



FY2024-2026 Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan

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I. Board Authorization

CERTIFICATION OF COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN AND ASSURANCES

The undersigned hereby certify that Springfield Partners for Community Action, Inc. complies with the Assurances and Requirements of this 2024- 2026 Community Assessment Report (CAR) and the information contained herein is correct and has been authorized by the governing body of this organization.


Per Organizational Performance Standards the Community Assessment must be formally accepted by the governing board.



Board President

12/14/23

Date



Executive Director

12-14-23

Date

II. Executive Summary

Springfield Partners for Community Action is proud to be the first Community Action Agency in Western Massachusetts, established in 1964 shortly after the Economic Opportunity Act opened the way for a network of poverty-fighting agencies across the nation. It's fitting that, regionally, Community Action came first to Springfield, MA, the 'City of Firsts.' Throughout the more than 50 years of its existence, through economic downturns, deregulation, policy changes and ideological shifts, Springfield Partners has maintained the optimism of those early years.

As part of this network of over one thousand Community Action Agencies currently operating in the United States, Springfield Partners shares a commitment, not merely to assist low-income people, but to empower them. Community Action Agencies focus on long-range solutions to poverty relief through education and training. They include low-income individuals in the community's problem-solving and decision-making, by such means as volunteerism and representation on agency Boards of Directors.

In this Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan (CARSP), we have articulated our mission statement and our vision for the future. We have profiled our agency and the community we serve using carefully gathered quantitative and qualitative data. We have discussed the approach we took to find and define our objectives for the next three years, clearly stated those objectives, and provided a timeline for their execution. This plan is our guide, developed carefully and thoroughly to keep us on task and to focus us continuously on our mission. It will be continuously reviewed and updated as needed.

In order to provide our community with the programs that best meet their needs in the coming three years, our Planning Committee developed a series of surveys and focus groups targeted to stakeholders. From the surveys alone, we obtained over 650 responses. The Committee used the data obtained via these methods to come up with a series of goals based on our stakeholders' perception of the greatest needs in our community. Despite the upheaval created by the recent pandemic and lockdowns, the top needs remain the same as when we

last surveyed our community, pre-pandemic. The strategic plan that follows updates our previous plan, combining our existing services with partnerships to help meet the challenges our community faces. The targets we set align with our Community Action Plan and our CSBG Annual Report. This approach conforms to the principles of ROMA (Results Oriented Management and Accountability), the cyclical process of assessment, planning, implementation, achievement of results and evaluation that has been mandated for use by all community action agencies nationwide for over two decades.

The needs that our stakeholders identified as most pressing—affordable housing, living-wage jobs and affordable child care—are felt not only in our area of service, but nationwide. Real, lasting solutions to these problems must include policy changes that our relatively small agency does not have the capacity to effect. What we *have* begun to do is educate our customers, direct them to existing services within our agency and, if necessary, refer them to one of the many agencies with which we partner.

For the coming three years, we desire to maintain or improve our current offerings. We will help low-income individuals and families stay in their homes; make those homes safer, more comfortable and more efficient; and help some to achieve home ownership. We will help the unemployed and underemployed attain living-wage jobs by increasing their skills in our volunteer, internships and senior aide programs and by referrals to our partner agency MassHire. We will provide high-quality child care to as many low-income families as possible so that adults in the household can work or attend school.

In the past two decades, we have weathered a recession, a tornado, a gas explosion and a pandemic, but we do it with all the resources of community action at our disposal. With board and staff committed to increased outreach to and involvement in the community, we are confident that we have the tools we need to best help our Springfield neighbors through this difficult time.

II. Mission Statement

As part of the agency's strategic planning process, its Board of Directors reviewed the mission statement in May of 2021. The Board determined that the current version, created in 2016, is aligned with ROMA standards and continues to reflect what the agency strives to do. It was therefore voted to keep the mission statement, which is as follows:

Springfield Partners for Community Action's mission is to utilize and provide resources that assist people in need to obtain economic stability, ultimately creating a better way of life.

The population we serve is people in need in our community. The services provided are a variety of resources that help them to obtain economic security. The desired outcomes are economic stability and a better way of life. We continue building and strengthening partnerships with non-profits, businesses, and individuals to be more efficient and proactive in offering short- and long-term solutions to low-income residents of our community. Helping economically-challenged people obtain economic stability ultimately enhances the quality of life of everyone in Springfield.

III. Vision Statement

It is the vision of Springfield Partners for Community Action to become the most prominent local nonprofit organization in Springfield and the surrounding area. We are already growing with the needs of the community. We hope to offer still more financial services and educational programs to low-income families of our community, thereby better helping them achieve economic stability. In particular, we will focus on safe and affordable housing, employment/job supports, and high-quality, safe and affordable early education and care.

Ultimately, Springfield Partners would like to transform its operation into a One-Stop Resource Center, so we can address the needs of the community. Springfield Partners will be the first step in making the Greater Springfield area a better place to live. We would like our partnerships with non-profits, businesses and individuals to be so effective that no one is turned away, that every person in need can either be served directly by our agency or routed seamlessly to the most appropriate resource.

IV. Agency Profile

Springfield Partners for Community Action is the federally designated Community Action Agency (CAA) for the greater Springfield area, serving low-income individuals and families. Established in 1964 under the Economic Opportunity Act, Springfield Partners is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, SOMWBA-certified enterprise. The agency has 59 years of experience providing services and advocacy to alleviate the conditions of poverty for area residents.

Springfield Partners is a lifeline for the low-income residents of Springfield and Hampden County we help every year. Over 25 percent of Springfield residents live below the poverty line. We help these families break the cycle of poverty and attain economic stability through education, direct assistance and outreach. Some of our programs help people through financial education, credit counseling and eviction prevention. Other programs help maintain assets through home weatherization, foreclosure prevention, income tax assistance and scholarships. We provide safe, affordable childcare so that parents can work or attend school. We guide clients through the often-confusing process of enrollment for a variety of benefits.

Springfield Partners currently administers 11 programs providing services to nearly 7,000 people annually. The agency has 51 staff members and an annual budget of approximately \$12.4 million. Our service area for most programs is the City of Springfield (population 155,770 according to 2021 census figures), although some of our programs, like Weatherization Assistance, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, Low Income Taxpayer Clinic and Housing Counseling, are

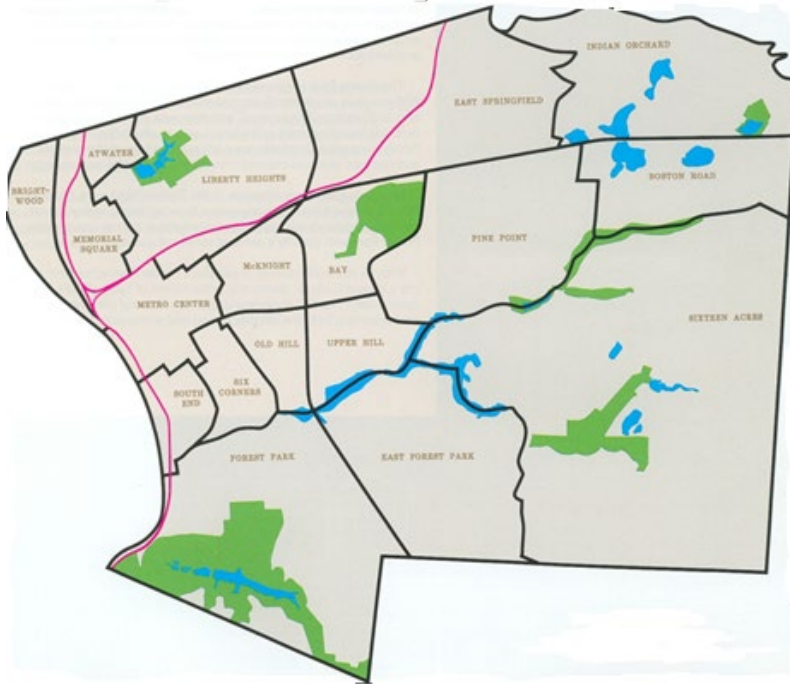
available throughout Hampden County. Our Veterans program is the most wide-ranging, reaching all four Western Massachusetts counties.

Springfield Partners has been led since 2000 by Executive Director Paul F. Bailey. Under his leadership, the agency has grown from two basic programs—Childcare and Weatherization—to 11 currently. With his focus on fiscal responsibility, the budget has risen from approximately \$1 million to over \$12 million. Mr. Bailey is committed to growing the agency responsibly, increasing awareness of what we do, and partnering with other organizations to increase our effectiveness.

V. Community Profile

The Community Information Profile describes Springfield Partners' service area, target population and current economic conditions. The profile provides a summary of the most impactful conditions affecting the community and the conditions the community members are facing.

A. Springfield Profile



The City of Springfield is the designated service area of Springfield Partners for Community Action. It has acreage of approximately 31.87 square miles, and is bounded by the Connecticut River to the west, the City of Chicopee and the Town of Ludlow to the north, the Town of Wilbraham to the east and the Town of Longmeadow to the south. Springfield is the hub of Western Massachusetts, which includes four counties: Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire. The city is also a vital hub of the “Knowledge Corridor,” the Connecticut River-linked metro area of Springfield and Hartford, CT, with dozens of institutions of higher education and distinct cultural, educational and civic partnerships.

1. History and Description



Springfield was founded in 1636 by William Pynchon, an English Puritan, on a bluff overlooking the Connecticut River previously settled by the indigenous Agawam tribe. Initially and throughout colonial times, it was an agricultural center and trading post. Springfield's neighborhoods fan out north, south and east from this original settlement, now known as Metro Center.

In 1777, Commander in Chief of the Continental Army George Washington chose Springfield as the site of the new nation's first Armory. The manufacture of weapons and, later, automobiles, bicycles, railcars, machinery, tires, chemicals, toys, clothing, books and many other goods attracted skilled laborers from all

over the world, establishing Springfield as a model of diversity and innovation. By the late 19th century, Springfield was among the wealthiest cities in the country, with elegant residential neighborhoods like Maple, Ridgewood, Mattoon, McKnight and Forest Park, as well as libraries, museums, theaters, shops and parks.

By the 1960s, however, Springfield was suffering the same fate as many other cities in the Northeast. Manufacturing had declined; in 1969, the Springfield Armory was decommissioned. City planning efforts were misguided: new highways fragmented and destroyed neighborhoods; historically significant buildings were razed, to be replaced with concrete structures and parking lots. Retail shops moved to the suburbs, along with a segment of the population who could afford to leave.

2. Population

With a population of approximately 155,770, Springfield is the largest city in Western Massachusetts and the third largest in the state, after Boston and Worcester. Springfield is economically, racially and culturally diverse, and becoming more so. For example, although the population grew only one percent between 1980 and 2021, the percentage of non-white inhabitants increased from eight to 71 percent, while the Hispanic or Latino population rose from nine to 47.5 percent.

Age: The city's population is younger (average 33.6 years) than the Massachusetts average (39.5), with 6.5 percent of the population under age five, 31 percent aged 6-24, 38 percent aged 25 to 54, and 24.5 percent aged 55 and over.

Race and Ethnicity: Springfield is more racially and ethnically diverse than Hampden County or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a whole. Currently, 29 percent of the population is White (compared with 61 percent county-wide and 70 percent statewide), 18 percent Black/African American (vs. 8 and 7 percent), while 49 percent identify as Hispanic/Latino of any race (compared to 26 percent for Hampden County and 12 percent for Massachusetts).

Country of Origin: Immigrants make up approximately 10.5 percent of the city's population, compared to 17.3 percent for Massachusetts as a whole according to 2021 Census Bureau estimates. Most of Springfield's immigrants are from Latin America, notably the Dominican Republic (3,006), Jamaica (2,722) and Guatemala (752), with 1,786 from various countries in Africa and 815 from Vietnam. Over four in ten households speak a language other than English (mainly Spanish) at home.

3. Household Composition

In 2021, the City had a higher rate of single-parent households than the state as a whole. According to census estimates, 27.9 percent of households were headed by a single female with children under 18, and 4.3 percent were headed by a single male with children under 18. The average household size, 3.2 persons, was slightly higher than the state average. Although in the state and the country as a whole nearly three in four households consist of married couple families, in Springfield it is less than half.¹

Families in Springfield by Household Type, 2021

Families w/ own children <18	49.8%
Married Couple Families	45.9%
Married Couple Families w/own children <18	17.6%
Male Householder, No Wife Present	9.7%
Male Householder, No Wife Present, w/own children <18	4.3%
Female Householder, No Husband Present	44.4%
Female Householder, No Husband Present, w/own children <18	27.97%

Source: American Community Survey 2021 Estimates

4. Veterans

In 2021, according to Census Bureau estimates, 4.2 percent of Springfield's adult population had veteran status. The Census Bureau estimated there were 3,133 veterans in Springfield, 2,762 males and 371 females. As a group, they are skewing much younger than just three years ago: whereas in 2018, only 13.5 percent were under 55, in 2021 that percentage is 62.9.

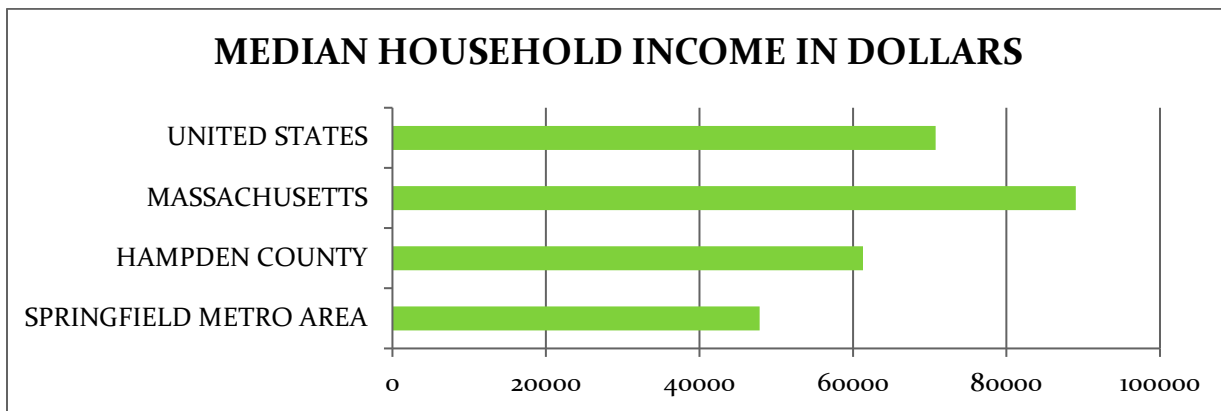
Veterans in Springfield by Age

Age	18-34	35-54	55-64	65-74	75 and over
% in 2018	2.2	11.3	30.4	37.8	18.4
% in 2021	30.7	32.2	17.1	12.5	7.5

Source: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021

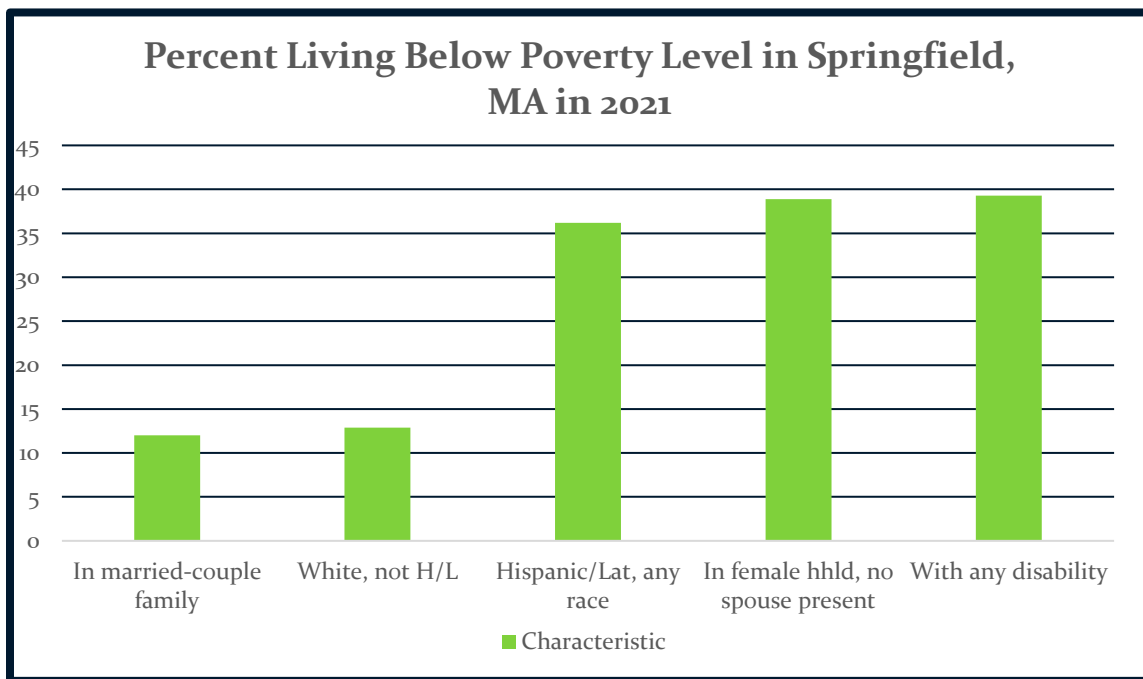
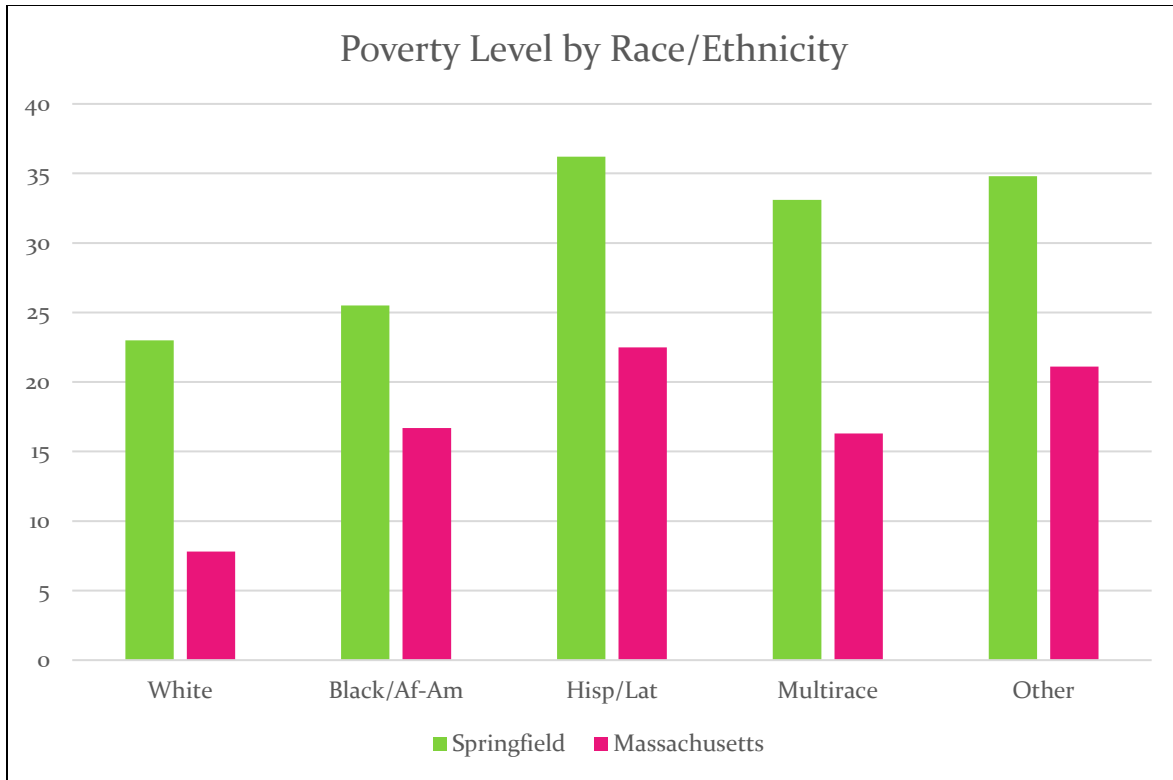
5. Economic Conditions

