

Mayor Ken McClure's 2020 State of the City Address

June 4, 2020

Good morning. This year's State-of-the-City address looks a little different. We are not yet able to come together in the usual way – having breakfast – greeting one another in person – sharing smiles and hugs. But - I am confident that one day soon we will be able to do that again. And oh, how appreciative we will feel. The coronavirus pandemic has been a reminder to me of how important it is not to take things for granted. My grandson's little league baseball game on a summer evening – a graduation party in the back yard – a Saturday shopping trip.

Unfortunately, some of those activities we hold so dear can also be a means to make us sick.

The state of our city is strong and we are a strong community. A colorful quilt sewn together using the fabric handed down by hard-working previous generations - those men and women who came before us – undeterred by difficulty, and who were resolved to blanket us with the materials needed to build a brighter future. Our community weaves the threads of empathy, self-sacrifice and steely resolve to form a bond that will allow us to get through anything together. Let us all have faith that our collective efforts will bring us warmth through the coldest of days.

I am pleased to be broadcasting from one of Springfield's stellar institutions of higher education – Evangel University. A normally bustling student building is somewhat quiet today. Only a few people are here with me today, but one of them is President Carol Taylor. Thank you, Carol. Your continued hospitality is appreciated. As is your humble service to our community. We

could have broadcast this from just about any place, but we feel at home here, having been hosted by Evangel for the previous two years.

We will miss you as you embark on your personal journey to retirement, opening a new, encore chapter, and we commend you for your more than 40 years in higher education. We are so grateful that you – an Evangel graduate, came home to lead this storied institution – the first female college president in our City’s history. And you did so with great accomplishment, my friend.

I had the distinct pleasure to recognize our mutual friend and former president Evangel University President, Dr. Robert Spence, with a key to the city, a rare and distinguished honor. That was just three months ago. Dr. Spence was a spiritual leader and community counselor, who exemplified the characteristics and traits all great leaders aspire to have. When I think of him, the one phrase I think of is servant leadership. The best leader is the one who seeks to serve others. It’s biblically-based, but it applies literally in all walks of life.

Ten days later, we lost Dr. Spence and many of us gathered in a beautiful chapel bearing his name on this campus, to remember and honor him. Dr. Spence was a community icon, a goodwill ambassador for our community, not only in his 40 years of service to Evangel, but also in his many more years of service to the community at large.

Dr. Taylor and Dr. Spence are two among the many people who have made a profound impact on the lives of our young people through education and enlightenment. Nelson Mandela famously said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Going to school this semester has looked profoundly different. Our public schools, private schools and college students have been required to transition from vibrant on-campus experiences to innovative online at-home learning environments. I applaud the flexibility of our educators and schools. I understand the toll this took on parents as you struggled to balance the demands of a whole new reality. What you have accomplished in such a short time is nothing short of amazing. And I do not use that term lightly.

So many things in our lives have been disrupted due to constraints COVID-19 has put on our lives. Many of the traditions our students previously experienced while transitioning from one phase of life to the next, have been postponed or cancelled all together. Birthdays. Proms. Sporting events. Graduation ceremonies. Like you, I mourn that loss. Our educational leaders, however, have done a fine job handling this disruption. Missouri State University President Clif Smart kept students, faculty and staff informed throughout the semester using his blogs, Tweets and videos. Clif shared an optimism that reassured everyone: In a May 5th blog he wrote: “We can be more flexible than we thought, and we have an opportunity to learn and grow from this.

OTC Chancellor Hal Higdon inspired students, recognizing their resilience and reminding them they are capable of weathering many storms and challenges. “I am confident we will emerge from this stronger than ever and even more resolute in our commitment to bring you a transformative educational experience.”

At Drury University, leaders acknowledged how difficult all of this is, and how it is perfectly normal to feel a sense of loss. But President Tim Cloyd also encouraged students to take time to reflect instead, on what has been gained: lifelong friends, caring mentors, connections that go beyond any amount of social distancing and a way of thinking and learning that will carry us through any of life’s trials and changes.

