaborative leadership capacity by redefining the importance of leadership;
- ▶ Engage strategic questions related to policies;
- ▶ Understand what people who are served by us are saying and are concerned about; and
- ▶ Develop a response to the community backed with data and engagement with every step of the way, to celebrate with the positive collective impact outcomes.

A scholar and a dear friend once told me that in this work: “Being ready is passive, and being prepared is being proactive.”

We’re fortunate to live in this current moment with the opportunity to be change agents.



INFORMATION RESOURCES

Bad actors have flooded our information landscape. Conspiracy videos abound on YouTube. Facebook Groups and news feeds have become filled with speculation that dismisses expert and scientific knowledge. And formerly dependable news brands have fallen prey to the rewards of “clickbait”—sensationalist headlines that pull in profitable online visits from users around the globe.

Misinformation not only disrupts our understanding of the world. It erodes our trust in institutions and can destroy citizen participation in our society at every level.

A 2021 Pew Research Center report found that almost half of U.S. adults often or sometimes get news through social media, up from one in five U.S. adults in 2018 but down slightly from 2020. About 31% regularly get their news from Facebook, while 22% regularly use YouTube—online spaces where misinformation and speculation spread freely, despite the platforms’ promises to stem the tide of inaccurate reports and propaganda.

With this fragmentation of usage, every internet user needs to have the skills to evaluate and interpret online sources. Doing your own research through search engines, Facebook or YouTube is simple and quick, but know that what comes up may be inaccurate or intentionally misleading. Don’t settle for the first item you find.

The Springfield-Greene County Library District and the American Library Association provide some strategies for finding reliable information from well-researched sources.

Battling Misinformation

1 Consider the source. Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info. If you see an article from a source you don’t recognize, don’t take it at face value. Check the source and corroborate the story with a search of other reliable news outlets to see if the news is widely reported.

2 Read past the headline. Headlines can be outrageous in effort to get clicks. Go beyond headlines.

3 Assess the credibility of the author and site. Do a search on the author and website. Does the site list its credentials? What organization does the author represent? Take time to search out the accounts of known and trusted news sources. Addresses ending in .edu, .gov or .org are generally more reliable than those ending in .com or other top-level domains.

4 Look at the links and sources supporting the article. Click those links. Determine if the subsequent information supports the story. Consider the reliability of the sources.

5 Check the date. Outdated information sometimes enjoys a resurgence through social-networking sites.

6 Consider that the item might be satire. If it seems too outlandish, it might be satire. Do some quick research

on the site and author to find out.

7 Consider that it might be promotional. Is the purpose of the site to sell a product?

8 Check your biases. You are susceptible to misinformation that activates your emotions and affirms your previously held beliefs. Hold every piece of information to the same level of accountability, especially if you plan on sharing it on social media.

9 Compare similar information across websites. Are well-respected news sites that focus on verification reporting the topic? Look through fact-checking sites such as FactCheck.org that independently verify claims and debunk false rumors. Look at Alliance for Securing Democracy’s trends dashboard—<https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/hamilton-dashboard/>—to see what hashtags might be targeted by misinformation efforts from Russian, Chinese or Iranian governments.

10 Run photos through a reverse image search. Fake articles often recycle old photographs. Right-click on the photo in the article and search Google for the image. If you find the same image in multiple articles on different topics, you may be dealing with a questionable article.



PHOTO BY GAYLE BABCOCK

Dig Deeper

All of this data is free. The following sources will help you get started.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

- WWW.CENSUS.GOV

Data from the U.S. Census, gathered every 10 years, is publicly available. The American Community Survey gathers demographic data.

- WWW.CENSUS.GOV/LIBRARY/VISUALIZATIONS.HTML

The Census Bureau has excellent infographics and visualizations using data from a variety of government sites.

FBI: UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING PUBLICATIONS

- UCR.FBI.GOV/UCR-PUBLICATIONS

This includes four annual publications: “Crime in the United States,” “National Incident-Based Reporting System,” “Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted” and “Hate Crime Statistics.”

DATA.GOV

- WWW.DATA.GOV

The U.S. General Services Administration manages and hosts Data.gov, a repository for federal government information. It provides data sets on topics such as consumer trends, education and public safety.

MISSOURI ECONOMIC RESEARCH & INFORMATION CENTER

- WWW.MISSOURIECONOMY.ORG

The research division of the Missouri

Department of Economic Development provides data such as average wages by county, cost-of-living data, unemployment rates, employment projections and more.

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SENIOR SERVICES COMMUNITY DATA PROFILES

- HEALTHAPPS.DHSS.MO.GOV/MOPHIMS/PROFILEHOME

This site includes statistics and reports on alcohol and drug abuse, child health, chronic disease, emergency room visits, hospitalizations and more.

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION SCHOOL DATA

- DESE.MO.GOV/SCHOOL-DATA

Find data related to college and career readiness, Missouri school districts, early childhood education, educators and special education.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

- WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG

This nonpartisan “fact tank” measures public opinion on topics including gun ownership, gay marriage and economic conditions. The public also has access to the data sets used to create them.

Next-Level Info

Need to talk to a research professional? These organizations provide research assistance to the general public for free.

SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT

- WWW.THELIBRARY.ORG

The Library offers free research help and public access to print and online reference materials at each of the 10 branches in Springfield and Greene County. A library card account is required for offsite access to online resources.