Springfield is one of the poorest communities in the state. While the 2021 median household income in Massachusetts was \$89,026, much higher than the country-wide median (\$70,784), or that of Hampden County (\$61,310), in Springfield it was only \$47,844. Over a quarter of residents live below the poverty level. That figure is more than double the national average of 12.6 percent, even though nearly 12 percent of those below the poverty level are employed.



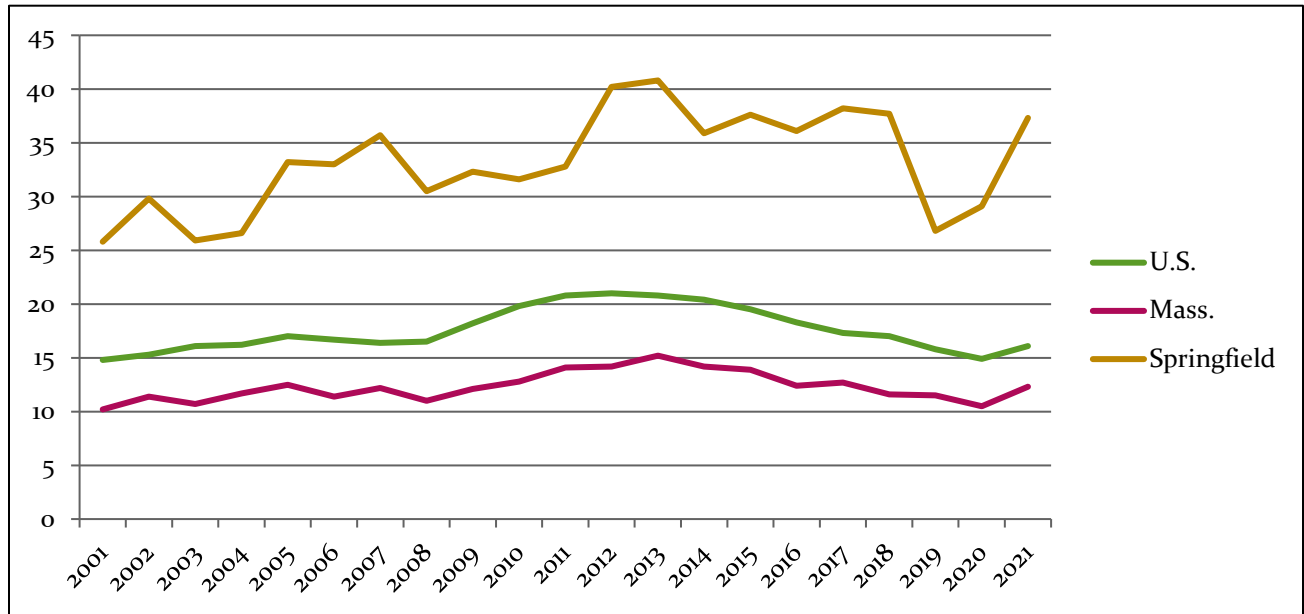
Source: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021

Women are more likely than men to be poor: 57.2 percent of people in Springfield below the poverty level are female. Over one-third are children under 18 (37.5 percent). Race and ethnicity are also major factors:



Source: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021

Ages 5 to 17 in Families in Poverty (SAIPE Data)



Source: Census Bureau Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates 2021

The elderly are also at risk. Community profiles from a “Massachusetts Healthy Aging Report” commissioned by Tufts Health Plan show that, in 2018, more than one in three 65+ households in Springfield had incomes of less than \$20,000, and that Springfield elders fared worse than the state as a whole for most Healthy Aging Indicators, such as oral health, depression, obesity, Alzheimer’s, stroke, hypertension, and COPD. The report concludes that communities with poorer older residents tend to have worse health, and that healthy aging is, to some extent, a social justice issue.²

The cost of living in Springfield is around eight percent below the national average, but much lower than for Massachusetts as a whole, which is currently the most expensive state in the nation after Hawaii. The main reason for this

relatively low cost of living in Springfield is the cost of housing—just 77 percent of the national average. The median home cost, for example, is just \$240,800, while for the U.S. it is \$338,100 and for the state it is \$557,300. The median gross rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,260; the state median is \$2,140.³

Nevertheless, maintaining adequate housing is still a struggle for many Springfield residents. More than half of renters and nearly a third of homeowners have excessive housing costs, defined as spending 30 percent or more of their household income on housing costs. A moratorium prevented evictions and foreclosures during the COVID crisis, but has since been lifted, leaving low-income residents with the same problems as before COVID, with the added burden of accumulated unpaid back rent or mortgage payments. COVID Community Impact Survey (CCIS) data for Springfield shows that approximately half of respondents are worried about paying rent, mortgage or utilities, and a quarter are worried they may have to move within the next few months.⁴

Many of the housing units in Springfield are unsafe or inadequate. They may lack complete kitchen or plumbing facilities, be severely overcrowded, or be severely cost-burdened. Over one in eight owner-occupied units and over one in three renter-occupied units fits this description.

6. Education

Public education in Springfield is improving after decades of great challenges. The high school graduation rate rose from 56.6 percent in 2012 to 84 percent in 2021. The annual high school dropout rate in 2018-19 was 4.4 percent—drastically

higher than the statewide average of 1.8 percent. By 2021, however, it was 0.6 percent for Renaissance and the High School of Science and Technology, 1.5 percent for Duggan, 1.7 for Commerce, 0.9 percent for Central and Putnam, and 0 percent for the Conservatory.

The chronic absenteeism rate in Springfield schools is nearly double the statewide average. One factor contributing to poor performance may be the number of high-needs students: 90 percent, compared to 55 percent statewide, and the number who are low-income: 86 percent, compared to 42 percent statewide. For 28 percent, English is a second language, compared to only 25 percent statewide. The school district has made progress since the 2011-2017 period in which it struggled to reduce proficiency gaps in a number of areas, instead failing to meet any of its targets. In 2021 and 2022, on the contrary, 68 percent of students met, partially met, or exceeded expectations, compared to 83 percent statewide.⁵

7. Unemployment

Springfield's unemployment rate had been dropping gradually over the last decade due to a number of new jobs created by the opening of the MGM casino, the CRRC factory, Tech Foundry, the culinary arts center and other recent economic initiatives. By March 2020, it was 4.4 percent. A month later, due to pandemic-related business closures, Springfield's unemployment rate shot up to 20.8 percent. Since that peak, the rate has been steadily dropping again; the preliminary unemployment rate for May 2023 is 2.6 percent.⁶ It should be noted that the unemployment rate only considers people actively and recently looking for work—not those who can't or don't want to work because of school,

caregiving responsibilities, age or the like, nor those who have been looking for work for over 15 weeks, nor discouraged people who have given up looking entirely. The Census Bureau's LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES) database estimates that in 2019 there were 88,156 jobs in Springfield, one-third of those in the education and health care sector.⁷

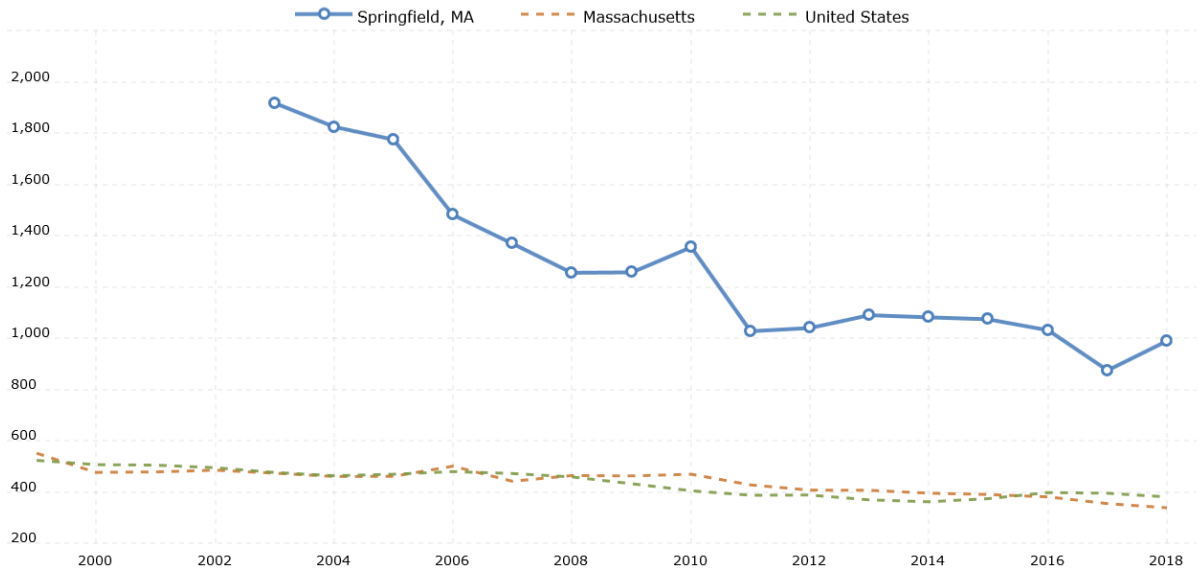
8. Transportation

In Springfield, more than one household in five has no access to a vehicle. The City of Springfield has bus service provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA). However, in 2021, only four percent of workers took advantage of bus service to commute, while four percent walked and nine percent carpooled. Three out of four workers drove alone in a vehicle. Mean commuting time was 21.1 minutes, several minutes shorter than state or national times.

9. Crime

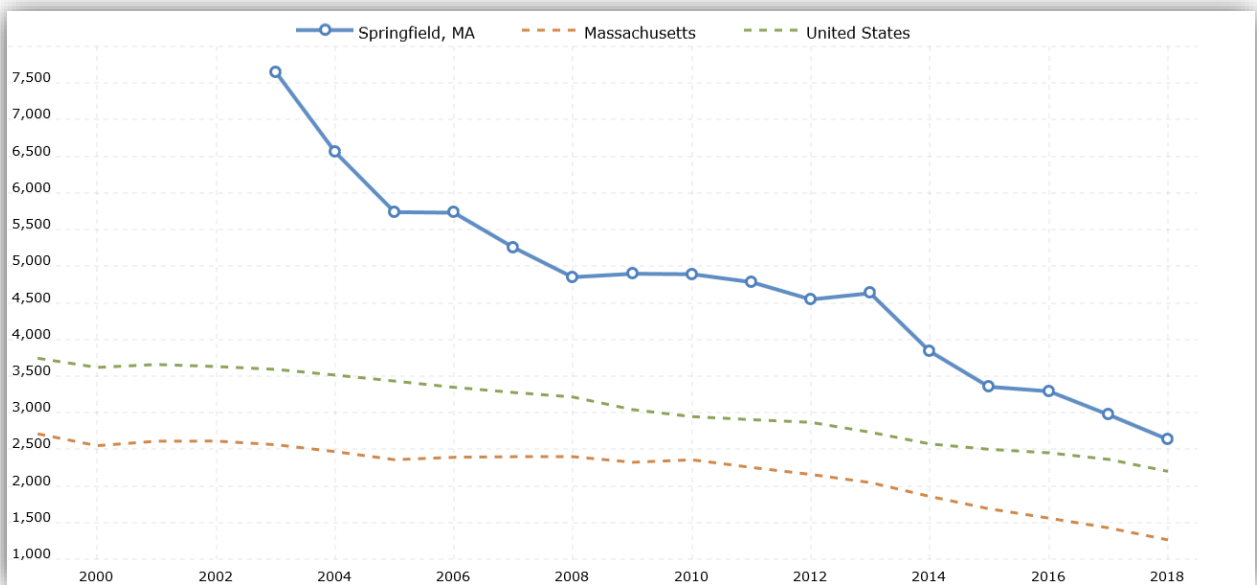
Crime is a serious problem in Springfield. Although crime rates have been dropping for the past two decades (4,547 violent crimes per 100,000 population in 1992, for example, vs. 905 in 2019), they are still high. In 2019, according to FBI statistics, both the violent crime rate and the rate of property crime in Springfield was nearly triple the rate for Massachusetts.⁸

Springfield MA Violent Crime Rate 1999-2018



(source: <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/us/ma/springfield/crime-rate-statistics>)

Springfield MA Property Crime Rate 1999-2018



(source: <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/us/ma/springfield/property-crime-rate-statistics>)

The FBI's annual Uniform Crime Report (UCR) shows that violent and property crime combined decreased in Springfield by four percent from 2019 to 2020. After a 25-year low in 2019, the city saw a slight uptick in violent crime in 2020 which is equivalent to approximately 100 more reported aggravated assaults than the prior year.⁹

10. Rebounding from Catastrophic Events

One of the most significant economic events to affect our area was the recession of 2007-2009. Growth all but halted, unemployment rates soared and poverty drastically deepened within the urban core of our region, the Pioneer Valley. These effects have slowly eased over the past several years.

A series of natural disasters in 2011, including an EF-3 tornado in June, Hurricane Irene in August, and a snowstorm in October all caused widespread damage and resulted in a federal disaster declaration. A gas explosion in Springfield's Metro Center area damaged or destroyed 62 buildings and displaced over 100 households. Rebuilding programs have been continuous with the use of state and federal monies, but hard-hit neighborhoods still have many vacant and damaged buildings.

Despite, and to some degree, because of these disasters, several exciting developments have recently been completed or are underway in the city. These projects have drawn visitors from outside the area, bringing revenue to the city. They have also created thousands of new jobs. Lastly, they have improved the quality of life for residents, making Springfield an increasingly attractive place to live.

Since the June 2011 tornado, Springfield has seen more than \$4 billion worth of economic development, development that has been supported by investments made through the City’s capital planning process.¹⁰ Four elementary schools have been rebuilt¹¹ and two municipal golf courses have been extensively renovated. Millions of dollars have been poured into the improvement of parks, athletic fields, roadways and walkways and to enhance safety and accessibility throughout the city.

The most ambitious project was the construction, completed in August 2018, of a nearly \$1 billion MGM casino in the tornado-ravaged South End.



MGM Casino

Union Station, a regionally significant intermodal transit hub, recently reopened after a nearly \$100 million renovation. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA), the intercity bus services Peter Pan and Greyhound, the Hartford Line

commuter rail, and Amtrak were all operating from the renovated station by June 2019. Springfield's geographic location, at the juncture of the east/west Boston/Albany routes and the north/south Connecticut River corridor, has always made it a hub city. As the downside of private automotive transport becomes more evident, the advantages of a public transportation hub to the economic strength, vitality, and progress of Springfield becomes clear.



Union Station

An Innovation District has been created in Metro Center, with startup accelerator Valley Venture Mentors and innovation center TechSpring located there. Springfield was recently named by *Inc.* Magazine among the 50 top cities for starting a business in 2020. The magazine factored in population growth, business investment and rate of entrepreneurship in their rankings, commending Valley Venture Mentors for supporting hundreds of startups since its formation in 2011 and TechSpring for working with startups in health care.