The largest secondary school district in the state of Missouri - Springfield Public Schools - sprang into action early, with teachers conducting wellness checks on every SPS student by phone during the first week of the COVID-19 closure. As part of those checks, SPS determined unmet needs that needed to be addressed by the district and its community partners. When Internet access was identified as an unmet need, the Board of Education authorized SPS to order an additional 2,000 hotspots to provide internet access for students who previously lacked access.

Missing their students, teachers from McBride Elementary and others across the district, toured the neighborhoods in impromptu parades to check on their students. First-grader Haley Clayton and her mom Michelle Clayton were among the many people who waved at teachers from her school - Robberson Elementary on this day, Monday, March 23, 2020.

Educating and caring for Springfield's smallest citizens became a challenge as well, as many daycare facilities closed, leaving essential workers to find new places for their children to go. The Discovery Center of Springfield launched an initiative to fund and provide emergency educational and childcare needs, turning the popular science center into a home away from home to hundreds of health care workers' children. It is one of only two science centers in the nation to stay open throughout the pandemic.

Boys and Girls Club of Springfield President and CEO Brandy Harris demonstrated the responsibility her organization has to our community and to the kids and families who depend on them for support. Brandy and her team created a virtual experience for their members to help continue structure and stability in their lives. And, they moved to providing curbside, drive-thru meal service at three locations. They established a COVID-19 help line and wellness check-in and worked with partners such as Care to Learn, to bridge any gaps they could not fulfill.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced all of us to adapt, and be more flexible and resilient. I am proud of the way our community has responded to this crisis, but I am not surprised. It is in the character of our community to calmly react, take decisive steps and to fully cooperate in times of emergency. I think our ability to work together during good times, helps ensure we successfully navigate to the best possible outcomes during the bad times.

The state of our City is strong.

The calm and steady leadership of health director Clay Goddard and the professionalism of our expert team at Springfield-Greene County Health Department is unparalleled. By the time we had our first COVID-19 case, Clay and the leadership of our fine hospital systems had launched a sophisticated unified emergency operation, with corresponding incident command centers in multiple facilities. Expert communications within this system led to evidence-based decision making that made my job as Mayor easier. While the decisions we made are the most difficult I have had to make in my entire professional career, I look back, knowing that the decisions were right. Despite having to choose (as Clay often says) the best, bad option at times, our community's success in suppressing the virus thus far is proof that our actions worked. We saved lives. In a county of more than a quarter-of-a-million people, a case rate of 57 per 100,000 is remarkable by any standards. We empathize with the 184 citizens who became sick and mourn for the 8 citizens who unfortunately lost their lives to this horrible disease, but we also celebrate the 100 recoveries. We may never know in this life how many cases we prevented and how many lives were saved.

During this difficult time, I took some solace in reading about my predecessor from long ago, Springfield Mayor J.J. Gideon. Mayor Gideon presided from 1916 to 1920, which included the time the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, when it affected the nation. This headline from October 2, 1918 particularly resonated with me: Mayor closes schools and stops all public gatherings to combat spread of Spanish Influenza. If you swap out the phrase Spanish influenza with coronavirus, the headline today- more than 100 years later - could be pretty much the same. History is an important teacher.

Clay Goddard has become a familiar face throughout this crisis. A community friend. A trusted mentor. Hosting more than 40 public briefings in three short months, Clay and the Public Information & Civic Engagement team provided (and continue to provide) transparent, timely and accurate information for our residents at a time they need to make informed and often life-saving decisions.

Public Health provides contact tracing, often working through the night to track the potential origins of cases.

We are so very grateful for our doctors, nurses, care teams and those working tirelessly behind the scenes. They are providing safe, quality, compassionate care. Together, we pray that our communities be granted wellness and healing, and that our health care workers be blessed with courage and stamina.

Both CoxHealth and Mercy understood that when many of us followed the stay-at-home order, closing businesses and cancelling activities, they needed to seize that moment which helped to buy them valuable time. They prepared in every way for the possible surge of COVID-19 patients.

They greatly expanded intensive care unit bed capacity; secured respirators and other personal protective equipment; set up virtual doctor visit capability and in what may have been one of the most significant moves - came together to offer mobile testing at no cost to our residents.

At one point in time, Greene County had more testing capabilities per capita than anywhere else in the state, giving us a tremendous head start in flattening our curve.

