

COMMUNITY FOCUS REPORT

2021 UPDATE

A series of white papers on the report's 11 primary topics will be published on a rolling basis ahead of the 2021 edition. For news, podcasts and more information, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.



PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY

First responders and follow-up interventions deliver results, but drug use and violent crimes are stubborn foes for community safety.

2021 UPDATE: **PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY**

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BLUE RIBBONS Expanded resources · Community collaboration · Enhanced technology



RED FLAGS Rising crime · Opioid proliferation · Staffing shortages

Resources tackle rise in crime, drugs

Springfield and Greene County continue to find innovative ways to keep the community safe. A focus over recent years has been expanding resources for victims of crime and the creation of a new jail to house perpetrators. Like all aspects of the community, the crux of public order and safety is community collaboration and partnerships. Through those partnerships, challenges like opioid addiction and crime can be successfully addressed.

BLUE RIBBONS

Continued collaboration and community engagement serve as the foundation for the **expansion of new and existing resources** throughout Greene County. In 2020, construction began on the new Greene County Jail. The facility, slated for completion in spring 2022, is at Division Street and Haseltine Road and will house double the number of beds than the old facility (up to 1,407). Once complete, the more-than-380,000-square-foot space will eliminate inmate overcrowding as well as provide space for the staff of the Greene County Sheriff's Office. The county was able to purchase the land and build the facility through funds from the Greene County ½-cent general revenue sales tax approved by voters in 2017.

While the new facility will allow for additional space to house prisoners, the continued challenge of moving cases through the court system in a timely manner still exists. This is due, in part, to a backlog created during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as a historically uncoordinated approach. To address this issue, efforts are currently underway to reconvene the Greene County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, which

COVID-19 IMPACT

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges when addressing safety in Springfield and Greene County. 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 the ability for multiple agencies, departments, and organizations to coordinate their response during the historic event. These coordinated efforts included hosting media briefings for the City of Springfield and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, facilitating weekly informational calls with community partners and coordinating the acquisition and distribution of personal protective equipment throughout Greene County.

During the pandemic, the Springfield-Greene County 911 Emergency Communications Department 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, telecommunicators adjusted the questions they asked to gather more information about the caller's health and keep first responders safe. Fortunately, despite working in close quarters, the 911 Emergency Communications Department was able to keep COVID cases among employees negligible.

However, at the Springfield Police Department, COVID cases among staff exacerbated the already low staffing numbers. More than 100 employees tested positive, and many more were quarantined for exposures. The lack of available staff affected all aspects of SPD operations, increasing workload for detectives, patrol officers and traffic officers, as well as suspending police academy instruction. The SPD Records Section was also substantially impacted, forcing the SPD Headquarters lobby to shut down to the public for two consecutive days and the South District Station lobby to close indefinitely.

During the City of Springfield's Stay at Home order (April 6–May 4, 2020), officers were responsible for ensuring that ordinance restrictions



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRINGFIELD FIRE DEPARTMENT
 Educating community members on life-safety skills such as the Heimlich maneuver shifted to virtual learning during the pandemic, enabling some 1,750 people to participate on the virtual Fire and Life Safety Education platform.

were followed. Those duties continued through the year, as officers responded to more than 1,500 calls for masking ordinance violations.

Precautions against the spread of COVID-19 also affected SPD's efforts to connect in person with the community. Programs like National Night Out, the Junior Police and Fire Academy, and SPD in PE were canceled or suspended. However, through innovation and the use of technology, other programs like Coffee with the Chief, Neighborhood Watch training and the Citizens Police Academy were able to safely continue.

The Springfield Fire Department was also able to adapt to the pandemic and continue to connect to the community virtually. In 2020, the department launched virtual Fire and Life Safety education. Through the virtual platform, more than 1,750 people received education in 2020, allowing educators and firefighters to stay connected with the community. Through virtual learning, SFD brought Fire Prevention Month, CPR/AED and Heimlich maneuver training to students in Springfield Public Schools.

Now that vaccines are available, infection rates have dropped from 107 cases at SPD in 2020 to nearly zero. As of August 2021, 44% of Springfield police officers and 47% of Springfield firefighters were fully vaccinated.



