

Theme: Minimizing Poverty

As pointed out in the Market Street Competitive Assessment report, Springfield has developed “a culture of poverty.” The strategy being suggested here is for our entire community to attack poverty from multiple directions, represented by the various chapter topics that have a relationship with minimizing poverty.

To address the theme of “minimizing poverty,” we asked each of the citizen-based planning committees to consider how their committee’s recommendations can help minimize the level of poverty and the effects of poverty in our community.

The Strategic Plan Coordinating Committee, when asked to measure the inter-relationships between “minimizing poverty” and the thirteen chapter topics, indicated the following (see Exhibit xx):

- Very strong relationship with Early Childhood Development, Economic Development, Education & Workforce Development, and Public Health chapters
- Medium-strong relationship with Growth Management & Land Use and Housing
- Moderate relationship with Global Perspectives & Diversity, Public Safety, and Transportation
- Moderately Weak relationship with Progressive City Management, Natural Environment, and Recreation & Leisure

The very strong inter-relationships with economic development and education & workforce development is not a surprise. It’s obvious that the better-paying jobs associated with a vibrant local economy can equal more affluence and open the door for more and better education. Accessibility to education and training opportunities is often a barrier for many in poverty. New public-private partnerships will be needed to provide more education/training opportunities for the poor in our community.

Likewise, the very strong relationship with early childhood development is not surprising. Research shows that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to be less successful in school, less productive as adults in the labor market, have lifelong health problems, and commit crimes and engage in other form of problematic behavior. The greatest indicator of whether an adult is homeless is whether they were homeless as a child. Thus, the cycle must be broken. Providing health, education and financial supports to children in their earliest years can break the cycle of poverty and produce a return on investment of 7 to 12 dollars for every dollar invested. While the biggest impact is usually derived through legislative or policy changes, community support for proven programs and services must help fill the gaps. Much of the poverty in Greene County consists of the “working poor” – the parent or parents work, but don’t make enough money to adequately support the family’s needs.

With healthcare costs continuing to rise and consume a greater portion of everyone’s income, public health will become increasingly important as a method of minimizing poverty in our community. Research has empirically proven that the underserved not

only struggle with access to health care, but have far poorer health care outcomes. Research has also suggested that low-socioeconomic status individuals tend to live close to other low-socioeconomic individuals, developing neighborhood pockets that have higher rates of infectious and chronic diseases and overall poorer health outcomes. It will become even more critical in the future to provide access to public health and health care services, as well as ongoing health education, which will not only sustain a healthy population, but level the population's health, reducing vulnerable sub-populations in outlying neighborhoods.

The medium-strong relationships between minimizing poverty and growth management & land use and housing indicates we must apply leverage from these two perspectives, as well, if we are to attack poverty from multiple directions. Poverty-stricken areas will need to be revitalized, which could also provide increased density of housing needed to provide more cost-effective public services, easier access to transportation, and greater access to jobs. The City will use its Economic Development Policy to incentivize the redevelopment of areas designated as "blighted."

Even the chapter topics that have a moderate or weaker inter-relationship with minimizing poverty in our community have a significant role to play if we are going to address this problem from all directions. Here are a few of those roles:

- It will be important to provide access to job opportunities and awareness of available services to all members of our community.
- Access to jobs, job opportunities, education, and services depends upon a multi-modal transportation strategy that moves our community toward decreasing household transportation costs.
- Arts education is significantly related to higher standardized test scores, higher attendance and graduation rates, and lower disciplinary rates for serious student infractions. Arts, culture and tourism industries create jobs as well as increase civic pride. Creative and cultural education, as well as artists or public art, can transform low-income neighborhoods and are powerful tools in rebuilding impoverished communities.
- Programs, such as PACE, that can help create many area jobs and lower utility bills. Local food production can both provide jobs and help feed the hungry in our community more cost effectively.
- Quality parks and open spaces can help poverty-stricken areas by promoting safe gathering places, community events, and community education.

[Note: Still lacks input from Housing, Progressive Management, and Public Safety.]