Dr. Seuss Museum

The past two decades have seen major developments to the lovely quadrangle of Springfield museums, which draw many visitors from outside the city. In 2002, the Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden opened. In 2009, the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History opened on the site of the painter James McNeill Whistler’s childhood home. A Dr. Seuss Museum added in 2017 increased museum attendance to 148,000 ticketed visitors that year, up 110 percent from the 70,500 paid visitors in the most recent prior fiscal year.¹²

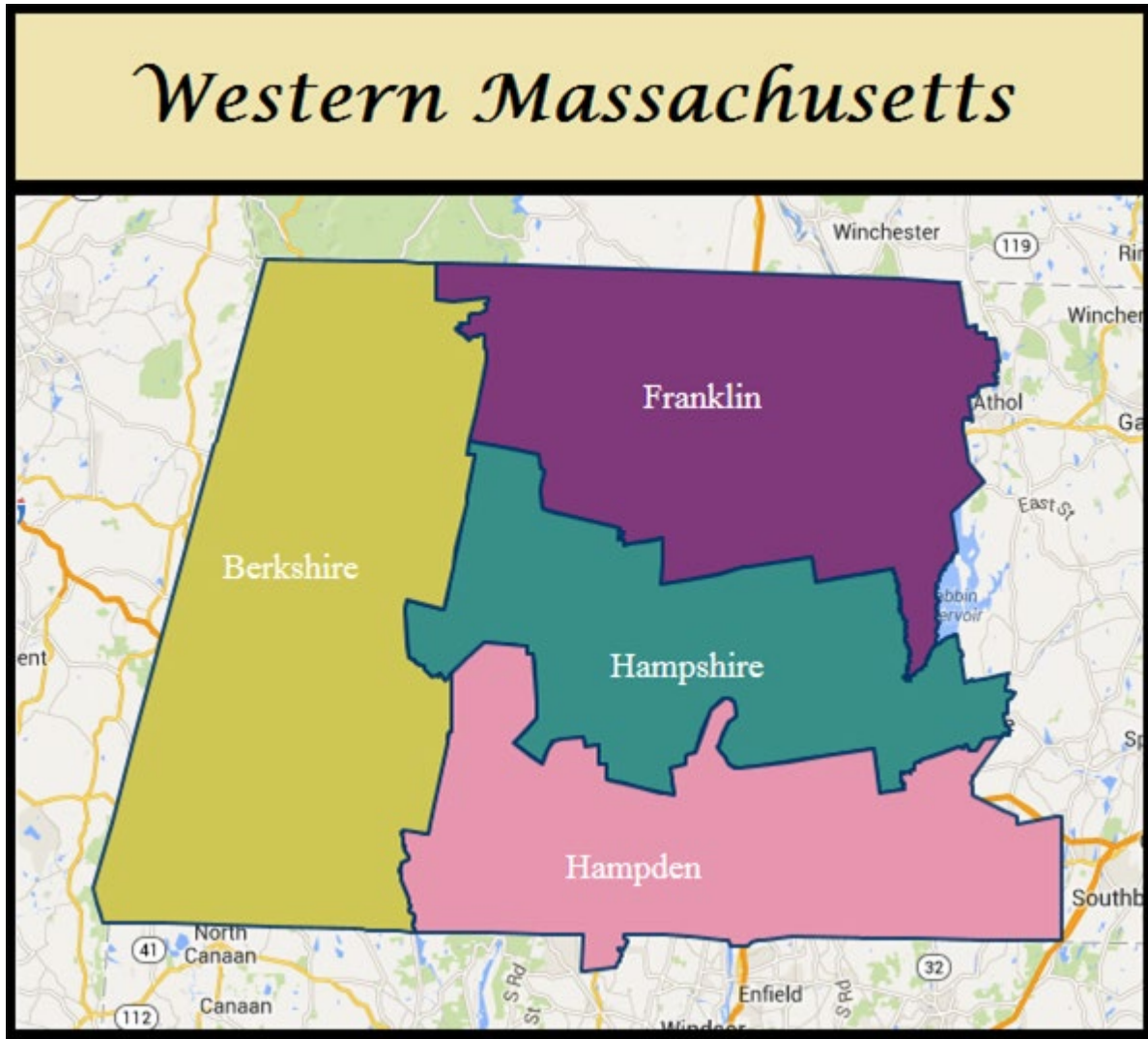
CRRC, the world's largest supplier of rail transit equipment, in 2015 opened a plant in Springfield that employs 222 skilled workers and has hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts. A \$21 million culinary and nutrition center, opened in April 2019, has created 40 jobs, improves the school breakfast and lunch program, and trains students for jobs in the culinary field.

Recently, \$2.75M in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds was used for the acquisition of three properties in the City's Metro Center census tract. The portfolio totals over 130K gross sq. ft of opportunity in the heart of downtown's central business and entertainment district. Funding is being used to reduce the negative impacts that the properties currently have on the neighborhood and to position them for future productive reuse. The City anticipates final negotiations with a preferred developer during the summer of 2023. Reactivation of these long-underutilized buildings will have a transformative impact on the neighborhood and overall stability of the City's downtown. The portfolio's redevelopment and reuse will produce jobs, increase the tax base and potentially creating additional housing units to bring a balance to the current stock seen within the Metro Center area.¹³

About to get underway is a redevelopment of the Metro Center area affected by the 2011 gas explosion. Redesigned "complete" streets, as well as green space, "tot lots," dog-friendly spaces and outdoor seating should spark housing and business development throughout that neighborhood. Making the community safer and more pleasant for pedestrians, bicycles, kids and pets will draw more people and improve their quality of life.

Springfield today is undergoing a renaissance. After decades of decline, many positive projects and initiatives have been realized or are underway in the city and the region. The challenge for government, industry and the non-profit sector will be to ensure that the promised growth and development bring economic improvement and better quality of life to all citizens equally.

B. Western Massachusetts Profile



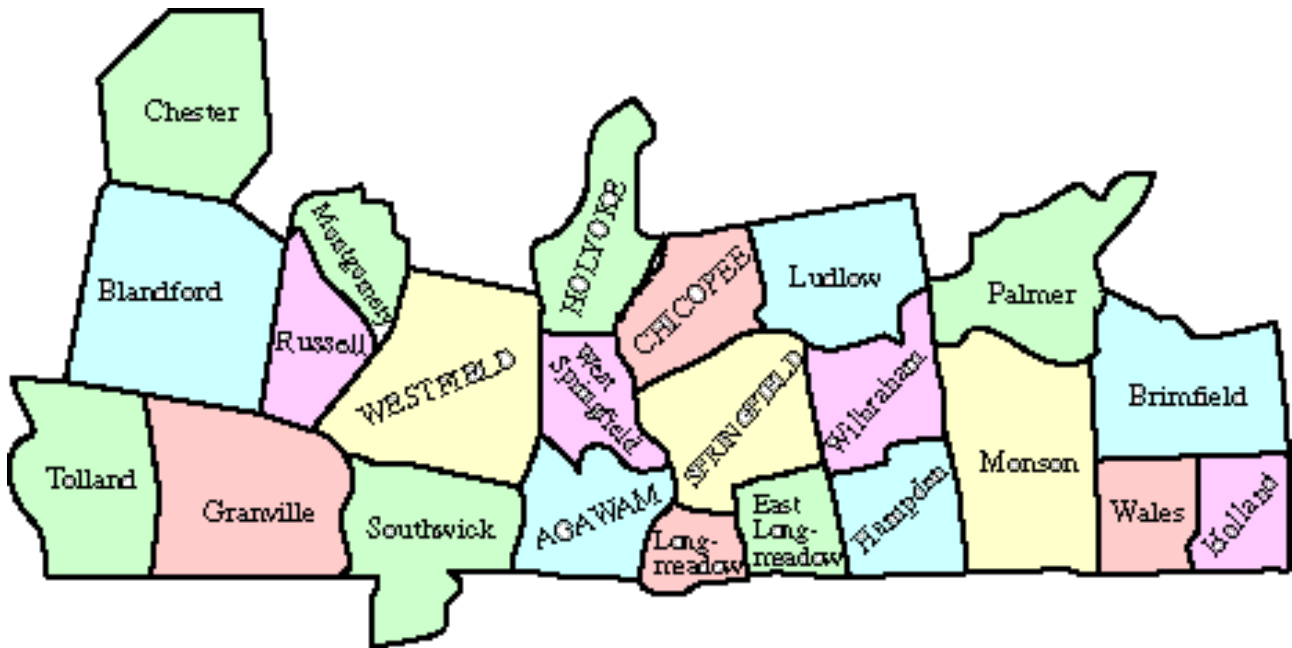
Springfield is located in Hampden County, one of the four counties that comprise the region known as Western Massachusetts, the others being Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire. Some of the programs operated by Springfield Partners, such as Weatherization and Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, are open to residents of this entire region.

By most economic measures, Western Massachusetts lags behind the Central and Eastern parts of the state. The percentage of people living in poverty, for example, is higher in every one of these four counties than in Massachusetts as a whole. Whereas the state rate is 11.6 percent, in Hampden it is 16.7, in Hampshire it is 11.1, in Berkshire it is 11.3, and in Franklin it is 10.6.

Western Massachusetts is much less densely populated overall than Springfield. The population density in Springfield is 4,893 persons per square mile, while in Hampden County overall it is 755, in Hampshire County, 308, in Berkshire County, 139, and in Franklin County, only 102 (2020 figures). Much of the Western part of the state is comprised of hilly or mountainous terrain as well. For these reasons, transportation and communication systems—notably, broadband internet service—are relatively sparse. Improving these systems has a positive impact on business, education, and people’s everyday lives, attracting young families, letting the elderly age in place, increasing property values and allowing people who work from home to find new convenience and opportunity.

While a 2016 public-private initiative to extend high-speed internet connectivity to rural communities in Massachusetts has vastly improved broadband service, the three westernmost counties (Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire) still lag behind the rest of the state. For example, while 97.8 percent of people in Massachusetts have access to 100 Mbps broadband, in Berkshire it is 93.1, in Hampshire, 89.4, and in Franklin, 84.7—the lowest figures in the state. On average, 84.9 percent in Massachusetts have access to speeds of one gig; in Berkshire County, only 3.5 percent!¹⁴

1. Hampden County



While most of the programs operated by our agency are only open to residents of the City of Springfield, other services, such as Housing Counseling, Low-Income Tax Clinic (LITC) and Weatherization, are available to residents of the entire county. Springfield is situated in Hampden County, which is a geographical region only, with no governing body. The county is approximately 617 square miles in area, with a population of 461,041. It is comprised of 23 cities and towns. The largest cities after Springfield are Chicopee (population 54,980), Westfield (40,535) and Holyoke (37,720). The smallest towns are Tolland (471) and Montgomery (819). Population density ranges from 4,879 persons per square mile in Springfield to only 15 in Tolland.

Economically, the county is also diverse. Per-capita income in 2019 in Longmeadow was \$77,797, for example, vs. only \$19,441 in Amherst, \$19,720 in Holyoke and \$16,839 in Springfield.

While the smaller towns in Hampden County have a mainly agricultural heritage, the larger metropolitan areas have a rich industrial past. Machinery, firearms, vehicles, paper, textiles, leather goods and many other products were manufactured here.

The region is in the process of reinventing its manufacturing base with high-tech industries such as the Massachusetts Green High-Performance Computing Center in Holyoke, Dielectrics in Chicopee, and CRRC and the Tech Foundry IT Workforce Training Program in Springfield. West Springfield High School is partnering with the MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board and several employer partners, including Peerless Precision, Ben Franklin Design & Manufacturing, Advance Welding, International Laser Systems, and Universal Plastics to launch a Manufacturing Innovation Pathways program serving 171 students. Students will take college courses at Springfield Technical Community College.

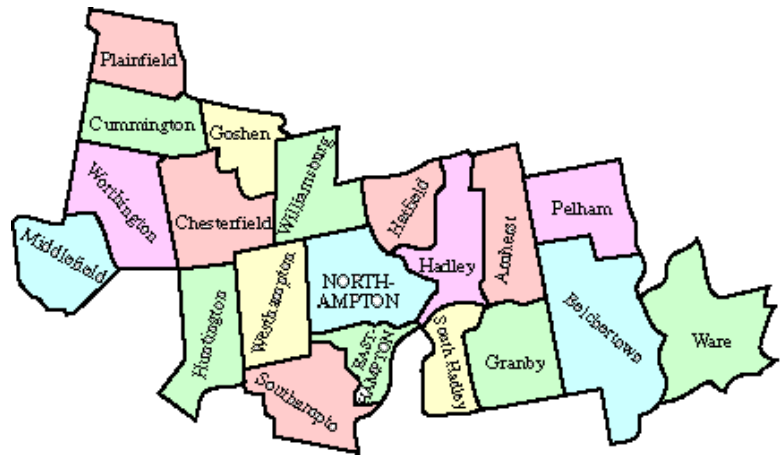
Despite having several economically stable communities like Longmeadow, Hampden County remains the second most challenged of the 14 counties in Massachusetts. Whereas the percentage of persons living below the poverty level was only 5.9 in Nantucket County, for example, and 10.4 statewide, in Hampden County it was 17 percent.

2. Hampshire County

Springfield Partners offers its Weatherization and LITC services to eligible residents of Hampshire County.

Hampshire County is situated directly north of Hampden County. It comprises an area of approximately 527 square miles, with a total population of 162,588 and a population density of 308

persons per square mile. Its largest communities are the town of Amherst (40,059) and the city of Northampton (29,327). Eighty-two and a



half percent of the

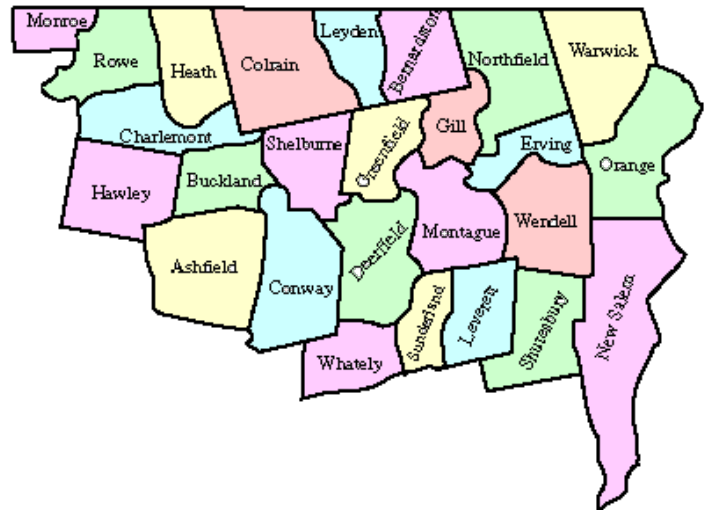
population identify as White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, 3.4 percent as Black or African American, 6.5 percent as Hispanic or Latino, and 5.7 percent as Asian.

Hampshire County is home to the main campus of the University of Massachusetts, as well as four distinguished liberal arts colleges: Amherst, Smith, Mt. Holyoke and Hampshire. Together, these five institutions comprise the Five College Consortium, an initiative which provides for shared academic and cultural resources. A bus service, free during the academic year to anyone with a five-college ID, connects the five schools. The people of Hampshire County are the most educated of the four Western Massachusetts counties: approximately 95 percent of residents have a high school diploma, while around 50 percent have a

bachelor’s degree or higher. Hampden County, by contrast, has the lowest rates: close to 86 and 28 percent, respectively. The poverty rate in Hampshire County is 11.7 percent for the general population.

3. Franklin County

Springfield Partners offers LITC and limited Weatherization services to eligible residents of Franklin County. Franklin County is situated directly north of Hampshire County, extending to the Vermont border. With an area of approximately 700 square miles and a total population of 70,894, it has a population density of only about 102 persons per square mile. It is the most rural county in the entire state. The largest community is Greenfield, population 17,656. Over 93 percent of the population identify as White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, 1.9 percent as Black or African American, 4.9 percent as Hispanic or Latino, and 1.8 percent as Asian. The poverty rate in Franklin County is 10.7 percent.

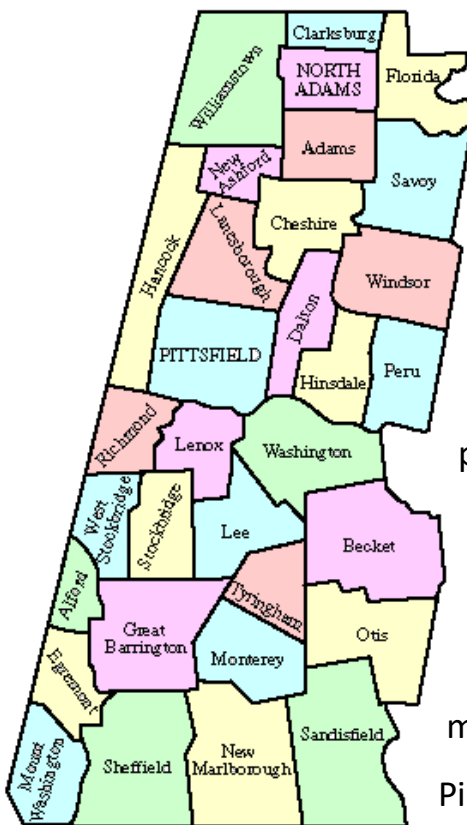


The smallest town, Monroe—population 118—has no mayor, no post office, no school and no police department. When the nearby Rowe nuclear power plant was decommissioned in 1992, many residents lost jobs. There is virtually no industry nearby, and most residents must travel to Pittsfield or Vermont to find work. The per capita income--\$8322 in 2019—was the lowest in the state.

