



COMMUNITY
FOCUS
REPORT

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A Report for
Springfield &
Greene County

2024 BLUE RIBBONS & RED FLAGS BY TOPIC



ARTS & CULTURE

- ▶ Audience engagement
- ▶ Collaborative approach
- ▶ Regional travel for cultural experiences

- ▶ Funding challenges
- ▶ Human capital
- ▶ Physical infrastructure

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Economic strength and consistent growth
- ▶ Welcoming environment for entrepreneurs, startups and young professionals
- ▶ Strong support for public education

- ▶ Skilled labor shortage
- ▶ Continued need to address wages
- ▶ Redevelopment challenges

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

- ▶ Civic engagement
- ▶ Interest in volunteering
- ▶ Improved voter access

- ▶ Low participation on boards and commissions
- ▶ Voter turnout
- ▶ Polarization

COMMUNITY HEALTH

- ▶ Mental health
- ▶ Family Connects
- ▶ Declining overdose deaths

- ▶ Suicide mortality
- ▶ Sexually transmitted infections
- ▶ Child abuse and neglect

EARLY CHILDHOOD

- ▶ Development of new facilities
- ▶ Early support and interventions for families
- ▶ Community awareness

- ▶ Access to child care
- ▶ Access to mental health services for families
- ▶ Racial and economic disparities

EDUCATION

- ▶ Collaborative culture
- ▶ Partnerships with community organizations
- ▶ Graduation rate

- ▶ Achievement gaps
- ▶ Social challenges
- ▶ Recruiting and retaining critical support staff

HOUSING

- ▶ Civic engagement and collaboration
- ▶ Response to blighted properties
- ▶ Initiatives to increase home ownership

- ▶ Shortage of accessible housing
- ▶ Shortage of affordable housing
- ▶ Shortage of safe housing

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Generally healthy natural environment
- ▶ Stable, established nonprofits
- ▶ Long-term regional plans include environmental concerns

- ▶ Regional drinking water supply
- ▶ Outdated, inefficient garbage collection
- ▶ Uncertainty surrounding state legislation

PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY

- ▶ Community collaboration
- ▶ Awareness, education and response to mental health
- ▶ Enhanced technology use

- ▶ Gun-related crimes
- ▶ Substance-use issues
- ▶ Staffing shortages

RECREATION, SPORTS & LEISURE

- ▶ Community collaboration
- ▶ Trails and connections
- ▶ Sports tourism

- ▶ Greenspace preservation
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Stable, long-term funding

TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ Continued trail development
- ▶ City Utilities Transit
- ▶ Traffic safety efforts

- ▶ Traffic safety
- ▶ Community support for public transit
- ▶ Funding for maintenance of existing trails and sidewalks

COMMUNITY FOCUS REPORT

2024 EDITION

A REPORT FOR SPRINGFIELD
& GREENE COUNTY

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Introduction

Over the past 20 years, volunteers from throughout Springfield and Greene County have compiled quantitative and qualitative data for 10 Community Focus Reports. The Red Flags and Blue Ribbons they identified through that collaborative process have helped area nonprofits, businesses and government agencies develop initiatives to make our community stronger, better and more effective.

Since 2004, five primary agencies — the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, the Junior League of Springfield, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, the Springfield-Greene County Library District and the United Way of the Ozarks — have supported the report’s development and evolution. They have offered projects and grant programs to tackle Red Flags and have sparked conversations about ways to maintain Blue Ribbons.

In recent years, that circle of impact has widened, as more area organizations have used the report to guide a variety of community efforts. Leadership Springfield and Give 5 have built training curricula around Red Flags and Blue Ribbons. Journalists at local news organizations reviewing the report have tracked challenges and successes listed in its pages. Faith-based organizations, community groups and university classes have developed individual projects using it as a guiding document.

Today, the Community Focus Report has grown well beyond what that initial steering committee envisioned after their inspirational trip to Lexington, Kentucky, where they saw the value in such a community report card. In this edition, Brian Fogle, retired chief executive officer of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, shares the story of that beginning, and the report’s evolution and impact over the years. Francine Pratt, Prosper Springfield director, recounts years-long efforts to combat poverty, a persistent Red Flag, and the Springfield-Greene County Library offers resources to help community members dig deeper.

The successes of the past 20 years have pushed this report beyond its volunteer origins as well. Ozarks Public Health Institute at Missouri State University, working with the Community Partnership of the Ozarks, has agreed to commit resources for a standalone entity and provide a data dashboard with information updated more frequently than the current biennial time line. In this edition, transition consultant Traci Nash maps the outline of the future for the Community Focus effort.

This work, from the past through today, has provided rich conversations for our community and opportunities to explore what we do well and where we must improve. We thank the dozens of volunteers who have put their stamp on this community endeavor with their commitment and dedication. It is time now for a new iteration, another evolution to ensure that the report and its impact will last another two decades and well into the future.



DR. JONATHAN GROVES, FACILITATOR



LYNNE MEYERKORD, STEERING COMMITTEE CHAIR

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This report would not be possible without the contributions of these community participants, whose input and guidance helped develop and present the 2024 edition. (Steering Committee members are **highlighted in bold**.)

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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
- ▶ **Aaron Scott, Matt Lemmon and Matthew Stewart**, editing and design — Community Foundation of the Ozarks

Community Focus Report: 2024 Edition 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.

More Online:

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

2024 Community Themes

Four years have passed since the worldwide pandemic upended our lives, affecting the health care system, schools and the wider community in a variety of ways. Wages rose, financial supports helped buoy and sustain organizations and businesses, and an influx of millions of dollars in federal funding led to infrastructure improvements and investment. But Springfield and Greene County — like much of the country — are still wrestling with the lingering impact on our education system, our workforce and our mental health.

Several sectors, including business, arts and nonprofit organizations, continue to work through changes wrought by a remote existence. Despite low unemployment, numerous sectors — including law enforcement, education, health care and other areas — are facing worker shortages as people retired, changed careers or moved. COVID variants have become a persistent presence. Some residents remain less involved, less connected in the post-pandemic world.

In many ways, the community has bounced back, as data in this report show. Crowds have returned to performances and other public events. The region has seen the construction and expansion of sidewalks, roads and schools.

The rebound is not complete, however. Misinformation and division burble underneath, threatening to undo progress on diversity and inclusion, highlighted in the previous two Community Focus Reports.

The City of Springfield's Forward SGF vision plan, finished during the pandemic, has outlined several key goals for community improvement for the next 20 years, including housing improvements, land development and city code updates. The initiative includes a focus on quality of place, an effort to define and develop a Springfield that is even more distinctive among the national landscape.

To explore how the Blue Ribbons and Red Flags fit together, the steering committee held two roundtable discussions to identify themes for the 2024 Community Focus Report. Themes are not necessarily positive or negative; they are broader categories in which Blue Ribbons and Red Flags from the 11 topic areas may intersect. Data from three focus groups run by Drury University also informed this analysis.

MENTAL HEALTH

In recent years, the community has brought a concentrated focus on the importance of mental health across sectors, as unresolved issues are often connected to a variety of Red Flags. Public programs such as the Healthy Living Alliance's "Hey man, you good?" campaign and Burrell Behavioral Health's Be Well Initiative are encouraging conversations to reduce the stigma of coping with mental-health struggles, and more resources to help those in need have become available as the community gains a firmer understanding of its wide-ranging impact.

Several partnerships have resulted in successful collaborations to confront

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►



Mental health

Need for sustainable funding

Housing challenges

Poverty and the economy

Child care

Community connections

Neighborhoods and expanded
community engagement



► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

issues, such as work between the Springfield Police Department and Burrell on the mental health co-responder program, and Burrell's Rapid Access Unit, a public-private effort to provide emergency-level care to those with acute mental-health crises help. And the pandemic revealed the importance of parks and the natural environment in offering respite from the stresses of everyday life.

NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Across sectors, agencies and organizations are strapped for funding. Though the pandemic-era American Rescue Plan Act infused millions of dollars in investment in infrastructure and resources into our community, the attention has turned to sustainability. Some organizations, such as those in the arts, have seen a drop in funding, as donations have fallen off.

HOUSING CHALLENGES

The need for safe, affordable and attainable housing has become a top community priority in recent years: Springfield now has more renter-occupied than owner-occupied homes in the city limits and has seen a rise in its unsheltered population. Housing prices remain a challenge, and the tight housing market adds to the struggle — especially for those living on minimum wage — to find a place to live.

POVERTY AND THE ECONOMY

Poverty has been a constant challenge over the past two decades, and about 20% of the Springfield population was estimated to be living below the poverty line in 2022, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Organizations such as Prosper Springfield (highlighted in this report) have been working to lower the poverty rate, and numerous programs have targeted households with children to ensure the next generation grows up with opportunities. Despite successes, there remains a continued need to address wages and housing affordability, and the community must raise the educational attainment and skills of the workforce and widen the range of economic opportunity.

Examining this issue means understanding the diverse community and disaggregating data by race, ethnicity, gender, ability, age and income. Successes do not always spread equally among various groups — especially those historically under-resourced and under-represented. These challenges are not limited to employment; achievement gaps by race, ethnicity and income continue to occur in our schools, which administrators have been working to address.

CHILD CARE

Our community still has a need for affordable and meaningful child care options, a Red Flag that has the potential to worsen. The Early Childhood chapter identified a lack of philanthropic funding for early childhood care, and a shortage of child care options for children from infant to six years old affects not only families but the larger community as well, in terms of economic and workforce development. The cost of child care also remains a challenge for low-income families.

Ensuring a commitment to early childhood care can affect Red Flags in other areas as well. It is connected to child safety and preparation for secondary education and has long-range implications for the community as children grow into adulthood.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Several community and government organizations have seen retirements of successful top leaders, which will require forging new networks and relationships among organizations to ensure continued collaboration, a hallmark of our area's ability to tackle Red Flags.

The upcoming generation of civic leaders is finding new ways to connect and make an impact, such as the Generosity Collective at the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, which combines the giving efforts of many to make a larger impact. Leadership Springfield continues to connect those rising business and community leaders to key institutions and agencies.

Springfield's Forward SGF vision plan inspired a high level of community engagement during its creation, and its shared goals will help shape the development of the region for years to come.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND EXPANDED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Historically, voter turnout and volunteer participation have been used to gauge community engagement, but this report reveals additional routes to community contributions, whether it be through helping local schools or participating in community-connection events such as National Night Out, neighborhood cleanup events, or library and parks programs. There are now 24 neighborhood associations in Springfield, which are connected to the Neighborhood Advisory Council, providing another space for community development.

As the focus narrows on neighborhoods to develop a sense of place, community leaders are also looking larger, at the southwest Missouri region as a whole. Some issues — such as water quality and landfill use — must be viewed through a regional lens, as Springfield is not an island, and regionalism will likely alter how we think about community engagement in the years ahead.

Community at a Glance

Demographics

SPRINGFIELD	2012	2022	CHANGE
Population	160,246	168,873	▲8,627
Median age	33.2	33.3	▲0.1
Individuals in poverty	24.0%	20.3%	▼3.7
High school graduate or higher	89.6%	91.8%	▲2.2
Bachelor's degree or higher	25.8%	30.0%	▲4.2
GREENE COUNTY	2012	2022	CHANGE
Population	275,671	299,188	▲23,517
Median age	35.6	36.3	▲0.7
Individuals in poverty	17.9%	14.6%	▼3.3
High school or higher	90.0%	93.1%	▲3.1
Bachelor's degree or higher	30.9%	32.4%	▲1.5

Race & Ethnicity

SPRINGFIELD	2012	2022	CHANGE
White	89.7%	86.4%	▼3.3
Black/African American	3.8%	4.3%	▲0.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.6%	0.4%	▼0.2
Asian	1.8%	1.9%	▲0.1
Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.2%	—
Some other race	0.9%	1.3%	▲0.4
Two or more races	3.0%	5.5%	▲2.5
Hispanic or Latino	3.4%	4.6%	▲1.2
GREENE COUNTY	2012	2022	CHANGE
White	91.5%	87.8%	▼3.7
Black/African American	2.8%	3.0%	▲0.2
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.4%	0.2%	▼0.2
Asian	1.6%	1.9%	▲0.3
Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	—
Some other race	0.8%	1.5%	▲0.7
Two or more races	2.7%	5.4%	▲2.7
Hispanic or Latino	3.0%	4.1%	▲1.1

Households

SPRINGFIELD	2012	2022	CHANGE
Persons/household	2.11	2.00	▼0.11
Households with one or more people 60 years and over	31.4%	33.9%	▲2.5
Households with one or more people under 18	23.4%	20.3%	▼3.1
Owner-occupied units	48.5%	42.3%	▼6.2
Renter-occupied units	51.5%	57.7%	▲6.2
GREENE COUNTY	2012	2022	CHANGE
Persons/household	2.29	2.20	▼0.1
Households with one or more people 60 years and over	32.2%	36.2%	▲4.0
Households with one or more people under 18	28.5%	24.7%	▼3.8
Owner-occupied units	59.9%	56.7%	▼3.2
Renter-occupied units	40.1%	43.3%	▲3.2

SOURCE: 5-YEAR AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEYS FOR 2012 AND 2022, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

2023 Median Household Income

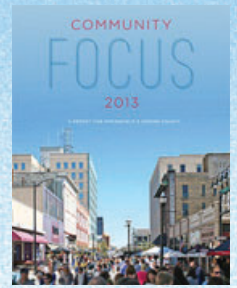
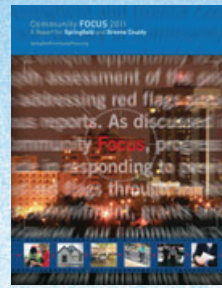
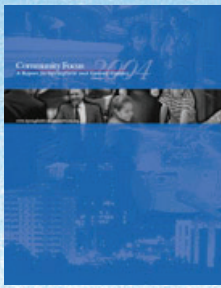
GREENE COUNTY	JACKSON COUNTY	ST. LOUIS COUNTY
\$55,098	\$62,422	\$79,440

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

2023 Annual Cost of Living Index

	OVERALL	GROCERY	HOUSING	UTILITIES	TRANSPORTATION	HEALTH CARE
Columbia	89.7	95.3	77.3	95.5	79.2	102.1
Joplin	86.7	93.3	67.1	110.8	83.5	93.1
Kansas City	91.3	86.7	89.2	104.7	85.9	81.1
St. Louis	89.5	98.2	81.3	98.8	89.3	86.7
Springfield	85.2	94.0	73.6	82.5	82.1	92.8
Missouri	88.5	95.5	77.7	98.5	84.0	91.2

SOURCE: COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH



Two decades of an unvarnished report card

BY BRIAN FOGLE

For more than 25 years, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce has organized a leadership visit to a peer city to learn about best practices for tackling issues facing our community. As a result of those trips, we now have a more robust airport facility, a world-class aquarium, and a commitment to quality of place by our City Council, among other successes.

On one such visit in 2003, a group of community leaders visited Lexington, Kentucky, to learn more about that city's efforts to bolster economic growth and vitality. The take-away that resonated the most with the Springfield delegation: the process Lexington leaders had initiated a deliberate survey of their community's unique assets and challenges.

A group of attendees from the Lexington visit committed to replicate such an effort here in Springfield. Five organizations met to begin planning the new initiative, and pledged time and resources to see it through. The organizational members of the Community Focus Report included the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, United Way of the Ozarks, Junior League of Springfield and the Springfield-Greene County Library District. Together, the group committed to produce a report for 2004 and ensure it was an unvarnished look in the community.

Dr. Gary Funk, then CEO of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, volunteered the CFO as the lead to convene and organize the committee, and publish the report. The library offered its media services to host the report electronically.

The initial Community Focus Report Steering Committee identified nine areas of focus:

- Arts and Culture
- Business and Economic Climate
- Citizen Participation
- Community Wellness
- Education
- Natural Environment

- Public Order and Safety
- Recreation, Sports and Leisure
- Transportation

Dr. Funk offered his thoughts in that inaugural report:

Still, this is an imperfect process. "Red Flags" and "Blue Ribbons" are editorial by nature, and some may rightfully question the conclusions that have been drawn. Also, the categories themselves are subjective, and the perspectives through which we see our community will require future revision.

Pointing out the limitations of this report is not done to denigrate the effort, but it does reveal that this is a work in progress. And that ongoing reflection is the essence of the Community Focus—the understanding that a community willing to honestly examine itself is a community committed to a better future.

