

LOCAL & STATE

SPRINGFIELD

Public encouraged to help plan for city's future Friday

By Jessica Orozco
Staff Writer

In an effort to forge a clear path to Springfield's future, a group of local stakeholders are working with a research and consulting firm over the next 15 months.

Springfield 2051, named for the city's upcoming 250th anniversary, officially launches Friday, Aug. 15, with a kickoff event at the Hollenbeck Bayley Creative Arts and Conference Center.

"The slogan is 'making history now' because we want to mobilize people to think about it, that this is about changing our reality for better," said Marta Wojcik, executive director and curator of The Westcott House and steering committee member.

The effort is forward thinking and making short-term and long-term goals in all identified areas of need. Most of this identification will come from focus groups and online surveys.

"In the last year, we have seen a lot of gaps that we've maybe avoided having some difficult conversations that we need to have about who we are and who we want to be, and then the absence of having a really strong understanding of that," said Clark County Commissioner, and steering committee member,

Melanie Flax Wilt.

"It's not just about messaging and good PR; it's about really understanding what that is, acting on it operationally and then being able to explain that and connect that to the rest of the world. In the absence of that, negativity grows and tension grows and voices that really shouldn't have an influence in the community can kind of get a foothold."

In September last year, the city was thrust into the international spotlight after prominent Republican figures, including now President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance, amplified false rumors that Springfield's Haitian immigrants were stealing and eating pets. What followed were numerous bomb and personal threats, as well as scrutiny on the city's crime rates, public assistance and more.

Flax Wilt said that "the next time that we have the international spotlight shining on us," the community will be able to share a consistent message.

It's good timing for this process, being in a "decade of really amplified or accelerated change," said David Beurle, CEO of Future iQ, pointing to the economy and artificial intelligence as examples.



Emma Francis enters Myers Market through the front entrance on June 25 in Springfield. A group of local stakeholders are working with a research and consulting firm over the next 15 months to forge a new roadmap for Springfield's future. JOSEPH COOKE/STAFF

Springfield's effort is unique with how far into the future it is projecting, Beurle said.

Springfield 2051 will be split into three parts, with the first being community conversations and engagement, the second being building a "road map" of where we want to be and how to get there and the third being implementation, Beurle said.

The first phase is in process now and will begin in earnest with the kickoff event. The second will be the first six months of 2026, and the third will be after that, Beurle said.

Residents will start to see changes next year, and as ideas come up that make

sense to implement immediately, that will likely happen, Flax Wilt said.

"I've already begun to see some of that happening just in the early course of conversations that we've had, where people are connecting dots that we just hadn't had the opportunity to connect before," Flax Wilt said.

Throughout the process, responses will be shared in a visual format, and people will be able to see how their opinions compare to each other, Wojcik said.

Demographic data like age, ethnicity and the area the person lives will be used to identify community cohorts and more effectively understand how different people see the

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The kickoff event Friday will be at the Hollenbeck Bayley Creative Arts and Conference Center at 275 S. Limestone St. from 9:30-11:30 a.m. The event will include an introduction to the project and group discussion on the future trajectory of Springfield.

For more information, visit bit.ly/Springfield2051kickoff.

Those willing to invest more time into public input can participate in Think-Tank sessions Sept. 19 and 26.

The first session, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Sept. 19, "will consist of a presentation of macro trends that could impact Springfield, followed by driver identification and build out, then ranking of the individual drivers." Register at bit.ly/thinktank192051. The second session, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Sept. 26, "will build upon the results of the first, and include brainstorming about the future of Springfield: scenario narrative development, presentations and plausibility checks, followed mapping of the Least Desired, Expected, and Preferred Futures." Register at bit.ly/4ldXhiX.

Participation is preferred at both sessions, though not required.

For more information on Springfield 2051, contact Marta Wojcik at info@springfield2051.com

future or current reputation of Springfield, Beurle said.

"You'll always get the grizzling kind of complaints in the community. You always hear that, but we want to dig in a bit and really understand that perception," Beurle said. "Do people see hope for the future? Are they upbeat about it? Where do they see opportunity? A lot of our questions are going

to be very forward looking, so they're not like the here and now immediate or the sort of backward looking."

Flax Wilt said she is keeping her "preconceived notions" from influencing her in the process, allowing things to happen that may be surprising.

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