CoxHealth CEO Steve Edwards recognized early the potential to be overwhelmed, the risk to healthcare workers and our community at large. He did not hesitate to aggressively seek personal protective equipment, Tweeting to the public to help, and was quick to authorize non-standard measures and enlisted community support to sew masks from material the hospital had stockpiled. He initiated the creation of 3-D printed face shields and expanded the use of technology for virtual visits, creating the ability to remotely interview patients within the emergency room. CoxHealth also created a tent triage station and provided community paramedics at targeted mobile testing sites.

Steve was named by EM Docs, an emergency medicine Facebook group, the best hospital administrator during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mercy Springfield Communities increased its number of negative pressure rooms from 60 to 255, which correlates to expanding its capacity to over 1,500 beds for infectious patients. In addition to constructing a forward triage center outside its emergency entrances, Mercy set up four in-house production lines to produce face shields and masks for its team of 10,000

employees. Mercy staff, reallocated from other areas whose work was on pause, assembled 50,000 face shields and nearly 20,000 mask kits.

From a makeshift command center in his Missouri living room, Mercy pulmonologist Dr. Steven Brown, is pulling 12-hour night shifts to monitor COVID-19 patients in rural areas around the country. A doctor with Mercy Virtual Care Center, he observes and remotely interacts with on-the-ground health care workers hundreds of miles away in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania, as well as far-flung corners of his state.

Recognizing that there's another curve coming behind the COVID curve ---and that is a developing mental health crisis, Burrell Behavioral Health launched virtual group services. That included a group exclusively for health care and essential workers, and offering free educational videos teaching about the acute stress response and how to handle it. Amid this pandemic, Burrell also opened the highly anticipated Behavioral Crisis Center - Rapid Access Unit.

The stories about our amazing health care heroes could go on...and on...and on....

Instead of hearing more stories about them, how about we actually meet some of them!!

Joining us today from Mercy is Brent Hubbard, President and COO, Mercy Hospital Springfield Communities and Steve Edwards, President and CEO of CoxHealth.

On behalf of the City Council, City of Springfield staff and the citizens of Springfield, we would like to provide our extreme gratitude for your strength, compassion, courage, resilience and love. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!

Thank you both for joining us! And thank you for bringing some of your healthcare heroes with you. I know that each of you have a few words for our citizens, so I will go to Brent first and then Steve. (Pause for comments)

Our community's collective response to COVID-19 extends beyond the health care, business and education sectors, relying heavily on the courage of local government leaders - both the cities and the counties, who work together and make important decisions quickly and collaboratively. I could not be more pleased with my colleagues at Greene County: Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon, Associate Commissioners Harold Bengsch and John Russell. Thank you, gentlemen. I am grateful for you.

Never in my life did I expect to have to ask businesses to close down. My entire career has revolved around building, creating and developing. These last few months have been among my most difficult. With hardship, however, you always find ingenuity and all around the region, businesses small and large, from retail to financial services to manufacturing, Ozarks' businesses found themselves developing inventive tactics to work around COVID-19.

At Zenith Climbing Center: masks are required for all staff, members and guests. Climbers are asked a couple of screening questions before entry to the facility and classes are held at limited capacity and physically distanced. One thing I noticed was the unique and creative way they came up with letting their clients know their real-time occupancy by checking online.

When the CARES Act was signed into law on March 27, it made \$376 billion available for workers and small businesses. As soon as that funding became available, **local banks** including Old Missouri Bank, Guaranty Bank and Commerce Bank all began working overtime to get loan requests processed for the Paycheck Protection Program. OMB has processed 364 applications for a total of over \$29 million. Guaranty Bank approved more than 450 PPP loans for more than \$50 million, which equates to 7000 local workers staying on their company's payroll. Commerce Bank processed \$1.5 million worth of loan requests for over 4,500 clients. All three banks had all hands on deck as staff from all departments helped fulfill the requests.

The CEOs of Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Community Partnership of the Ozarks and United Way of the Ozarks (Philanthropy Row) met in late February to brainstorm how they could work even closer together to benefit the community. Daily coordination meetings among the three CEOs yielded a coordinated support system for the nonprofit community and later, the faith community, which included the development of a single Master Needs List that donors could reference to help meet these nonprofits' most pressing needs during the pandemic.

