

“Have Faith” Initiative”

The Faith Community’s Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Notes from 7/9/20 meeting (via Zoom)

Greg Burris opened the meeting and thanked all for participating on behalf of Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Community Partnership of the Ozarks, United Way of the Ozarks, the City of Springfield and Greene County. There were 45 participants on the Zoom call. Greg welcomed all newcomers to the call.

Co-chair of the Have Faith Initiative, Rev. Bob Roberts, welcomed the group and shared a reflection on kindness and then provided the opening prayer.

Greg then welcomed Major Jon Augenstein with the Salvation Army. Major Augenstein thanked the community for the kind reception, and he is looking forward to getting involved in the community.

Rev. Mark Struckhoff reviewed a few items from last week’s meeting with Chief Paul Williams and encouraged the group to review the notes that are available on the Have Faith Initiative website- www.uwozarks.org/have-faith. He thanked everyone for participating in the survey, and the results will be discussed later in the meeting.

Mayor McClure was introduced and then turned the floor over to Jon Mooney, Assistant Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department. Jon began his remarks by stating that the disease is in a very active phase. There are 426 confirmed cases, 186 are currently active. Sadly, last week was the first death since May, for a total of nine deaths to date. There are more than 500 people quarantined right now, with 100 added on Wednesday. One-fourth of the cases are attributed to community spread, meaning they are unable to determine the origin.

The Health Department’s goal is to respond to any reported case within 24 hours. Our community is a top performer in the area and frankly in the nation based on the rate of disease in our population. Jon indicated that they are exploring every avenue to fight this disease. Of note, in the recent month, there have been more cases than in the prior three months combined.

Regarding masking, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control are now recommending masking. There is a growing body of evidence to support this. In those states that require masking, there has been a 25% decrease in the number of new cases.

Bill Hennessy, with Mercy hospital, indicated that they currently have 20 COVID patients in their facility.

Jon Mooney, Mayor McClure, and Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, addressed questions.

Q: Does the Health Department have the staff it needs currently? There is a bill headed to City Council to request an additional 37 new hires. The current team is weary, and more resources are needed to respond to the crisis.

Q: Please explain the current masking bill that Council will be considering, as related to Springfield Public Schools. The draft bill has a masking requirement for those that are 11+ years old. There is a vast difference in age requirements across the country. They can expect compliance out of those that are 11 and older. Children under three will not be required to wear a mask. Those from 3-11 are recommended to wear a mask, but it will not be required.

Q: Please explain the rate of community spread. They have found that 20-25% of the cases are of unknown origin. They believe that the cause is close, unmasked contact or travel outside our community.

Q: How long do people have to wait for testing results? Those who are local and with symptoms, the typical turnaround is a day. Some labs have a backlog, but we are not experiencing that here. In the beginning, all testing was done at a single location, but now Mercy, Cox, and Jordan Valley are each doing their testing.
(<https://health.springfieldmo.gov/5129/Testing-Information>)

Q: What is the accuracy of the testing? Locally, they are using the PCR diagnostic test, the “gold standard” with high reliability. Antibody testing is less accurate and used to test whether the body has developed an immune response to the disease.

Mayor McClure then addressed the group. The Mayor indicated that there has been a lot of disease activity in the last two weeks. Two weeks ago, Joplin defeated a masking requirement 5 to 4. Wednesday night, they passed the ordinance 6 to 3. He believes that, at this time, their responsibility is to educate, advocate, and prepare the community. In March, they acted on projections, what will happen. Now they are acting on data. The activities in northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri have proven the justification for masking.

The Mayor, under city code, has had the right to issue emergency orders. That ability will expire on July 15. After that, City Council will need to pass ordinances. He believes there will be a unified Council vote on the masking ordinance on Monday. All the Council will be co-sponsors of the ordinance. The Mayor stressed personal responsibility. This mandate will not be easy, but it could stop the Council from having to issue another stay-at-home order. The Mayor indicated that he will do everything he can to avoid another stay-at-home order.