Limited broadband access hampers economic development throughout this hilly region. A state-funded wi-fi hotspot program, launched in April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided outdoor, high-speed wireless access points in municipalities that still lacked broadband access. State support for hotspots automatically terminated on December 31, 2022.

4. Berkshire County

Springfield also offers LITC services to eligible residents of Berkshire County.



Berkshire County is the westernmost county in the state, extending from the Connecticut border to the south, Vermont to the north, New York to the west, and Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties to the east. It has an area of 926.88 square miles, a population of 127,859 and a population density of 139.2 persons per square mile. Pittsfield, population 43,310, is its largest city. Berkshire County is a hilly region, with the highest peak in the state, Mt. Greylock, within its borders. The area is noted for its picturesque beauty and many cultural attractions, such as Tanglewood, Jacob’s Pillow, Mass MoCA, and the Norman Rockwell Museum.

Most residents of Berkshire County identify as White alone, (91.3 percent). Blacks/African Americans make up 3.9 percent of the population, and Hispanics/Latinos, 5.5 percent. The poverty rate in Berkshire County is 10.9 percent overall.

VI. Community and Internal Assessment Process

A. Methodology

To facilitate the community and internal assessment process, the Planning Committee of the Board of Directors invited the agency's planning coordinator, senior staff members and all interested Board members to meet monthly or as necessary. This Committee, using the DHCD*-developed Community Needs Survey mandated for use by all CAAs in the Commonwealth, distributed, gathered and analyzed the collected data; planned the focus groups; conducted the stakeholder interviews; and created the plan to address the findings. The team reported to the Board on a regular basis. The Strategic Planning Committee solicited ideas and input from agency staff and Board on every stage of the assessment and strategic planning process.

CSBG Organizational Standard 2.2 requires the agency to collect input from five sectors: community, faith-based, private, public, and educational. With the assistance of our Strategic Planning Committee and Board members in the dissemination of our survey and interviews, all five sectors are represented.

Surveys: The DHCD* Community Needs Surveys were distributed throughout our service area at community events, electronically and at workshops. They were handed out to clients visiting our offices and parents picking up their children from our Early Learning Center. We also shared through Facebook. We carried surveys to customers during home visits (by our Weatherization Department, for example). To get responses from low-income people who were not necessarily our customers, we set up tables at various locations around the city, such as

community centers and low-income housing developments. Most responses came from our designated area of service; some, from surrounding communities. Upon closing for preliminary analysis on July 13, the survey had generated 654 responses.

Focus Groups: Three focus groups were led by members of the Strategic Planning Committee with assistance from a facilitator, Shannon Rudder. They served as venues to hold discussions around the top six community needs identified in the community needs assessment survey. Participants brainstormed ideas on how to address those issues. One focus group was held at our agency with veterans, one at a local non-profit for neighborhood residents and a third group was held with parents from our own Early Education and Childcare Center (all in Springfield).

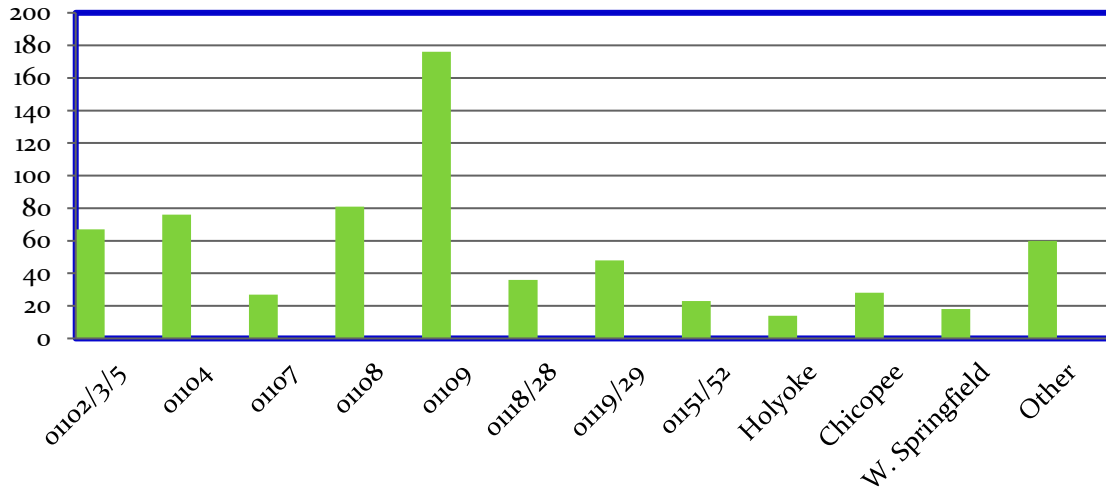
Stakeholder Interviews: Members of the Strategic Planning Committee reached out to community leaders representing the public, private, educational, faith-based and non-profit with a series of questions regarding the top needs identified in our community needs assessment survey. Responses from six stakeholders were recorded electronically.

B. Community Survey Results: Demographics

1. Location

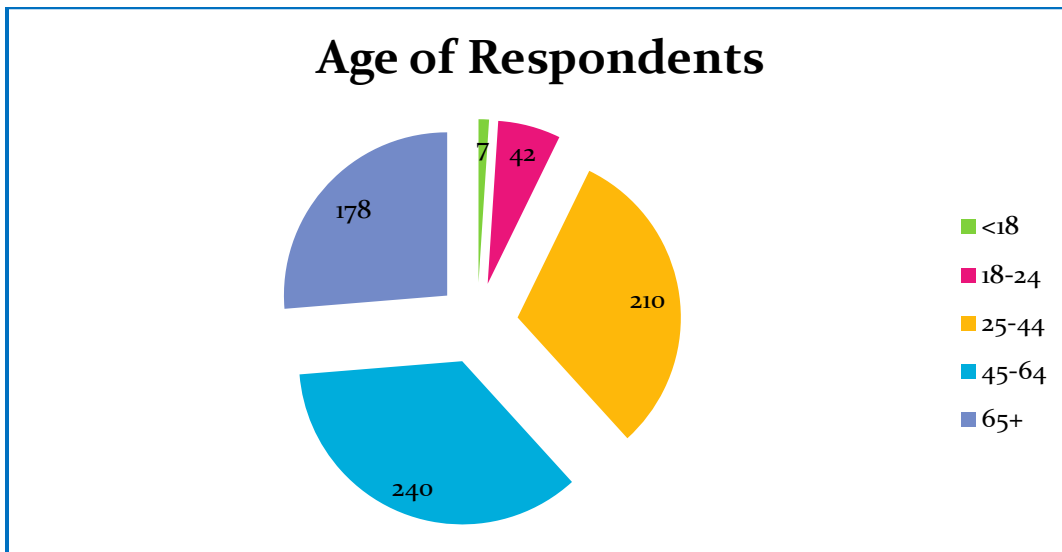
We tried to get a diverse mix of respondents by surveying customers from all of our programs and by setting up survey-taking tables at a variety of locations in the community. The largest group came from our own zip code, 01109:

Location of Respondents by Springfield Zip or Other City



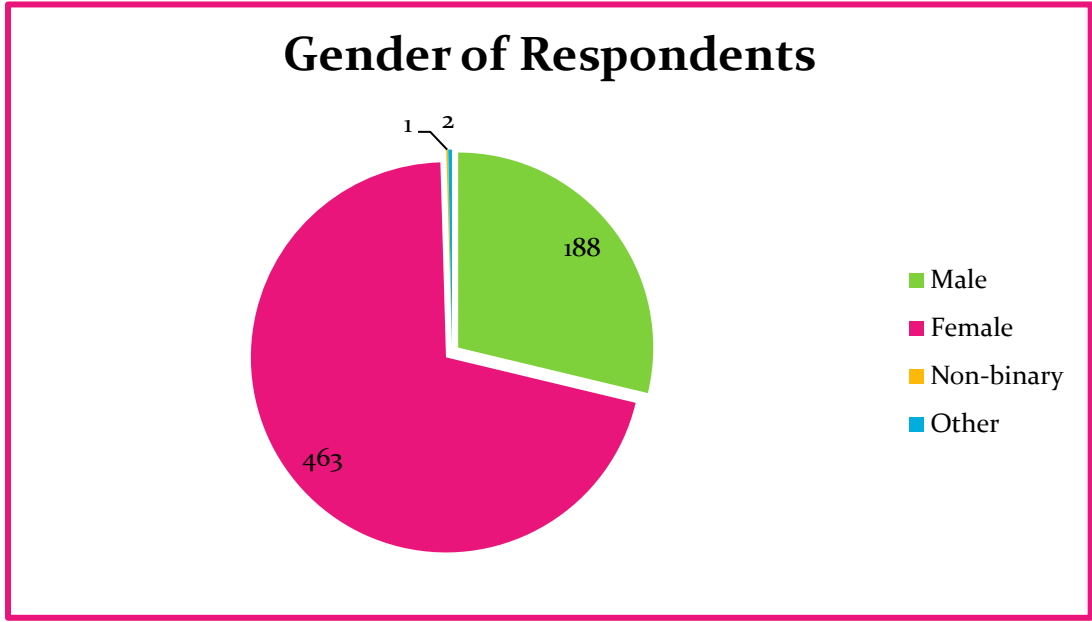
2. Age

About two-thirds of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 64:



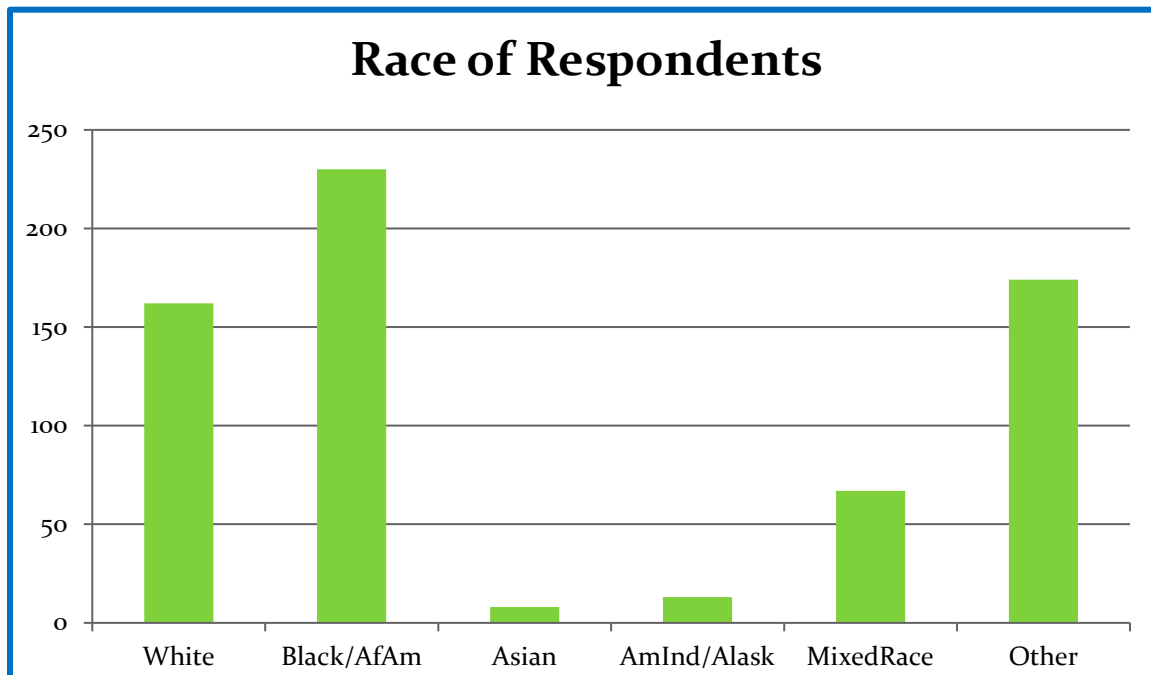
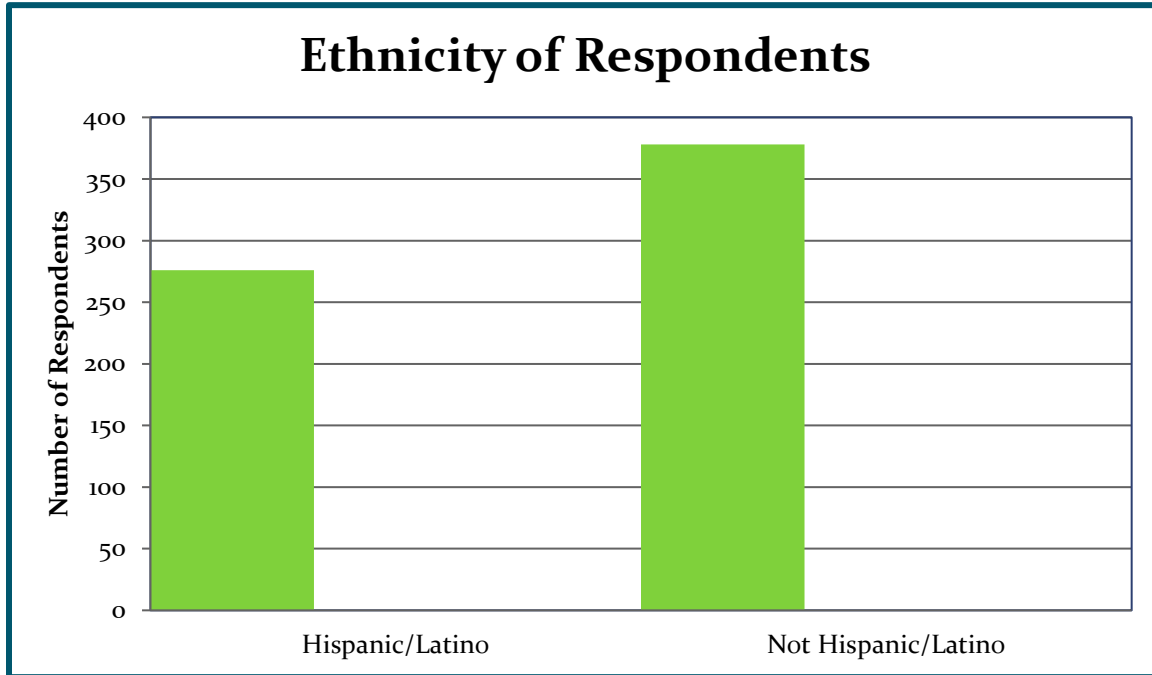
3. Gender

Although about 58 percent of the people we served last year were female, the percentage of female survey respondents was 71:



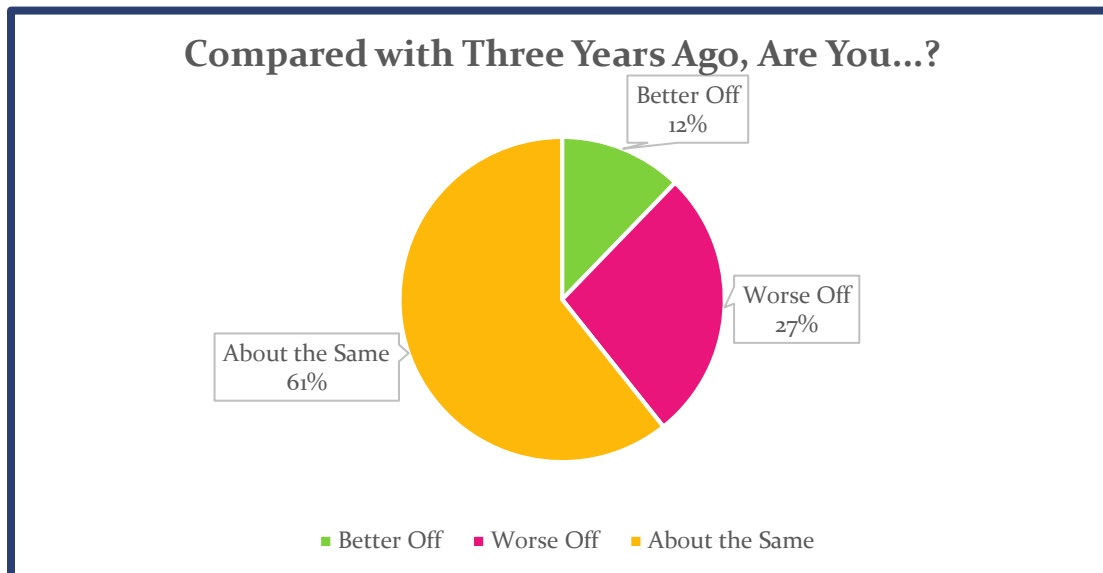
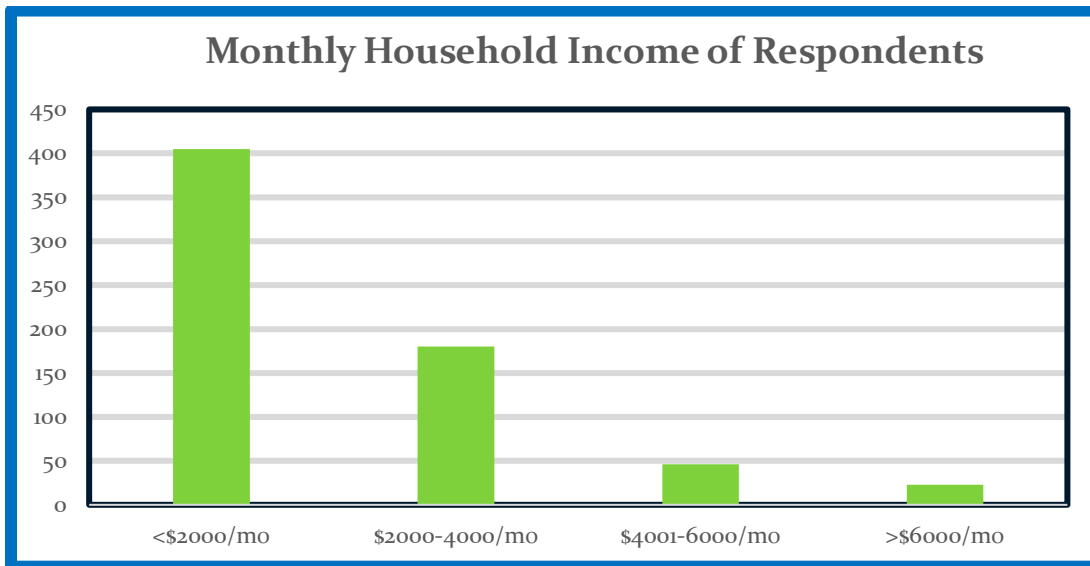
4. Race and Ethnicity

