



2023 UPDATE

A REPORT FOR SPRINGFIELD & GREENE COUNTY

COMMUNITY
FOCUS
REPORT

Welcome to the 2023 Update of the Community Focus Report

BY LYNNE MEYERKORD, STEERING COMMITTEE CHAIR, AND DR. JONATHAN GROVES, FACILITATOR

Nearly two decades ago, dozens of community leaders compiled the first Community Focus Report for Springfield & Greene County, a report card to identify our key strengths and challenges.

Since that time, 10 reports have tracked the Red Flags and Blue Ribbons across diverse topics, from core needs such as Community Health and Public Order and Safety to areas that deepen residents' connection to the community, such as Arts and Culture, and Recreation, Sports and Leisure. In each report, local subject-matter experts evaluated data and compiled top-of-mind issues facing the community.

Today, that work continues with this 2023 Community Focus Report Update. This interim update gathers new data but does not identify new Blue Ribbons and

Red Flags. Instead, it lays the foundation for the 20th anniversary report, to be released in 2024.

At that time, the report's supporting organizations — the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, the Junior League of Springfield, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, the Springfield-Greene County Library District and United Way of the Ozarks — will decide the next steps for this endeavor.

Initially, the biennial printed report served primarily as a collection of data, a resource for grant writing and mission guidance. Over the years, it has evolved into a multiplatform way of understanding the community over time, chronicling solutions as well as persistent problems.

Nonprofit organizations, businesses and government agencies have used the

Blue Ribbons/Red Flags to concentrate resources toward initiatives that tackle complex, intertwined issues such as poverty, crime and homelessness. Several organizations, including Leadership Springfield, Drury University and Give 5, now use the Community Focus Report as an integral part of their programs.

As the report has grown in use and impact, the organizers are considering how the effort might evolve beyond the current format, looking to other successful community-benchmarking efforts around the country as potential models.

For now, we offer this interim update as we begin next year's report to identify the next set of Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, 20 years after a previous generation of leaders took that first reflective, honest look at our community.



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

- ▶ **Dr. Jonathan Groves**, Facilitator, Community Focus Report — Drury University
- ▶ **Lynne Meyerkord**, Chair, Community Focus Report Steering Committee — Community Foundation of the Ozarks Board Member
- ▶ **Louise Knauer, Matthew Stewart and Aaron Scott**, editing and design — Community Foundation of the Ozarks

More Online:

- ▶ SpringfieldCommunityFocus.org
- ▶ facebook.com/SGFCFR

Community Focus Report — 2023 Update:

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.

Area rebounds in several sectors, although some struggles persist post-pandemic

Post-pandemic, Springfield and Greene County have begun to heal.

For this 2023 interim update, the committees for the Community Focus Report for Springfield & Greene County identified consistent signs of recovery, improvement and growth while reviewing data for the report's 11 topic areas. Schools and arts venues reopened, and available jobs rebounded, with unemployment dipping to pre-pandemic levels. Median household income in the area increased, and the area drew new residents and businesses with an increased focus on placemaking with the development of amenities and investment in parks, trails, recreation and the natural environment. The health system returned to a sense of normalcy after struggling with overcrowding and staff exhaustion caused by the pandemic crush.

Still, thousands of community members struggle, facing financial stress, mental-health challenges and other concerns. Though measures have improved, more than one in five Springfield residents (21.1%) live in poverty as housing costs and rents continue to rise. Greene County's suicide rate — higher than the state and national rates — and rising opioid use reveal neighbors in crisis. Gun violence continues to top Springfield policing priorities. The area's domestic violence and child abuse rates, too, remain stubbornly high.

As with previous reports, collaboration stands a key component to confronting the community's Red Flags. And an infusion of millions of dollars from the federal American Rescue Plan Act has brought growth and improvement across the report's 11 topics.

This interim update reviews the 2021 themes through a 2023 perspective, with new data for the Red Flags and Blue Ribbons from the 2021 report. The 20th anniversary report, to be released in 2024, will develop an updated list of Red Flags

and Blue Ribbons, and provide a blueprint for the evolution of this community report card that identifies the strengths and challenges of Springfield and Greene County.

THE NEED TO REGAIN MOMENTUM

Since the 2021 Community Focus Report, Springfield and Greene County have recaptured some of the momentum chronicled in the 2019 Community Focus Report. Economic measures such as the unemployment rate and median household income have shown gains, while poverty rates slowly decline. People are returning to musical performances and arts venues, but after an initial spike in 2022, not all have seen a return to pre-2020 levels, as engagement in some community activities remain down.