2021 UPDATE: **PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY**

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PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The new Greene County Jail is expected to open in 2022 in northwest Springfield. With 1,407 beds, the \$150 million facility is intended to eliminate current overcrowding.

would bring all the stakeholders together in an effort improve the efficiency of the entire Greene County criminal justice system.

Alternatives to incarceration, such as the Greene County Adult Treatment Courts, continue to have a positive effect. These include Co-Occurring Disorders Court, DWI Court and Veterans Treatment Court and serve to enhance public safety by placing felony offenders suffering from substance abuse and addiction into a judicially supervised program that provides comprehensive treatment, life-skill training and accountability, to help them become sober, law-abiding members of the community. The Greene County Prosecutor also operates the Prosecutor's Restorative Justice Program, which consists of a community board that holds offenders accountable for community service and restitution, among other consequences.

The 2017 sales tax also helped fund the creation of the Greene County Family Justice Center, a "one-stop shop" for victims of domestic violence where they can access services of 22 partners. Upon opening in 2018, the center was temporarily housed in the Greene County Courthouse. In June 2020, it relocated to the former Tefft School at 1418 E. Pythian St., allowing for additional office space and a threefold increase the center's service area.

Two partners, The Victim Center and Harmony House, expanded their reach further in April 2020, providing the Springfield Police Department with two in-house victim advocates. The Victim Center employs one advocate and Harmony House employs the other, but

both are housed at SPD and work directly with police personnel to serve victims of sexual assault and domestic violence through personal advocacy and support services.

Another new resource available to assist first responders with serving the community is Burrell Behavioral Health's Behavioral Crisis Center-Rapid Access Unit, designed to deal with crisis-level mental health or substance-use needs (See "Success Story"). The creation of the RAU was made possible through extensive **community collaboration** in the form of public-private partnerships, which continues to be a Blue Ribbon for public safety in Springfield.

In 2019, the Springfield Fire Department expanded the effectiveness of its fire safety efforts by partnering with the Compliance Engine, a web-based service for code officials to track and drive inspection, testing and maintenance code compliance for fire protection systems at commercial occupancies. In 2019, the SFD amended the International Fire Code to include a requirement for fire protection system testing records to be submitted to the department via the Compliance Engine with an initial compliance rate of 74%. By December 2020, the compliance rate for systems tested was 86%, or nearly nine out of 10 fire protection systems that were without deficiencies when tested. This program is important for making Springfield a fire-safe community.

The Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management remains a vital partner by working to ensure community and individual disaster preparedness, cited as a Red Flag

SUCCESS STORY



PHOTO COURTESY OF BURRELL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Burrell Behavioral Health's Behavioral Crisis Center-Rapid Access Unit, which opened in 2020, offers a round-the-clock access point for crisis-level mental health or substance-use needs. While the RAU is open to the public through self-referral and walk-ins, it is intended to be used by law enforcement and emergency medical responders as an alternative destination for those experiencing behavioral health disorders. Rather than taking a citizen to the jail or the emergency department—which drains valuable time, personnel resources and equipment from both law enforcement and medical providers—they can quickly and safely bring these individuals to the RAU. At the RAU, they immediately receive screening and evaluation from Burrell nursing and psychiatric staff and, once stabilized (held up to 23 hours), are connected to the appropriate resources within the community.

Burrell's RAU is also identified as the "Success Story" in the Community Health 2021 Update, which details the facility's benefits from a public-health perspective.

in the 2011 Community Focus Report. The HometownREADY program, which addresses disaster preparedness, was reimplemented in 2021. The program creates a three-tier approach to community preparedness that includes the Community Emergency Response Team program, the Business Resilience Program, and the Community Engagement Program. The goal of HometownREADY is to educate the public in preparedness measures and provide them with the tools they need to be individually and collectively resilient in the face of the next disaster.