Our respondents were racially and ethnically diverse:

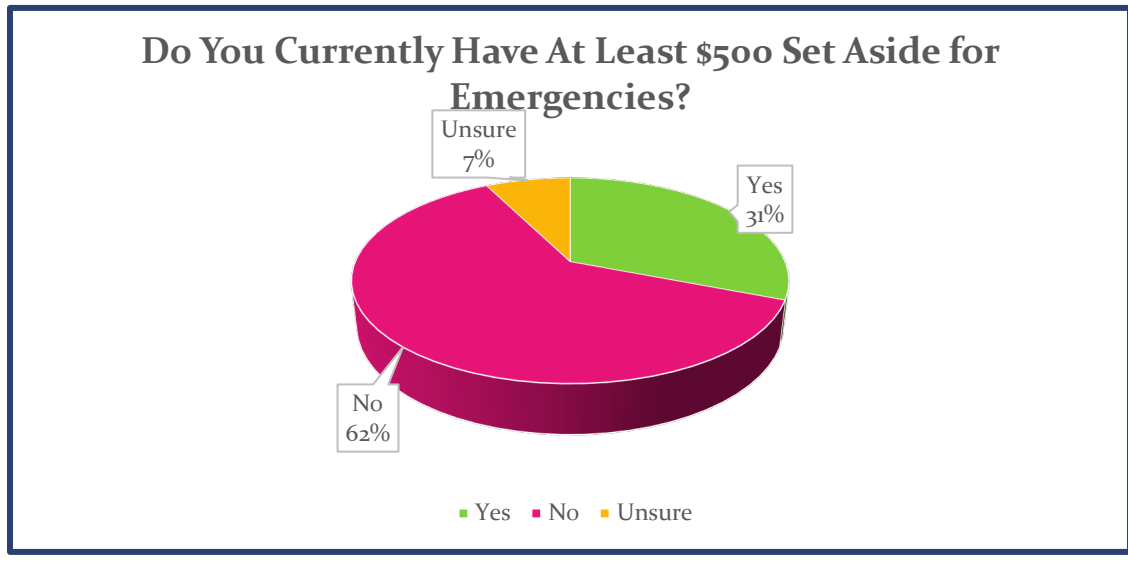
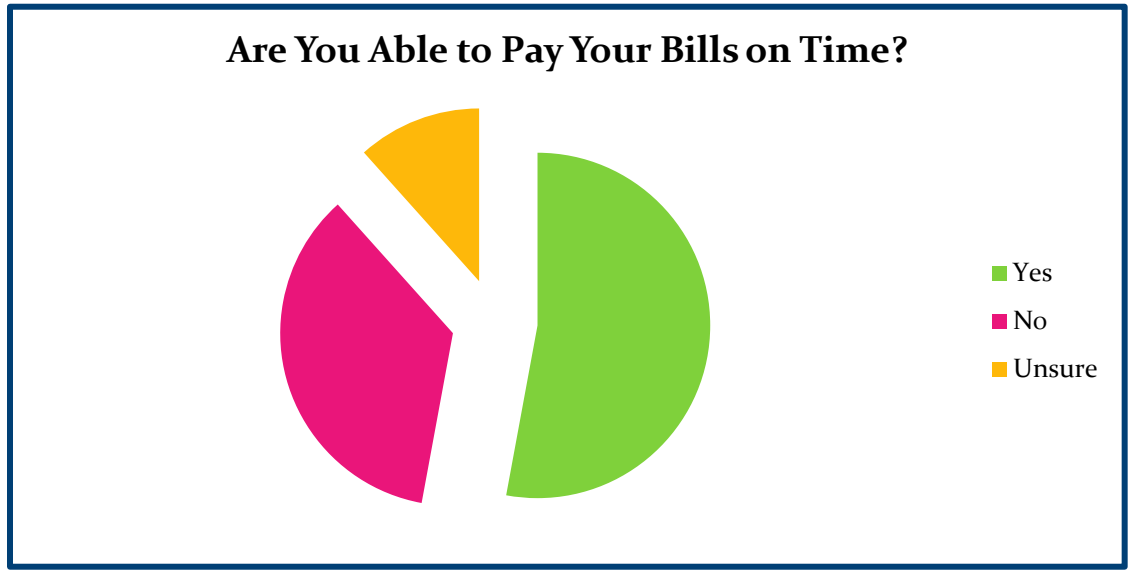


5. Income

About sixty percent of respondents had household incomes of less than \$2,000 per month, or \$24,000 per year. Ninety percent had incomes of no more than \$4000 per month, or \$48,000 per year. (The Federal Poverty Level for FY2023 was \$30,000 per year for a family of four.) Only one in eight considered themselves better off financially than before the COVID-19 pandemic.



Just over half said they were able to pay their bills on time, and only a quarter said they have \$500 set aside for emergencies.



When asked what kept them from feeling more financially stable, the most common response was "My living expenses (rent/mortgage, heat, food) are too high," followed by "I am on a fixed income (Social Security, pension, etc.), and my income is limited," and "I work full time, but my pay doesn't cover my expenses."

What keeps you or your family from feeling more financially stable?

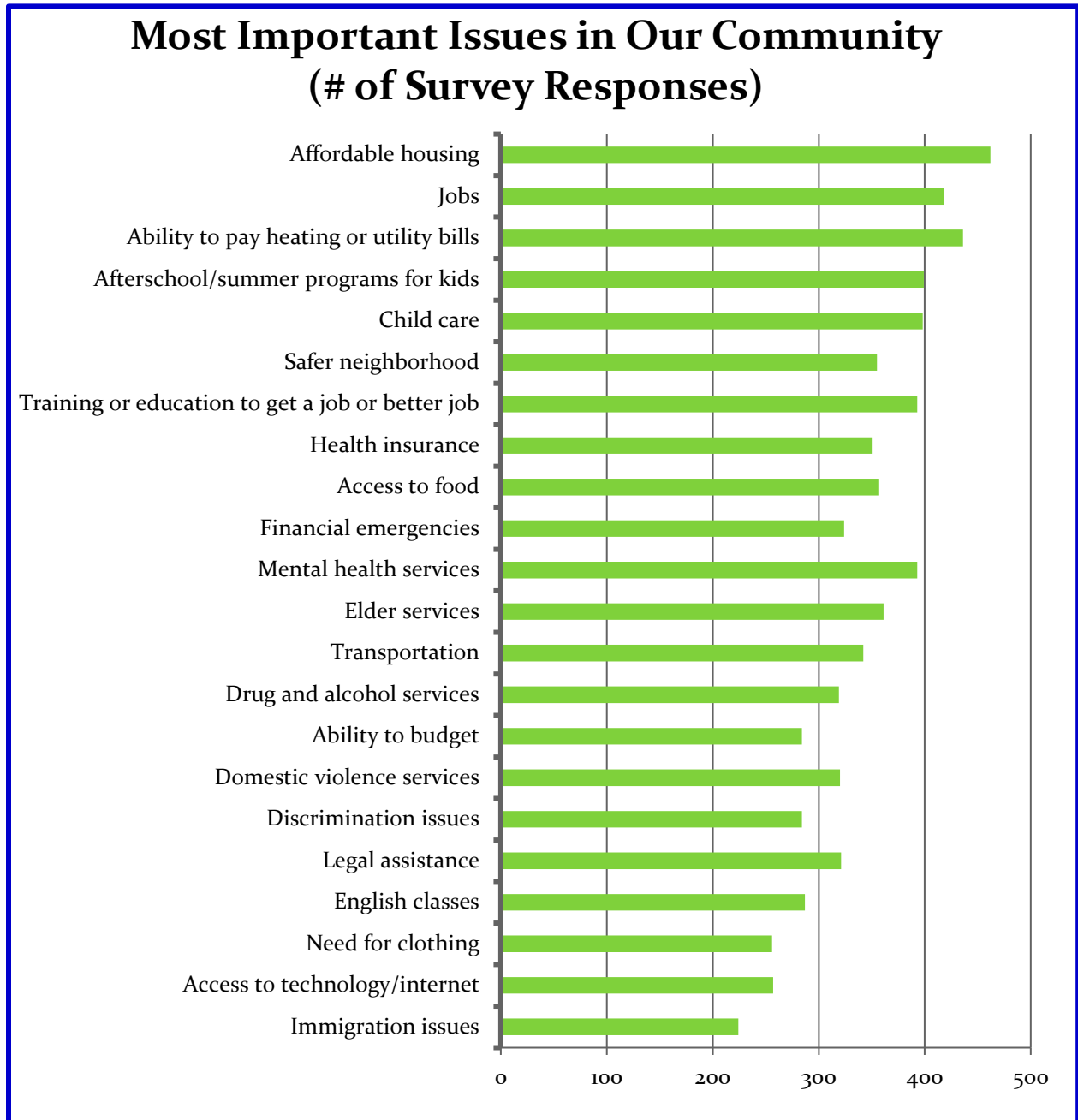
My living expenses (rent/mortgage, heat, food) are too high.	281
I am on a fixed income (Social Security, pension, etc.), and my income is limited.	205
I work full time, but my pay doesn't cover my expenses.	140
I can't find housing that I can afford.	117
I need more education or training to get work or better work.	107
I don't have reliable transportation.	93
I can only find part-time work.	89
I or a family member am struggling with mental health issues.	88
I can't find a job.	68
I've had a lot of medical expenses that weren't covered by my insurance.	67
Child care is too expensive and/or interferes with my ability to work.	67
I lost eligibility for benefits (i.e., SNAP, MassHealth, DTA).	60
I don't feel safe in my community.	43
I or a family member am struggling with addiction.	30
I don't feel safe in my home.	24
Someone in my household is spending money on things we don't need, so there isn't enough left for other expenses.	11
Someone else controls the money and makes decisions I don't agree with.	11

VII. Key Findings: Community Assessment

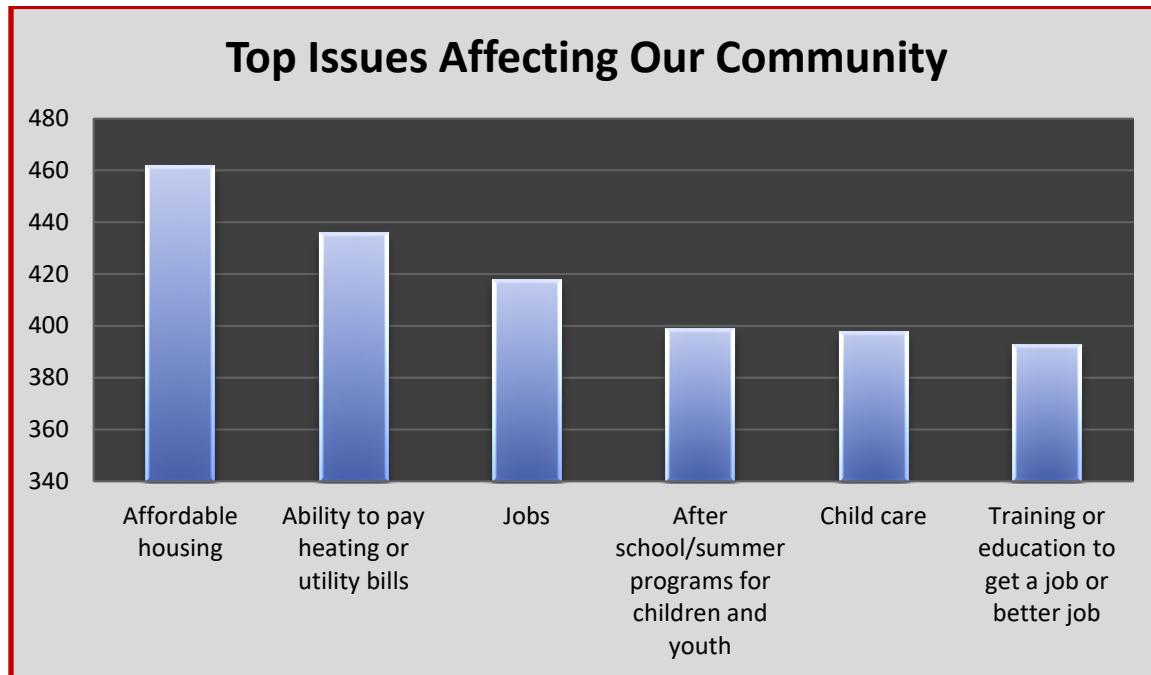
Our designated area of service, the City of Springfield, as well as the entire Western Massachusetts area, throughout which some of our programs extend, is transitioning from an industrial economy to a service-, technology- and knowledge-based economy. Large amounts of money are flowing into the region for development projects: high-tech manufacturing plants, transportation centers, market-rate housing, schools of higher education, a casino and entertainment complex. Our citizens are eager to take part in this new economy; however, many need assistance. Market-rate housing is out of reach for most people out of work or living on fixed incomes. The new jobs available require skills and training that not all applicants have. Applicants with criminal records may be disqualified from positions for which they are otherwise qualified. Lack of affordable child care or transportation may make it difficult or not cost-effective to work outside the home.

With the exception of a few cities and suburbs that have experienced recent growth explosions, Western Massachusetts communities are also typical of the Northeast in that they have a large percentage of older housing stock. These apartments and homes, while gracious and beautiful originally, have in many cases fallen into disrepair, and renovation has not been cost-effective. While these older neighborhoods have many amenities, such as sidewalks, libraries and parks, they may lack others, such as reliable public transportation or good schools. However, many programs, such as the “Complete Streets” initiative, are underway to address these problems.

The first question we asked our stakeholders was to identify the top issues impacting their community. Here are the results:



This chart shows the top six issues that affect our community, according to our respondents:



Then, in order to have an in-depth understanding of these top issues, we held a series of focus groups, at which participants helped us identify the specific challenges surrounding each issue. Participants also brainstormed ideas for how these challenges might be overcome. We also interviewed community leaders about the state of housing, jobs and childcare in our community.

A. First Concern: Housing/Utilities

The top issue identified by our stakeholders was affordable housing. Over 70 percent of respondents selected this option. The second, related issue—chosen by two-thirds—was the ability to pay heating or utility bills. Similarly, when we asked in Question 5, "What keeps you or your family from feeling more financially stable?" the top response was "My living expenses (rent/mortgage,

heat, food) are too high." About one in six also said, "I can't find housing that I can afford."

The issue of utility bills cannot be separated from that of rent/mortgage.

Massachusetts Minimum Standards of Fitness for Human Habitation (105 CMR 410,000) specifies that a residence must have potable water, electricity and a central or hard-wired heating system (not merely a fireplace or space heater) to be habitable.¹⁵ Once utilities are shut off, the process of issuing an order to vacate must begin, just as the process of eviction will result from non-payment of rent or mortgage. In order to have shelter, therefore, a household must be able to pay both rent/mortgage and utility bills. We will consider both of these issues together as "affordable housing."

1. Availability of Housing

According to the *US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021*, the City of Springfield has 63,179 housing units, 92.3 percent of which are occupied. Sixty-eight percent of the housing stock is made up of single-family homes and duplexes.¹⁶ According to the *HUD Picture Subsidized HH 2021*, 12,265 are income-restricted affordable housing units ("Section 8").¹⁷

New housing has the potential to be more energy-efficient, accessible and appropriate for the needs of the current population, but growth in the region has been slow. In Springfield there is little available land to build on, and lack of investment return without incentives. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of housing units in Springfield only grew by one percent. Springfield is a fully built-out city, with very little developable land, so the City has not experienced much

new residential construction. The new buildings that are constructed are generally infill or small development projects and are single-family homes or duplexes. According to the city's own records, there have not been any starts of new residential buildings with more than two units since 2011.¹⁸

An exciting trend has been the renovation and conversion of vacant or underutilized commercial or industrial properties to residential or mixed-use space. The \$49 million Court Square renovation project includes six floors of more than 70 market-rate apartments. Plans also call for 11,000 square feet of retail on the first floor and another 11,000 square feet of office space on the second floor. First Resource Development Company has submitted plans to redevelop the buildings at 195 State Street and 310 State Street into apartment complexes that together will have nearly 100 new apartments for rent at prices that are considered affordable for people with low incomes, at a total projected cost of \$46 million. Feasibility studies conducted on key parcels in the area affected by the gas explosion, including the Birnie Building at Apremont Triangle and the Absorbine Jr Building on the corner of Chestnut Street and Lyman Street, reveal that historic properties hold strong potential for mixed-use residential redevelopment, particularly once the district gains momentum and rents improve.”¹⁹ The historic Willys-Overland Building on Chestnut Street, sixty apartments with ground floor commercial space, is a recent example. According to a study of market potential in downtown Springfield, “90% of all downtown units are being subsidized in some form....Feasibility studies suggest that the area proximate to Chestnut Street alone could support between 500 and 600 dwelling units, with a full district build-out accommodating up to 1,500 new units.”²⁰

The city's Downtown Master Plan concludes, "At a time when remote working has become commonplace, the retail/ restaurant experience has changed and the concept of community interaction has evolved due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, a revitalized urban neighborhood with historically preserved building stock, generous public open spaces, flexible streetscapes and access to transit seems most welcome. This paradigm holds the potential to define a new urban lifestyle in Springfield's Northeast Downtown District."²¹

When asked about the state of affordable housing in the city, Pam Wells of the Springfield Housing Authority replied, "It is certainly in short supply." Dawn Forbes DiStefano, president and CEO at Square One child care center, described it as "limited and needed." Springfield City Councilor Kateri Walsh acknowledges that access to affordable housing has become a growing issue and is one the City Council pays close attention to when granting special permits. "We try to make sure proposals are fair and sensitive to needs of our residents," she says.

