

Your Voice **Ohio:** **Vibrant** **Springfield**

**Exploring how to make
Springfield a thriving
community for all**

September 24, 2018



A lot has changed about Ohio's economy over the last 20 years. There are nearly 152,000 fewer jobs, there's a lower average household income and higher student debt, and the state is falling behind in education. For the first time in at least a half century, Ohio did not recover from one recession before it entered the next recession. Complicating matters, the correlation between economic struggle and the addiction crisis, which is claiming lives and sucking financial vibrancy from families, communities and the state, has become clear.

But many people don't need to read these statements to tell them what's going on. We see it in our neighborhoods, from vacant blocks to payday lenders to shuttered factories.

In Clark County, Ohio, residents are seeing a growth in manufacturing jobs and higher educational institutions. On the other hand, the community is also facing generational poverty and a lack of affordable housing for many citizens. Despite these challenges, many residents remain optimistic about the ability for Springfield and the surrounding county to thrive. To confront these changes head-on and explore what steps could make Springfield a more vibrant place to live for all, local journalists joined together and sat down face to face with community members.

On Monday, September 24, 2018, at Clark State Community College, residents met with members of the media to explore what Springfield would like it if it was thriving for everyone in the community. Some of the key issues mentioned by residents included the need to confront generational poverty, bring more business to downtown Springfield, and ensure job opportunities and other resources are available to all parts of the county.

The word "economy" can be intimidating to many because it means different things, including jobs, the overall economy, debt, poverty, income inequality, trade, and perhaps even the cost of health care. This can make it difficult for community members to easily find and provide information about what they're experiencing.

Our goal, through these community conversations, is to put people at the center of local reporting. Our collaborative aims to supply people with the information and resources they need to create smart, shared, and sustainable solutions to the struggles facing folks across Ohio.

EVENT SUMMARY

On September 24, 2018, a dozen community members gathered at Clark State Community College, and over the course of 2 hours, discussed their experiences and identified local solutions.

We asked these four questions to prompt the discussion:

- 1. What would Springfield look like if it was thriving for everyone in the community?**
- 2. What's one thing you would improve or change in Springfield to make it more vibrant?**
- 3. What assets, resources, and strengths exist in Springfield?**
- 4. What actions might we take to make Springfield more vibrant?**

The conversation generated important questions for the local media to explore. In the following pages, you'll find stories and ideas shared by participants during the event.



RESPONSES

WHAT WOULD SPRINGFIELD LOOK LIKE IF IT WAS THRIVING FOR EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY?

- » Jobs available for all levels.
- » Jobs paid living wage.
- » Community activities and gatherings.
- » Businesses are busy.
- » Foster entrepreneurial-ism.
- » Sense of pride, desire to be involved.
- » Low crime rates.
- » Improved education rankings.
- » More local-owned businesses.
- » Improved property values.
- » There would be lively foot traffic in center city. People strolling, shopping, talking, enjoying life here.
- » More new development throughout the city or maybe more foot traffic in downtown or other areas.
- » We would have beautiful homes without empty foreclosed properties and vacant lots, plus a strong downtown with many businesses, and affordable homes.
- » Population growth; less of an aging demographic; satisfied middle class; innovation: concept to reality.
- » Larger middle class.
- » Revitalized housing stock.
- » More jobs with so-called “living” wage.
- » Less crime. Population growth. More taxes collected = better services (streets, police, etc.)
- » SAFE schools and children with aspirations.
- » Jobs available for people of all levels of educational attainment in all areas of the city that PAY a LIVING WAGE.
- » Children succeeding in and excited about going to school.
- » Families spending time together in the community, i.e. parties, events.
- » Green/open spaces used diversely.

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU WOULD IMPROVE OR CHANGE IN SPRINGFIELD TO MAKE IT MORE VIBRANT?

Individuals wrote...

- » Affordable and safe housing
- » Job opportunities that are flexible and may more than minimum wage
- » Accessible pre-school education that is affordable and high quality
- » Schools that are centers of education for the entire community
- » Transportation
- » Accountability and transparency of local government
- » Living wage employment opportunities on the south side, should be felony-friendly
- » Higher-wage jobs with benefits
- » More support for new and small business
- » Community relationships with local government and police
- » Tax structure
- » Finding more investment to rehab older buildings
- » More options to attract younger needs
- » Improve transportation, reduce reliance on autos and pickup trucks
- » Continue to remove old house and replace with affordable and appealing mid-price housing
- » Change downtown one-way streets to two-way
- » Improve our housing stock with new and remodeled housing that is affordable
- » Increase minimum wage to at least \$13 per hour
- » More positive news and information, change the mindset
- » Public infrastructure
- » Better leverage colleges and universities to attract new people
- » Generational poverty
- » Higher education attainment
- » Diversity of jobs that offer good wages in manufacturing, education, service, tech, arts
- » Niche success in neighborhoods and schools and parks that allow for good family experiences
- » For employees: Transportation, education, recovery-reentry, childcare; for employers tax credits and living wage
- » Housing: emergency housing; place to receive mail; support from utilities and landlords, accountability for them as well
- » Get beyond high school diplomas for entry jobs; food stamps going up; wages going down; GED participation; mobility/transportation; preschool and childcare options with transportation

The large group prioritized...