Momentum requires community involvement, and since the pandemic, participation in voting and volunteering have not fully recovered. Although total registered voters have gradually increased over the past few years, turnout remains low for municipal elections. In April 2023, 17.6% of registered voters voted in Greene County, up from 14.7% in April 2022 and 13.3% in April 2021.

Disinformation floods our public spaces online especially during elections, affecting public discourse. Local news media offer verified information about issues facing the community. A joint project by the nonprofit Springfield Daily Citizen and KYTV inspired new collaborative efforts to tackle the area's child care shortage, an issue identified in the 2021 Community Focus Report.

ONGOING INVESTMENT

Maintaining momentum requires continued investment in infrastructure, park development and construction, and those investments have continued to grow, helped in part by funding from ARPA. Millions of dollars in state ARPA funds have gone to 39 projects in

Springfield and Greene County, with city and county governments also providing ARPA awards for infrastructure and programs to support with housing, workforce development and other needs.

Taxpayers also continue to approve public investment. In April 2023, voters in Springfield overwhelmingly approved an additional \$220 million investment in schools through Phase 2 of Proposition S.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Diversity, equity and inclusion remain top-of-mind issues in the community. In the 2022 American Community Survey, the Census Bureau estimated 15.7% of Springfield's residents and 14.2% of Greene County's residents identify as a race other than White only, and 4.5% of Greene County residents report being of Hispanic/Latino descent. More than 5% of households in Greene County speak a language other than English at home.

Springfield and Greene County leaders note that recognizing the needs of a diversifying population is important for sustainable growth, and will help identify our region as vibrant and desirable for entrepreneurs and business investment. Springfield Public Schools has implemented a new testing system to assess more quickly the effectiveness of educational efforts, including ways to address racial/ethnic achievement gaps in schools, as the district's population continues to diversify.

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Because of the pandemic, community health was the centerpiece of the 2021 Community Focus Report. In 2023, health concerns remain a top priority, especially mental health and substance use, which are issues in other report topic areas as well. Although the ratio of mental-health providers has improved in Greene County, the suicide rate remains higher than state and national rates, and the overdose mortality rate — driven

COMMUNITY AT A GLANCE

DEMOGRAPHICS

SPRINGFIELD	2019	2022	CHANGE
Population	167,864	170,062	▲2,198
Median Age	33.6	33.6	—
Median Income	\$35,677	\$45,400	▲\$9,723
Families in Poverty	12.7%	12.7%	—
Families in Poverty with			
Children Under 18	14.9%	24.3%	▲9.4
High School Graduate or Higher	90.5%	92.3%	▲1.8
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	26.2%	31.2%	▲5.0
Without Health Insurance	16.8%	13.2%	▼3.6

GREENE COUNTY	2019	2022	CHANGE
Population	293,086	303,293	▲10,207
Median Age	36.3	36.5	▲0.2
Median Income	\$43,752	\$55,098	▲\$11,346
Families in Poverty	7.6%	10.2%	▲2.6%
Families in Poverty with			
Children Under 18	9.8%	16.9%	▲7.1%
High School Graduate or Higher	91.6%	93.1%	▲1.5%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	32.9%	32.8%	▼0.1%
Without Health Insurance	13.6%	10.0%	▼3.6

RACE & ETHNICITY

SPRINGFIELD	2019	2022	CHANGE
White	87.7%	84.3%	▼3.4
Black/African American	4.4%	4.2%	▼0.2
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.8%	0.3%	▼0.5
Asian	2.1%	1.3%	▼0.8
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.4%	▲0.4
Some Other Race	1.5%	2.8%	▲1.3
Two or More Races	3.5%	6.7%	▲3.2
Hispanic or Latino (any race)	4.0%	5.1%	▲1.1

GREENE COUNTY	2019	2022	CHANGE
White	89.3%	85.8%	▼3.5
Black/African American	3.5%	3.0%	▼0.5
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.4%	0.3%	▼0.1
Asian	2.3%	1.8%	▼0.5
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.2%	▲0.1
Some Other Race	1.1%	2.5%	▲1.4
Two or More Races	3.3%	6.4%	▲3.1
Hispanic or Latino (any race)	3.9%	4.5%	▲0.6

HOUSING

SPRINGFIELD	2019	2022	CHANGE
Total Units	81,945	84,329	▲2,384
Total Households	80,693	77,278	▼3,415
Average Household Size	1.94	2.08	▲0.14
Owner-occupied Units	38.7%	40.7%	▲2.0
Renter-occupied Units	61.3%	59.3%	▼2.0
Owner-occupied Value	\$124,000	\$166,400	▲\$42,400
Median Rent	\$733	\$900	▲\$167