Input from our focus groups indicates that Springfield residents think more housing is needed. Veterans would like housing specifically for veterans and their families. Participants in two of the three focus groups we held stressed safety as a concern, citing problems with guns and violence in the city. Paying for security deposits, making and getting to appointments to apply for housing, and poor customer service at housing agencies were other barriers noted.

2. Age of Housing

One major issue affecting affordability is the age of the city's housing stock. Forty-one percent of units were built prior to 1940. Only 14 percent of the City's units

have been built since 1980.²² Director of Springfield WORKS Anne Kandilis believes that the condition of multi-family/two-family rental properties and the high cost of those properties is not good. Older buildings, while lovely and full of character, are expensive to repair and maintain, and may contain lead paint.

HUD estimates that 90 percent of residential structures built prior to 1940, 80 percent of structures built between 1941 and 1959, and 62 percent of structures built between 1960 and 1979 contain lead-based paint. That translates to over 40,000 units in Springfield, a possible over-estimate given the strong Massachusetts laws regarding lead paint, but significant risk remains. In 2016, 218 Springfield children aged nine months to four years were estimated to have confirmed elevated blood lead levels ≥ 5 mg/l, which has been identified by the Centers for Disease Control as the level of concern for lead exposure. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to negatively affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement.

3. Homeownership

Although still out of reach for the lowest-income households, homeownership in Springfield was until recently relatively affordable. Springfield's homeownership rate as of 2021 was 47 percent. In recent years, however, values have been rising rapidly. In July, 2023, 136 homes were listed for sale in the city, priced from \$39,900 to \$2,000,000. The median sold home price in June 2023 was \$279,500.²³ In 2015, the average price of a home in Springfield was \$144,560; in 2023 it was \$260,815—almost double.²⁴

Many people in Springfield would like to move from renting to owning. One focus group participant commented, "Bring back the IDA [Individual Development Account] program!" Enrollees of this program develop a budget and, each month, put aside money, which is then matched two for one by a participating bank, providing the enrollee with a down payment for the purchase of a home. First-time homebuyer's classes, another program that helps participants by qualifying them for lower financing rates while giving them valuable information, was a topic of discussion in two of the three focus groups.

4. Subsidized Housing

As of 2022, Springfield had 12,461 subsidized housing units available. Such units are of two types: **income-restricted** units, most of them managed by the Springfield Housing Authority, and units eligible for state or federal **vouchers** ("Section 8"), managed by Way Finders or the Springfield Housing Authority. Vouchers pay two-thirds of the cost of rent. In 2022 there were 6212 vouchers in Springfield. The average family expenditure per month for one of these units was \$360; the average monthly HUD contribution was \$845. Sixty percent also had a utility allowance, averaging \$125. In about one out of three households, all members had a disability. About eight out of ten households were headed by women, and about nine out of ten were minorities.²⁵

Despite these subsidies, many households have severe housing cost burdens. Almost a quarter of all Springfield households pay more than half of their income for housing. These households are in a precarious position, as reflected by statistics about housing emergencies. In 2018, there were 2,575 eviction filings in

Springfield, and 618 actual evictions. A state moratorium during the COVID-19 pandemic prevented evictions, but it was lifted on October 17, 2020. As of December 2022, there were 487 eviction notices issued in Hampden County, 60 percent of those in Springfield.²⁶

This long wait for subsidized housing was a subject of discussion in all three focus groups. One veteran said that the wait time for a housing voucher was 14 years. Understanding what programs are available, the eligibility requirements and how to apply for them were also concerns.

5. The Burden of Utility Bills

The cost of heating oil, natural gas and water and sewer fees has been rising rapidly all over the world, and our community is no exception. Springfield water and sewer rates jumped by 6.5 percent on July 1, 2022,²⁷ and are set to increase again by 6.5 percent in August 2023.²⁸ In 2016, the cost per 100 cubic feet (CCF) for water was \$2.78 and for sewer, \$4.56 (you have to pay not only for the water to come into your house, but also to leave). In August 2023 those rates will be \$4.75 and \$7.51—an increase of over 60 percent. The average cost in March 2016 for home heating oil in Massachusetts was \$2.13 per gallon; in March 2023 it was \$4.27: double the cost.²⁹ Natural gas prices have risen from \$1.73 per million BTUs in March 2016 to \$2.31 in March 2023—about a 30 percent increase.³⁰ Electric rates have nearly doubled over the same period—the fixed residential rate was \$.1947/kWh in June 2016 from Eversource (now Columbia); in June 2023, it was \$.3379/kWh.

Our focus group participants found utility bills intimidating and confusing. Fluctuating bills were hard to budget for, but they weren't sure of their payment options, or what programs might be available to help them. Hours of operation of the utility companies were not always convenient either. Councilor Walsh, when asked what the city could do, noted that the City Council could advocate for easement of housing and utilities burdens thru public statements, proclamations and resolves.

6. Conclusion

The Springfield housing market appears to be strengthening. Signs of change have included the redevelopment of Silver Brick Lofts, 122 Chestnut Street, Skyview Apartments, and the Willys-Overland Building. A stronger market gives developers reason to purchase and rehabilitate abandoned housing, improving neighborhood conditions. It makes foreclosure less likely, when values of homes rise above what is owed on them, letting owners sell rather than be subject to foreclosure. Improved values yield tax revenue for the City, enabling it to provide improved services to residents, including public safety and infrastructure.

However, when values go up, so do housing costs, at least in the private housing market. The cost of utilities has also skyrocketed. Springfield's median income is lower than that of Hampden County and Massachusetts, and 25 percent of the city population has income below the poverty level. Affordability of the housing stock to the City's population is relative to income, and may be addressed not only by lowering housing costs, but also by increasing the income of its citizens. Programs are also needed to address the burden of utilities.

NEEDS STATEMENTS #1:

Individuals and families need increased access to safe, stable and affordable housing. (family level need)

The community needs more safe, stable and affordable housing. (community level need)

B. Second Concern: Jobs

The next most pressing issue as identified by our survey respondents was employment: both “jobs” (chosen by 418) and “training or education to get a job or better job” (chosen by 393). Additionally, when respondents were asked what kept them from feeling more financially stable, six of their top nine reasons concerned work:

I work full time, but my pay doesn't cover my expenses.	140
I need more education or training to get work or better work.	107
I don't have reliable transportation.	93
I can only find part-time work.	89
I can't find a job.	68
Child care is too expensive and/or interferes with my ability to work.	67

According to 2019 Census Bureau statistics, the unemployment rate in Springfield in 2019 for people aged 16 and older was five percent, yet only 60 percent of that population was employed. A careful analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data reveals the logic behind this apparent paradox. Unemployment rates reflect only the segment of the population not currently working, but available for work and having actively looked for work within the last four weeks. They do not take into account people who are not in the labor force but who are considered to be *marginally attached to the labor force*, such as discouraged workers. The latter desire to be employed, but are not currently looking for work because:

- They believe no job is available to them in their line of work or area.
- They had previously been unable to find work.
- They lack the necessary schooling, training, skills, or experience.
- Employers think they are too young or too old, or
- They face some other type of discrimination.

Unemployment rates also do not take into account those who would like to work but cannot because they don't have access to affordable childcare, or access to adult daycare for family members who are elderly or disabled. Of course, others who are of working age are not in the labor force because they are in school, or incarcerated, or disabled, or for some other reason. The table below shows how widely unemployment rates and labor force participation rates vary depending on sex and economic status:

	In Labor Force Employed % of Population >16	In Labor Force Unemployed % of Population >16	Not in Labor Force % of Population
M Below Poverty Level	1.58	1.03	6.41
F Below Poverty Level	3.67	1.35	15.00
M at or > Poverty Level	22.20	2.81	12.61
F at or > Poverty Level	22.50	1.98	13.95

Source: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021

In 2021, 39.9 percent of males aged 16-64 and 42.7 percent of females in Springfield did not work. Of those considered to be of prime working age in Springfield, while less than 11 percent with a four-year degree and only 15 percent at or above the poverty level are not working or actively looking for work, the rate rises to almost 36 percent for those with less than a high school education, over 38 percent for those living below the poverty line and 43 percent for those with a disability. Contributing factors include lack of education, skills, social supports, language and literacy. In addition, available services, resources, and information are not being efficiently delivered to this population.

Qualitative data gathered from our focus groups bore out these observations. We asked participants first of all to think about their ideal job and what it would take to get there. “A career with growth opportunities, not just a job,” said one. “We must begin to think in advance of AI,” said another. “Remote work in the computer or electronics field” appealed to a third. Specific job titles ran the gamut from toy salesman to archaeologist to firefighter.

Some veterans felt that the military did not do enough for veterans leaving the service. They cited lack of hands-on vocational training, inadequate computer skills or even mental health issues as barriers to employment. Some felt that discrimination (i.e., sexism or ageism) was prevalent. Parents cited lack of confidence, not knowing how to navigate the system, the high cost of education and background checks as barriers. They would like to see affordable education, paid internships, professional development and on-the-job training. The mixed community group distinguished between jobs and careers. They felt that employment training should start with youth, guiding them towards career paths and resources.

Some tied the difficulty of earning a living wage to the lack of job supports such as transportation. Language barriers, the need for flexible hours and the need for more education, skills and training were also much discussed.

The "cliff effect" describes the sudden and disproportionate loss of eligibility for government benefits triggered by even a small increase in wage income. Housing vouchers, fuel assistance, a lower rate for utilities, and weatherization assistance are some of the housing-related benefits that may be lost. If the income of a household is high enough, government assistance is not necessary. However, many households in Springfield, as noted above, do not have a comfortable income. According to the MIT Living Wage calculator, for example, a single parent with two children would have to earn \$101,421 to be able to meet all their expenses. That yearly figure translates to \$48.76 per hour for a full-time worker. The poverty wage is \$23,026 per year, or \$11.07/per hour; 200 percent of that

wage is the ceiling for most benefits. So our single parent of two, if he or she earned between \$22.14 and \$48.76 per hour, would be "off the cliff."³¹

When asked if sufficient living-wage jobs existed in Springfield, Director of Springfield WORKS Anne Kandilis said no. "The fastest growing jobs are in the social services sector and those are not paying a living wage," she explained. However, she added that her organization "is collaborating with training and employer partners to increase access to good jobs. The EDC WMass Anchor Collaborative has specific activities and goals to increase access to good jobs."

Dawn DiStefano of Square One was optimistic. "Square One currently trains 60 youth age 16-24 for local employment each year and plans to continue. We also have employment as a teacher or school age group leaders for community members seeking employment," she said. Springfield City Councilor Kateri Walsh also stressed training for youth. "Jobs are always important for a thriving City and opportunity for employment for our youth is a priority. All city employees receive training and the City has just implemented an Internship program to increase job opportunities in City Departments."

In conclusion, employment in Springfield is a major issue, but cannot simply be attributed to a dearth of jobs. According to the WesternMass Economic Development Council, approximately 4,700 businesses are based within the city, employing more than 73,000 workers, making Springfield the economic hub of the region. MGM, MassMutual, CRRC, Smith & Wesson, Baystate Health, Mercy Hospital and Big Y Foods are among the many businesses needing qualified employees.³² The challenge is to ensure that potential workers are trained and

have the necessary job supports, like transportation and child care, to access those jobs.

NEEDS STATEMENTS #2:

Individuals and families need increased access to living-wage jobs.
(family level need)

The community needs more living-wage jobs. (community level
need)

C. Third Concern: Childcare & Afterschool/Summer Programs

The next most pressing issues revealed by our survey were afterschool/summer programs for kids and child care: 399 respondents selected the former, and 398 the latter. Additionally, when we asked what kept them from feeling more financially stable, 67 responded, "Child care is too expensive and/or interferes with my ability to work."

For adult members of a household with ability and desire to work outside the home, dependable child care is an invaluable work support. The recent lockdowns demonstrated the importance to families of having a safe place for their children while parents worked. When asked how the pandemic had impacted them, 84 of our survey respondents said that they had left the workforce to care for children or other family members. The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care notes in its *Strategic Action Plan 2020-2025*, "...amidst the crisis and widespread impacts of the pandemic, it has become even more apparent that

early education and care is a fundamental underpinning of stability for our families, our state, and our nation—especially as our nation faces an economic downturn.”³³

Placing infants and toddlers in early childhood programs offers more than just the short-term benefit of providing a safe environment for youngsters so that adults can work. According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), ECE interventions can improve children’s development and act as a protective factor against the future onset of adult disease and disability. “Children in low-income families often are exposed to more adverse early childhood experiences and environmental factors that delay or negatively affect their development and place them at a disadvantage for healthy growth and school readiness.”³⁴

Short- and long-term benefits of early childhood education include:

- Increase in maternal employment and income
- Reduction in crime, welfare dependency, and child abuse and neglect
- Reduced costs for health care, remedial education and child care
- Lifelong Improvement in health, better jobs and higher earnings for ECE children.

Springfield Public Schools began last year to offer free, universal full-day preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, becoming the first district in the Commonwealth to do so.³⁵ However, the traditional hours of 8:50 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. do not accommodate the schedules of most parents working full-time, and no pre- or after-school care is offered within the system for children of that age. Working

parents also have to find care for children during summer vacation and other school breaks. For children under three, there is no public-school option.

In 2021, approximately 2,500 Springfield children were enrolled in early childhood education (ECE). More parents would undoubtedly place their children in ECE, afterschool programs and summer programs if they could. No data exist to quantify exactly how many nonworking parents in our service area would be working if they had access to affordable, accessible child care suited to their needs.

Some of our focus group discussions concerned the complexity of the system. One participant summed it up: “Travel time is often not taken into account when setting childcare hours of operations. If pick-up is at 4:30 but a work shift ends at 5pm--this serves as a tremendous barrier.” Others thought the voucher system too inflexible and cumbersome, waitlists too long, especially for multiple children, capacity and choices too limited.

Parents want child care that is tailored to their needs and those of their children. For some children, language is a barrier. Parents would like to see bilingual or multi-lingual programs for them. They would like programming to include such options as swimming, dancing, and American Sign Language. They would like flexible hours to accommodate all work schedules—even third shift.

For our focus group participants, afterschool and summer programming for children and youth is also an important issue. One parent spoke highly about Camp Atwater—and how to increase access to this opportunity for more children

in Springfield. (Camp Atwater, founded by Springfield pastor Dr. DeBerry, is the first and oldest Black-owned and -operated summer campsite in the U.S.)

Training and education for parents is also desired. One parent suggested “homework training so that parents are able to assist their children to complete and understand the lessons being sent home.” Another wanted to see help with IEPs. “Parents don't always know how best to support their scholar once an IEP becomes in place,” she said. Still another wanted Food programs for school: “They must be reinstated and be consistent--providing hot meals and food to take home over the weekend to support families.” Other suggestions for families were budget management and mental health awareness.

In conclusion, child care programs in Springfield are plentiful; the state’s EEC website lists 278 licensed programs.³⁶ Challenges include affordability and the subsidy system, which is hard for parents to navigate. Another difficulty is finding a good match for the specific needs of each child and their family. Our own program operates year-round, opens at 6:30, earlier than many others, and we are centrally located on a main bus route, making us easy for families to access.

NEEDS STATEMENTS #3: Individuals and families need increased access to high-quality, safe and flexible early childhood education, afterschool care and summer programs for children and youth.
(family level need)

The community needs more high-quality, safe and flexible early childhood education, afterschool care and summer programs for children and youth. (community level need)

VIII. Key Findings: Internal Assessment

A. Methodology

Springfield Partners for Community Action, Inc.'s assessment of internal needs and areas for organizational improvement was conducted via anonymous surveys of staff members, members of the Board of Directors and customers. The surveys were available both electronically and in hard copy. The electronic versions were available through links sent to our staff, Board members and customers, which took respondents directly to the surveys. Hard copies were distributed to the staff and Board of Directors at meetings and to customers during home or agency visits and at various events.

B. Survey Results

Results relevant to community needs and to ideas for addressing those needs have been incorporated into the Community Needs Assessment. Results relevant to satisfaction of staff and Board members, internal operations, and Springfield Partners' role as a partner are included below.