That "ongoing reflection" has been a hallmark of the report for its 20-year history.

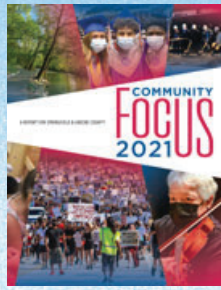
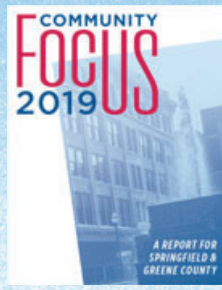
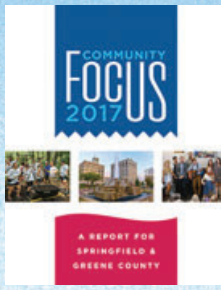
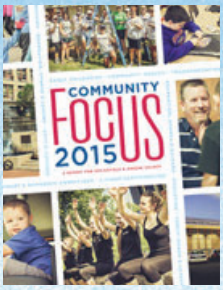
An initial promise of that first committee was a commitment to using data to guide the Blue Ribbons and Red Flags. To be sustainable and trusted, the report had to be fact-based.

That first report identified overall community assets — areas where Springfield was doing well — and labeled those "Blue Ribbons." Likewise, our challenges were identified as "Red Flags." Each area of focus had its own Blue Ribbons and Red Flags, but the report also spotlighted overall issues and strengths.

Those initial overall Blue Ribbons were:

- The overall economy of Springfield and Greene County is outstanding.
- Springfield and Greene County are rich in medical and public health programs.
- Vision 20/20, an exemplary community-based planning process, headlines a variety of collaborative efforts that have moved our community forward.





The overall Red Flags consisted of:

- Too many children in our community suffer from the lingering effects of poverty.
- The needs of many at-risk children in Springfield are not being met.
- Public schools in Springfield and Greene County lag far behind the state average in per-pupil expenditures.

Soon after that first report was published, the steering committee started on another edition for 2005, which led to the Grantmakers Challenge for Children, initiated by the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, with other local funders joining a multi-year commitment to address issues impacting our children. A new Blue Ribbon of a “collaborative community” was added in that report, and new Red Flags of “methamphetamine trafficking” and “funding for public education” were included as well. In addition, the steering committee decided to publish the report biennially, as data did not change much from one year to the next, and it was difficult to develop annually with a volunteer group.

The 2009 report provided an opportunity for a fifth anniversary perspective. That year, the report explored “emerging issues”—those areas not yet deemed a Red Flag but concerns to monitor. The report also noted some new community initiatives that were catalyzed at least in some part by the Community Focus Report:

- The Springfield/Greene County Health Commission
- Isabel’s House Crisis Nursery
- Ambassadors for Children
- The Neighborhood Stabilization Program

That report also tracked five-year trends in the focus areas. The good news was the data were improving in most areas. But by the time the report was released, our country had entered into the Great Recession after the housing collapse. The results of the ensuing years’ reports were a reminder that Springfield is not immune from the macro-trends of economic and political issues impacting the nation and world.

The 2015 report provided a decade look back at trends

and the impacts from the report. It was also the first report that included an interactive web version, thanks to the good work of the talented staff at the Springfield-Greene County Library District. The trend data certainly reflected the worst recession in our country’s history since the Great Depression, but the steering committee noted that the trends would probably have been even more unfavorable had it not been for the CFR.

As we observe the 20th anniversary of the Community Focus Report, we do not have the gift of banker George Bailey in “It’s a Wonderful Life,” who saw what Bedford Falls would have looked like without him. We do believe, however, that our community is better because of the focus that the report has brought to Springfield and Greene County. It was the impetus of many initiatives that targeted Red Flags. We have also heard how widely it is used by the nonprofit sector in grant-seeking efforts. Most grants require a community assessment of some sort, and this effort provides a ready-made analysis for those organizations.

Over two decades, the Community Focus Report has changed and adapted as we have learned more, listened attentively, and responded to changing global, national, and local dynamics. We note that it is not a given such an effort will be sustained over time. Even our inspiration, Lexington, discontinued its report card years ago.

Now, this community endeavor is at another point in its evolution, and 20 years from now, we are certain the report will look quite different. But our pledge is that it will remain true to that initial observation from Dr. Funk to preserve “the understanding that a community willing to honestly examine itself is a community committed to a better future.” We think the Community Focus Report has already done that and will continue to contribute to a better Springfield for years to come.


Brian Fogle, who was part of the Community Focus Report’s initial steering committee, retired as CEO of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks earlier this year and now is executive-in-residence at Drury University.


**Over two decades, the
Community Focus Report
has changed and adapted as
we have learned more, listened
attentively, and responded
to changing global, national,
and local dynamics.**



More resources, planning needed to sustain thriving arts scene

 Audience engagement · Collaborative approach · Regional travel for cultural experiences

 Funding challenges · Human capital · Physical infrastructure

Springfield's arts and culture scene is thriving, marked by strong audience engagement. While challenges exist, a collaborative spirit and innovative programs are setting the stage for sustainable growth. To realize this potential, increased resources and long-term planning are essential to meet rising demand.

BLUE RIBBONS

Audience engagement is strong. Organizations are operating at maximum capacity, but growth has not been equal across the sector. Some are seeing attendance numbers begin to plateau or slow slightly, and there does not appear to be any singular reason behind this disparity. But in the last two years, new organizations like New Moon Art Studio and the Ozarks Film Foundry continue to form to fill local needs.

Springfield mirrors national trends in that new material is selling better than traditional staples. Ozarks Lyric Opera produced Tom Waits' "Black Rider" in 2024, with nearly double the attendance of Beethoven's "Fidelio" in the same year. Still, community favorites do well. Springfield Ballet's annual production of "The Nutcracker" in 2023 sold out 3,134 tickets a month before performance weekend.

Engaging new audiences is vital, but how do organizations keep up with the demand of the fastest-growing MSA in the state? Staffing, facilities and funding levels have not grown at the same pace as the demand for programming. While the growth projections are exciting, resources need to match to keep the arts



Springfield Public Schools students attend a visual literacy workshop, a collaborative effort with Moxie Cinema.

PHOTO BY
GRETA CROSS

ecosystem healthy and sustainable.

The arts community has always been known for its **collaborative approach**. Collaboration engages audiences across artistic and cultural genres while cost-sharing across multiple organizations.

At the Moxie Cinema, staff collaborate with Springfield Public Schools to provide third graders with visual literacy workshops to learn how color, camera shots and sound communicate meaning. More than 800 students gained the ability to understand, interpret and evaluate visual messages and strengthen their critical

thinking skills.

Celebrate Springfield is a collaborative grassroots effort celebrating local attractions and amenities to expand promotion and connections. The culminating event in the fall brings together dozens of partners to lessen or eliminate barriers to engagement in the community.

The arts community is mature, with organizations celebrating half-century and centennial anniversaries soon. As we focus on long-range collaborations, we shed the startup image and move into a sustainable model ensuring the region's legacy will continue for generations.

Efforts to improve accessibility for those with physical challenges are growing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, an estimated 14.9% of Greene County's residents had a disability in 2022. Artsfest, High Tide Theatrical, Springfield Little Theatre and Springfield Art Museum worked to address accessibility points including vision impairment, colorblindness, mobility limitations, and sensory-friendly experiences the last two years. Doing this work makes the arts open and welcoming to energized patrons looking for quality-of-life experiences.

A new opportunity is **regional travel for cultural experiences**. Americans for the Arts'

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Arts, cultural activities contribute to vibrant, growing community

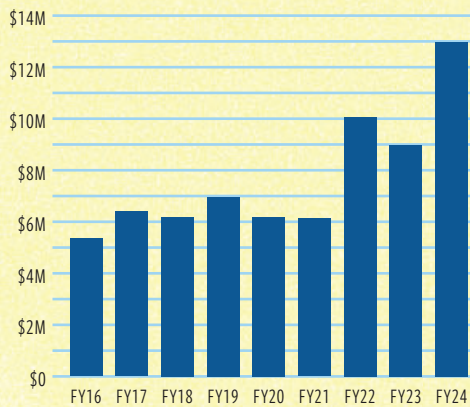
Advocacy has been a major focus for arts and culture organizations for nearly two decades. Building community awareness about the importance of a healthy arts and culture sector has been a strategic effort at the Springfield Regional Arts Council.

With the data-driven research from the Arts

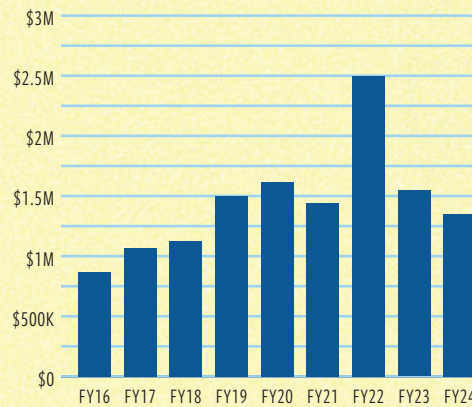
& Economic Prosperity Study 6, this sector has engaged with elected officials from the local level to the state legislature to grow and retain public funding for the arts. Moving into 2025 and beyond, there is a desire to embed arts and culture as a part of the economic development engine in Springfield and throughout southwest Missouri.

KEY METRICS

Revenue of local arts organizations



Donations to local arts organizations



These figures track nine major arts organizations in Springfield following a July–June fiscal year.

SOURCE: SPRINGFIELD REGIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

Arts & Tourism Fact Sheet states 35.3 million people travel for the arts annually. These cultural tourists spend two times more during their trips. The Arts & Economic Prosperity Study 6, released in October 2023, showed the arts having a direct economic impact of \$89.2 million on Springfield with support for 1,610 jobs. The arts also generate \$2 million in local tax revenue.

RED FLAGS

Funding challenges persist, and organizations must diversify funding. Inflationary pressures are especially acute in the arts. Organizations keep expenses low while also increasing quality, but the problem isn't in producing more; it is the economic challenge of the arts. The marginal cost of a production, or the cost of doing one more, far exceeds the revenue generated from that one performance. Nonprofits are thrifty, but leaders report the exhaustion of "doing more with less." Diversifying funding and expanding donor pools together with public funding are critical steps to doing more with more.

Public sources have expanded support. In April 2023, residents approved Ballot Measure 3, which reallocates a portion of the local hotel/motel tax for arts and sports. The Springfield Regional Arts Council invested \$115,000 of the funds in grantmaking, along with investments by the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and the Jeannette L. Musgrave Foundation. At the state level, the Missouri Arts Council was able to retain \$10.1 million for the 2025 fiscal year.

One outcome of decades-long chronic funding challenges is lack of investment in operational needs. Donors should value investing in costs like fully staffing organizations rather than overloading them with the responsibilities of multiple positions.

Human capital is critical to a thriving arts

and culture ecosystem, and the region is experiencing a major leadership change. Arts leaders are leaving because of retirement, burnout or career shifts. Turnover isn't bad if an organization is prepared with a succession plan, but when unexpected transitions happen, organizations lose institutional knowledge and stability.

Hiring and keeping people is more expensive than ever. Competing with corporate pay and benefits moves the needle on professionalizing the sector, allows for more innovation and aims to keep the heart and soul of the arts alive through the humans who create it. The Springfield Regional Arts Council has studied this staffing challenge for years. With the expanded funding from the hotel/motel tax, the SRAC established a three-year operational grant in 2024; five organizations were selected to receive \$20,000 per year for three years. All the winning applications requested support for staffing expansion. The SRAC hopes to show successes and attract future donors for the effort.

Physical infrastructure to support high-quality experiences is a big challenge. Facilities have not kept up with the growth in demand. There is a thirst for bigger experiences, but that growth requires more physical space. Several performing arts organizations report repeatedly selling out performances. Though encouraging, the trend demonstrates the expanding demand and the lack of capacity to meet it.

Since the last report, an emerging challenge arts and culture leaders reported seeing is changing attitudes around the perceived value that the arts have in our community. While other communities are lauded and celebrated for their engaging vibe and rich cultural landscape, Springfield struggles to capitalize on our vibrant creative economy. Arts and culture organizations must share a collective story of arts philanthropy to keep planned gifts, local art collections and local wealth here.



A volunteer with the Historic Gillioz Theatre's Essential Personnel program assists a patron.

PROVIDED BY THE HISTORIC GILLIOZ THEATRE

SUCCESS STORY

Volunteer programs build consistent community

Finding volunteers for local annual events or festivals has been a challenge, but organizations with regular programming have found a solution: building committed communities of volunteers.

The Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts has an established volunteer program called Partners in Performance. These volunteers donate more than 11,000 hours annually serving as ushers and in other roles.

At the Historic Gillioz Theatre, the Essential Personnel program is a critical part of the theater's operations, providing volunteers for roles such as ticket scanners, wrist banders, ushers and will-call tenants. In 2023, 126 participants provided 1,500 hours.

These programs provide a unique model that builds relationships with those most passionate about their missions in a way that benefits both the organization and the volunteer.

Wages, vacant positions pose challenges

 Economic strength and consistent growth · Welcoming environment for entrepreneurs, startups and young professionals · Strong support for public education
 Skilled labor shortage · Continued need to address wages · Redevelopment challenges

Springfield's collaborative legacy has led to a local ecosystem that makes our community attractive for business growth, from inception through expansion. The ability to retain homegrown and legacy employers committed to reinvestment while attracting new business has ensured Springfield's steady and sustainable growth. Building on that foundation for the future requires continued partnership and gaining certainty around Forward SGF and its impact on development.

BLUE RIBBONS

The Springfield metro area continues to show **economic strength and consistent growth:**

- Springfield's historically low unemployment rates, coupled with a parallel increase in population, indicate a robust local job market with expanding companies. With an excess of jobs and a shortage of people, individuals can seek out the best financial and personal fit for themselves, which may lead to increased wages.
- Springfield's office market has shown resilience, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, with notably lower office vacancy rates than much of the country — 4.6%, compared with the national average of 13.9%.
- Likewise, industrial and retail commercial



On Aug. 26, Gov. Mike Parson and employees of Paul Mueller Company celebrated a \$22 million expansion that added 100,000 square feet to its Springfield facility.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

rates are extraordinarily low, pointing to a growing commercial real-estate market.

- In addition to strong growth in manufacturing, Springfield securing the first Buc-ee's travel center location in Missouri is a key economic development win. Creating 175–225 new full-time positions and a potential draw of up to 6 million customers annually, the project also opens 1,000 acres for development north of I-44, and associated public improvements facilitated expanded utility service in the area.
- Springfield sales-tax revenues are up nearly 1.81% on a year-to-date basis in June 2024 compared with the previous year.
- Use of Springfield-Branson National Airport continues to grow, with a 12.7% increase in total passengers June 2023–June 2024 YTD.
- The Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau reported an increase in hotel demand

and is launching several new marketing initiatives.

- Our diverse local economy, not dominated by any single industry or job type, prevents drastic economic fluctuations, and provides a stable environment for residents and businesses.

As many communities struggle to facilitate small-business growth and attract and retain younger demographics, Springfield maintains a **welcoming environment for entrepreneurs, startups and young professionals.** Missouri State University's efactory, which hosts the local Small Business Development Center, supports businesses at every stage with incubator space, small-business counseling, and ongoing mentoring and training. Following the creation of the Southern Missouri Innovation Network, the efactory and Codefi LLC launched Innovate SOMO Funds in early 2024 with a \$2 million

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Investments, initiatives have led to resilient local economy

In the past two decades, Springfield has experienced significant changes in business and economic development with further diversification of the job market, particularly in professional services and manufacturing. Notable trends and activities include:

- The cost of living in the Springfield MSA has remained consistently lower than the national average despite economic fluctuations and remains lower than St. Louis and Kansas City.
- The availability of certified and industrial sites has improved, and the new terminal at Springfield-Branson National Airport, along with the new general aviation facility to be completed in fall 2024, enhances our transportation infrastructure.
- City Utilities' investment into the John Twitty

Energy Center has provided stable and low-cost utilities, supporting businesses and the ability of the community to compete for industrial projects with low utility rates.