- » Generational poverty makes solutions difficult
- » Resources are clustered and not easily accessible to people who need
- » Living wages
- » No vibrant downtown: Needs easy access, parking, affordable housing, markets
- » Accountability/transparency in local government
- » Support for small business



WHAT ASSETS, RESOURCES, AND STRENGTHS EXIST IN SPRINGFIELD?

Individuals wrote...

- » Symphony orchestra
- » Strong multi-cultural element; Perfect transportation possibilities -- highways and airports; Enjoyable climate; Lower costs of living; Lots of colleges, arts facilities
- » Non-profits: Springfield Promise Neighborhood (support for children to address long-term poverty); Rocking Horse Health Services Center; Fuller Center (housing services)
- » Summer arts festival
- » Parks and open space
- » History
- » Natural resources, activities
- » Location
- » Cultural assets
- » Outdoor options, kayaking park, ice arena
- » Educational institutions such as Clark State and Wittenberg
- » Diversity of people (age, race, ethnicity, sexuality etc)
- » Active community groups (culture fest, farmers market)
- » Service organizations doing work with kids (YMCA, SCYM, Ark, Dome, Project Jericho)
- » Local funders interested in local issues (Turner, Springfield Foundation, Wilson Sheehan, United Way, Della Selsor, CHF)
- » Small business development center
- » City community development department
- » Water, Farmland, Next to I-70 and I-75, Crossroads of America
- » Affordable housing, Location, Arts, museum, summer arts, Wittenberg
- » Location, Affordability, Proximity to higher education
- » Arts, music and visual performance
- » Wittenberg, parks, proximity, affordability
- » People and pride
- » Foundations: Springfield, Turner and Davidson Trust
- » Jobs available
- » History, arts, culture
- » Location, water, farmland
- » Affordability
- » Family, community

The large group prioritized...

- » Location
- » Water
- » Agricultural farmland
- » Non-profits: Rocking Horse, Springfield Promise Neighborhood, Fuller Center
- » Arts -- Symphony orchestra, art museum in a small town
- » Jobs -- job openings at manufacturing with good wages
- » Affordable housing and living costs
- » Community-oriented
- » Diversity with religions and culture
- » Outdoor activities
- » Higher education



WHAT ACTIONS MIGHT WE TAKE TO MAKE SPRINGFIELD MORE VIBRANT IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS?

Generational poverty

- » Education
- » Pride and doing a good job
- » Ok with living a substandard lifestyle
- » Folks are disengaged, they're not part of a network
- » Each generation needs to be addressed -- kids, parents, grandparents
- » Food bank and planning assistance
- » Tie assistance to learning opportunities. When people receive assistance, use it as a learning opportunity
- » Health: When in contact regarding health, discuss weight, eating, exercise
- » Champion the city scholars program at younger ages
- » Support organizations that are here already
- » Expose people to each other

Creating a vibrant downtown

- » Find key projects, such as food and entertainment
- » Improve walkability
- » Take a closer look at cost to open businesses downtown, fewer regulations or easier code, city should be regulation-friendly
- » Look for amenities that appeal to all ages, such as housing
- » Market downtown Springfield, professionally market empty spaces

Access resources

- » Wages and jobs
- » Transportation
- » Education (GED participation and Focus on recovery and reentry)
- » Access to affordable child care
- » Encourage living wage and benefits
- » Encourage jobs for re-entering citizens (felons)

STATEMENT TO NEIGHBORS

At the end of the conversation, we asked participants to write down a statement they would want their neighbors to know about community vibrancy, to share with those that couldn't attend the event:

- People in Springfield care about generational poverty.
- I learned that there are dedicated people working in the trenches of nonprofits in Springfield.
- Multi-layered and complex issues.
- The problems are not hopeless, but they can be addressed incrementally in a way that lessens the severity.
- Everyone has the responsibility to be engaged in their communities.
- Springfield has a little bit of everything.
- City government should aggressively work to find occupant businesses to fill all the empty storefronts in the downtown area.
- People believe generally some of Springfield's challenges are solvable with more effort/creativity.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Using the discussion as a guide, here are the questions participants want political candidates to answer, with the help of Your Voice Ohio journalists.

- What kinds of businesses can we bring to the south side to employ people there at a living wage (especially if those people don't have a HS diploma but maybe do have a felony)?
- How is Springfield doing with recovery and re-entry programs?
- Alternative funding models outside of grants and fundraising? What's doable in Springfield?
- How can we get children more proactive in our community?
- How can we create more affordable housing?
- How can we have pre-school/free education for 3 + 4 year olds?
- What are the regulatory issues that hinder downtown revitalization?
- Where was everyone tonight? As long as only a few people engage, only a few people will decide.
- What is Springfield's financial ability to stand out vs. Xenia, London, Beavercreek, Troy?
- Why do we have a bus service named for animal droppings? Something is wrong there!
- What can be done to improve workforce training locally? It's a key issue but was barely discussed tonight.



LOCAL MEDIA PARTNERS

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The Springfield News-Sun is a daily newspaper published in Springfield, Ohio, by Cox Media Group.

NEXT STEPS

Reporters across these organizations are dividing up the questions now and reporting answers back to the community.

For up-to-date information and reporting, visit:

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