

Rue: Survey results not surprising

Only 23% of survey respondents satisfied with city as a place to live; street conditions a top concern.



A makeshift shelter constructed by a homeless person in the doorway of a vacant business along West Main Street in Springfield on Nov. 27. BILL LACKEY/STAFF

By Jessica Orozco and Jeremy P. Kelley Staff Writers

Springfield Mayor Rob Rue said Thursday that the negative results of the city's recent resident survey are not surprising. He said if they were a surprise, that would mean the city had not been listening to resident concerns all year.

Springfield city government officials released the results of their fall 2024 community survey late last Friday. The most striking number was that only 23% of respondents said they were satisfied with the city as a place to live.

These surveys often ask overlapping questions that can lead to confusing answer data. While only 23% were satisfied with the city “as a place to live,” 41% said they were satisfied with the quality of life in their neighborhood.

But there was no doubt about the overall tone. One slide showed residents’ answers about their satisfaction 10 different ways — quality of life in your neighborhood, quality of services provided by the city, city as a place to live, quality of life in the city, quality of new development in the city, feeling of safety in the city, city as a place to do business, as a place to raise a family, as a place to retire, and value received for city taxes and fees.

In nine of those 10 categories, the percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied was at least double the percentage that was satisfied.

Rue said this is the third survey completed in the last 10 years, with previous ones being done in 2020 and 2016.

He said the city is glad to have feedback and knows that there is a lot of work to be done.

“The fact is that the city government cares about how the city is run and the input,” Rue said. “We are interested in the input and we do take this seriously, and the city manager’s office is going to take it seriously and focus on these issues.”

For comparison, in the 2016 survey, about 41% said the quality of life in Springfield was good or very good, 31% said it was OK, and 27% said it was poor or very poor.

In that 2016 survey, about 47% said the city was headed in the wrong direction, while 36% said right direction.

The 2024 survey did not ask about the city’s ongoing adjustment to the arrival of thousands of Haitian immigrants.

A search of the large document sent out by the city, for words like Haiti, Haitian, immigrant or immigration, showed those words appeared on only one of the 77 pages, in a spot allowing residents to write “other” answers to the question: “Which two of the focus areas listed below do you believe should receive the most emphasis from city leaders?”

According to the 2024 survey, the positive points of residents’ responses were:

- 72% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of fire services
- 57% were happy with Springfield parks and recreation facilities
- 55% were satisfied with emergency medical services.

However, there were some overwhelming areas of dissatisfaction.

- 10% were satisfied with the condition of streets, pavement, and sidewalks
- 18% were happy with “enforcement of city codes and ordinances”
- 19% liked the effectiveness of city communication with the public

The survey, administered by ETC Institute, was conducted “this fall,” but city officials did not say exactly when. That timing could be important. While some residents’ frustration with issues tied to Haitian immigration has been longstanding, those issues boiled over in September, with political campaign attention, bomb threats, school closures and more.

Rue said the results cannot be solely attributed to September’s events. He said there is room for growth in many areas, though he said some study on what satisfaction rates are attainable would be helpful.

The survey was sent out to a random sample of households, 434 of whom submitted complete responses, according to the city.

“We deeply appreciate the feedback we’ve received from our residents,” City Manager Bryan Heck said.

“The results reflect the areas where we are excelling, but they also clearly point to areas where we need to improve. As we move forward, we are fully committed to addressing these concerns, particularly around street conditions, communication and public safety, in order to provide high-quality services to every resident of Springfield.”

The city said it will use survey results to “improve existing programs, guide investment priorities and better serve the needs of Springfield residents.”

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