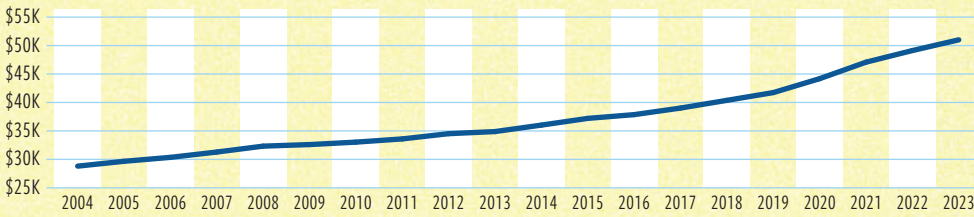
- The addition of the Wilson Logistics Arena at the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, Betty & Bobby Allison Sports Town, and public-private investments in Cooper and Killian parks are fueling sports tourism for the region.
- Advocacy at the state and federal levels, especially for transportation funding, will accommodate Springfield's rapid growth in key areas such as a \$25 million grant closing gaps in the local trail system, the \$20 million Grant Avenue Parkway project, and the planned expansion of I-44 to six lanes through Springfield with public investment

in the hundreds of millions.

- Leadership Springfield launched in 2018 as an independent organization from the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, broadening its scope for talent recruitment and retention.
- Despite enthusiasm for regionalism and community branding, better clarity on the "identity" of the community is needed to positively impact long-term population and business growth.
- In recent years, development tensions have continued to grow between governmental bodies and private sector developers, with public perception sometimes halting progress. Springfield, like many communities, faces challenges from an increasingly polarized society.

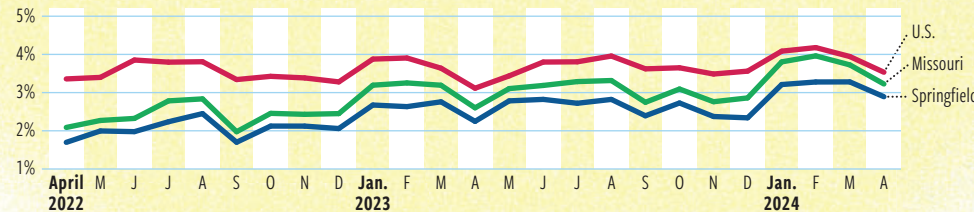
KEY METRICS

Average annual wages in Springfield MSA, 2004–2023



SOURCE: JOBSEQ

Unemployment rate, April 2022–April 2024



SOURCE: JOBSEQ

funding pool for Missouri tech startups. The Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce hosts a talent attraction initiative launched in 2014 at LiveInSpringfieldMO.com and produces a biannual Relocation Guide in partnership with 417 Magazine to support young population growth. The Network for Springfield’s Young Professionals, a chamber program developed in 2007, connects those aged 21–39 with peers and business leaders in the community and conducts outreach to our area’s 40,000 college and university students to encourage young talent retention.

Springfield shows **strong support for public education** through voter-approved bond issues, funding initiatives, and stable enrollment at colleges and universities. Opportunities like SPS Choice Programs and Greater Ozarks Centers for Advanced Professional Studies, better known as GO CAPS, connect education and business, providing students access to unique learning experiences driven by their interests and potential career fields. The chamber’s annual summer Teacher Externship helps educators familiarize their students with the in-demand skills necessary to enter the workforce. These efforts enhance educational outcomes and help build a pipeline of well-prepared students for local employers.

RED FLAGS

Springfield faces a **skilled labor shortage** despite stronger population growth compared with much of the state. An increasing population does not necessarily mean an increase in available labor, and workforce participation in Springfield is consistently below the state and national average. Unemployment rates are low, yet there are thousands of open positions, particularly in lower-paying frontline jobs. Retaining and attracting skilled workers and increasing labor force participation are critical to matching workforce growth with economic development

opportunities in the future.

Although Springfield has a comparatively lower cost of living and average wages have increased by 80% over the past 20 years, the buying power of workers is below the national average. Inflated prices across all sectors highlight a **continued need to address wages**. Identifying housing stock within the financial means of Springfield’s average household wages is increasingly challenging for families, and our low wages contribute to sustained poverty overall. The community must attract higher-paying jobs to enhance residents’ economic well-being.

As Springfield becomes landlocked by the growing surrounding communities and the difficulty of extending infrastructure to available property, our area will likely need to overcome **redevelopment challenges** to sustain growth and economic stability. Significant residential development occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, and growth in industrial, office and retail development has been sustained for the past two decades. However, recent enthusiasm for capital investment in the urban core and speculative site development has slowed.

Through demand, the private sector has driven public investment in certain areas to expand the footprint of Springfield with new sites, buildings and efforts to enhance quality of life.

Still, several marquee spaces in downtown Springfield remain vacant. Real estate in downtown Springfield is among the most economically valuable of the city’s tax base, but there is a clear perception that downtown and connecting corridors lack the capital resources and development energy needed for revitalization.

Addressing this challenge requires coordinated partnerships to re-energize downtown Springfield and other vacant areas to attract investment and leverage public-private partnerships to unlock its full potential.



Business and civic leaders broke ground on the \$57 million expansion for Cold Zone, a cold storage logistics subsidiary of the Erlen Group, on June 20 at Partnership Industrial Center West.

SUCCESS STORY

Size, dedication keep Springfield competitive

Springfield’s economic success rests with homegrown businesses that have emerged from an entrepreneurial and business-friendly ecosystem and benefited from strong public-private collaboration.

Major companies that started in or grew rapidly in Springfield include O’Reilly Auto Parts, Bass Pro Shops, Digital Monitoring Products, Erlen Group, Forvis/Mazars, Kraft Heinz, 3M, Enersys and many others. These companies have chosen to stay and continually expand in the market despite having globally competitive options, effectively mitigating economic stagnation. The recipe for this reinvestment success story includes robust infrastructure, human capacity, a strong and supportive local lending market, and high levels of trust and relationship-building, which is an integral part of Springfield’s fabric.

Springfield’s size in the market also plays a crucial role. As a midsize metro in the Midwest, Springfield is big enough to get significant deals done but small enough for business leaders to call on anyone they may need for help. This accessibility fosters a supportive business environment. The robust health care sector, with providers such as CoxHealth, Mercy and Jordan Valley Community Health Center employing more than 40,000 people combined, ensures the general health and welfare of our workforce with affordable health care rates driven by competition.

Partnership Industrial Center West, established just over 20 years ago, is another shining example of investment and collaboration. This industrial center has become a cornerstone for local businesses, offering the physical infrastructure needed for growth at a low cost but with high returns, and allowing millions of dollars to be invested in the community by growing manufacturers.

Volunteerism, citizen input increase while voter turnout, board service remain low

 Civic engagement · Interest in volunteering · Improved voter access

 Low participation on boards and commissions · Voter turnout · Polarization

Springfield and Greene County citizens continue to make their voices heard on local and national issues. But political and social divides — a 2022 Red Flag — continue and are expected to increase in the lead-up and aftermath of the 2024 presidential election.

BLUE RIBBONS

Civic engagement and **interest in volunteering** continue to increase. Springfieldians donated significant time and dollars to local charitable organizations, shared their input via surveys and public meetings, and participated in special events, such as the Mayor's Tree Lighting Holiday Show and the Birthplace of Route 66 Festival.

The Council of Churches of the Ozarks continued to see donation increases, with 2022 resulting in the highest giving (\$2.8 million) of the past five years for the organization that has more than 70 member churches. Also, 7,219 volunteers contributed more than 32,000 hours toward its various programs, such as Crosslines, Safe to Sleep, Child Care Food Program and Diaper Bank of the Ozarks, among others. The organization's 2022 annual report listed more than 19,000 food pantry visits supporting more than 6,000 households with food assistance. The council reported an impact of 143,391 neighbors



A representative of the League of Women Voters of Southwest Missouri shares information during a voter registration event in 2022.

PROVIDED BY LWV OF SWMO

assisted, with more than 87,000 of those children.

United Way of the Ozarks invested \$1.9 million in the community in 2023, including grants funding 21 programs at 14 local nonprofits. More than 1,400 volunteers — mostly teams from local employers — worked at 53 locations around Christian, Greene, Taney and Webster counties during the 2024 Day of Caring. Volunteers donated work worth \$210,969 by performing 121 projects benefiting 42 of our community's nonprofit agencies on a single day.

Almost 2,150 community members provided nearly 13,000 volunteer hours to Springfield Public Schools during the 2023-2024 school year, an increase of 15% in approved volunteers. In July, SPS had 180 volunteers and 50 community partners support the Back to School Bash to provide supplies, resources and services to more than 6,500 individuals.

United Way's Give 5 program, a civic match-making program serving retirees, continued to attract volunteers and completed its 24th training class. Since its inception in 2017, Give 5 has introduced 350 participants to meaningful volunteer opportunities.

Volunteer Ozarks, a free community web portal, helps people connect with 184 participating nonprofits and more than 200 volunteer opportunities. More than 500 people visit the site weekly, and thousands of connections have been made since 2018, when the portal was developed by KY3 and the United Way of the Ozarks.

The Community Partnership of the Ozarks, an umbrella organization for numerous programs and collaboratives, continued to make a sizable impact, leveraging more than \$13.3 million to support the region. In 2023, more than 86,000 people were served or affected by CPO programs, services, education and community awareness campaigns — up from more than

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Voter access improves while non-presidential election turnout continues to lag

Since the inaugural Community Focus Report, voter participation has been a key metric for evaluating citizen participation in the community.

Organizations such as the nonpartisan League of Women Voters of Southwest Missouri have worked to improve voter access and have registered thousands of voters over the years. As of August 2024, 201,813 residents are registered to vote in Greene County — about 85% of the adults aged 18 or older in the county. That's up from 166,222 in August 2020.

In recent years, the league has collaborated with Paws to the Polls, a nonpartisan campus initiative at Missouri State University that works to

increase voter participation and literacy among college students. The Springfield-Greene County Library District has provided voter registration opportunities in conjunction with the league and serves as an early voting site at the Library Center location two weeks prior to Election Day.

Eligible citizens may register at any library branch or through the Mobile Library seven days a week.

Thanks to the Greene County Clerk's office, the county was the first in the state to offer more than one central polling location. Five central polling locations for Greene County registered voters to vote on Election Day are available for accessibility

purposes, including the Greene County Courthouse, City Utilities Bus Transit Center, Cox South Hospital, Mercy Hospital and the Missouri State Davis-Harrington Welcome Center.

As of August 2022, all voters may vote no excuse in-person absentee during the two weeks prior to each election. During that time, you do not need an excuse to vote absentee.

Despite these improvements, turnout remains low during non-presidential election cycles. Just under 50% of registered voters turned out for the November 2022 midterm election, and April municipal elections typically have turnouts of less than 20%.

KEY METRICS

Voter participation in Greene County elections, March 2020–April 2024

	Registered Voters	Total Ballots	Absentee Ballots	Turnout
March 2020	164,697	46,372	1,892	28.16%
August 2020	166,222	53,620	3,638	32.26%
November 2020	168,458	142,752	32,409	84.74%
April 2021	180,432	23,914	1,233	13.25%
April 2022	170,391	24,961	1,207	14.65%
August 2022	198,911	47,219	2,443	23.74%
November 2022	198,004	98,868	9,896	49.93%
April 2023	199,804	35,091	2,897	17.60%
April 2024	192,052	29,030	2,470	15.12%

SOURCE: GREENE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

68,000 in 2020. Though slightly fewer volunteers participated year over year (9,259, compared with 9,596), those participating gave much more time (56,940 hours, compared with 35,895 hours).

In 2023, the organization launched its Nourish the Ozarks program, which allows CPO to deliver fresh produce and other foods to 17 counties across southwest Missouri to help reduce food insecurity. It also developed new partnerships with the Multicultural Business Association, to help multicultural businesses build capacity for success and growth, and Borrow My Angel, which focuses on mental health awareness and suicide prevention. Both organizations are now under the CPO umbrella.

Nearly 1,000 individuals registered to volunteer for litter cleanup and beautification opportunities through the City of Springfield's Clean Green Springfield campaign in 2024. Volunteer opportunities included one-time street and stream cleanups, beautification projects, and Point of Pride Cleanup events, and provided volunteer support for the scheduled neighborhood cleanups hosted by CPO. Assuming an average of 2.5 hours of volunteer work per participant, it is estimated that Clean Green volunteers logged more than 2,325 volunteer hours through the spring initiative. Clean Green volunteers collected approximately 865 bags of trash throughout the campaign, estimated at more than 10 tons of litter removed from Springfield streets, neighborhoods and waterways.

The Springfield-Greene County Library System reported 111 volunteers donating about 5,500 hours in 2023.

The number of registered neighborhood organizations in Springfield grew to 24, and many neighborhoods participated in local Good Neighbor Week events, led by the City of Springfield, KY3 and the University of Missouri Extension office.

Citizens in Springfield took advantage of many opportunities to share input for a city-wide housing study, visioning for the future of

Lake Springfield and via the city's Citizen Satisfaction Survey, a long-term planning survey, transportation and infrastructure for future tax funding survey, Community Development Needs Survey, and CPO's Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness System Survey. Leadership Springfield, a nonprofit that develops leaders in the area, continues to see an increase in demand for programs and community engagement and reported an impact of more than 1,400 leaders developed through its program in 2023. Rosie, a professional development, business assistance and leadership program for women, reported 1,400 members in 2023.

To improve communication and relations regarding neighborhood rezoning and development, the city created the Neighborhood Engagement Best Management Practices Guide to encourage developers, neighborhood organizations and neighbors to work together to plan successful neighborhood meetings, which are required when a piece of property is being rezoned and/or developed.

Voter registrations increased in Greene County, with a high of 201,813 residents registered to vote as of August 2024. The League of Women Voters works to provide voter education and **improved access for voters**.

RED FLAGS

However, Springfield and Greene County continue to struggle with **low participation on boards and commissions**.

Voter turnout for non-presidential elections remains a Red Flag, with only 15% of registered voters participating in the April 2024 election. Numbers were slightly higher for the April 2023 election, at 17.6%.

The League of Women Voters is working to address the Red Flag of **polarization**, which is expected to increase during the 2024 election season. The league and the Neighborhood Advisory Council regularly cohost nonpartisan candidate forums before local school board and City Council elections.



Neighborhood Advisory Council Chair Becky Volz of Woodland Heights leads the August 2024 NAC meeting, with Springfield City Councilwoman Callie Carroll and representatives from Springfield's 24 registered neighborhoods.

PROVIDED BY NEIGHBORHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL

SUCCESS STORY

Residents effect change via Neighborhood Advisory Council

In 2013, the Neighborhood Advisory Council was formed by Springfield City Council and former City Manager Greg Burriss to advise the council and city staff in improving neighborhoods and quality of life throughout the city. The NAC comprises representatives from Springfield's 24 registered neighborhood organizations. Woodland Heights Neighborhood Association President Becky Volz is the current chair of the NAC. Past chairs have included Rusty Worley, Pete Radecki and Phyllis Ferguson, prior to her term on the City Council.

The NAC meets quarterly to discuss issues pertinent to neighborhoods — crime, nuisance properties, health, parks, streets and sidewalks, neighbors in need, planning and development, community engagement, need for jobs and so on. As a group, they identify concerns across multiple neighborhoods and seek solutions. Through engagement with city staff and other stakeholders, NAC delves into the challenges faced in making improvements.

For example, several years ago, the city's ordinances were written in such a manner that it was difficult and time consuming for city inspectors to address properties that were overgrown with weeds, falling apart and dangerous — so-called nuisance properties. NAC encouraged city staff and the council to address the issue and, as a result, the City Code was revised. City staff's ability to address such properties has since significantly improved, though more work remains. The VPLI program equips leaders with the skills to address vacant, abandoned and deteriorated properties for the benefit of their communities. The nonprofit Restore SGF has worked to improve housing conditions and home ownership rates among Springfield's historic homes through grants.

Access to care, resources provide foundation to improve residents' health

 Mental health · Family Connects · Declining overdose deaths

 Suicide mortality · Sexually transmitted infections · Child abuse and neglect

According to the 2024 County Health Rankings, Greene County fell to 60th of 115 counties in Missouri based on health outcomes. However, we remain strong in health factors, ranking 11th out of 115 counties. This position reflects excellence in areas such as access to care and exercise, underscoring our commitment to fostering a healthier community.

BLUE RIBBONS

Mental health in Greene County has seen significant improvements in recent years in terms of infrastructure, awareness and community support. Mental health infrastructure, quantified by the mental health provider ratio, is a key strength. Greene County, had one mental health provider for every 220 people, better than Missouri's ratio of one provider for every 410 people. Commitment to mental health infrastructure remains strong, as evidenced by Burrell Behavioral Health's under-construction Youth Behavioral Crisis Center, which will expand services for youth ages 13–17.