Q: What is the state of the local economy? Mayor McClure has been in regular contact with Matt Morrow, President of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, regarding

the impact. Cora added that the city and county sales tax revenues have not been as low as they expected, but that is a lagging indicator since they haven't seen the May numbers yet. Cora also added that Goldman Sachs issued a research paper indicating that mandated masking has shown to have a positive impact on the economy. People are more willing to shop if there is a masking mandate.

Brian Fogle, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, added that our unemployment is at 8.7%, well below the national number. He indicated that the Paycheck Protection Plan kept people working, which helped, but that is about to expire. Brian added we are in a recession, but the travel and leisure markets are in a depression.

Q: Are there any expected updates for churches? Churches will stay at 50% capacity with the next announcement. David Kendrick, with St. John's Episcopal Church, said their Bishop in St. Louis just closed churches until September. Cora added that there would be specific guidance for churches in the next announcement, including that pastors will not need to wear a mask while "on stage."

Q: What will be done regarding the unsheltered and masking? Cora said that the police would not arrest someone for not wearing a mask. They are looking for mask donations so they can provide those populations masks for free.

Commissioner Harold Bengsch then spoke to the group and said that something terrible is now happening. People are in control of their actions and need to take personal responsibility. He went on to compliment the Health Department for their hard work and dedication.

Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, reminded the audience about the Health Department hotline, (417) 874-1211. She provided the following information in the chat.

- For current COVID updates from the City, County, and the Health Department:
<https://www.springfieldmo.gov/5147/Recovery-Dashboard>
<https://www.springfieldmo.gov/5068/Coronavirus>
- The proposed masking ordinance can be read here:
<https://www.springfieldmo.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/14780?fileID=203417>
- For testing information: <https://health.springfieldmo.gov/5129/Testing-Information>
- Regarding the masking ordinance for City Council on Monday night – Cora shared the following information as of noon on Thursday.
"Here is what the City is hearing from citizens regarding a required wearing of masks in public spaces: Forms submitted – 3,338
In support of mandatory masking – 2,481 responses – 74.3%
Not in support of mandatory masking – 858 responses – 25.7%

The City has had 894 calls submitted through the phone tree
Received on the "in support" line – 491
Received on the "not in support line" – 403."

Mark thanked all the speakers, and then there were brief committee reports.

Tom Ryan, the co-chair of the Food/Supply Drive Committee, indicated that their committee is now providing seven days of food to the sheltered homeless by delivering boxed, non-perishable food twice a week. Crosslines has provided space for the packing. Food donations and delivery volunteers are still needed. Contact Rennie Diekemper if you or your organization can help, rdiekemper@uwozarks.org, or 417-224-6100.

Pastor Jenn Simmons then shared the Community Spiritual and Mental Health Committee report in the chat.

- Please review the Resource File. Any additions to share? Other needs to address? https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10h6vqn6_NMddNDTnpmRTICVUZW9Uj6iG
- Mental Health Kits: July 16th@6pm, opportunity to give funding for more. Volunteers still needed, great project for high school students, contact Deana Carpenter - kdcarpenter@sbcglobal.net
- As leaders, do you need additional support? Please follow up with Jenn directly, pastorjenn@nationalavenuecc.com

There was one last question. If someone is masked, do they still need to maintain social distancing? Jon indicated that masking is one strategy, and there is some talk of only having to social distance three feet if you have a mask on. In public spaces, we need to mask and distance for the best results. He did specifically address sports and said that masking would not be required for activities requiring exertion.

Due to time, Rev. Bob Roberts indicated that the survey results were provided in the agenda and that those would be discussed later.

Rev. Struckhoff closed the meeting by telling the audience that his mentor, supervising pastor, and close friend has recently been diagnosed with COVID. He stressed the importance of these calls to help reach the community. He then closed in prayer.

The meeting was adjourned.