1. Staff Survey

The staff survey included questions on job satisfaction and questions related to staff perceptions of the community needs. Responses were recorded in March of 2023. The survey was completed by 33 out of 55 employees, or 60 percent. The results were:

Questions receiving 70 – 100 % “Agree” Responses	Agree	Somewhat	Disagree
I HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF SPRINGFIELD PARTNERS’ MISSION.	85%	15%	0%
I FEEL INFORMED ABOUT SPFLD PARTNERS’ POLICIES & PROCEDURES.	76%	21%	3%
I UNDERSTAND WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME BY SPRINGFIELD PARTNERS.	76%	24%	0%
I UNDERSTAND WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME BY MY SUPERVISOR.	73%	24%	3%
I AM SATISFIED WITH MY ROLE AT SPRINGFIELD PARTNERS.	73%	24%	3%
SPFLD PARTNERS CLIENTS ARE TREATED IN A RESPECTFUL & CARING MANNER	70%	30%	0%
50-69% “Agree” Responses	Agree	Somewhat	Disagree
I FEEL INFORMED ABOUT SPRINGFIELD PARTNERS PROGRAMS & SERVICES.	67%	27%	6%
I RECEIVE THE TRAINING AND SUPERVISION NEEDED TO DO MY JOB WELL.	67%	21%	12%
I ENJOY SPRINGFIELD PARTNERS’ WORK CULTURE/ENVIRONMENT.	67%	24%	9%
I HAVE THE RESOURCES (REFERRAL SYSTEM, ETC.) TO ASSIST CUSTOMERS.	68%	28%	4%
SERVICES PROVIDED BY SPFLD PARTNERS MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR CLIENTS.	66%	28%	6%
THERE IS A SENSE OF RESPECT FOR ME AND THE WORK I DO.	58%	33%	9%
I AM SATISFIED WITH THE BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO SPFLD PARTNERS STAFF.	55%	39%	6%
MY PROGRAM HAS THE TOOLS IT NEEDS (COMPUTERS, TELEPHONES, ETC.).	55%	42%	3%
I FEEL I CAN BE OPEN AND HONEST AT WORK.	52%	33%	15%
Below 50% “Agree” Responses	Agree	Somewhat	Disagree
I FEEL PROUD TO WORK AT SPRINGFIELD PARTNERS.	48%	48%	3%
THE MORALE IN MY DEPARTMENT IS HIGH.	48%	45%	6%
I AM PROVIDED WITH TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES.	48%	52%	0%
I FEEL CONFIDENT IN SPRINGFIELD PARTNERS’ LEADERSHIP.	42%	45%	12%
THE MORALE AT SPFLD PARTNERS IS HIGH.	42%	48%	9%
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STAFF AND MANAGERS IS EFFECTIVE.	36%	52%	12%
THERE IS ADEQUATE STAFFING IN MY PROGRAM.	36%	48%	15%

Results show that, overall, staff members have a clear understanding of the agency’s mission and policies. They also understand their job duties and responsibilities and are satisfied with their jobs. The major negatives revolved around morale, communication between staff and managers and the need for adequate staffing in their programs.

A space was provided in the survey for suggestions. There were only three. One named better healthcare insurance. The other two involved salary: "Competitive pay. Wages are at an all-time high; the pay you provide needs to be raised;" "Pay daycare staff better. Why does upstairs make so much?"

2. Board of Directors Survey

The Board of Directors survey included 12 questions about respondents' experience and satisfaction as Board members. Responses were recorded from March to July of 2023. The survey was completed by 19 Board members, or 100 percent of those serving during that period. Overall, Board members indicated that they are proud to be on the Board, understand the mission of the agency and feel that it is meeting the needs of its customers. The major negatives revolve around Board members' own degree of knowledge of community action and of budget matters. They would like more training and more effective communication with agency staff. In the open-ended comments, one respondent asked for "more Communication between members," while another wished for "direct and timely communication to the Board at all times and every situation." A third wrote, "Board meetings need to be more organized. Sometimes it's difficult to follow along with the conversation."

2023 Board of Directors Assessment Survey

Question	Agree	Somewhat	Disagree
1. I have a clear understanding of Springfield Partners' mission:	89%	11%	0%
2. I feel informed about Springfield Partners' policies and procedures:	63%	37%	0%
3. I understand Springfield Partners' budget and funding strategy:	42%	58%	0%
4. I feel informed about the community action network and how federal, state and local issues impact the agency and its customers:	42%	58%	0%
5. I am satisfied with my role on the Springfield Partners Board of Directors:	63%	37%	0%
6. Springfield Partners' organizational structure functions effectively:	68%	26%	5%
7. I feel confident in Springfield Partners' leadership:	68%	32%	0%
8. Communication between members of the Board and staff is effective:	53%	26%	21%
9. I understand what is expected of me as a member of the Board:	68%	32%	0%
10. I feel proud to be a member of the Springfield Partners Board of Directors:	79%	16%	5%
11. Services provided by Springfield Partners meet the needs of our customers:	84%	16%	0%
12. The orientation and training that I received prepared me to be an effective member of the Board:	53%	37%	11%

3. Customer Satisfaction Survey

The customer satisfaction survey was completed by 921 people from June 1, 2020 until June 23, 2023. It included questions about respondents' satisfaction with our programs, the attitude and knowledgeability of our staff, the ease of application, the degree of stability they had attained as a result of our services, and whether they would recommend Springfield Partners to others.

Almost everyone surveyed reported a positive experience in dealing with Springfield Partners. Ninety-seven percent found the staff courteous, friendly and respectful—and all but one of the remaining three percent were neutral. Ninety-six percent said the application process was easy and convenient, and the staff was able to answer all their questions. Only two individuals out of 921 would not recommend Springfield Partners to others. Only one percent reported that the staff had not talked to them about other programs and services available to them, compared to two percent three years ago, and 18 percent three years before that. These results suggest that our staff training efforts have been successful. One hundred percent compliance is probably unrealistic for this question. In some instances, the lack of discussion of other programs might be appropriate or unavoidable. For example, a language barrier or a customer's time constraint might make such discussion impossible.

The question with the lowest positive response rate (85 percent) was "The program helped improve my financial well-being." Fourteen percent were neutral, while one percent (seven respondents) disagreed. It would seem that many customers, despite their satisfaction with the services they have received, do not make the connection between those services and the more abstract and long-range goal of financial stability.

We also asked respondents how they had heard about Springfield Partners. Over 40 percent learned about us through word of mouth. "Referral from another agency" was selected by 231, while 205 said they were returning customers. Only

69 selected "Internet," 41 picked "TV, radio or newspaper," and only 19 selected "Event."

As part of the survey, respondents were invited to suggest how Springfield Partners could better serve them. Some suggested new services; e.g., "I would like it if you offered dryers for gas appliances," or "I had a very good experience with Springfield Partners. I would like for Springfield Partners to provide more Housing Assistance."

Some had difficulty communicating with us, stating, for example, "The staff are great. Getting in touch with this group to start with was difficult." Some wanted a less automated system: "Computers make it harder for people to reply and care for services," while others wanted more: "Online application availability as opposed to attempting to reach by phone to get process started."

Several said we should advertise more: "I just feel more effort is needed whenever a program is available to the public to be either in the media or radio truly many others I spoke with I had no idea you can get help," or "Advertisement would have been great. I don't have cable so I didn't know about this service. Putting more information out in several ways would be beneficial to the residents of Massachusetts."

The great majority of respondents said that Springfield Partners was doing a great job and should just keep on doing the same or more of the same. As one stated, "Partner is a positive caring organization in our community cannot imagine with our lives with be without them Thank. Spfld partners." Another wrote, "I have been homeless for a while and Springfield Partners has helped me out a few times

over the years with food and clothing." And a third, "I was referred to Springfield Partners from the VA and I am very appreciative of the services I received. I received financial assistance for my utilities, a food card and store support card. This has helped me financially and improved my mental health and well-being."

In summary, the results of this survey show that Springfield Partners is doing an excellent job of serving the community. Our biggest need is simply to let more people know about our programs and services, stressing their role in contributing to financial stability. Continuing the survey will also undoubtedly yield new insights.

IX. Strategic Three-Year Goals

A. Goal One: Housing

The most pressing issue for low-income residents of the Greater Springfield area in the next three years, as identified by our customers, staff, Board members, community partners and others, is affordable housing. In the cost of housing we include not only rent or mortgage payments, but also utilities, which make a housing unit safe and comfortable for occupants.

Housing in disrepair financially drains occupants through structural inefficiencies such as lack of insulation, inadequate windows, and other factors that increase the cost of heat and utilities. Homelessness and housing insecurity affect the well-being of entire families, impacting health as well as the ability of family members to work and go to school. Homelessness and housing insecurity also create the conditions for crime, thereby affecting the entire community.

To address the housing challenges, survey takers and focus group participants suggested addressing a variety of service gaps. Assistance with rent, utilities and down payments; eviction advocacy; financial management and home improvement were the primary services desired. All of these are currently being provided by our agency.

In the coming three years, at the Individual/Family level, we will continue to provide housing counseling services and tenant-landlord conflict resolution services, weatherize and upgrade housing units of low-income families, conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants' rights and responsibilities and educate low income individuals to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling. We will help households with rent, mortgage and utility payments. This goal will empower families with low incomes to become more self-sufficient, as well as help to revitalize the communities in which these homes are located. This goal aligns with our agency's mission to help create a better way of life for low-income people.

Springfield Partners is already well established providing supports in this area. Our HUD-certified Housing Counseling program teaches tenants their rights and assists those throughout Hampden County interested in purchasing a home through homebuyer workshops and one-on-one counseling. Our RAFT program helps tenants and homeowners avoid eviction/foreclosure. Our Weatherization Assistance Program provides home insulation and energy assistance to low-income, elderly and families with young children throughout Western Massachusetts, thereby reducing average annual energy costs by several hundred dollars per household.

1. Funding, Linkages and Service Delivery

We will continue using CSBG and grant funds for education, case management, counseling, financial literacy, landlord outreach, credit repair, and assistance with poor rental history in our current programming. We will use CSBG and DVA funds to provide rent and utility assistance. and also look for grant opportunities through the private sector, particularly banks.

Springfield Partners will coordinate with other public and private agencies, such as the Valley Opportunity Council, the Springfield Housing Authority, Springfield Works, Way Finders, the Springfield Redevelopment Authority and area banks, to provide support services. Support services to low-income buyers will be delivered in the form of in-house or online workshops, classes, and one-on-one counseling and case management. We will help underhoused customers apply for RAFT funds, and then refer them to our HUD Certified Housing Counselor for household budget creation, housing search or other referrals as needed.

Need #1: Housing

Strategic Three-Year Goal Statement

At the Individual/Family level, we will continue to provide housing counseling services and tenant-landlord conflict resolution services, weatherize and upgrade housing units of low-income families, conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants’ rights and responsibilities and educate low income individuals to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling. We will help households with rent, mortgage and utility payments.

Indicate whether the goal addresses (check all that apply): *Org. Standard 6.2*
 Reduction of Poverty Revitalization of low-income communities Empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self sufficient

Indicate whether it is a (check all that apply): Family Goal Community Goal Agency Goal *Org. Standard 6.3*

Indicate which CSBG Service Category applies (check one): *Org. Standard 4.2*
 Employment Education Income Management Housing Emergency Services Nutrition Linkages Self-Sufficiency Health Other:

Specific Objectives

insert additional rows if needed

Fiscal Year 2024

Help 90 people maintain safe and affordable housing for 90 days and 75 people avoid eviction. Weatherize 1000 existing housing units of low-income families. Upgrade 75 homes to Air Source Heat Pumps and Install windows in 40 Homes. Conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants’ rights and responsibilities for 100 people. Educate 100 people to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling. Complete 500 RAFT applications to assist clients who are behind on rent, mortgage, utility payments. Work with clients to create housing budgets, and complete apartment searches. Help 25 veterans with rent, mortgage or utility payments.

Fiscal Year 2025

Help 90 people maintain safe and affordable housing for 90 days and 75 people avoid eviction. Weatherize 1000 existing housing units of low-income families. Upgrade 75 homes to Air Source Heat Pumps and Install windows in 40 Homes. Conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants’ rights and responsibilities for 100 people. Educate 100 people to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling. Complete 500 RAFT applications to assist clients who are behind on rent, mortgage, utility payments. Work with clients to create housing budgets, and complete apartment searches. Help 30 veterans with rent, mortgage or utility payments.

Fiscal Year 2026

Help 90 people maintain safe and affordable housing for 90 days and 75 people avoid eviction. Weatherize 1000 existing housing units of low-income families. Upgrade 75 homes to Air Source Heat Pumps and Install windows in 40 Homes. Conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants’ rights and responsibilities for 100 people. Educate 100 people to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling. Complete 500 RAFT applications to assist clients who are behind on rent, mortgage, utility payments. Work with clients to create housing budgets, and complete apartment searches. Help 40 veterans with rent, mortgage or utility payments.

B. Goal Two: Employment

The second most pressing issue for low-income residents of Springfield in the next three years, as identified by our clients, staff, Board members, community partners and others, is employment opportunities/job skills. Secure living-wage employment is perhaps the single most important determinant of economic stability. If a household has an adequate annual income, its members can have more choices regarding housing, education, access to services, and all of the other components which contribute to a good quality of life.

Based on our assessment, we identified several areas in which additional support is needed for low-income persons in our community to obtain and maintain self-sustaining employment: 1) skills and education they need to be qualified employees, 2) education about the “cliff effect” so that people looking for jobs or better jobs can make informed decisions, and 3) the necessary job supports, like transportation and child care, to access good jobs.

We already have much of this employment-support programming in place. **In the coming three years, at the Agency level, we will work with local colleges to bring on interns. At the Individual/Family level, we will provide job skills training through our volunteer and senior aide programs. We will educate job-seekers about the “cliff effect,” hold job fairs and refer unemployed or underemployed customers to our partner employment agency. We will continue our work as a Core Partner with Springfield Works towards their mission of working with employers and job seekers so that anyone in Springfield who wants a job, can get one.**

This objective, by increasing the pool of qualified job applicants, will not only help lift individuals from poverty and make them more self-sufficient, but will benefit the entire community. This goal aligns with our agency’s mission to help create a better way of life for low-income people.

Springfield Partners has consistently used volunteers and senior aides, particularly in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. We currently have one volunteer grandparent in the Early Learning Center through the Urban League Foster Grandparent

program; we will work to increase that number to up to six. An internship program will have to be created as we have no had an intern for several years.

Our Veterans program does case management for as many as 500 veterans each year and routinely provides such job support services as resume creation, work-appropriate clothing, transportation to interviews and referrals. We will also make referrals to MassHire from our early education and care program, which has begun conducting “environmental screenings” of all its families to learn what services besides child care they might need. Although our transportation program does not have the capacity to offer rides to and from jobs, our early education and care program does offer child care to working adults (see our third goal).

1. Funding, Linkages and Service Delivery

We will continue using CSBG, DVA and other grant funds for training and managing volunteers, senior aides and interns, conducting “cliff effect” workshops and tracking referrals. Springfield Partners will coordinate with other public and private agencies, such as the Department of Transitional Assistance, the Department of Elder Affairs, the Springfield Rescue Mission and the Worthington Street Shelter, to identify low-income individuals who need these supportive services. The services will be delivered in the form of in-house or online workshops, classes, one-on-one counseling and case management. We will refer unemployed and underemployed customers to MassHire.

Need #2: Employment/Job Skills

Strategic Three-Year Goal Statement

At the Individual/Family level, we will provide job skills training through our volunteer, intern and senior aide programs; educate job-seekers about the “cliff effect,” hold job fairs and refer unemployed or underemployed customers to our partner employment agency. We will continue our work as a Core Partner with Springfield Works towards their mission of working with employers and job seekers so that anyone in Springfield who wants a job, can get one.

Indicate whether the goal addresses (check all that apply): *Org. Standard 6.2*
 Reduction of Poverty Revitalization of low-income communities Empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self sufficient

Indicate whether it is a (check all that apply): Family Goal Community Goal Agency Goal *Org. Standard 6.3*

Indicate which CSBG Service Category applies (check one): *Org. Standard 4.2*
 Employment Education Income Management Housing Emergency Services Nutrition Linkages Self-Sufficiency Health Other:

Specific Objectives

insert additional rows if needed

Fiscal Year 2024

Increase agency capacity by working as a host agency for the senior aide program through the Department of Elder Affairs, and for the Foster Grandparent Program through the Urban League. Provide job skills training to one senior aide and up to six Foster Grandparents. Continue to work with area colleges to recruit and train interns in our ELC and tax programs. Train 15 volunteers/interns to complete tax returns at our VITA site. Hold 6 workshops of 10-12 participants each to educate them about the “cliff effect.” Veterans Department will hold 3 job fairs per year and refer 3 unemployed or underemployed veterans to our partner agency, MassHire, for services.

Fiscal Year 2025

Increase agency capacity by working as a host agency for the senior aide program through the Department of Elder Affairs, and for the Foster Grandparent Program through the Urban League. Provide job skills training to one senior aide and up to six Foster Grandparents. Continue internship program. Train 15 volunteers/interns to complete tax returns at our VITA site. Hold 6 workshops of 10-12 participants each to educate them about the “cliff effect.” Veterans Department will hold 3 job fairs per year and refer 3 unemployed or underemployed veterans to our partner agency, MassHire, for services.