Mental health stigma can often be a barrier for individuals seeking help. Burrell and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department have partnered on efforts to address this issue. With funding from the Community Foundation of the Ozarks' Advancing Mental Wellness grant program, SGCHD launched a mental-health awareness campaign titled "Hey Man, You



Family Connects nurse Toni Cowger conducts a home visit for a Greene County family.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Good?" to promote messaging that encourages men to start conversations about mental health. The grant also drives two projects by Burrell, the Be Well self-care initiative and Our Networks Engaged, a workforce development program to help individuals learn how to have conversations about suicide prevention.

Increasing awareness is key in continuing to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Recent high-profile events focusing on mental health include Greene County Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon's State of Greene County address, Mayor Ken McClure's State of the City address and the Springfield Area

their children. The success of this program is only possible through extensive collaboration among organizations including the Healthy Living Alliance, CoxHealth, Mercy Springfield, Jordan Valley Community Health Center, Musgrave Foundation, Children's Trust Fund of Missouri, the City of Springfield, Greene County and the Missouri state legislature.

In addition to the significant progress in mental health care infrastructure, the community is making meaningful improvements in overdose prevention — as evidenced by **declining overdose deaths**. For drug overdoses involving all substances, the age-adjusted death rate

Chamber of Commerce 2024 Health Care Outlook.

One of the biggest success stories related to community health in Greene County is the recent implementation of the **Family Connects** program. This program addresses the serious issue of child abuse and neglect, which has been a Red Flag in the community since the 2004 report.

Family Connects is an evidence-based program that provides home visits by nurses to families with newborns. These visits ensure parents have the support they need to care for

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Collaborative mental health efforts inspire community-wide improvement

With issues like mental health, change doesn't occur overnight. In 2004, mental health was not often recognized as a health issue; there was too much stigma. Since then, there has been an incremental but monumental shift in how our community approaches mental health.

Both hospital systems, Mercy Springfield and CoxHealth, have established a method to connect patients in the emergency department to mental health providers. This approach enables patients in crisis to be connected to care sooner. Another

option for patients in crisis is Burrell's Behavioral Crisis Center. Opened in 2020, it provides 24/7 access for mental health crises for adults. Collaboration is a recurring strategy; in 2021, Mercy began working with Concert Health to identify mental health challenges in OB-GYN or primary care visits. If a need is identified, the patient receives a call from Concert Health within a day to connect them to needed care.

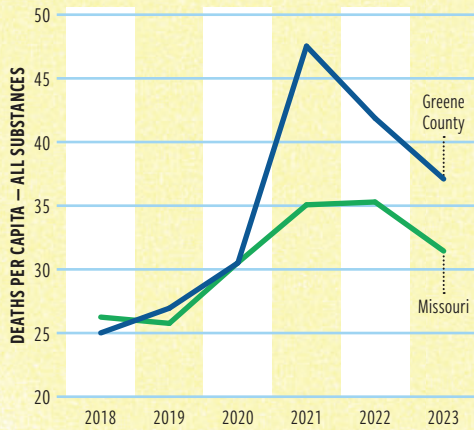
Mental health providers are also collaborating with new sectors such as law enforcement,

while the creation of the 988 mental health crisis number in 2022, a mental health companion to 911, offers improved access and support.

Our community has also grown in normalizing conversations about mental health. In the last year, city and county leaders publicly shared concerns and insights on how we can better support our families, friends and neighbors. Although too many still face these challenges and die by suicide, the community is engaged in the hard work it takes to create long-term positive change.

KEY METRICS

Drug overdose mortality rate



SOURCE: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES AND CDC WONDER

decreased to 37.1 per 100,000 population in 2023, from 47.53 per 100,000 during the COVID-19 pandemic. This area has been a Red Flag in multiple past reports.

A number of local entities meet regularly to discuss ways to impact this issue. Thanks to this collaboration, 35 times more Naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal drug, is available in Greene County compared with 2018. While much work remains, the leveling-off of mortality, combined with increased prevention efforts, suggests the community is helping to combat these tragic outcomes.

RED FLAGS

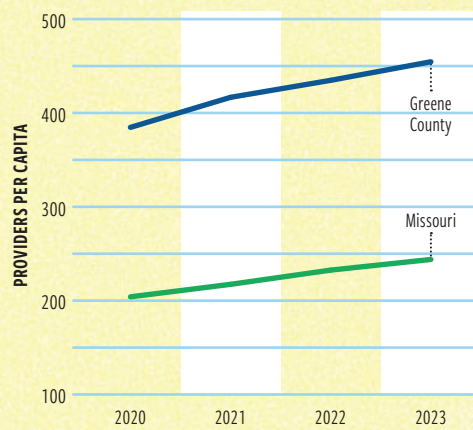
Though many mental-health-related measures are trending in the right direction, Greene County's age-adjusted **suicide mortality** rate presents a significant concern. The age-adjusted death rate for suicide rose from 15.9 per 100,000 population in 2004 to 22.1 in 2021.

This increase in mortality rates suggests underlying issues that need to be addressed through better mental health support, awareness campaigns and community resources. While much is being done, more comprehensive efforts are necessary to combat these devastating outcomes and improve the overall mental health and well-being of Greene County residents.

Greene County faces a significant public health challenge with rising rates of **sexually transmitted infections**. The incidence rates for syphilis and HIV have shown sharp increases over the years, which is a serious concern for our community.

In 2021, the rate of new HIV infections was 8.2 per 100,000 people, a concerning rise from 4.5 in 2017. For syphilis, the incidence rate in 2021 was 124.6 per 100,000 people, more than four times the rate of 30.5 in 2018.

Mental health provider ratio



SOURCE: CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES, NATIONAL PLAN AND PROVIDER ENUMERATION SYSTEM

These rising rates of STIs signal a Red Flag but may stem partly from increased rates of testing and response because of efforts such as SGCHD's Disease Intervention Specialist program. DIS program workers investigate cases of sexually transmitted infections while providing education and ensuring patients are linked to appropriate medical care and case management services. Programs such as these are crucial to improving the overall health and well-being of Greene County residents, especially when it comes to STI treatment and education.

Greene County continues to face a serious issue with **child abuse and neglect**. The rates of children affected by abuse and neglect reports remain alarmingly high compared with the state of Missouri.

In 2022, Greene County had a rate of 8,528.91 children affected by child abuse and neglect incidents reported per 100,000 children, significantly higher than Missouri's rate of 5,909.12. This troubling trend is not new. In 2021, our rate was 8,252.77 compared to the state's 5,573.25. Although there was no data for 2020, previous years show a consistent pattern of higher rates in Greene County.

According to literature, children in unsubstantiated cases have similar maltreatment experiences and developmental outcomes to children in substantiated cases. As a result, no distinction was made regarding the results of the investigation when considering these rates.

These high rates of child abuse and neglect are a Red Flag, and they indicate underlying issues that need urgent attention and action. We must strengthen child protection services, increase support for families and implement more effective prevention programs. Addressing this issue is crucial for the safety and well-being of our children and the future health of our community.



Community leaders gather outside Historic City Hall after introducing the Tobacco 21 ordinance to City Council on June 17, 2019.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

SUCCESS STORY

Community effort knocks down tobacco use

Twenty years ago, the community's attitudes and behaviors around tobacco were vastly different than they are today. In 2004, people could and often did smoke in bars, restaurants and other public spaces. People were regularly exposed to secondhand smoke and its harmful health effects. At the time, our community's cigarette use rate among adults was 24%.

Tobacco use, widely recognized as one of the most harmful habits to health, is associated with heart disease, lung disease, multiple cancers and stroke. Since 2004, our community and country have taken strides to effect change. Locally, the city passed clean indoor air laws, protecting people in public places from exposure to tobacco smoke — one of the first communities in Missouri to adopt such a measure. Springfield also passed Tobacco 21, raising the legal age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21. This evidence-based approach has helped restrict children's access to tobacco and vape products. Support for Tobacco 21 led to a federal law raising the legal age and protecting our youth.

These efforts, combined with prevention in schools, counseling by pediatricians and healthcare-based cessation programs have led to positive change for our community. Mothers smoking during pregnancy was identified as a Red Flag issue in 2005 and 2009. Since then, the community has seen steady improvements in this population, with rates dropping from 18.3% in 2007 to 13.98% from 2019–21.

Community needs sustainable funding for children's programs

📍 Development of new facilities · Early support and interventions for families · Community awareness

🚩 Access to child care · Access to mental health services for families · Racial and economic disparities

Springfield continues to focus on factors that impact young children, specifically access to high-quality child care, parenting support and family mental health support. As this work continues, sustainable funding is needed for specific programs to continue to make a difference in the lives of our youngest citizens.

BLUE RIBBONS

The Springfield community has identified and supported the needs of children and families through the **development of facilities** such as the CASA Clubhouse, the Greene County Family Justice Center and the Arc of the Ozarks Autism and Neurodevelopmental Center. These new facilities provide immediate access to resources for families. During the 2024 fiscal year, the CASA Clubhouse supported 2,093 families, and the Greene County Family Justice Center supported 1,133 households.

Early support and interventions for families — prenatally through the first five years of childhood — have positively affected families by reducing child abuse and neglect, improving birth and health outcomes for mothers and babies, and increasing kindergarten readiness. The support families need through in-home services has continued to be a high priority in our community and at a state level. Greene County has seen an increase in program options for families with Parents as Teachers/SPS, Lutheran Family and Children Services, Catholic Charities, Preferred Family Healthcare, Good Samaritan



Community Wide Play Day provides opportunities for children to participate in a variety of activities with others in the community.

PROVIDED BY
COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP OF
THE OZARKS

Boys Ranch, Bringing Families Together, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department and OACAC Head Start. All these agencies have home-visiting programs that serve Greene County.

The Family Focused Network is a collective-impact approach to support home-visiting programs that operate through Community Partnership of the Ozarks. The FFN offers a coordinated referral and intake system to help streamline referrals to home-visiting agencies, ensuring they are received promptly and are centrally located for tracking.

Community awareness of these issues has also grown. In August 2022, the Springfield Daily

Citizen, KY3 and CPO hosted a community forum focused on the current child care crisis. The Early Care and Education Collaborative created a workforce subcommittee that began meeting monthly after the forum and invited local businesses to participate. In January, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with that subcommittee, hosted a roundtable discussion related to child care followed by a successful panel titled “Inside the Issues: Bridging the Child Care Gap.” This event was instrumental in reinforcing the idea that child care access is a workforce issue.

Our community also participated in the Early Care and Community Planning Project,

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Early childhood focus has sparked many successful initiatives

Early Childhood was added as a topical focus in the 2005 Community Focus Report, and since then, issues have included maternal and child health, children in poverty, child abuse and neglect, kindergarten readiness, and child care cost and availability.

Community collaboration and increasing community awareness around the importance of early childhood were consistently highlighted across the 20 years, and many successful

initiatives were developed, including the Mayor's Commission for Children, Isabel's House, new early childhood centers, Jordan Valley Community Health Center, CPO's Early Care and Education Collaborative, library outreach programs, the Every Child Promise, K-Prep, and Parents as Teachers and Head Start expansion.

While the support and development of these initiatives is a positive, the community has experienced a lack of sustainable and consistent funding

to continue to support children and serve families. When programs are funded for a few years at a time, and then service providers change or funding streams become competitive, it creates barriers for agencies to meet the needs of the community.

We have a very giving philanthropic landscape, but of the \$92 million in giving in 2022, less than \$400,000 went toward specific early childhood education initiatives in our community.

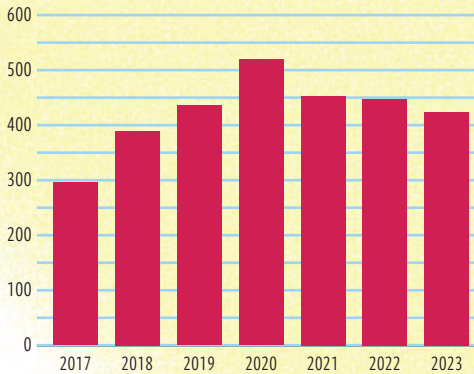
KEY METRICS

Gap in total child care slots in Springfield, September 2023

	Slots Available	Children Who Need Care	Gap in Slots	Percent Served
Infant & Toddler (birth–2 years)	2,859	4,813	-1,954	59%
Preschool (3–5 years)	4,982	4,748	234	105%
District Pre-K (4–5 years)	1,270	1,590	-320	80%

SOURCE: EARLY CARE AND COMMUNITY PLANNING PROJECT

Referrals for child abuse and neglect in Greene County, 2017–2023



SOURCE: GREENE COUNTY JUVENILE OFFICE

supported by Kids Win Missouri. This 10-month process included data gathering and fiscal mapping to help our community identify priorities related to child care. The team identified engaging the business community in the solution-building process as the second highest priority, after increasing access to quality infant/toddler care. During this process, the group surveyed local employers, one of which had this to say:

“I believe affordable, reliable child care that enriches the children in our community and allows their parents to work and contribute to the community is crucial. It’s crucial for current workforce needs, economic development and to develop our workforce of the future.”

RED FLAGS

Access to child care remains a Red Flag in the community. The Early Care and Community Planning Project identified that in Springfield alone there is a shortage of almost 2,000 infant and toddler spots and 800 spots for children eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Parents have to choose child care based on availability when the focus should be on quality and which program best fits their family’s needs. In Springfield, on average, families are spending 25% or more of their income on child care expenses, and providers are still not charging enough to cover the true cost of care, which includes paying livable, competitive wages to staff, benefits, training and expenses to operate

a successful business.

Access to mental health services for families has also been identified as a Red Flag. Although there has been growth in this area, the extreme need surpasses the effort to provide timely support and resources to families in need. Data show that 61% of all charges related to child abuse and neglect were related to improper care, poor supervision, or substance-use issues. Untreated mental health needs and trauma can cause or aggravate many factors leading to increased child abuse and neglect referrals and charges. The struggle of affordability and access to mental health services for adults and children remains a barrier to treatment.

Racial and economic disparities continue to impact our community. The economic gap creates barriers for children who live in lower-income households. Access to affordable, high-quality child care affects parents’ abilities to work, creating stress barriers for families and resulting in children not being kindergarten-ready. Childhood poverty is associated with not completing high school, unemployment or underemployment as adults, and numerous lifelong health concerns. Families need economic support now to ensure that children grow into healthy and productive members of the community.

When looking at child welfare referrals, 42% of children referred were aged 0–3, and of the 411 total referrals, 100 were of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian/Pacific Islander descent. Discrimination and racism create barriers to accessing health and education resources for all families of color. Dealing with everyday racism compounds what is already a stressful environment. All these factors coalesce into an environment detrimental to child development.

To address this issue, in fall 2023, CPO created the Health Equity Collaborative, a group whose mission is to advance health equity in the greater Springfield community by supporting and equipping the Springfield-Greene County Health Department and community partners to identify health disparities in our community, build trust within underserved populations, and develop interventions to improve the overall well-being of Springfield-Greene County residents through a lens of racial equity.



A family selects books from the literacy table at the Community Wide Play Day.

PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP OF THE OZARKS

SUCCESS STORY

Community project readies kids for kindergarten

Our community promises to empower families so that every child from birth to 6 years old can enter schools ready to learn. The Every Child Promise was created in 2013 after the Springfield News-Leader launched a public service-journalism project to focus attention on critical challenges facing children while fostering discussion and building on existing initiatives. The ECP created a 10-year strategic plan to significantly improve the lives of children by working together, improving access to resources, and empowering parents.

According to the 2022 Mayor’s Commission for Children report, kindergarten readiness has increased incrementally over the years. In 2022, 75.9% of Springfield children were ready for kindergarten. This result fell short of the original 90% goal, primarily because of COVID-19; but as access to preschool increases, so will children’s ability to gain skills and readiness. As in previous years, preschool attendance is more likely to ensure readiness. In 2022, 79.6% of children who attended preschool were ready for kindergarten. Furthermore, among the 588 children who received ECP scholarships, 94% were ready for kindergarten.

Other outcomes from ECP include universal access to Parents as Teachers within SPS by having a parent educator in every elementary school; universal access to affordable, high quality pre-K education within SPS through the addition of 800 slots; and the investment of \$1 million by the Darr Family Foundation in the “Steps to Excellence” program.