CFO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund grants are supporting nonprofit agencies directly involved in addressing regional needs, particularly for vulnerable citizens, such as seniors, those with food insecurity or health needs. To date, CFO's funding has surpassed \$1.23 million in total grants made for pandemic relief.

CPO's Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness, the HUD-designated continuum of care for Springfield-Greene County, worked closely with direct service providers, the City of Springfield, the Health Department and the Office of Emergency Management to develop and implement a community-wide COVID-19 response plan for individuals facing homelessness.

When a cold snap Easter weekend during the pandemic made the challenge of sheltering a large number of homeless people even more difficult, a newly convened group of faith-based organizations, called the Have Faith Initiative, came to the rescue. CPO's Alliance and Connecting Grounds pastor Christie Love, coordinated emergency shelter for 66 people at five different churches.

The Have Faith Initiative, which has grown to more than 100 churches and organizations representative of over 20 different faith traditions, started when City and County leaders requested assistance from United Way of the Ozarks to help coordinate the faith community's response to the COVID-19 health crisis.

Now every Thursday, an average of 65 congregational leaders participate on a Zoom call to

discuss how they are serving their membership and various community outreach efforts. The group has hosted food and supply drives and coordinated support for our community's spiritual and mental health during this time of physical distancing requirements. I am grateful for the work of Philanthropy Row and for these faith leaders and congregations for truly stepping up to help.

Finally, let me salute and thank our colleagues in the media for their superb work in covering this pandemic, its impact on our community, and providing the necessary information to keep the community informed. Their work is critical, essential and appreciated. The state of our city is strong.

While we are all working together to address the issues caused by the global pandemic, your City government continues to press ahead with other very important projects and initiatives. It is crucial that we do not lose momentum and that we continue to build and improve our community. Your elected City officials have continued to meet virtually and they, along with City staff, are moving projects and plans forward.

I would like to recognize your City Council members: Mayor Pro Tem and Zone 1 Councilwoman Phyllis Ferguson; Zone 2 Councilman Abe McGull; Zone 3 Councilman Mike Schilling; Zone 4 Councilman Matthew Simpson; General Seat A Councilwoman Jan Fisk; General Seat B Councilman Craig Hosmer; General Seat C Councilman Andy Lear and General Seat D Councilman Richard Ollis.

Monday night, my colleagues and I collectively took an initial and important step in addressing a very real issue which has become more apparent and widespread across the nation. The recent actions by police officers in Minneapolis that caused the death of George Floyd are intolerable and cause us all to think twice about the dignity of all persons, the value of life and our responsibility as a community. Among many things, a resolution we passed commits to our community that the City does not, and will not, tolerate, nor accept in any way, the violent or disrespectful treatment of others that degrades dignity or disregards human life. It's up to all of us—black, white, everyone—no matter how well-meaning we think we might be, to do the honest, uncomfortable work of needed action here at home. It starts with self-examination and listening to those whose lives are different from our own. It ends with justice, compassion, and empathy that is demonstrated in our lives and in our community. Like so many others, I pray we all have the courage for that journey, just as I pray for the families of those who were taken from us.

Our City Council's Priorities continue to be: Public Safety; Quality of Place; Economic Vitality; Fiscal Sustainability and Accountability and Legislative Engagement.

We have come to learn this year a valuable lesson about the importance of Public Health in keeping people safe. In addition to our traditional public safety departments of Police, Fire, 911 and Emergency Management, I consider all of the City's 20-plus departments integral to the health and safety of our community. I would like to highlight a few key things, however.

In 2019, the Springfield Police Department was reaccredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement (CALEA) for the eighth consecutive time. The accreditation

followed a multi-year self-assessment phase and a meticulous site-based assessment of community engagement, policy, procedures, equipment, and facilities by CALEA assessors. We are grateful to the men and women who wear the badge and call Springfield home. It is a tough and dangerous job. In other cities, we see examples of misconduct that frankly, we just do not see here and would not tolerate. Police Chief Paul Williams does an excellent job of setting expectations, demanding high ethical and professional standards and makes sure that SPD officers are ingrained in the community they serve. He promotes a culture of inclusive excellence, supported and assisted by community leaders who understand the dynamics needed to serve and protect ALL citizens.

