

Theme: Regionalism

We are not in this alone. While that sounds obvious, we sometimes forget that Springfield and Greene County are part of a larger ecosystem. How can we be better “citizens of the region by working with surrounding cities and southwest Missouri?” This community strategic planning process has highlighted a variety of perspectives and ideas for becoming a “better neighbor.” It may be trite to state that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” but it’s true. And Springfield and Greene County need to take the lead for our region.

Regionalism can be defined in a relatively narrow sense (as we have here, referring to the surrounding communities), or can be defined in the global sense – we are indeed part of a global community. Springfield has a very successful Sister Cities program that better connects our community to that global community. While we currently have sister cities in Iseaki, Japan and Tlaquepaque, Mexico, we encourage the expansion of this program to establish additional relationships with cities in other parts of the world. We also encourage additional engagement with our existing and future sister cities – we are not in this alone.

We have a symbiotic relationship with our surrounding region. The ways that the theme of “regionalism” can be implemented seem to fall into two broad categories – the ways Springfield and Greene County can help our neighbors, and the ways our neighbors can help us.

Part of the planning process involved Springfield’s Mayor and City Manager making a series of “road trips” to meet with their counterparts in various surrounding cities. To our knowledge, this has never happened before. It was important (and perhaps symbolic), however, that Springfield’s representatives went to them for a meeting on “their turf.” We are hopeful this exhibits Springfield and Greene County’s willingness to work with our partners rather than be the proverbial 800-pound gorilla. Time will tell whether this strategy will succeed. As one of the four themes for this plan, we are committed to trying.

First, while there is a lot of overlap between strategies for us assisting the region and the region helping us, here are some ways that Springfield and Greene County will reach out to help our neighbors . . .

- Springfield and Greene County already serve as the region’s cultural hub for arts, culture and tourism. We can accentuate that role by reaching out to regional communities with our resources, which will allow growth in terms of numbers reached by metropolitan organizations and, in turn, provide awareness for those in the rural communities of the number of arts and cultural opportunities to experience within the Springfield metropolitan area.

- As the largest city and the region's economic hub, Springfield and Greene County should lead the economic development initiatives and market the region in order to continue healthy, well-balanced growth for the region.
- The Springfield Metropolitan Area needs to gain a reputation for possessing a highly skilled and highly motivated workforce. One of the most effective ways to provide a real future for people in our region who need jobs is to provide education and training that is related to the economic future of the region – training for jobs in growth industries. The Springfield Regional Economic Partnership already engages key area leaders from many sectors, including education and workforce development, in the development of regional economic strategies supported by the region. We must continue to align these workforce development goals and strategies to ensure they are coordinated with the work of the region's education and training institutions. This will assist the region's students and workers in developing the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the region's labor market.
- The only effective way to improve the regional community's health and sustain strong public health functions is to work globally and understand there are minimal limitations, if any, to geographic boundaries in improving our population's health. All responsible public health partners serve the greater region and beyond; we need to ensure that positive outcomes will be measurably evident throughout the region by aligning public health goals to ensure a regional effort is coordinated, measurable, and effective.
- Regionalism is considered throughout the Transportation chapter of the plan – in the vision statement, and in the specific goals and objectives. Springfield is consistently asked to work with the region's other jurisdictions and organizations. Transportation is not an activity unto itself. The decisions made for Springfield impact the surrounding region, while the transportation system in Springfield is also impacted by the activities and decisions of the surrounding region.

Second, here are some ways that our neighbors can help us . . .

- The educational outreach work of Springfield arts and cultural organizations will grow a future workforce of creative individuals throughout Southwest Missouri. These individuals will become Springfield, Greene County, and the entire region's future workforce. Now is the time to begin preparing them for future success.
- Because Springfield and Greene County's future workforce is primarily developed regionally, a broad-based effort will be required to adequately impact the economic growth by preparing tomorrow's workforce – this should start early in a child's life. Media-based awareness campaigns for early childhood issues can have an influence regionally. Economic problems of the rural areas tend to gravitate to the urban center where services are provided and become Springfield's problems. A unified effort to prevent poverty, address mental and physical health issues, and adequately train tomorrow's workforce via early childhood development is a winning combination for all.

- Springfield will benefit from the growth and economic expansion of the region. A rising tide lifts all boats. Each entity within the region should encourage economic success for the others.
- Increased collaboration between the City of Springfield, Greene County and the surrounding municipalities to provide better and more cost effective services to our community is encouraged. Working together can provide increased efficiencies.
- Regionalism and the environment go hand-in-hand. As evidenced in the objectives within the Natural Environment chapter, many of the initiatives have social, economic, and political ramifications beyond the geo-political boundaries of Springfield and Greene County. When we look at air and water quality in particular, we have to consider where the impact is coming from, and where our community's impact is going; it's certainly not limited to just us – regional cooperation is essential. Efforts regarding these environmental initiatives have very little effect without regional coordination.

As evident from the above-listed perspectives, the theme of “regionalism” is complex and will require extensive cooperation by many players at many levels. The regional communities' responses to the Joplin tornado disaster are evident that, when the chips are down, we pull together and help one another. That needs to be the norm.