Schools provide foundation for higher education, jobs

🎓 Collaborative culture · Partnerships with community organizations · Graduation rate
 🚩 Achievement gaps · Social challenges · Recruiting and retaining critical support staff



With more than 1,800 graduates in 2024, Springfield Public Schools celebrated a fourth year in a row of record-breaking graduating classes.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Springfield Public Schools, with 25,000 students, plays a significant role in the vitality of our community and the success of its children. Its focus on providing high-quality academic opportunities and supports has yielded positive outcomes, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of students graduating ready for college and the workforce.

BLUE RIBBONS

A **collaborative culture** with parents and the community has empowered SPS to make significant progress in strategic focus areas. This culture reduces barriers for families of under-resourced and underrepresented students and encourages genuine engagement with all individuals. Community members are regularly invited to share input through in-person meetings with the superintendent, online thought exchanges and special events.

Partnerships with community organizations have resulted in SPS being able to offer students several unique programs, like the Alliance for Healthcare Education and Fly SPS, which create pathways for high-school students. These collaborations allow them to

simultaneously complete their diploma while earning an associate's degree, preparing a future workforce for highly competitive industries.

Other partnerships support the physical, emotional and mental wellness of students by providing immediate access to food, clothing, health care, counseling and other resources needed to make sure students can focus on learning while at school.

As part of the Principal for a Day program, community members can observe firsthand the demands and needs of both students and staff while they spend the day shadowing a school principal. Participants have made connections that resulted in partnerships that benefit schools and individual students.

In 2023, SPS had its largest graduating class and, for the fourth year in a row, increased its **graduation rate**. The Class of 2023 included 1,830 students, resulting in a graduation rate of 96.5%. In 2003, the graduation rate was 83.2%.

RED FLAGS

SPS is making progress toward increasing student proficiency, but

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

State's largest district improves facilities, expands early childhood education

Over the past two decades, Springfield Public Schools has remained steadfast in its commitment to helping children reach their full potential. Along the way, it has responded to academic, financial, social and political challenges with innovative solutions and a collaborative spirit that have sustained its forward momentum.

A few milestones of progress include:

- **Student learning:** SPS has established high academic and behavioral expectations for all students, and schools work hard to build supportive cultures. Educators use effective

instruction strategies to teach curriculum aligned with Missouri learning standards. A system of positive behavior interventions and other resources support students' physical, emotional and mental well-being so they feel safe and ready to learn.

- **High-quality learning environments:** In 2004, a significant number of SPS schools were not air-conditioned and lacked the space and infrastructure to support learning in the 21st century. Since then, the Springfield community has passed bond initiatives,

supporting an investment of more than \$600 million in facility improvements and safety and security upgrades for schools. Recent projects include the construction of three new middle schools and 20 tornado safe rooms, and major renovations for numerous other schools.

- **Expansion of early childhood education:** Beginning in 2018, SPS started a three-year expansion plan to nearly double the number of preschool spots and build an additional early childhood center.

KEY METRICS

Public school districts in Greene County, 2022–23

	Enrollment	Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility	Four-Year Graduation Rate
Ash Grove	683	42.3%	95.6%
Fair Grove	1,200	33.8%	92.1%
Logan-Rogersville	2,376	30.6%	91.2%
Republic	5,083	35.9%	96.3%
Springfield	23,653	51.6%	95.8%
Strafford	1,350	38.0%	89.7%
Walnut Grove	269	39.0%	100.0%
Willard	4,539	37.7%	96.3%

SOURCE: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

continued focus is required to address **achievement gaps** by race and income and create systemic improvement in student achievement. Based on 2023 MAP testing results, SPS students overall continued to perform above the state average in English/language arts; in math, they narrowed the performance gap between the district and state averages.

Beyond the annual MAP test, teachers gain a fuller picture of individual student achievement by using a new universal screening tool three times throughout the year. This timely data provides insights that allow them to tailor instruction in real time to help students achieve proficiency.

Families continue to struggle with the ongoing impact of **social challenges** such as poverty,

hunger, trauma and unsupported mental-health issues. Without proper interventions, these challenges negatively impact a child’s ability to learn and may result in poor behavior and irregular attendance at school.

These issues were particularly evident during and since the pandemic. In a 10-year span, SPS attendance dropped from 94.65% in 2013 to 91.10% in 2022.

Despite the competitive salary and benefits offered by SPS, **recruiting and retaining critical support staff** has become a challenge. A shortage of candidates to fill vacancies in special education, transportation, custodial and nutrition services may cause schools and departments to be understaffed, which compromises the level of student support they can provide.



In 2021, recruiting teachers was identified as a Red Flag. In 2024, recruiting and retaining employees for critical support staff positions like bus drivers is a challenge.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Fly SPS is a new innovative program provided by Springfield Public Schools in partnership with Ozarks Tech and Premier Flight Center at the Springfield-Branson National Airport.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SUCCESS STORY

Unique opportunities empower students

Expanding high-quality learning opportunities and making them more accessible to all SPS students has helped narrow gaps in achievement and opportunity over the past 20 years.

Today, SPS students can choose from an array of learning options, empowering them to customize their experience based on their specific needs, interests and goals. Theme-based magnet schools, like AgAcademy and Academy of Fine and Performing Arts, career-technical education, and college and career pathways are just a few examples of these options.

Virtual learning has significantly removed barriers for students statewide. In 2012, SPS began offering its students a limited assortment of online classes. Today, more than 390 Missouri school districts rely on SPS’s Launch program for virtual instruction to meet their students’ unique needs. In May 2024, Launch awarded diplomas to 120 students who completed the requirements to graduate through virtual classes.

Collaboration key to providing safe, accessible and affordable housing

Civic engagement and collaboration · Response to blighted properties · Initiatives to increase home ownership

Shortage of accessible housing · Shortage of affordable housing · Shortage of safe housing

Springfield has made progress toward increasing accessible, affordable and safe housing, but many system-level challenges remain. Continuing to address these gaps will help families, neighborhoods and our community thrive.

Experts note that one of the keys to combatting poverty is addressing the lack of affordable housing.

BLUE RIBBONS

System-level gaps often require diverse entities coordinating together to resolve. **Civic engagement and collaboration** continue to be a Blue Ribbon, best exemplified by Community Partnership of the Ozarks' Housing Collaborative. The collaborative comprises partner agencies working to develop long-term solutions to a range of housing issues. Recent outcomes include increased collaboration with city leadership to incorporate housing into City Council priorities and building and improving relationships with landlords through the Landlord Tenant Sub-Committee.

A second example is the level of community engagement in the development and implementation of Forward SGF, a key component of which focuses on housing and neighborhoods. Four goals within Forward SGF's comprehensive plan will guide future policies and decision-making: support the creation of complete neighborhoods, diversify housing choices,



Community members attend a job fair at Community Partnership of the Ozarks' O'Reilly Center for Hope.

PROVIDED BY
COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP
OF THE OZARKS

revitalize Springfield's neighborhoods, and cultivate neighborhood identity and cohesion. The high level of civic engagement and collaboration within Springfield is also demonstrated in the following Blue Ribbon examples and outcomes.

Two key initiatives in Forward SGF that will facilitate a **response to blighted properties** include the Community Development Code update and neighborhood revitalization. The updates to city codes are related to development of land and installation of public infrastructure. These codes were last thoroughly updated in 1995. In spring 2023, the Nuisance Property Work Group presented findings to City Council, which identified 18,000 code complaints that had been filed

between 2015 and 2020, with 71% of them being related to renter-occupied properties. Neighborhood revitalization focus areas include Restore SGF, the City of Springfield's Housing Study and addressing nuisance properties.

Forty-twoaaaaasdfsdfv of Springfield residents live in a home they own, a percentage that has declined over the past decade. Home ownership can improve neighborhood stability and play a key role in building generational wealth. Nationally, the average homeowner's net worth is 38 times higher than the average renter's.

Springfield has seen growth in **initiatives to increase home ownership**:

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

As prices rise, housing affordability has become key priority

The past two decades have seen extensive transformation related to housing. Nationally, shifts in the economy have exacerbated housing concerns. This is exemplified by the longtime Red Flag of shortage of affordable housing.

In the early 2000s, the median home price in Missouri was \$89,900. Adjusted for inflation to 2020 dollars, that amount would be \$135,116. Today, the median home price in Missouri is \$274,200 and \$244,492 in Greene County. Recent increases in the minimum wage have not kept up with the

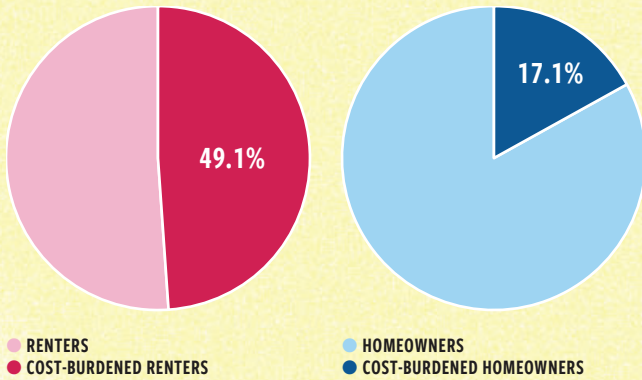
rising cost of living. Home prices have increased, and the construction of new, affordable housing has not kept up with demand. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, for every 100 renter households falling into the category of "extremely low income" in Missouri, there are only 42 affordable and available homes.

Locally, housing has grown into a key priority. The initial Community Focus Report did not include housing. Today, housing is considered a critical component in improving the quality of life

in Springfield. An intentional increased focus on housing within city leadership is a positive change that has created tangible outcomes including the city's Housing Study, integrating housing and neighborhoods into the comprehensive plan and support of housing-related initiatives such as Community Partnership's Housing Collaborative and O'Reilly Center for Hope; development and ongoing support of neighborhood associations; Restore SGF; and allocation of COVID relief funding to address Red Flags.

KEY METRICS

Cost-burdened households in Greene County



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU — AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2022 5-YEAR ESTIMATES

- Habitat for Humanity: Offers affordable home ownership, home repair, and neighborhood preservation programs throughout Springfield.
- Springfield Community Land Trust: Creates opportunities for home ownership in central Springfield based on shared appreciation; home stays affordable in perpetuity.
- Drew Lewis Foundation/Blue House Project: Renovates distressed homes in the Grant Beach Neighborhood for home ownership.
- Restore SGF: Supports reinvestment in Springfield's historic neighborhoods by funding home upgrades for homeowners and down-payment assistance.
- Abandoned Housing Act: Springfield Community Land Trust, Legal Services of Southern Missouri and the West Central Neighborhood Association are reviewing how to implement a local initiative under this act to transition vacant properties to owner-occupied homes.

RED FLAGS

Despite these Blue Ribbons, serious Red Flags persist. A lack of housing limits our ability to address homelessness, impacts early childhood development, and affects neighborhood stability. According to the Equality Trust, higher levels of inequality within communities impact everyone across several measures of social health that range from individual happiness and physical health to the occurrence of violent crime and economic stability.

Housing is a key social determinant of health, and Springfield currently sees a **shortage of accessible housing**. Accessibility can include many facets, ranging from the availability of housing to the physical design of structures to places that are available to people leaving institutions of care.

- Most residential areas in Springfield are

zoned for single-family homes; as a result, 94% of housing in Springfield is single-family housing. There is a lack of diverse housing options (across both rentals and owner-occupied homes).

- Physical accessibility addresses design considerations such as no step entries, wider doors and hallways, and bathrooms with roll-in showers and grab bars. Our community will see an increased need for accessible housing as

our population ages.

- Often people leaving institutions of care — foster care, criminal justice settings, health care systems — need additional support. In an increasingly tight rental market, these populations face additional barriers in obtaining and maintaining housing.

According to the Springfield Housing Study, there is a mismatch in housing that is available and incomes of Springfield residents. This **shortage of affordable housing** means 49% of renter households pay more than 30% of their household income toward housing, compared with 17% of homeowners who pay more than 30%.

New construction has not kept up with demand and has increased in cost. Most new construction is not affordable and is being built outside of Springfield city limits. The high demand for housing has resulted in households with the lowest income being priced out of the market. First-time homebuyers have difficulty affording a home purchase, and federally funded rental assistance programs often have an assistance cap that is below the market rate for housing.

According to the Springfield Housing Study, the majority of Springfield housing stock is older, with 44% of its housing structures built between 1950 and 1970. Twenty-one percent of homes are designated as being in fair to poor condition. In this **shortage of safe housing**, blighted properties can impact the quality of life for families and entire neighborhoods. There is currently no rental regulation program in operation to ensure baseline housing quality standards are met and maintained, and there is a lack of resources to consistently support code enforcement.

Addressing each of these Red Flags will be even more critical in the future as the population ages. According to the Springfield Housing Study, the percentage of people in Springfield who are 65 or older will increase nearly 25% by 2030.



This Woodland Heights resident (right) was the first Restore SGF Block Grant Challenge recipient.

PROVIDED BY RESTORE SGF

SUCCESS STORY

Engagement helps improve neighborhoods

The most successful effort to impact Red Flags has been increased neighborhood engagement. Engagement has increased both through grassroots means and at the system level. Neighborhood engagement has facilitated citizen impact on community planning and development, increased neighborhood character and ensured citizen input in development and implementation of city strategic planning. Outcomes over the past 20 years include:

- 2006: Neighborhood Organization Volunteer Awards began. The annual event, hosted by Community Partnership of the Ozarks, recognizes neighborhood volunteers who work to improve and revitalize their communities.
- 2009: Neighborhood Clean-up Program started. Annual neighborhood-based events provide free disposal of bulk items. Last year, 239 tons of waste were collected.
- 2009: City started reporting neighborhood health indicators.
- 2011: Neighborhood Advisory Council organized. The effort provides an avenue for communication and problem solving between the city and neighborhood association leadership.
- 2013: City Council adopted the Great Neighborhood Philosophy.
- 2022: Forward SGF adopted. The vision plan includes neighborhood revitalization, neighborhood commercial hubs and planning, and a place-based approach as top initiatives.
- 2023: Restore SGF launched home reinvestment and home-ownership programs serving Doling, Grant Beach, Fassnight, Meador Park and Woodland Heights neighborhoods.
- 2024: Registered neighborhood associations number 24, up from 13 in 2004.

Varied partners work together to improve, protect natural resources

 Generally healthy natural environment · Stable, established nonprofits · Long-term regional plans include environmental concerns

 Regional drinking water supply · Outdated, inefficient garbage collection · Uncertainty surrounding state legislation

Over the past 20 years, the dedication of individuals, singly and banded together, to preserve and protect our region's rich natural environment has not changed. Though not without serious challenges itself, a new generation is coming into its own — also dedicated to improving and protecting the natural environment.

BLUE RIBBONS

Springfield's **generally healthy natural environment** is the result of several areas of improvement over the past 20 years. Air quality is one example. City Utilities of Springfield, a municipally owned/operated utility, and other industry and nonprofit partners have remained focused on quality of place for our community. At the end of the 2023 ozone season, the design value for Springfield-Greene County ground level ozone levels were at 66 parts per billion against a standard (regulatory limit) of 70 ppb. The federal Environmental Protection Agency is required by law to review national ambient air quality standards on a periodic basis, taking into account levels protective to human health and the environment.

In 2015, the ground level ozone standard was reduced from 75 ppb to 70 ppb. In 2012, Springfield's monitored design value reached as high as 74 ppb prior to the lowering of the ozone standard. Since that time, CU commissioned and began operating a new voter-approved coal-fired power station, which, along with improvements to the existing power station, successfully reduced the utility's overall emissions footprint



Fellows Lake, located north of Springfield, is part of the city's drinking water supply.

PROVIDED BY
WATERSHED

from 11,852 tons in 2011 to 3,414 tons in 2023 — a 71% reduction.

Springfield has been and remains in attainment for all national air-quality standards. The utility meets or exceeds current regulatory requirements. Local primary sources for ground level ozone components are mobile sources — cars, trucks, buses and other fossil fuel engines.

Stable and established nonprofits, such as Watershed, Ozark Greenways Inc., James River Basin Partnership, Ozarks Clean Air Alliance, Greater Ozarks Audubon Society, Ozark Society, Missouri Master Naturalist, Ozarks Environmental and Water Resources Institute and others have provided advocacy, education and

technical assistance, including hands-on work for the protection and enjoyment of our valuable natural resources.