I commend the actions of the Springfield Police and of the protestors who convened last weekend and sought understanding and compassion. Springfieldian Damon Paige shared this photo. This is difficult work.

The inequities laid bare by both the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and the long history of discrimination of racism in this country make is painfully clear how far we are from a truly inclusive democracy that fairly and effectively serves all Americans. While we strive to reflect that vision in our work, what is clear to us, as it should be for the rest of America, is that we have not been doing nearly enough to realize it. I do not have the answers, but I know finding the answers begins with listening. All of us should be asking ourselves and urging all Springfieldians to ask themselves: how can we do much more to build a community that truly works for everyone - not just right now, but in the days, weeks, months and years to come. Another highlight of the year is the launch of "SPD in PE", a partnership between the Springfield Police Department and Springfield Public Schools. The goal of SPD in PE is to create consistent

and positive one-on-one interactions with kids to allow students to get to know and feel more comfortable with law enforcement. Officers and seventh-graders sweat it out together during physical education class and most importantly, get to know one another.

Following the direction of a Citizen Sexual Assault Task Force, SPD has made progress in its work to address domestic violence and sexual assault.

Last month, the Police Department sent 30 sexual assault kits to the private lab contracted through the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative grant administered by the Missouri Attorney General's office to address the backlog of untested kits.

As part of this initiative, SPD has been able to send 62 kits for testing, reducing the number of backlogged kits held by SPD to 169. SPD was selected as the agency in Missouri to pilot the process to test backlogged kits.

Our community suffered a great loss this year, with the death of Officer Chris Walsh. On March 15, Officer Walsh responded to an active shooter situation at a convenience store. The shooter had entered the store killing three people and injuring a fourth person. Officer Walsh rushed into harm's way to protect others. The shooter opened fire on Officer Walsh and his fellow officer Josiah Overton, killing Officer Walsh and injuring Officer Overton. Officer Walsh had been a U.S. Army reservist with 14 years of service in the reserves. He had completed tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chris was the first Springfield officer to be killed in the line of duty since the 1930s. I would like to read a line from his memorial service: Christopher Ray Walsh was a man devoid of vanity and devoted to the service and welfare of others. He would hope that out of this tragic circumstance something beautiful could take place in all our hearts. Chris would

hope that his memory would serve as an example to spur small kindnesses and acts of devotion and service to all of our community. He would want acts of kindness toward our friends and loved ones, and for us to look past the things that separate us and focus on the things that unite us.

Springfield Fire Department remained focused on the development of a fire-safe community through community risk reduction programs, including a focus on identifying early signs of an opioid overdose epidemic. During a two-week span in October, Springfield experienced 40 overdoses, including four deaths. The spike totaled about 70 for the entire month. The opioid problem in Springfield does not hold to a pattern, according to Fire Chief David Pennington. The calls come in at all times of the day and night. They come in from the north, south, east, and west sides of the city. Chief Pennington says that overdoses are happening across all socioeconomic levels, referring to it as indiscriminate and unfortunately, deadly.

The Fire Department pulled together a multi-departmental, multi-agency work group to continue the monitoring and response to this situation.

Responding to more than 18,000 total incidents in 2019, the accredited Fire department focused on emergency preparedness, and planned for interagency response to unique and challenging incidents, and provided fire and life-safety education, fire prevention and community CPR/AED training in collaboration with the Springfield Public Schools, our Neighborhoods Program and through Project RED Zone.

Now, more than ever, citizens are depending on Springfield's infrastructure in order to be able to remain safe and healthy in our homes. We rely on our roadways to access essential services

and count on our infrastructure to be ready to support the economy as it gets moving again. I commend the City's Public Works and Environmental Services department staff for their dedication and service.

The COVID-19 crisis has served to highlight the critical nature of the work these vital departments do. Regardless of what is happening in the world, citizens need reliable road work, sewer and solid waste services in order to meet their most fundamental needs. I could not be more impressed with the dedication exhibited by these employees.

