

## Andrew V Lear, CPA

### Short and Long- term Vision

*Short term* I believe Council should focus on the basic “blocking and tackling” issues of economic vitality, infrastructure and public safety. Establishing appropriate rapport, trust and accountability, both internally and externally, are a must in setting the course to realizing our community’s potential. Additionally, we need a sharp focus on maintaining recent momentum in programs designed to increase educational opportunities, establishing bridges between employers and their potential workforce and create meaningful investment in solidifying neighborhoods. Council and community leaders should approve and actively support a common comprehensive plan and work toward establishing buy-in from the broader community. Bold planning today to capture and sustain recent momentum in order propel the city towards its longer term vision.

*Long term* the city should further identify our brand and strive to be the vibrant community of choice for individuals, families and business. Focus on initiatives to allow all stakeholders to thrive, valuing the natural environment, emphasizing strategic, sustainable growth. Springfield should be a city that other communities look to emulate for our inventive, dynamic solutions to community problems.

### City’s Strengths

- Geography- Springfield is evenly centered between the larger communities of Kansas City, St Louis, Little Rock and Tulsa, thus making our city a natural regional hub for health care, retail, professional services and arts and cultural opportunities. Proximity to outdoor recreation opportunities is a significant factor.
- The local presence of Missouri State, Drury, Evangel and OTC provides a continual potential pipeline of talent, as well as a robust economic footprint extending well beyond the campuses.
- A generally collaborative spirit between business, university, utility, nonprofits, and local government.
- A moderate cost of living (note that this is a dual-edged sword, as it is correlated with persistent low wages), city owned utility provider with relatively low rates, and a reliable water source.
- Economic diversity—Springfield is not dependent on any one industry or select few employers for prosperity. Our major employers (health care, school systems) are stable. Active and vibrant entrepreneurial environment.
- Springfield is “right-sized”—large enough to provide opportunity, amenities, and quality of life, yet still small enough to be nimble and responsive to opportunities and challenges and retain the appeal of a smaller community.

As a policy making body, Council’s primary role should be to develop policies that promote economic vitality, ensure public safety, and develop and maintain the appropriate infrastructure in a sustainable fashion. As noted above, Springfield has a lot to offer. In order to capitalize on those strengths, Council can help foster a collaborative spirit, and be open and transparent with stakeholders in building a compelling case for policies and funding that advance the above narrative. Council’s ability to achieve significant results is highly dependent on a cohesive team approach, both within council itself and among the various leadership groups within the city, county, and legislative bodies. The funding necessary to realize the vision will require significant work to maintain the trust of the community. The

quality of life issues cannot be ignored in setting policies that further the growth of the city, as they are central to building on our natural strengths. Workforce development, building connections between employers and workforce, increased revitalization efforts, and finding stable funding sources for education and infrastructure are all initiatives that should be dovetailed in furtherance of the vision

### **Adequate funding for infrastructure, sidewalks, nuisance properties**

- Legislative activity. Continue vigorous advocacy for internet sales tax in Missouri in order to alleviate some pressure on the General Fund. Advocate for statewide funding for transportation (critical if Proposition D fails, still important even if it does). Stay closely attuned to efforts in Washington to pass an infrastructure bill so that the City is positioned to aggressively compete for funding if/when it becomes available.
- Sales Taxes. The city has built a great deal of trust in the ¼ cent capital funds and 1/8 cent transportation tax, garnering overwhelming support from taxpayers with each 3 year sunset cycle. I support council's current thinking regarding lengthening the sunset terms of those taxes to allow for a known, stable funding source of sufficient duration to plan efficiently and effectively for large projects (keeping the accountability objective top of mind).
- Property Taxes. Passage of the level property tax last year was an important step. Additional property tax levies would need to be balanced with other community priorities, such as R12 and OTC, and County capital needs. Coordination among these entities is essential.
- The city has been largely following a "pay as you go" plan for funding infrastructure, such that current debt service is relatively low. With stable funding in place (level property tax, longer term capital sales tax approvals) consider if appropriate to increase leverage now while rates remain favorable to push forward critical projects.
- Aggressively pursue and leverage any and all dollars available in matching grant and public/private development opportunities

**Nuisance Properties** (*strengthening and improving neighborhoods creates a virtuous cycle by raising property values and increasing the tax base*)

- Consider additional measures to hold property owners and landlords responsible
- Allocation of PILOT monies where available, and utilization of developer agreements, CID's
- Determine if HUD funds can be made available
- Determine feasibility of revenue sources not currently tapped (e.g lodging tax on Airbnb rentals, city fee on auto rentals, other?...)

### **Hope to accomplish before leaving Council**

- Stabilized sustainable funding sources for education and infrastructure needs.
- Show demonstrable improvement in the metrics regarding attraction and retention of young talent, both within the professions and the trades.
- Show demonstrable improvement in the wage/cost of living gap
- Accomplished annexations of areas within the urban zone, and streamlined additional services between county and city jurisdictions