Long-term regional plans include environmental concerns. First reported in the 2015 Community Focus Report, the integrated approach to the multiple environmental challenges and associated costs implemented in Springfield was the first of its kind in the nation and has been recognized as an innovative approach. Progress using this approach continues.

The Forward SGF Comprehensive Plan establishes a long-term vision for Springfield and its growth area. The plan is supported by a series

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Collaborative efforts substantially improve air, water quality

- **On water quality:** Over the past 20 years, through a combination of effective legislative action, proactive action on the part of the City of Springfield and others regarding nutrient removal from wastewater and programs to address stormwater runoff, water quality has markedly improved.
- **On air quality:** As a result of efforts by the city, City Utilities and other industry partners, air

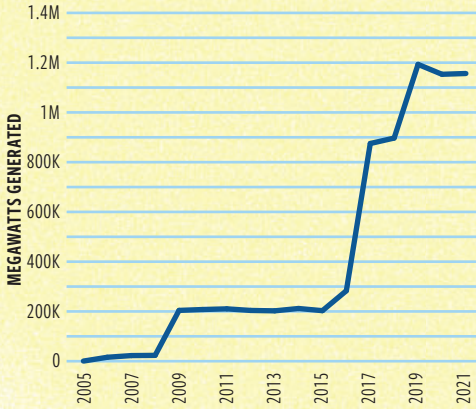
quality has substantially improved over the past 20 years. At the end of the 2023 ozone season, the design value was 66 ppb against a standard of 70 ppb.

- **On solid waste management:** Although Springfield still uses an outdated and inefficient method of residential trash collection, the Integrated Solid Waste Management System was passed by

voters in 1993 and implemented in 1994 as one of the first such programs in the country. The components of the IWSMS have successfully provided service addressing household hazardous waste, yard waste, recycling drop-off centers and efforts to improve local recycling practices via education and outreach, as well as working to develop local end-use and processing facilities.

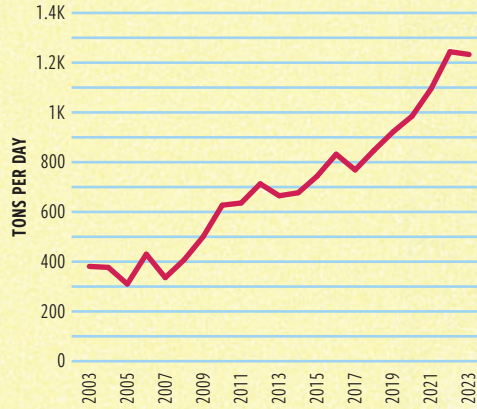
KEY METRICS

City Utilities — Renewable energy generation, 2005–21



SOURCE: CITY UTILITIES

Springfield landfill use, 2003–2023



SOURCE: CITY OF SPRINGFIELD ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

of goals and strategies, which will work collectively to achieve measurable change in the community. In the end, all components of the plan are driven by one unifying principle: improve quality of place through a well-connected system of parks, open spaces, trails and recreational opportunities that link to the region’s many natural assets. The protection of the Ozarks natural environment and ecology will be made a priority and is woven throughout the plan.

The Lake Springfield Plan, unanimously accepted by the City Council earlier this year, continues to receive community attention, including in the areas of recreational access and in water quality issues including nutrients, bacteria, PCBs, and now PFAS, along with varying opinions about the removal of the dam and restoration of a free-flowing river.

RED FLAGS

For the past 20 years, SWMO Water has worked to secure a reallocation of storage from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reservoirs to ensure our water supply meets growing regional demands, establish drought resiliency, drive the economy, and meet public health and safety requirements.

In that 20-year timeframe, the water industry has moved to a more regional approach to water systems. In that vein, SWMO Water is consistent with the industry and is on the leading edge to lay the foundation for a regional water source and infrastructure project.

While not a direct concern in the City of Springfield, **regional drinking water supply** concerns continue. Joplin and Missouri American Water continue to pursue construction of a dam and reservoir to supply the western portion of southwest Missouri with water for the relative short term. This is important because Joplin and MoAM are members of and participants in the cooperative water supply effort. Joplin

and MoAM plan to use the reservoir to store water pumped from the regional reallocation of storage from Stockton Lake for the longer term, similar to how Springfield uses Fellows Lake. It is important that all of southwest Missouri work together in establishing a long-term water source. Cooperation provides efficiencies of scale by pooling resources and is consistent with the current movement towards regionalism within the water industry.

Outdated and inefficient garbage collection plagues the collection component of the voter-approved Integrated Solid Waste Management System, which relies on independent trash companies and results in unnecessary wear and safety issues in neighborhood streets, provides mediocre recycling services and contributes unnecessary air pollutants due to inefficient trucks and unnecessary miles traveled. Unfortunately, solutions have been stymied by special-interest interference. The situation is increasingly urgent. The possibility of state and regional landfill space shortages looms, due to declining numbers of working landfills. (See the 2023 update of the Community Focus Report.)

Uncertainty surrounding state legislation has led to an uncertain future for the state’s solid waste districts and associated funding mechanism, following a landmark legal decision. The waste district grants have provided \$8.3 million to fund waste reduction/recycling projects in the five-county district since the board was established in 1992.

Legislative action eroding former protective measures and ignoring current needs are a threat to the future of our ability to protect and preserve our natural environment. One example points to actions regarding the Clean Water Commission that have resulted in water-quality advocates being removed from the commission and replaced with vested business/industry interests.



Children play in the fountain at Jordan Valley Park, which previously housed abandoned industrial sites.

PROVIDED BY CITY OF SPRINGFIELD

SUCCESS STORY


Downtown park serves as city centerpiece


In 1994, an ambitious citizen-led planning effort began and, upon completion, the Parks, Open Space and Greenways focus group of Vision 20/20 proposed a dream of a vast park in the center of Springfield that would connect the city and become the gathering place for the community.

It was to embody the commitment of the community to address the mistakes of the past and to provide a permanent space of pride and use for future generations — accessible to all that wanted to use it — with visions of concerts, events, celebrations and children of all ages and backgrounds playing together in the fountains on a hot summer day. Temporarily named Civic Park, it would later become Jordan Valley Park — one of the signature identifiers of our community. Development on the park continues: the first phase of the daylighting of Jordan Creek will begin this fall.

In 1999, the City of Springfield Brownfields Program began. To date, the city has received over \$8 million in federal EPA grant funding specifically designed to return tainted property, known as brownfield, to productive use. Although a few notable legacy sites remain, the success of the Brownfields Program has shown remarkable results.

Interagency connections lead to public-safety successes

 Community collaboration · Awareness, education and response to mental health · Enhanced technology use

 Gun-related crimes · Substance-use issues · Staffing shortages

Ensuring the security of the community is the top priority of public safety agencies in Springfield and Greene County. Through innovative uses of technology and positive collaboration, agencies work alongside each other to move the needle on historically challenging Red Flags such as crime, opioids and staffing.

BLUE RIBBONS

Community collaboration continues to weave a consistent thread throughout Public Order and Safety reports, past and present. Interagency collaboration helps improve the community's Red Flags.

Started in 2023 with the Community Partnership of the Ozarks, the Gun Violence Collaborative brought numerous public safety and community agencies together. The collaborative is working to address gun violence in Springfield, specifically among the community's youth.

The Greene County Criminal Justice Roundtable was created in 2022 to bring together representatives from every aspect of the criminal justice system. The group meets on a regular and informal basis to discuss immediate and long-term issues, and works together to improve the local criminal justice system for all those involved.

Recent years have seen an increase in **awareness, education and response to mental health** needs by public safety agencies. Implemented in 2022, the mental health co-responder program, a partnership between the Springfield Police Department and Burrell Behavioral Health, connects those in crisis to the services they need. Since the program's inception, co-responders



Announced in April, a \$797,798 grant from the Missouri Department of Public Safety State Crisis Intervention Program will help SPD and Burrell Behavioral Health expand the mental health co-responder program. Pictured left to right: Police Chief Paul Williams, Project Director Holli Triboulet and Burrell Southwest Region President Clay Goddard.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT

have made 852 contacts, equaling 1,702 hours of saved officer time, as of May 2024. To further expand the program, SPD was awarded a \$797,798 grant from the Missouri Department of Public Safety State Crisis Intervention Program, which will expand the program's capacity with funding to hire additional staff.

In 2022, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline was nationally implemented. The southwest region 988 call center is currently housed with Burrell. To streamline and further improve service to callers in crisis, Burrell is working with the Springfield-Greene County 911 Emergency Communications Center to co-locate 988 call

takers at the 911 dispatch center.

To improve the quality of life for incarcerated individuals, the Greene County Jail's mental health department had 7,475 encounters providing services to inmates in 2023. Additionally in 2023, the Greene County Defendant Assistance Program, a partnership between multiple community organizations, was established to facilitate high-need inmates and develop re-entry plans as a team. Finally, inmates who are preparing for release can also be screened to connect with the drug addiction and mental health services at Jordan Valley Community Health Center.

Across all public safety agencies, **enhanced technology use** thrives. A prime example is the use of drone technology by both the SPD and the Springfield Fire Department. SPD is moving toward using drones as a first responder, which allows officers to have eyes more quickly on an incident. SFD continues to use drones during special operations and search-and-rescue missions.

With the proliferation of video doorbells and private security cameras, SPD continues to expand the public camera registration program, with a database of more than 1,600 cameras across the city. The citizen-reported locations assist officers with investigations by speeding up the process of identifying cameras from which they can request to view footage.

The construction of the new Greene County Jail also led to the use of more technology for timely video court appearances. Of the 13,926 total court appearances made in 2023 by inmates, 9,963 were on video. This use of technology enhances efficiency and saves money.

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

New facilities, community support for initiatives among highlights

In the past 20 years, the landscape of public order and safety has seen ongoing change and improvement. Countywide facilities have improved, including the newly built Greene County Jail and fire stations as well as the addition of the Public Safety Center and the Police/Fire Training Center. Each facility has a purpose that will serve the community well into the future.

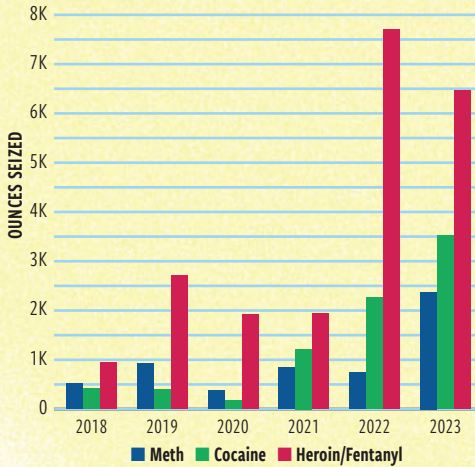
The opening of the Greene County Family Justice Center in 2018 marked a turning point in Springfield for survivors of domestic violence. In its five years of operation, the GCFJC has served nearly 10,000 clients, providing crucial access to services and information in a single hub.

While the needle has moved in a positive direction for much of the past 20 years, some

challenges continue to persist in the community. Throughout the 20 years of this report, staffing concerns for law enforcement and the justice system as well as prolific drug use continue to be community Red Flags. However, the consistent community support for public safety and criminal justice initiatives remains a success story for Springfield.

KEY METRICS

Drugs seized by SPD Special Investigations Section



SOURCE: SPRINGFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT

Text-to-911 sessions have increased with 16,092 text-to-911 sessions in 2023, 17% more than 2022.

RED FLAGS

The past few years have seen a steady increase in **gun-related crimes**, particularly where juvenile offenders are concerned. While the Springfield Police Department saw a slight decrease in the number of shots-fired calls and persons injured by gunfire in 2023, the trend still requires more work from the community to advocate for responsible gun ownership. In 2023, SPD's Special Investigations Section seized 266 illegal firearms as part of ongoing investigations, 14% more than in 2022 and nearly 44% more than in 2021.

Another concerning trend in gun-related crimes is the increase in juveniles committing weapon violations. The Greene County Juvenile Office reports 39 weapon violations charges for youth aged 17 and younger in 2023, a 36% increase over 2022.

Substance-use issues remain a concern in Springfield, but there is hope, particularly regarding opioid use. Led by the SFD, Narcan leave-behind kits are a new tool being used to help prevent deaths from opioid overdoses. Kits include two doses of Narcan, a CPR mouth shield and instructions on how to use it, along with resources to connect people with recovery, treatment and support. As of June, 165 kits had been distributed this year.

While there has been an increase in the distribution and use of Narcan that has resulted in fewer fatalities because of opioid overdose, that effort doesn't necessarily indicate less use of those and other substances. Overdoses associated with opioids, meth and other substances continue to occur; however, both police and firefighters are receiving fewer overdose calls.

Weapons violations by youth

	2022	2023
Charges	25	39
Referrals	23	37
Unique Youth	22	33

SOURCE: GREENE COUNTY JUVENILE OFFICE

Staffing shortages as of Dec. 31, 2023

Springfield PD — Sworn	17%
Springfield PD — Non-Sworn	17%
Greene County Sheriff — Jail	12%
Greene County Sheriff — Operations	2%
Greene County Public Defender	23%
Greene County Prosecutor	23%
911	18%

SOURCE: THE AGENCIES

In 2023, SPD removed historic amounts of meth, cocaine, heroin and fentanyl from the Springfield community. However, drug use continues to impact other criminal behavior in the community. In many cases, those with substance use disorder often resort to property crimes such as stealing, burglary, forgery and other crimes to finance their next drug use. Additionally, crimes like domestic abuse and assault increase when those involved are under the influence of drugs.

While some agencies have reached a comfortable level of personnel, **staffing shortages** continue to affect law enforcement agencies and the judicial system.

For law enforcement, SPD ended 2023 with a historic high of 62 vacancies for sworn police officers. However, extensive recruitment marketing efforts in 2023 and into 2024, new hiring incentives, a student loan reimbursement plan and expanded minimum experience requirements hope to bring in additional candidates for police officer. Over the past 20 years, the Greene County Sheriff's Office has consistently had open positions, with the primary concentration of vacancies in the jail division, ending 2023 with 42 openings for detention officers. The patrol division was fully staffed, however.

The need is even greater for the judicial system. The Greene County Public Defender's Office ended 2023 with six vacancies, which is nearly 23% of its available attorneys. With six assistant prosecuting attorney positions open — 23% of their total attorneys — the Greene County Prosecutor's Office is also struggling with staffing and managing an ever-increasing number of cases.

In addition to a lack of applicants and qualified hires, another challenge is an overall lower experience level in both law enforcement and the judicial system, while handling a consistently higher workload.



Opened in 2018, the Greene County Family Justice Center remains the ideal example of community collaboration among Springfield's public safety agencies.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT

SUCCESS STORY

Agencies connect to tackle issues

Since the earliest editions of the Community Focus Report, community mobilization and collaboration among public safety entities has remained an ever-evolving Blue Ribbon for Springfield. The relationship between these entities in the community to come together to solve problems differentiates Springfield from other communities. While maintaining that level of cooperation over the past 20 years hasn't always been easy, the community has seen the positive results of the collaboration.

There are many examples of interagency collaboration and community support over the years, but these are among the most notable:

- First approved in 2009, the community came together to support the ¼-cent sales tax dedicated solely to the city's Police and Fire Pension Fund, which was subsequently renewed twice in 2014 and 2019.
- The community saw a need for a central hub of operations during emergencies because of the 2007 ice storm and, in 2012, the Greene County Public Safety Center opened its doors, housing the Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management, the Springfield-Greene County 911 Emergency Communications Center, and other offices.
- An initial partnership between the Springfield Police Department, the Greene County Prosecutor's Office and the Greene County Sheriff's Office as well as numerous other government and non-profit agencies brought to life the Greene County Family Justice Center in 2018.
- In 2020, the Burrell Behavioral Health's Rapid Access Unit opened, which further allowed collaboration among public safety entities to assist individuals in mental health or substance-use disorder crises.

Opportunities, investments growing through area's recreation and sports offerings

Community collaboration · Trails and connections · Sports tourism

Greenspace preservation · Obesity · Stable, long-term funding

In 2024, Springfield's recreation landscape is growing and changing. Public and private investments are building new sports fields and playgrounds, attracting new economic activity. Demand for trails and sporting opportunities is rising. But stubborn issues like greenspace preservation, obesity and stable, long-term funding continue to vex our community.

BLUE RIBBONS

A longtime Blue Ribbon for sports and recreation is **community collaboration** among leaders, institutions, agencies, nonprofits and businesses.