Recently, **enhanced technology** has allowed for more effective distribution of existing resources among first responders in Springfield. In 2012, Springfield-Greene County began the process

2021 UPDATE: **PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY**

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of upgrading the Trunked Radio System, a cooperative effort between City Utilities, Greene County and the City of Springfield. The Springfield-Greene County 911 Emergency Communications Department serves all area public safety departments and first responders, as well as a variety of other governmental agencies within Greene County, efficiently and effectively through the TRS. The decision was also made to link the system with the Missouri Statewide Interoperability Network. The upgrade will connect local users with emergency responders from across the state and allow for broader communication in the event of a major disaster in or around Greene County. The completion date is scheduled for late fall of 2021.

Technology became more deeply embedded at the SPD with the January 2021 launch of the body-worn camera program. In years past, the SPD advocated to the Springfield City Council for funding to allow body-worn cameras to be distributed and used by every officer. In mid-2020, a funding source was identified and, in October 2020, City Council approved the funding and a contract with Motorola Solutions was approved for the purchase of WatchGuard body cameras. Officers began using the cameras in January 2021.

RED FLAGS

The past few years have seen a steady **increase of crime** in our community. 2020 was the most violent year on record with a record-setting 23 victims of homicide. That rising number can be attributed to several factors, but many times, gun violence is at the core of the issue. Of the 23 homicides, 17 deaths involved a firearm.

Gun violence is becoming an epidemic in Springfield. In 2020, there were 1,550 calls from citizens who believed they heard gun shots. These are difficult crimes for law enforcement to solve, as many times once an officer has arrived on scene, the perpetrator is no longer in the area (see “Legislative Impact”).

The first significant jump in “Shots Heard” calls occurred between 2016 (805 calls) and 2017 (1,138 calls). Notably, in 2016, Missouri Senate Bill 656 was passed,

which loosened restrictions on firearms by removing the permitting requirement for carrying a concealed weapon, among other changes. Since that time, the issue of gun violence has continued to increase in our community. Of course, there are other factors involved when examining the increases in crime in Springfield, including community-wide factors such as poverty, drug abuse, unemployment and interpersonal disputes.

Vacant structure fires are on the rise throughout Springfield and poverty is the root cause of this issue. In 2020, there were 64 fires in vacant or idle structures. Sixty-eight percent of these fires occurred in just in three of the 12 fire districts in the city: District 1 (Central), 2 (North Central) and 5 (Northwest). From 2017 to 2020, vacant structure fires increased by 100%, highlighting the need for a collaborative approach to resolve this issue.

Incendiary and accidental are the two types of vacant structure fires, both with several causes. Incendiary fires are purposely set fires in unsecured vacant homes and buildings for a malicious purpose. These are fires of opportunity due to the prevalence of unsecured vacant structures. These fires often occur to cover other illegal activities. Accidental fires occur because of activities within a vacant structure for acts of survival, such as a fire for warming or cooking, which get out of control and result in a larger fire. The solution will be a community-wide community-risk-reduction program involving city departments, community groups and neighborhood associations, aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty while working to reduce or eliminate the prevalence and volume of vacant structures.

We also continue to see a significant number of property crimes. In 2020, there were 3,346 reports of thefts from vehicles and 1,432 vehicle thefts in Springfield. These are crimes that can largely be prevented by citizens taking precautions such as locking their car doors and taking the keys, keeping valuables out of sight, and not leaving vehicles running while unattended.

Another significant property crime

LEGISLATIVE IMPACT



Two actions taken by the General Assembly in recent years have affected 2021 Red Flags in the Springfield-Greene County area.

- Missouri Senate Bill 63, which passed in June 2021, will create will create a Joint Oversight Task Force of Prescription Drug Monitoring, responsible for collecting and maintaining the prescription and dispensation of prescribed controlled substances to patients within the state. The statewide program will assist health-care professionals to monitor controlled substances and prevent overprescribing.
- In 2016, Missouri Senate Bill 656 was passed, which loosened restrictions on firearms by removing the permitting requirement for carrying a concealed weapon, among other changes. Since that time, incidents of gun-related crime has continued to increase in the Springfield-Greene County community.

issue affecting Springfield and the surrounding area is the theft of catalytic converters from vehicles. Between 2019 and 2020, the reported cases jumped from 66 to 408. Catalytic converters contain valuable metals and, as with most property crimes, provide easy cash for criminals.