GREENE COUNTY	2019	2022	CHANGE
Total Units	135,642	139,406	▲3,764
Total Households	133,900	130,986	▼2,914
Average Household Size	2.10	2.24	▲0.14
Owner-occupied Units	52.4%	56.6%	▲4.2
Renter-occupied Units	47.6%	43.4%	▼4.2
Owner-occupied Value	\$157,400	\$219,500	▲\$62,100
Median Rent	\$755	\$912	▲\$157

COST OF LIVING

2022 INDEX	AVERAGE	GROCERY	HOUSING
St. Louis	86.3	97.4	74.1
SPRINGFIELD	87.4	95.9	74.5
Kansas City	94.9	92.4	102.4

(National average: 100; additional details available in the Business & Economic Development update)

SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU/AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY— ONE-YEAR ESTIMATES FOR 2019 AND 2022; COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH

in part by the prevalence of opioid use, a concern of public-safety officials as well — has continued to rise. In 2021, Greene County conducted a needs assessment for use of ARPA funds, and mental-health services topped the list of needs, a point emphasized by Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon in his 2023 State of the County address.

The community has come together in multiple collaborations to confront these issues. Greene County awarded a \$5.325 million ARPA grant to establish a new Youth Behavioral Crisis Center — Rapid Access Unit. The planned mental-health facility for youth under 18 is modeled after a successful acute-care unit for adults highlighted as a success story in the 2021 Community Focus Report.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collaborations are not limited to the health sector, as such collective efforts continue to combat other community Red Flags. Among them are Prosper Springfield, the Greene County Family Justice Center and the Community Partnership of the Ozarks' six Community Collaboratives, which are seeking ways to tackle child abuse and neglect, environmental issues, housing challenges, transportation, early care and education, and food concerns. The Community Foundation of the Ozarks and United Way of the Ozarks include targeted grant programs to confront the area's Red Flags.

In 2023, the Council of Churches of the Ozarks, which has more than 70 member churches, opened a new

57,000-square-foot headquarters to centralize its multiple programs, including Crosslines Food Pantry, Ambassadors for Children, Diaper Bank of the Ozarks, and Safe to Sleep. The building was funded by a \$7.1 million capital campaign as well as \$1 million in ARPA funding provided by Greene County's Community Impact Program.

THE COMMUNITY'S CHANGING IMAGE

In 2022, the Census Bureau estimated that Greene County topped 300,000 residents for the first time. Despite that milestone, the county's growth rate is less than 1% per year, a pace lower than more vibrant areas that are luring greater economic investment. Place-making efforts, such as the \$31 million

Grant Avenue Parkway project, are in the works to develop walkable neighborhoods, multimodal transportation and distinctive amenities. The area’s air quality remains better than other parts of the state and country, and the City of Springfield’s Forward SGF comprehensive plan has embraced a deep connection to the area’s natural environment. Regionalism for economic development and business attraction is an increasingly important part of the conversation as well.

EMERGING ISSUES

The 11 committees contributing to this report also identified emerging issues as we head into 2024. The low unemployment rate is not synonymous with labor participation, and many sectors are struggling to find enough

workers. The Springfield Police Department and Springfield Public Schools have implemented programs to fill employment gaps, and Ozarks Technical Community College has worked with local employers to develop targeted training at its new Center for Advanced Manufacturing to increase the pool of available skilled workers. Despite a collaborative focus, a lack of child care resources remains an issue.

Waste issues are a community challenge, as recycling fell out of favor during the pandemic. Around the state, landfill space is running out; while Springfield’s landfill has capacity for decades to come, the concern is other municipalities may look to tap into the area’s resources to alleviate the load.

Affordable housing and homelessness,

connected in part to the area’s mental-health crisis, have taken on a keen focus, and neighborhood revitalization is among the focal areas of Forward SGF. Restore SGF is among several efforts to encourage reinvestment and homeownership in the city, as the percentage of owner-occupied homes in Springfield remains below 50%.

Overall, the recovery identified in the 2021 Community Focus Report has continued, with some areas of the community still on the mend. As in the past, organizations across sectors are developing collaborative solutions, but as improvements happen in some sectors, persistent challenges — including poverty, mental health, child abuse and neglect, and opioid use — remain for Springfield and Greene County.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report would not be possible without the contributions of these community participants, whose input and guidance helped develop and present the 2023 update. (Steering Committee members are **highlighted in bold**.)

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2023 UPDATE

BLUE RIBBONS & RED FLAGS BY TOPIC



BLUE RIBBONS



RED FLAGS

	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