The Springfield-Greene County Park Board attributes much of its success to longtime partnerships with schools, universities, local government, businesses, donors and nonprofit agencies, including close partner groups Friends of the Zoo, Springfield Sister Cities Association, Friends of the Garden, Springfield Regional Arts Council and Ozark Greenways. In total, the board maintains an active partnership with more than 250 entities, which provide funding, volunteers and community buy-in.

Post pandemic, this spirit of collaboration has opened the door for major new investments in sports and recreation infrastructure, with the federal American Rescue Plan taking the lead on two major sports projects, and other



Competitors play in the 2024 Queen City Pickleball Open at Cooper Tennis Complex. Demand for pickleball opportunities continues to rise.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY PARK BOARD

public-private partnerships are underway.

Construction is continuing at Cooper Park, the Park Board's multi-use sports corridor, where artificial turf is being installed on 19 sports fields. This \$28.5 million reinvestment project is made possible by joint ARPA funding from the City of Springfield and Missouri, with other funds from the city, the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Park Board.

The new Wilson Logistics Arena has opened at Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, replacing an aging livestock arena with a 6,300-seat,

160,000-square-foot multi-use venue. Construction included \$15 million in combined ARPA funding from Greene County and Missouri as well as private investment.

Betty and Bobby Allison Sportstown USA, new in 2022, now offers volleyball, flag football and soccer leagues, and serves as the home field for Sporting Springfield, an official academy affiliate of Sporting Kansas City pro soccer franchise.

At Fellows Lake, the Springfield South Kiwanis Club is partnering with the Hatch Foundation and City Utilities to build the Hatch Playground at Miller Park.

As local leaders have often noted, this spirit of collaboration and partnership is unique to this area and is not typically a strength for benchmark communities or other cities in Missouri. However, as longtime leaders retire and Springfield welcomes new executives, directors and presidents, Springfield's collaborative spirit must be actively cultivated and celebrated.

Springfield's **trails and connections** are a Blue Ribbon on the rise. Already a community favorite, Springfield's greenway trails emerged as a top initiative in Forward SGF, which articulates the city's vision through 2040. The city took a giant step for better connectivity when the U.S. Department of Transportation announced a \$24.8 million award through the Rebuilding

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Sports facilities create new pathways for tourism, recreation

The amount and quality of Springfield's sports and recreation facilities has grown along with the community over the past 20 years. These facilities contribute not only to the quality of life in our region, but also are economic, tourism and employment drivers.

The first Community Focus Report was published the same year that Hammons Field opened in 2004, hosting the Missouri State University baseball team. The following year was the inaugural season for the Double-A Springfield Cardinals baseball team, which completed its 20th Texas League season in 2024. In 2023, the City

of Springfield purchased the stadium from the John Q. Hammons Charitable Trust. The purchase, which made possible long-needed accessibility and amenity improvements to the stadium, resulted in a long-term lease extension between the team and the city.

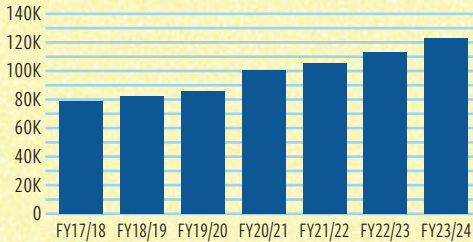
Additional public-private partnerships have enhanced the facilities landscape as well. MSU opened JQH Arena (later renamed Great Southern Bank Arena) in 2008, providing a new home for not only MSU basketball and athletics, but concerts, conventions and other community events.

In 2024, Wilson Logistics Arena opened at the

Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, hosting among other offerings the Ozarks Lunkers Arena League football team. The Springfield-Greene County Park Board is currently in the midst of a \$28.5 million overhaul of Cooper Park athletic facilities, funded by numerous organizations and expected to contribute to Springfield's growing reputation as a tournament destination for youth travel teams. Other major projects include the Betty and Bobby Allison Sportstown USA and new construction and renovations of recreation facilities, stadiums and arenas owned by Missouri State University, Drury University and Evangel University.

KEY METRICS

Annual rounds of golf at Park Board public courses



SOURCE: SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY PARK BOARD

American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity grant.

Sports tourism remains a Blue Ribbon. All new sports facilities and upgrades enhance Springfield's ability to attract sports tournaments. The Springfield Sports Commission had 40 tournament and championship events booked for Springfield in 2024 — including four at Wilson Logistics Arena, home of the new Ozarks Lunkers Pro Arena Football team.

RED FLAGS

Greenspace preservation has been noted as a Red Flag since 2005. Before that, increasing parks inventory and greenspace was identified as a priority in the 2004 Vision 20/20 Strategic Plan. More recently, this issue has been identified as a priority in the Springfield-Greene County Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2021 and in the City of Springfield's Forward SGF master plan, adopted in 2022.

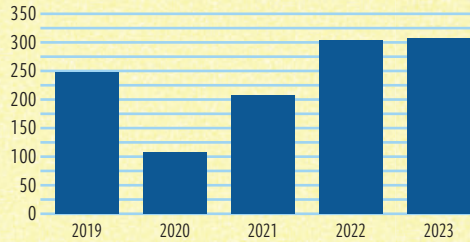
When broken down into types of parkland, Springfield-Greene County falls far behind the target of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents for mini parks, neighborhood and small-to-medium community parks, and even further behind the target 5 acres per 1,000 for larger urban and metropolitan parks. The master plan identifies central Springfield, as well as the city's perimeter to the north, east and west, as areas most in need of more mini parks and neighborhood parks. The document also states that acquisition of parkland "has not kept pace with residential development in Springfield's growth areas."

The Lake Springfield Plan, adopted in 2024, calls for transformation of 1,000 acres along Lake Springfield and the James River, including land adjacent to the decommissioned James River Power Station. The plan envisions outdoor recreation opportunities and access to nature as centerpieces for economic development, fueled by public and private partnerships. No funding has been appropriated for the project, and a timeline has not been identified, though city leaders have acknowledged the beneficiaries of the plan as future generations.

Identified as a Red Flag since the 2009

KEY METRICS

Annual sales of 10-day punch cards for pickleball



Community Focus Report, **obesity** remains a concern as well as a primary motivator for parks and recreation officials — not to mention the health care industry. At 32.4%, Missouri consistently ranks higher than the 29.5% national average in obesity prevalence. The Springfield metro area, including Greene, Webster and Christian counties, is even higher, at 32.6%.

Despite these trends, interest in sporting activities has grown, particularly since the pandemic. Rounds of golf at the Park Board's four public courses jumped 17% during the pandemic, as one of the few sports that was playable with social distancing guidelines. Since then, golf rounds have continued to grow as golfers rediscover the game. Over the past seven years, rounds of golf have grown 43%.

Interest in pickleball continues to soar as more players find the game offers the right mix of accessibility, affordability, competition and social connection. Ozarks Regional YMCA reports a consistent 1,000-plus pickleball players, with ages ranging from 12–85 years, at its six locations throughout the region. Annual sale of Park Board 10-play punch cards has grown nearly 24% since pre-pandemic numbers.

Identifying a **stable, long-term funding** source for parks, trails and sports infrastructure has been highlighted as a Red Flag since 2009. Funding became a greater concern following the 2012 expiration of the countywide parks sales tax. While grants, donations and private development enhance the recreation landscape, funding lags for renovation and upkeep of older and historic facilities.

After 110 years in downtown Springfield, the Ward Branch YMCA closed in March 2023, and the building was sold. Ozarks Regional YMCA's administrative offices relocated in downtown, but recreation opportunities were moved to the southside Pat Jones YMCA and facilities in other cities throughout the region.

The Citizens Commission on Community Investment recommended "parks projects" to be included in the City of Springfield's ¾-cent sales tax proposal, appearing as "Question 1" on the November 2024 ballot.



The 35-mile Frisco Highline Trail connects Springfield to Willard, Ash Grove and Bolivar.

PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY PARK BOARD

SUCCESS STORY

Ozark Greenways connects Springfield with 110 miles of trails

Ask someone about Springfield, and you'll hear about trails. Community leaders have picked up on this asset. Trails feature heavily in the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce relocation guide and the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau's Things to Do. Expanding and connecting trail sections emerged as a Top 10 initiative in Forward SGF, under the moniker "UnGap the Map."

At the center of it all is Ozark Greenways, established in 1991. In 33 years, Ozark Greenways has grown from a scrappy nonprofit fueled by volunteer workdays and big dreams, to become a synergistic powerhouse, bringing together the city, county, City Utilities, Ozarks Transportation Organization, regional partners, private investment, federal grants, donors and landowners, to build a well-used trail network, spanning Greene County and beyond.

When trails were first noted as a Blue Ribbon in the 2005 Community Focus Report, 58 miles were in place. Trails were a priority under the 2001 and 2006 parks sales taxes, which funded 14 projects. When the tax expired in 2012, Ozark Greenways doubled down on membership, fundraisers, building regional partnerships and engaging with donors. And trail development continued to today's count of 110 miles.

The \$24.8 million RAISE grant is the largest single funding source for trails in Springfield's history, furthering the city's vision to keep trails among Springfield's most valuable assets.

Trails, transit provide alternate pathways as community seeks to improve safety

 Continued trail development · City Utilities Transit · Traffic safety efforts

 Traffic safety · Community support for public transit · Funding for maintenance of existing trails and sidewalks

The previous Transportation chapter highlighted multimodalism and collaboration, and this year's chapter shows those efforts in action. The local trail system continues to develop regional trails and close gaps in the existing system, while collaboration has led to the finalization of a new transit plan and organized efforts at improving traffic safety.

BLUE RIBBONS

Continued trail development in Springfield and at a regional level has been positive during the past year. A total of about 5.3 million in grants was awarded to trail projects regionally, while Springfield received nearly \$25 million for 3.14 miles of new trail. These projects work toward the goal of closing gaps in the network and promoting alternative modes of transportation.

These projects include:

- Grant Avenue Parkway
- Division Street Trail
- Multiple phases of the Chadwick Flyer Trail between Ozark and Springfield
- Segments of the Jordan Valley Creek Trail
- A new segment of the South Creek Trail, increasing the east-west connection within Springfield
- New trails along Farm Road 182 and Route ZZ, better linking Republic and Springfield

Continued work on the Route 66 trail study, the Chadwick Flyer study, and Forward SGF



The recent development of Wilson's Creek Trail along Route ZZ, near Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, improves connections for alternative transportation between Springfield and Republic.

PROVIDED BY OZARK GREENWAYS

help develop future trails and create awareness of the trail network within the region. Multiple public workshops provided ways to engage the public and landowners, resulting in the acquisition of critical land pieces, including one that closes the gap between the Wilson's Creek and South Creek greenways.

City Utilities Transit continues to support and improve public transit through the City of Springfield. Over the years various route optimizations have been studied, but resulting changes to the system were incremental. Between 2022 and 2023, CU Transit conducted ConnectSGF,

a transit optimization study that identified opportunities and potential efficiencies for transit services, assessed rider and community priorities, and provided alternatives for expanded service, if prioritized in the future by the Springfield community. CU leadership used the results of the study to recommend and implement improved route and schedule changes and a fare reduction, scheduled to go into effect this fall.

While roadway crashes continue to be a concern in the region, several **traffic safety ef-**

forts have received additional support over the past year. In 2023, the Ozarks Transportation Organization was awarded a Safe Streets and Roads for All planning grant, which provides support for the development of a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan. Currently in progress, OTO has hired a transportation engineering firm to assist with crash analysis and an equity engagement firm to maximize public input. Slated for completion in fall of 2024, the plan will identify and prioritize potential solutions for high-crash locations and behaviors, leading to eligibility for federal funding.

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Technology, planning help ease load of ever-growing traffic in area

Over the past 20 years, traffic in Springfield has increased but congestion has improved due to a comprehensive approach. The Traffic Management Center monitors traffic and crashes for smooth roadway operations. Deployment of an intelligent transportation system and refined signal timing enhance road capacity for growing traffic.

Bicycle-friendly policies and infrastructure have eased pressure. Springfield has been recognized as a Bronze Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists. In

2019, Springfield adopted a walkability resolution, integrating complete streets into Forward SGF. Sidewalks are being upgraded to 10-foot-wide sidepaths along streets such as Division Street and Fremont and Grant avenues.

Transit has evolved. CU Transit opened a downtown transit center in 2016, leading to a system redesign. Ridership has fluctuated due to fuel prices, fare adjustments and the pandemic.

Transportation funding has steadily increased with each federal bill, doubling the region's allocation from 2004 to 2024. Springfield's ¼- and

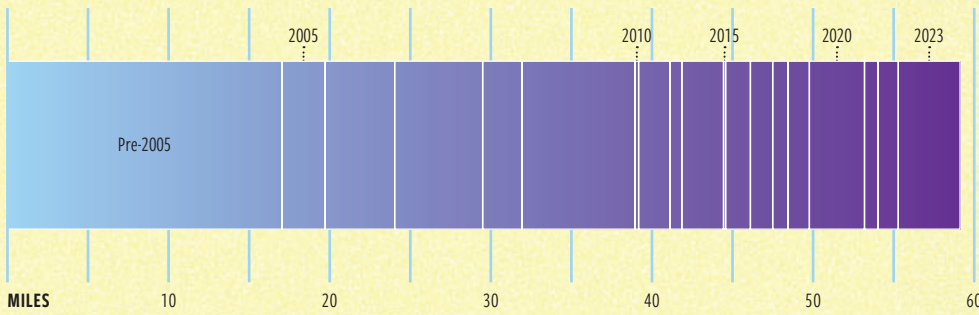
¼-cent sales taxes have been extended from five-year to 20-year sunsets and surrounding communities have passed additional transportation and capital improvement taxes. These adjustments do not offset increasing construction costs, however.

On safety, Missouri saw a peak in crash fatalities in 2005 at 1,257, dropping below 1,000 in 2007 with a low of 757 in 2013, before rising again to 1,106 in 2021. Despite the helmet law repeal and reduced driver's education, efforts like hands-free driving laws and safety campaigns focus on saving lives.

KEY METRICS

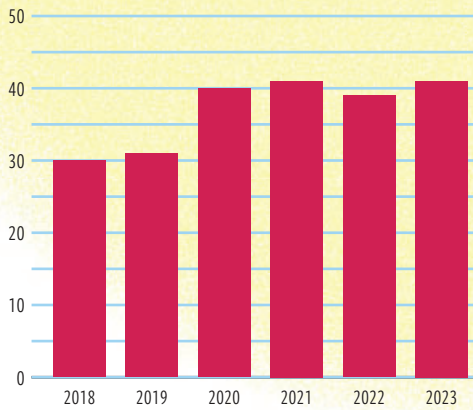
Annual expansion of transportation trails within OTO region

The Ozarks Transportation Organization's region covers parts of Greene and Christian counties, including Springfield and surrounding communities.



SOURCE: OZARKS TRANSPORTATION ORGANIZATION

Traffic fatalities in OTO region



SOURCE: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Springfield has continued to implement SGF Yields, a campaign for cultural change in pedestrian safety. In addition to continued use of Mr. Walker figures and crosswalk yield checks, SGF Yields developed “Use Your WITS,” offering street smarts to unhoused persons and those in unstable housing. The “Use Your WITS” video produced for this campaign encourages pedestrians to:

- Watch and be seen
- Identify the risks
- Take the safest route across
- Stay alert

SGF Yields has also been marketed to communities across the country as Safe Across.

RED FLAGS

Traffic safety continues to be a concern. Among cities with more than 150,000 residents, Springfield ranks 13th out of 172 for traffic fatality rates. While the total number of crashes in the region are trending downward, fatal crashes have increased since 2018 and serious injury crashes have trended up. Motorcycle crashes have increased, as well, while bicycle and pedestrian crashes have remained steady. The safety action plan described in the Blue Ribbons section will set a goal date for zero fatal crashes,

as well as a date for no serious injury crashes. These targets will be a challenge when past data indicates this problem is pervasive. Additional obstacles include the lack of mandated driver’s education, the repeal of the motorcycle helmet law, and the secondary nature of seatbelt and distracted driving laws.

While CU Transit has taken the lead to optimize the existing transit system, a critical concern is the overall lack of **community support for public transit**. Despite improvements made by CU as a transit provider, the broader community has not demonstrated the necessary advocacy to further elevate and transform public transit throughout the region. There is a need for more affordable housing near transit routes, connection of new developments and employers to transit, and awareness of transit by human resources and real-estate professionals. Other policies that affect land use surrounding transit should be used to further support the transit system. CU Transit does not serve Springfield’s surrounding communities, and the Older Adults Transportation Service that does cannot keep up with the demand or provide scheduled service.