Not only have we seen an increase in crime, but the **proliferation of opioid abuse** continues to wreak havoc on all aspects of our community. While we currently do not have data that shows a causal relationship between opioid abuse and crime, local law enforcement officials have noticed a correlation indicating that a substantial number of both violent and property crimes are drug-related.

As crime increases, the incidents of drug seizures and drug-related arrests have also steadily increased. In 2018, two pounds of heroin were seized, compared six pounds in 2019, and while the COVID-19 pandemic affected 2020 seizure numbers, the SPD’s Narcotics Unit still confiscated 4.24 pounds of heroin.

In 2020, Springfield saw an alarming uptick in opioid overdoses. The Fire Department responded to a total of 405 opioid incidents in 2020, compared to 311 in 2019, a 30% increase. Of those overdose incidents, the SPD investigated 31 opioid-related overdose deaths. Those

2021 UPDATE: PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY

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numbers remain high in 2021, with the SFD responding to an average of 35 incidents per month.

While local paramedics have carried Narcan, an emergency medication used to rapidly reverse opioid overdoses, for some time, all SPD officers also began carrying the lifesaving medication in 2020. Narcan, provided to SPD by the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, will allow officers to aid in the continued reduction of opioid-related deaths.

A positive legislative change to help combat the growing opioid abuse problem was the June 2021 passage of Missouri Senate Bill 63 (see “Legislative Impact” on page 4).

Locally, the Community Partnership of the Ozarks currently has two programs that specifically address opioid-misuse prevention. The first is the State Opioid Response grant, through which CPO provides the Generation Rx presentation to youth and adults in our region. The second is the Prevention Resource Center program, which offers educational presentations to real estate agents and veterinarians, opioid-overdose and naloxone-administration training, community awareness and education campaigns, medication disposal box locations, and other opioid prevention-related tasks in Greene County.

While issues with crime and drug

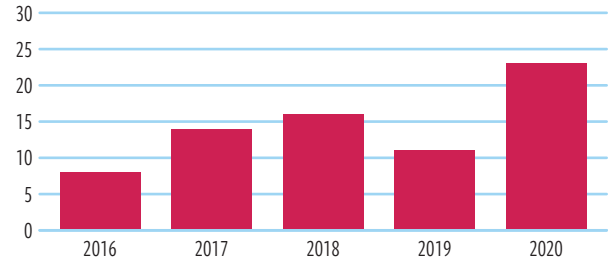
abuse continue to increase, many agencies in our area are strapped for staffing to address the growing problems. Over the past several years, **staffing shortages** have been an issue at law enforcement agencies across the country, but the SPD remained a nationwide leader in recruitment strategies. Recently, however, SPD saw applicant numbers drop dramatically from 436 in 2019 to 203 in 2020.

Following the May 2020 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, stories highlighting police misconduct in other jurisdictions became more prevalent, leading to increasingly negative narratives about police officers. This deeply affected the reputation of policing, subsequently impacting prospective applicants and current officers, which resulted in fewer applications and many current officers opting for early retirements or choosing to resign. Citywide efforts recently took effect to assist in addressing staffing shortages at SPD, some of which include increasing pay, adjusting minimum requirements and offering a wider variety of benefits to officers.

The Public Order & Safety 2021 Update was produced by Jasmine Bailey of the Springfield Police Department with input from Dave Pennington, Dan Patterson, Larry Woods, Kris Inman, Jamie Willis, Matt Lemon, Chris Davis and Jacque Harness.

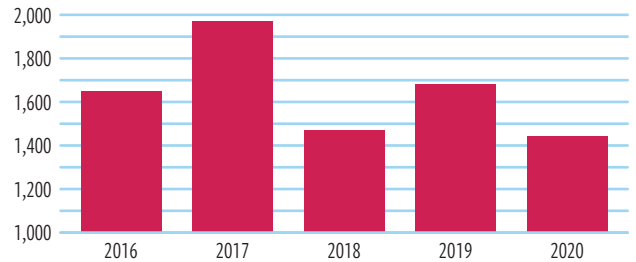
KEY METRICS

Homicides in Springfield



SOURCE: SPRINGFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT

Vehicle Theft in Springfield



SOURCE: SPRINGFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT

2021 UPDATE: PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY

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