The reduction in traffic at this time afforded our crews and contractors a unique opportunity to conduct roadway maintenance faster, safer and with much less impact to businesses and the traveling public. Twelve lane-miles of pavement were recently rehabilitated in downtown Springfield and the surrounding roadways and pavement overlay contracts were accelerated in order to take advantage of the reduction in traffic and parking needs in one of the City's busiest areas.

Springfield's Public Works Department manages more than 1,700 lane-miles of roadways, 140 traffic signals and 38,000 traffic and street signs while also managing Hazelwood Municipal Cemetery and caring for the urban tree canopy.

The city's Environmental Services department is in charge of more than 1,200 miles of sanitary sewers, guiding wastewater to the city's two treatment plants which process an average of 40 million gallons per day. Environmental Services staff also manage the region's solid waste landfill as well as recycling programs, air-quality control and environmental compliance activities.

In 2017, Public Works and Environmental Services collectively achieved re-accreditation from the American Public Works Association – achieving 100% compliance.

City Council would like for Springfield to become a choice destination for residents, visitors, students and companies. We all know how special our city is, but to the uninitiated, our assets may not be immediately recognizable. By focusing on quality of place, we will make sure that everything we build in our community - whether it be public or private development - helps create a better sense of pride, a better sense of place. Placemaking is a discipline. It inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces.

We hired long-time Springfield architect Tim Rosenbury, to be our Director of Quality of Place. We are so pleased to have him on our team.

Great examples of Quality of Place events were the community's enthusiastic response to hosting the Stanley Cup, won by the St. Louis Blues in 2019, and providing an unprecedented and memorable event for 250 military personnel - "Home for the Holidays". This is Springfield at its best!

A couple of upcoming public-private projects that demonstrate the use of placemaking include the Art Museum Master Plan and the Grant Avenue Parkway.

We were notified by Senator Roy Blunt's office that Springfield is the recipient of a Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant to reconstruct approximately 3.3 miles of a multi-use bicycle and pedestrian path on Grant Avenue. The Grant Avenue Parkway will start in Downtown Springfield and end at Sunshine Street, as a gateway to Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium. This is what we call a transformative

project, and I cannot wait for the day I can ride bikes with my grandkids on the GAP. We are grateful for the strong support and assistance which this project had from Senator Blunt, Senator Hawley, and Congressman Long. Their work made this \$21 million grant a reality. Another great project - the African American Heritage Trail - continues to grow, as four new markers were installed this year. One on Park Central Square memorializes three innocent men lynched in 1906 – a stain on our community and a memory which we must never forget. A second one honors two of the historic African-American Churches in Springfield with two more to follow soon. A third remembers Graham’s Ribs and the fourth is Lincoln School. We have plans to install six additional markers in the next several months. A wonderful new website details this and other history.

Despite workforce shortages, Springfield continues to see growth in our local companies in a variety of sectors.

In 2019, the Springfield Business Development Corporation won six competitive projects, securing job creation and capital investment for the Springfield region. Collectively, the businesses expanding or locating here will generate: 321 new jobs; \$14.3 million in payroll; \$88.8 million in capital and 617,000 square feet in new building space. This year’s successful projects include winning the competition for expansions from existing Springfield manufacturers CMH Reman and Jarden Plastic Solutions. Three project wins were centered around Springfield’s thriving food processing and specialty manufacturing sector. The investment of companies like these into their local operations and workforce demonstrate our region’s excellence in this growing industry.

The IDEA Commons project - a joint endeavor with the City, Missouri State University and the Vecino Group moved forward this past year as the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority, the Tax Increment Finance Commission, and Springfield City Council all voting unanimously in favor. A groundbreaking on the Jordan Valley Innovation expansion is expected later this month.

Balancing new development with neighborhood concerns - Council adopted new guidelines for development in Galloway to preserve the village feel while allowing more people to enjoy living in the park-like setting.

Our City's Loan Program worked with existing borrowers to defer loan payments to lessen the economic impact of COVID-19 and created new programs to assist businesses to recover from the economic crisis.

This year marked the 100th iteration of the Missouri General Assembly. Clearly, this legislative session was unlike any other. The General Assembly, like virtually every other entity in the state, was virtually shut down for six weeks.