Funding for maintenance of existing trails and sidewalks is another Red Flag. There is no program in place to rehabilitate or replace asphalt on existing trails. Springfield has about 780 miles of sidewalk with \$1.2 million annually dedicated to building new and maintaining existing sidewalk. More than \$100 million is needed to bring existing sidewalks into compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and an additional \$40 million is needed to fill 80 miles of high-priority sidewalk gaps where new sidewalk is needed. These additional resources will also require maintenance over time.

The Missouri Department of Transportation will have completed ADA transition plan improvements in the OTO region by 2026. But gaps in the system and future maintenance concerns are barriers to construction of sidewalks beyond those required by the ADA.



The Chadwick Flyer Trail will ultimately connect southeast Springfield in Greene County to downtown Ozark in Christian County.

PROVIDED BY OZARK GREENWAYS

SUCCESS STORY

Expanding trails offer solution to Red Flags

Over the span of the Community Focus Report, congestion, lack of regional and school transit, and a lack of sidewalks have been consistent transportation themes cited among the Red Flags. While a variety of community projects and initiatives have tackled these concerns, the regional trail system has emerged as a solution.

The regional trail system demonstrates how perseverance leads to success. From a dozen distinct trails in 2004, the region now has over 60 miles of trail that are more connected each year. When including soft-surface and water trails, there are over 110 miles available. Communities surrounding Springfield are connecting more trails and contributing to the regional system. Ozark Greenways, formed in 1991, works with a variety of community partners to fund, construct, and maintain the Greenway trails system. They have been an advocate and partner in implementation of the regional trail system, providing an active, safe, and connected regional network.

As trails become more connected, they serve transportation and commuting needs, beyond recreation. More sidewalk is also being built to a trail standard, creating connections and safer routes within town. Trails in Springfield were first constructed along stormwater projects, placing many trails in low-lying locations and following the east-west routes of the waterways through town. Now, we have seen success in building trails that create north-south connections, as well as connections to the surrounding communities.

Prosper Springfield: Tackling the persistent Red Flag of poverty

BY FRANCINE PRATT

A decade ago, the Impacting Poverty Commission was established to address increased poverty levels in Springfield. The commission researched and analyzed prior Community Focus Reports and other local data with a focus on education, health, housing, financial/job security and transportation.

By October 2015, the commission created a community action plan to reduce poverty and increase education beyond high school. The action plan included a goal to reduce poverty by five percentage points by 2025 for the city of Springfield and led to the launch of Prosper Springfield, an initiative to follow through with the plan's recommendations.

In 2015, the poverty level for the city of Springfield was 25.7%. The poverty level increased slightly for two years and then started to decline as the private, public and social sectors agreed on what they could collectively do to tackle the issue. According to U. S. Census Bureau data, Springfield's 2019 poverty levels by race/ethnicity were:

- White: 21.8%
- African American/Black: 32.6%
- Hispanic/Latinx: 27.2%
- Asian: 40.9%

By November 2020, the Equity and Prosperity Commission was created to review the progress Springfield was making toward poverty reduction. The commission reviewed several different reports, assessments and

findings related to the city of Springfield and Greene County. These reports included hearing and reading different lived experiences from individuals from a variety of intersectional population groups.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the overall poverty level for Springfield had dropped to 21.7% by that time. The commission disaggregated poverty levels by race/ethnicity and population groups where consistent data was available to see how different demographic groups were affected:

- White: 19.8%
- African American/Black: 34.8%
- Hispanic/Latinx: 21.7%
- Asian: 32.0%
- American Indian: 16.8%
- Two or More Races: 27.9%
- Other Race: 27.1%

In April 2022, the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality was adopted by City Council, promoting five pillars of change: dialogue and understanding, cultural consciousness, advocacy and partnerships, structural and systemic barriers, and personal and organizational accountability. The effort was designed to increase access to resources and services to address poverty disparities.

By July 2022, the commission had published a new community action report with a set of recommendations that included the original five areas of focus from the 2015 community action plan and added public safety.

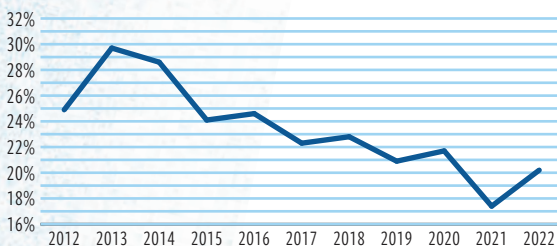
The commission set a new goal to reduce the poverty level for each population group by 10 percentage points by 2030. The new goal focuses on poverty reduction for all races/ethnicities, as well as individuals with disabilities and/or health disparities.

As of December 2023, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 report for Springfield reflects a 20.3% overall poverty level. In 2024, Prosper Springfield is in the process of determining which recommendations can be implemented, revised and updated to reduce the poverty level for each population group. The Equity and Prosperity Commission's updated community action plan should be completed by the end of the 2024–25 fiscal year.



Francine Pratt is director of Prosper Springfield.

Springfield residents below the federal poverty level



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 1-YEAR AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEYS; THE 2020 DATA COMES FROM THE 5-YEAR AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, WHICH IS THE ONLY AVAILABLE DATA FOR THAT YEAR

Community Focus Report poised for a dynamic future

BY TRACI NASH

Since 2004, the Community Focus Report has served as a vital tool in highlighting Springfield and Greene County's strengths while addressing their challenges. The report has become an essential community resource, thanks to the dedicated volunteers who invested their time, passion and expertise into its creation. As we look ahead, we are committed to honoring this legacy by ensuring the report's continued growth and relevance.

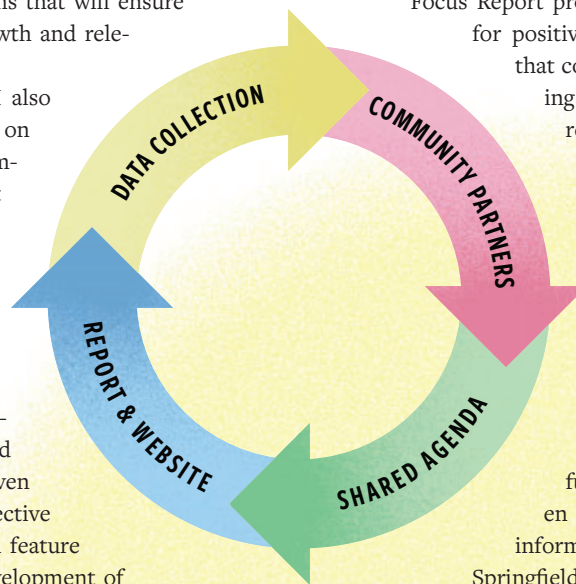
When a small team at Missouri State University was invited to research similar community assessment tools nationwide, it became evident that a new structure was important to sustain the report's future beyond its volunteer roots. After two years of research and discussion, the Community Focus Report has found a new home in the Ozarks Public Health Institute at MSU, where it will be supported by full-time staff and expanded funding. This transition marks the next chapter in the report's evolution, building on the strong foundation laid by those who came before. Moving forward, we are committed to honoring this legacy while embracing innovations that will ensure the report's continued growth and relevance.

The transition to OPHI also brings a renewed focus on strategic planning and community engagement, first through a relationship with Community Partnership of the Ozarks. Under OPHI's stewardship, the Community Focus Report will evolve from its original design as a reflective community report card into a dynamic, data-driven and action-oriented collective impact approach. A central feature of this evolution is the development of shared metrics, where the Community Focus team will clean and verify local data, then build presentations tailored to each community partner's topic area. This process ensures the data is accurate, relevant and actionable.



The Community Focus team will also facilitate workshops with existing CPO collaboratives and new community partner groups to identify measures to track each group's progress as well as the overall movement toward shared goals. Using the shared metrics built by the Community Focus team, collaboratives and coalitions can set measurable objectives for themselves from an informed stance. This process is designed to be inclusive, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued and that opportunities for collaboration are explored and encouraged. Looking ahead, the Community Focus program will continue to publish a biennial report while integrating a robust data network and increasing community ownership. An online dashboard will be introduced to demonstrate progress toward shared goals through stakeholder programs and local initiatives. This dashboard will provide a map to invite community participation, further enhancing the program's collective momentum toward creating an environment in which everyone can thrive.

The volunteers who built the original Community Focus Report provided a sustainable pathway for positive change and gave us a gift that continues to inspire. The evolving Community Focus effort will remain a community-driven initiative — with expanded resources. Its new home at OPHI offers opportunities to deepen connections and increase engagement with more frequent and consistent data analysis for the community's benefit. We are committed to working together toward a future where this data-driven effort remains a catalyst for informed, collective action in the Springfield region and plays an even greater role in shaping a better tomorrow for everyone.



Traci Nash is the transition consultant for the Community Focus initiative at the Ozarks Public Health Institute.

Information to inspiration

For many, the Community Focus Report serves as a source of both information and inspiration. If you find yourself inspired by these pages, the following steps can help you take action.

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** (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 off-site access to online resources.
- **Duane G. Meyer Library at Missouri State University**: Meyer Library, 850 S. John Q. Hammons Parkway, 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.
- **Hamra Library at Ozarks Tech**: The library, on Ozark Tech's main campus at 1001 E. Chestnut Expressway, 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.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Springfield-Greene County Library District recommends these books as starting points to explore community engagement:

- **Love Where You Live: Creating Emotionally Engaging Places** by Peter Kageyama
- **Read This to Get Smarter: About Race, Class, Gender, Disability & More** by Blair Imani
- **The Beginner's Guide to Grant Writing: Tips, Tools, & Templates to Write Winning Grants** by Holly Rustick
- **Big Bets: How Large-scale Change Really Happens** by Rajiv Shah
- **Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community** by Robert D. Putnam
- **The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference** by Malcolm Gladwell

The library also has staff and resources that can help you navigate the research process. Contact your nearest branch for more information.

STEP ONE

Where do I go to learn more?

The information contained in the Community Focus Report is a detailed overview of the Blue Ribbons and Red Flags for 11 different facets of our community. It serves as a spotlight of where we are and where we can go to make our region a great place to learn, work, play and thrive.

When seeking more detailed information about the 11 topics contained in this report, start with the two primary types of agencies working to turn our Red Flags into Blue Ribbons.

- **Government agencies**: permanent or semi-permanent organizations at local, state and federal levels that are assigned to oversee aspects of civil society, such as environmental issues, utility regulation and law enforcement. They provide services or carry out tasks specific to areas assigned by law. Examples: Springfield-Greene County

Park Board, Springfield-Greene County Health Department, Environmental Services, Public Works

- **Nonprofit agencies**: a legal entity that operates for a public or social benefit and does not generate financial profits for its operators. Examples: United Way of the Ozarks, Drew Lewis Foundation, Alzheimer's Association, Child Advocacy Center, Harmony House
- Visiting the websites, attending public programs, and following the social media of these agencies can give you a fuller picture of community issues and potential solutions.

Remember, many successful organizations are already at work in our community tackling these issues. Your local library branch can help you identify agencies and efforts already in place that align with your passions and energy.

STEP TWO

Where can I find reliable data for understanding the issue?

If you find yourself drawn to a topic, raw data can help you understand the depth of the issue from an empirical perspective. Such information is needed to help stakeholders evaluate the seriousness of the problem and develop benchmarks for improvement. Many government and nonprofit agencies can point you to special studies specifically related to their areas of interest, but for general information, here are a few good places to begin:

- **U.S. Census Bureau** (census.gov): Data from the U.S. census, gathered every 10 years, is publicly available. The American Community Survey gathers demographic data more frequently on issues about Springfield, the county and the surrounding area. The Census Bureau offers excellent infographics and visualizations using data from a variety of government sites.
- **FBI: Uniform Crime Reporting Publications** (ucr.fbi.gov/ucr-publications): This resource 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** (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** (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** (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.

STEP THREE

Where do I find grants?

Grants are funds received by an organization that are not expected to be repaid. Grants can be a major source of funding for government and nonprofit organizations in our community. They are often targeted to very specific projects or efforts by an organization looking to bring about social change. They also need to have demonstrable impact.

Please note: Most grants require funds being granted through an existing 501(c)3 organization or government entity to qualify. It is highly unusual for a grantmaker to direct grant funds directly to an individual.

When seeking grant opportunities, many organizations will start with a quick internet search. While this approach isn't necessarily wrong, it can quickly lead to an overwhelming amount of information. Instead, start with a few key sources that can help you on the journey to seeking out grants for your organization:

- **Community Foundation of the Ozarks** (cfozarks.org): This nonprofit foundation based in Springfield serves communities throughout central and southern Missouri and has several competitive grant programs, including one that targets Red Flags.
- **Grants.gov**: This federal site provides numerous grant opportunities and resources for grant writers.
- **Candid Foundation Directory Online** (fconline.foundationcenter.org): With full access available through the Springfield-Greene County Library District, this robust research tool includes over 90,000 grantmakers and 900,000 grants from all over the United States to help you seek possible sources of funding for your projects.

Remember, when seeking out grants, it is crucial that you match the mission and goals of a grantmaker with the needs and desires of your organization.

STEP FOUR

How do I apply for grants?

The process of applying for and receiving grants runs the gamut from simple to extremely meticulous, depending on the grantor, the amount received and the reporting required. A full grant cycle can be time-consuming. It is helpful to have at least one point person to manage the grant process from start to finish.

Every grantmaker will have a set of parameters for applying for and receiving grant funds as well documentation requirements for ensuring the funds are spent appropriately. Before applying for any grant, be sure your organization has:

- Current documentation of nonprofit status
- A clear and strong mission statement
- Goals and desired outcomes for your project
- A detailed vision of how you will carry out your project if funds are received
- Measures to demonstrate that the project was successful in reaching its goal (statistics, anecdotes, etc.)

While grant applications may ask many types of questions about how you will use grant funds, having these core pieces in place will always help ensure a smoother application process and hopefully, more successful outcomes for your organization.

Battling misinformation

Whether seeking clarity on a topic or citing research for a grant application, researchers should have some tools in their box to evaluate and interpret online sources. The Springfield-Greene County Library District and the American Library Association provide some tips for ensuring the veracity of information:

- **Assess the credibility of the author and site.** If you see an article from a source you don't recognize, don't take it at face value. Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info. Check the source and corroborate the story with a search of other reliable news outlets to see if the information is widely reported. Addresses ending in .edu, .gov or .org are generally more reliable than those ending in .com or other top-level domains.
- **Read past the headline.** Headlines can be outrageous or misleading in an effort to inspire clicks. Go beyond headlines.
- **Check the links and sources supporting the article.** Click those links. Determine if the subsequent information supports the story. Consider the reliability of the sources. For polls, review the methodology, including sample size and margin of error. Be

skeptical of those that don't provide such details.

- **Check the date.** Outdated information sometimes enjoys a resurgence through social-networking sites.
- **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.
- **Consider that it might be promotional.** Is the purpose of the site to sell a product?
- **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.
- **Check the facts.** Look through fact-checking sites such as Fact Check.org that independently verify claims and debunk false rumors.
- **Run photos through a reverse image search.** Fake or misleading 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.

What about AI?

The proliferation of sources and images now created through artificial intelligence further complicates the battle against misinformation and disinformation. Generative AI takes a user prompt and uses existing data to create new text or images. It is easy for anyone to use services like ChatGPT, Midjourney and Gemini to create content and publish it online. As our society grapples with the ethics and implications of this rising technology, it is wise to learn to distinguish between what is AI and what is not.

AI detection tools do exist but are

not always reliable, especially when it comes to writing. Our tips above for battling misinformation can help you identify AI-generated content but here are a few key signs that something you are reading might be AI:

- Repetitive language or ideas
- Inconsistent style, tones or tenses
- Extremely generic explanations of a topic
- Absence of personal experience
- Excessive use of typical AI words (e.g. furthermore, consequently, crucial, particularly)



This guidesheet was compiled by the Springfield-Greene County Library District, a Community Focus Report partner.

2024 EDITION

ARTS & CULTURE

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

COMMUNITY HEALTH

EARLY CHILDHOOD

EDUCATION

HOUSING

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

PUBLIC ORDER & SAFETY

RECREATION, SPORTS & LEISURE

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