DUANE G. MEYER LIBRARY

- MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, 850 S. JOHN Q. HAMMONS PARKWAY

Meyer Library is open to the public. Those not directly affiliated with MSU may not check out materials, but they can access research assistance and resources on site.



OTC HAMRA LIBRARY

- OZARKS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 1001 E. CHESTNUT EXPRESSWAY

The library can assist the public with research requests on a case-by-case basis. Members of the public are advised to email or call ahead for an appointment.

2021 BLUE RIBBONS & RED FLAGS BY TOPIC

Blue Ribbons and Red Flags appearing in the 2019 Community Focus Report are **highlighted in bold**.

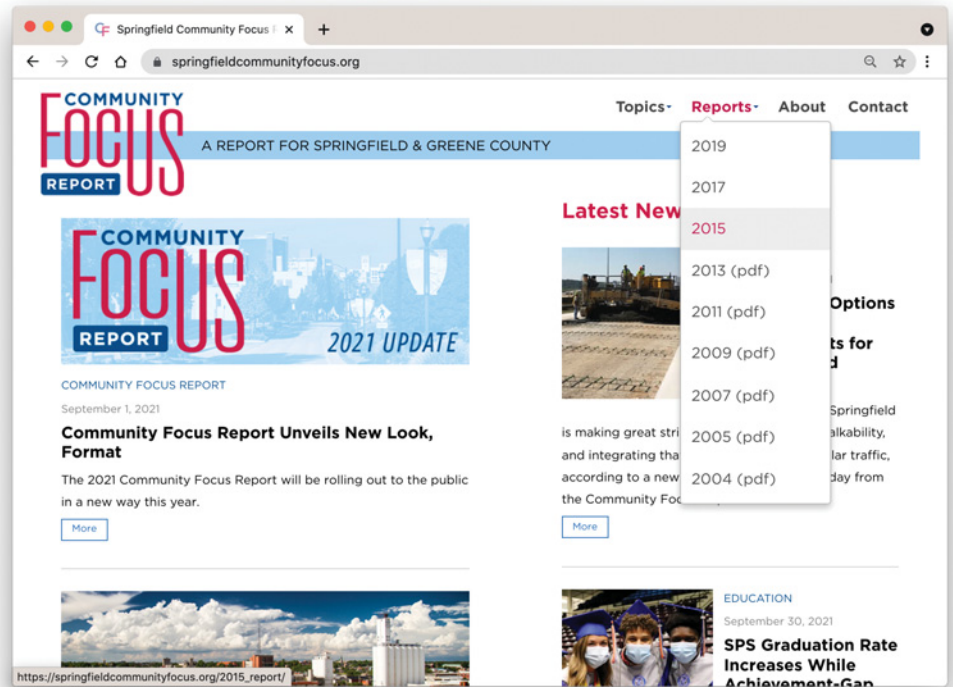
	 BLUE RIBBONS	 RED FLAGS
ARTS & CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strong audience engagement and virtual delivery ▶ Strong forward momentum ▶ Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Prolonged shutdown and capacity limitations ▶ Diversity and inclusion ▶ Chronic funding concerns
BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength and growth ▶ Welcoming startup environment ▶ Strong education system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Skilled worker shortage ▶ Continued need to address wages ▶ Lack of sustained population growth
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Robust civic engagement ▶ Interest in volunteerism and nonprofit support ▶ Improved voter outreach and education efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Low voter turnout ▶ Difficult to identify active voters ▶ Misinformation affecting participation
COMMUNITY HEALTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Collaboration ▶ Strength of health-care infrastructure ▶ Tobacco-use prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Mental-health and substance-use problems ▶ Access to care ▶ Children's health
EARLY CHILDHOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Early childhood as community priority ▶ Adoption of Conscious Discipline methods ▶ Legislative support for funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Economic disparities ▶ Child abuse and neglect ▶ Lack of support to mitigate post-trauma mental health effects
EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Graduation rates ▶ Expansion of learning opportunities ▶ Progress as promised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Achievement gaps ▶ Pandemic-related learning challenges ▶ Teacher shortage and recruitment challenges
HOUSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Collaborative spirit ▶ Civic engagement ▶ Influx of financial assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Shortage of safe, affordable housing ▶ Aging housing stock ▶ Housing instability
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Economic engine ▶ Clean air and water ▶ Forward-looking public institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Extreme weather events ▶ Invasive species and diseases ▶ Concerns about water sources
PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Expanded resources ▶ Community collaboration ▶ Enhanced technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Rising crime ▶ Opioid proliferation ▶ Staffing shortages
RECREATION, SPORTS & LEISURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Community collaboration ▶ Trails and connections ▶ Sports tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Green space preservation ▶ Obesity ▶ Parks, trails and sports infrastructure funding
TRANSPORTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Multimodalism ▶ Collaboration, engagement and advocacy ▶ Improving existing roadways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Traffic safety ▶ Consistent funding ▶ Public transit

ON THE WEB

The Community Focus Report website has been redesigned for more robust, ongoing content in a news-style format. The website address remains the same: **springfieldcommunityfocus.org**.

Thanks to the Springfield-Greene County Library District, the revamped website also includes additional content and news updates—including the white papers that provide in-depth analysis of the 11 topics. The site includes an archive of all previous Community Focus Reports.

The Springfield-Greene County Library District is one of five original partners involved in production of the Community Focus Report.





SPRINGFIELDCOMMUNITYFOCUS.ORG