Fiscal Year 2026

Increase agency capacity by working as a host agency for the senior aide program through the Department of Elder Affairs, and for the Foster Grandparent Program through the Urban League. Provide job skills training to one senior aide and up to six Foster Grandparents. Continue internship program. Train 15 volunteers/interns to complete tax returns at our VITA site. Hold 6 workshops of 10-12 participants each to educate them about the “cliff effect.” Veterans Department will hold 3 job fairs per year and refer 3 unemployed or underemployed veterans to our partner agency, MassHire, for services.

C. Goal Three: Child Care

The third most pressing issue for low-income residents of Springfield in the next three years, as identified by our clients, staff, Board members, community partners and others, is affordable child care and afterschool/summer programs for kids. Reliable child care allows adults in the household to work without compromising the safety or the developmental needs of their children. It is perhaps the single most important job support for families.

Based on our assessment, we identified several areas in which additional support is needed for low-income persons in our community to obtain and maintain self-sustaining employment: 1) child care for infants and preschoolers, 2) afterschool care for school-aged children and 3) summer programs for both school-aged and preschool children. Our stakeholders stressed the importance of flexibility and choice in selecting a program.

We already have a high-quality early education and care program in place for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. This program runs throughout the year. **In the coming three years, at the Individual/Family level, we will continue to provide safe and affordable child care to infants, toddlers and preschoolers.** This objective, by allowing adults in the household to work, will not only help lift individuals from poverty and make them more self-sufficient, but will benefit the entire community. This goal aligns with our agency's mission to help create a better way of life for low-income people.

Springfield Partners has been running a warm, responsive, caring, safe, and culturally diverse early education and care program for decades. We are fully licensed and NAEYC-accredited. Our long hours accommodate a variety of family schedules, while our central location, accessible by public transportation, provides added convenience for families. Through our partnership with the Springfield Public Schools on the Commonwealth

Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI), we can accommodate children with special needs right in the classroom (rather than bussing them to the public schools for services).

Change may be on the way—or not. While the public school system in Springfield has recently begun offering free preschool classes to children aged three to five, its school day is shorter than what we offer and does not accommodate the schedules of many working parents. Time will tell how much competition it offers to early learning programs like ours. A shortage of qualified teachers, meanwhile, not merely in our area of service but nationwide, may also impact our program. We will need to continually “assess the landscape” to determine whether we can maintain effective programming.

1. Funding, Linkages and Service Delivery

We will continue using CSBG and Department of Early Education and Care funding for running our programs. Springfield Partners will coordinate with other public and private agencies, such as the Springfield Public Schools, Raising a Reader, Behavioral Health Network, Commonwealth Mobile Oral Health Services, the Urban League of Springfield and the Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation, to enhance our programming. The services will be delivered in the form of age-appropriate classroom activities; parent engagement activities such as workshops, field trips, open houses and lunches; and family case management.

Need #3: Child Care	
Strategic Three-Year Goal Statement	
In the coming three years, at the Individual/Family level, we will continue to provide safe and affordable child care to infants and preschoolers.	
Indicate whether the goal addresses (check all that apply):	<i>Org. Standard 6.2</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reduction of Poverty <input type="checkbox"/> Revitalization of low-income communities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self sufficient	
Indicate whether it is a (check all that apply):	<i>Org. Standard 6.3</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Family Goal <input type="checkbox"/> Community Goal <input type="checkbox"/> Agency Goal	
Indicate which CSBG Service Category applies (check one):	<i>Org. Standard 4.2</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Employment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Income Management <input type="checkbox"/> Housing <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Services <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition <input type="checkbox"/> Linkages <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Sufficiency <input type="checkbox"/> Health <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
Specific Objectives	
<small>insert additional rows if needed</small>	
<i>Fiscal Year 2024</i>	
Provide safe, affordable child care to 7 infants, 18 toddlers and 40 preschoolers.	
<i>Fiscal Year 2025</i>	
Provide safe, affordable child care to 7 infants, 18 toddlers and 40 preschoolers.	
<i>Fiscal Year 2026</i>	
Provide safe, affordable child care to 7 infants, 18 toddlers and 40 preschoolers.	

D. Internal Improvements

Staff: Over the next three years, as a result of survey responses given by staff, we are developing an enhanced training process for staff and management, focusing on agency-wide systems, such as ROMA, Engage, Microsoft Teams and Bookly. In 2024, 100% of staff will participate in at least one training workshop, conducted by such partner agencies as MASSCAP and CAPLAW. Supervisors will meet with their staff on a regular basis. In 2025 and again in 2026, we will conduct a review of the efficacy of our 2024 objectives and continue or refine them, as the assessment dictates.

Board: As a result of survey responses given by the Board, we are developing an enhanced orientation process. More board education is essential, covering the duties, responsibilities and expectations of Board members, as well as an overview of the agency. Board committees need to meet with more frequency and regularity. Districts need to be re-drawn, and district

directors to do more outreach to their neighborhoods. Board members should be more involved in direct service to the community and in strategic planning for the agency. We will conduct a review of the efficacy of our 2024 objectives and continue or refine them, as the assessment dictates.

Agency Visibility: Our biggest need, according to survey responses by both staff and members of the community, is simply to let more people know about our programs and services. We will therefore concentrate in 2024 on increasing our presence on social media, establishing linkages with other agencies and doing outreach and marketing of our agency to the community. We need to survey the community more frequently and assess what services we offer vs. what we would like to offer. We will look for ways to utilize our building space more, to upgrade and improve it, or even to increase it. We will conduct a review of the efficacy of our 2024 objectives and continue or refine them, as the assessment dictates.

Need #4: Internal Improvements	
Strategic Three-Year Goal Statement	
Over the next three years, at the Agency level, we will improve staff and management through training sessions and meetings, help our Board better understand the workings of the agency and their responsibilities to it through a series of ROMA and other trainings, re-draw low-income districts, make board committees more effective, and communicate our offerings to the public through social media, linkages with other agencies, outreach and multilingual materials and services.	
Indicate whether the goal addresses (check all that apply): 6.2	<i>Org. Standard</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Reduction of Poverty <input type="checkbox"/> Revitalization of low-income communities <input type="checkbox"/> Empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self sufficient	
Indicate whether it is a (check all that apply): 6.3	<i>Org. Standard</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Goal <input type="checkbox"/> Community Goal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agency Goal	
Indicate which CSBG Service Category applies (check one): 4.2	<i>Org. Standard</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Employment <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Income Management <input type="checkbox"/> Housing <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Services <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition <input type="checkbox"/> Linkages <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Sufficiency <input type="checkbox"/> Health <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other:	
Specific Objectives	
<small>insert additional rows if needed</small>	
<u>Fiscal Year 2024</u>	
100% of staff will participate in at least one training workshop per year, such as ROMA or Engage, conducted by such partner agencies as MASSCAP and CAPLAW. Supervisors will meet with their staff on a regular basis. The Board will undergo training covering the duties, responsibilities and expectations of Board members, ROMA, and an overview of the agency. Board committees will meet with more frequency and regularity. Districts will be re-drawn, and district directors do more outreach to their neighborhoods. Board members should be more involved in direct service to the community and in strategic planning for the agency. The agency will concentrate on increasing its presence on social media and do outreach in the community two times per month.	
<u>Fiscal Year 2025</u>	
We will conduct a review of the efficacy of our 2024 objectives and continue or refine them, as the assessment dictates.	
<u>Fiscal Year 2026</u>	
We will conduct a review of the efficacy of our 2024 objectives and continue or refine them, as the assessment dictates.	

X. Specific Objectives

A. Housing Objective

In the coming three years, at the Individual/Family level, we will continue to provide housing counseling services and tenant-landlord conflict resolution services, weatherize and upgrade housing units of low-income families, conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants' rights and responsibilities and educate low income individuals to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling. We will help households with rent, mortgage and utility payments.

Fiscal Year 2024:

- Help 90 people maintain safe & affordable housing for 90 days & 75 people avoid eviction.
- Weatherize 1000 existing housing units of low-income families.
- Upgrade 75 homes to Air Source Heat Pumps and install windows in 40 homes.
- Conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants' rights & responsibilities for 100 people.
- Educate 100 people to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling.
- Complete 500 RAFT applications to assist clients who are behind on rent, mortgage or utility payments. Work with clients to create housing budgets & complete apartment searches.
- Help 25 veterans with rent, mortgage or utility payments.

Fiscal Year 2025

- Help 90 people maintain safe & affordable housing for 90 days & 75 people avoid eviction.
- Weatherize 1000 existing housing units of low-income families.
- Upgrade 75 homes to Air Source Heat Pumps and install windows in 40 homes.
- Conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants' rights and responsibilities for 100 people.
- Educate 100 people to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling.

- Complete 500 RAFT applications to assist clients who are behind on rent, mortgage or utility payments. Work with clients to create housing budgets & complete apartment searches.
- Help 30 veterans w/rent, mortgage or utility payments.

Fiscal Year 2026

- Help 90 people maintain safe & affordable housing for 90 days & 75 people avoid eviction.
- Weatherize 1000 existing housing units of low-income families.
- Upgrade 75 homes to Air Source Heat Pumps and install windows in 40 homes.
- Conduct Homebuyer Education Workshops on tenants' rights and responsibilities for 100 people.
- Educate 100 people to develop the necessary skills to maintain their homes, such as by budgeting or credit counseling.
- Complete 500 RAFT applications to assist clients who are behind on rent, mortgage or utility payments. Work with clients to create housing budgets & complete apartment searches.
- Help 40 veterans with rent, mortgage or utility payments.

B. Employment Objective

In the coming three years, at the Individual/Family level, we will provide job skills training through our volunteer, intern and senior aide programs; educate job-seekers about the “cliff effect” and refer unemployed or underemployed customers to our partner employment agency. We will continue our work as a Core Partner with Springfield Works towards their mission of working with employers and job seekers so that anyone in Springfield who wants a job, can get one.

Fiscal Year 2024:

- Increase agency capacity by working as a host agency for the senior aide program through the Department of Elder Affairs, and for the Foster Grandparent Program through the Urban League.
- Provide job skills training to one senior aide and up to six Foster Grandparents.
- Train 15 volunteers/interns to complete tax returns at our VITA site.
- Hold 6 workshops of 10-12 participants each to educate them about the “cliff effect.”
- Refer 3 unemployed or underemployed veterans to our partner agency, MassHire.

Fiscal Year 2025:

- Increase agency capacity by working as a host agency for the senior aide program through the Department of Elder Affairs, and for the Foster Grandparent Program through the Urban League.
- Provide job skills training to one senior aide and up to six Foster Grandparents.
- Train 15 volunteers/interns to complete tax returns at our VITA site.
- Hold 6 workshops of 10-12 participants each to educate them about the “cliff effect.”
- Refer 5 unemployed or underemployed veterans to our partner agency, MassHire.

Fiscal Year 2026:

- Increase agency capacity by working as a host agency for the senior aide program through the Department of Elder Affairs, and for the Foster Grandparent Program through the Urban League.
- Provide job skills training to one senior aide and up to six Foster Grandparents.
- Train 15 volunteers/interns to complete tax returns at our VITA site.
- Hold 6 workshops of 10-12 participants each to educate them about the “cliff effect.”
- Refer 8 unemployed or underemployed veterans to our partner agency, MassHire.

C. Child Care Objective

In the coming three years, at the Individual/Family level, we will continue to provide safe and affordable child care to infants and preschoolers.

Fiscal Year 2024:

- Provide safe, affordable child care to 7 infants, 18 toddlers and 40 preschoolers.

Fiscal Year 2025:

- Provide safe, affordable child care to 7 infants, 18 toddlers and 40 preschoolers.

Fiscal Year 2026:

- Provide safe, affordable child care to 7 infants, 18 toddlers and 40 preschoolers.

D. Internal Improvements

Over the next three years, at the Agency level, we will improve staff and management through training sessions and meetings, help our Board better understand the workings of the agency and their responsibilities to it through a series of ROMA and other trainings, re-draw low-income districts, make board committees more effective, and communicate our offerings to the public through social media, linkages with other agencies, outreach and multilingual materials and services.

Fiscal Year 2024:

- 100% of staff will participate in at least one training workshop per year, such as ROMA or Engage, conducted by such partner agencies as MASSCAP and CAPLAW.
- Supervisors will meet with their staff on a regular basis.
- The Board will undergo training covering the duties, responsibilities and expectations of Board members, as well as an overview of the agency.
- Board committees need to meet with more frequency and regularity.
- Districts need to be re-drawn, and district directors to do more outreach to their neighborhoods.
- Board members will be more involved in direct service to the community and in strategic planning for the agency.
- The agency will concentrate on increasing its presence on social media and do outreach in the community two times per month.
- The agency will survey the community frequently & assess what we offer vs. what we would like to offer
- We will look for ways to utilize our building space more, to upgrade and improve it, or even to increase it.

Fiscal Year 2025:

- We will conduct a review of the efficacy of our 2024 objectives and continue or refine them, as the assessment dictates.

Fiscal Year 2026:

- We will conduct a review of the efficacy of our 2024 objectives and continue or refine them, as the assessment dictates.

XI. Plan Monitoring and Reporting

Springfield Partners requires program directors to report service counts as well as outcomes regarding progress toward achieving the National Performance Indicator (NPI) goals on a monthly basis to ensure that their programs and services are achieving their objectives. These service counts and NPIs are input into our Community Action Plan (CAP).

Currently, the mid-year and end-of-year CAP Reports are presented to Springfield Partners' Board showing progress toward the objectives set in their programs. The Board reviews these reports and provides feedback to the programs on areas of improvement.

The staff will conduct evaluations of the strategic three-year goals at least every three months for Springfield Partners' Board to review. If, after the first six months, the evaluation indicates that a goal is not meeting its performance objectives, the Executive Director and the Springfield Partners' Board will determine the appropriate action to take.

*now EOHLC

XII. Resources

¹ US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021. All statistics, unless otherwise noted, are taken from this source.

² **Massachusetts Healthy Aging Data Report funded by Tufts Health Plan Foundation:** <https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/data-report/explore-the-profiles/>

³(https://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/city/massachusetts/springfield)

⁴https://www.publichealthwm.org/application/files/7416/8373/9353/Springfield_Municipal_Report_January_2023.pdf

⁵<https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=02810000&orgtypecode=5>

⁶https://www.bls.gov/regions/new-england/ma_springfield_mn.htm

⁷<https://lehd.ces.census.gov/>

⁸<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/table-8/table-8-state-cuts/massachusetts.xls>

⁹https://www.springfield-ma.gov/cos/news-story?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=15193&cHash=4af9e0740564174524e17fef087cd278

¹⁰https://www.springfield-ma.gov/cos/fileadmin/mayor/2023/Press_Release_-_Mayor_Sarno_Announces_2024-2028_Capital_Improvement_Plan.pdf, p. iv.

¹¹Ibid., p. i.

¹²<https://springfieldmuseums.org/about/our-history/>

¹³[https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/fileadmin/Planning_files/Northeast Downtown Master Plan 2021.pdf](https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/fileadmin/Planning_files/Northeast_Downtown_Master_Plan_2021.pdf)

¹⁴<https://broadbandnow.com/Massachusetts>

¹⁵<https://www.mass.gov/doc/105-cmr-410-minimum-standards-of-fitness-for-human-habitation-state-sanitary-code-chapter-ii/download>

¹⁶[https://www.springfield-ma.gov/housing/fileadmin/housing/Housing Study/Housing Study June 2018.pdf](https://www.springfield-ma.gov/housing/fileadmin/housing/Housing_Study/Housing_Study_June_2018.pdf)

¹⁷ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/SpringfieldMA-comp.pdf>

¹⁸[https://www.springfield-ma.gov/housing/fileadmin/housing/Housing Study/Housing Study June 2018.pdf](https://www.springfield-ma.gov/housing/fileadmin/housing/Housing_Study/Housing_Study_June_2018.pdf)

¹⁹[https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/fileadmin/Planning_files/Northeast Downtown Master Plan 2021.pdf](https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/fileadmin/Planning_files/Northeast_Downtown_Master_Plan_2021.pdf), p. 6.

²⁰https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/fileadmin/user_upload/Downtown_Springfield_Market_Rate_Housing_Study_2019_ZVA.pdf

²¹Ibid., p. 20.

- ²²https://www.springfield-ma.gov/housing/fileadmin/housing/Housing_Study/Housing_Study_June_2018.pdf
- ²³https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Springfield_MA/overview
- ²⁴<https://www.zillow.com/home-values/7221/springfield-ma/>
- ²⁵<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/assthsg.html>
- ²⁶<https://www.wvlp.com/news/i-team/i-team-evictions-piling-up-now-that-state-moratorium-has-ended/>
- ²⁷<https://www.masslive.com/news/2022/06/springfield-water-and-sewer-rates-to-jump-by-65-on-july-1.html>
- ²⁸<https://www.masslive.com/news/2023/04/springfield-water-and-sewer-commission-says-average-residence-could-see-750-a-month-increase.html>
- ²⁹https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=PET&s=W_EPD2F_PRS_SMA_DPG&f=W
- ³⁰<https://www.eia.gov/dnav/ng/hist/rngwhhdm.htm>
- ³¹<https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/44140>
- ³²<https://www.westernmassedc.com/choose-western-mass/springfield/industry/>
- ³³<https://www.mass.gov/doc/eec-strategic-action-plan/download>, p. 3
- ³⁴<https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hi5/earlychildhoodeducation/index.html>
- ³⁵https://www.springfieldpublicschools.com/departments/student_assignment_services/k-12_enrollment_and_school_assignment/pre-school_enrollment
- ³⁶<https://childcare.mass.gov/findchildcare>