Despite that challenge, we are grateful that the local delegation led passage of a measure which provides the opportunity for a visitor tax increase, paving the way for us to bring forward to the electorate a proposed measure that would allow the City to move forward with needed capital investments to support tourism. In addition, it would allow the ability to bring forward a

question to voters regarding funding for early childhood education. This has been a long-time community objective.

Senator Lincoln Hough and Representative Craig Fishel both advocated for these measures and we are grateful for their leadership, support and encouragement.

But, there is still work to be done. Springfield enacted a prescription drug monitoring program in July 2017. Eighty-seven percent of the state's population is now covered through local initiatives, but the Missouri General Assembly needs to make this program applicable statewide. Missouri is the only state which has failed to do so. As I mentioned earlier, opioid and prescription drug abuse is a major problem in our community.

The General Assembly also needs to pass legislation authorized under the Wayfair Supreme Court decision to allow implementation of an Internet sales tax. This is a fairness issue to our local employers, their families and employees. They deserve tax policies to be applied evenly and fairly. Now, more than ever, Wayfair needs to become law. We are grateful for the support and encouragement of Governor Parson - and urge the General Assembly to get the job done. It is time to do the right thing for our local businesses and communities with regard to sales tax policy and be pragmatic, realistic, and govern effectively and fairly.

Springfield continues to be a smart and thriving city. We have made very wise decisions as a community, investing in things that matter most AND addressing fiscal challenges head on. We are fortunate to have a history of being responsible and forward-looking.

We have a strong team in the City Manager's office: City Manager Jason Gage and Deputy City Managers Collin Quigley and Maurice Jones. These gentlemen lead a top-notch team of department heads – strong individuals who lead this community through good times and through bad, taking responsibility and public-servant leadership very seriously. We are a very strong and very busy City.

As many of you know, more than a third of the entire City budget is dependent on sales tax. The reduction and closure of retail activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic has had an immediate impact on sales tax collections.

City Manager Jason Gage and his team have done an excellent job navigating these difficult waters, implementing many cost-saving measures early to reduce expenses for the remainder of the current fiscal year and redoing a conservative budget for the year ahead. The City's strong fiscal health and financial discipline have allowed us to continue providing essential municipal services to our citizenry, but austerity measures had to be put in place to ensure the City remains financially intact and able to move forward when these extraordinary times come to an end.

A bright spot in the overall budget is that the Level Property Tax, approved by voters in 2017, provides a stable source of revenue for many high-priority General Fund needs. This funding source provides a dedicated revenue stream for Police, Fire, and Public Works personnel and life-cycle vehicle and equipment and other essential services.

The City of Springfield is engaging in a planning process for a new Comprehensive Plan. The plan, which we call Forward SGF, is our blueprint for the future. It is a community vision that is intended to guide the City for the next 20 years. We had no idea that a life-changing event would occur in the middle of our planning process, but rest assured that we will use the opportunity to begin anew after this COVID-19 crisis to make even bigger and better plans. Over the course of three months this past year, the initial phase of the Forward SGF outreach program yielded an unparalleled amount of input regarding the issues and opportunities facing the Springfield community. During the summer and fall of 2019, a total of 1,500 residents participated in 57 workshops in face-to-face community engagement exercises. In addition, over 5,500 people participated online through a series of surveys and use of an online mapping tool. In our most recent in-person workshops, prior to the pandemic, 800 attendees across three workshops shared their vision for Springfield.

In March, approximately 120 focus group participants from a number of community organizations, advisory boards and neighborhood groups met virtually for the first of three workshops to narrow down a vision statement, as well as baseline goals, strategies, metrics and key community partners for the 8 planning themes you see on the screen.

Following the pandemic, as I mentioned, there will be a reset - our chance to reimagine and recreate Springfield in a way we would have never experienced before this pandemic occurred.

We will emerge from this stronger than before.

As everyone determines their new normal in the coming weeks, months and years, I want to use this time to map out the sunny days ahead. We live in a time that can sometimes be divisive, but we can CHOOSE to be united. We can reject hate and embrace love.

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend” and “**Darkness** cannot drive out **darkness**; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

The road before us may take us many different places in the days ahead - there always be ups and downs. But I sincerely hope that the road home for you always leads you here.

The state of our city is strong. Be safe and be healthy.