

Listening Tour Addendum Springfield Public Schools

As the initial Listening Tour process was drawing to a close, the City and Springfield Public Schools conducted an additional series of meetings with students between March 18-April 7. In total, about 185 students participated in Listening Tours at Central High School and Boyd, Cowden and Field elementary schools.

In many ways, the priorities of the students were not significantly different than those of the adults who participated in the initial Listening Tour process. But the students definitely put an emphasis on maintaining and growing the natural environment, recycling and reducing pollution, more transportation options like bikes and electric cars, a wealth of recreational opportunities, and caring for animals.

Here is a breakdown of some trends in each of the four questions.

What do you value most?

“The city is trying to be greener.”

“There are habitats for animals.”

“The laid-back, less busy lifestyle.”

In this question, the students noted the number of parks, trails, the Nature Center and trees. They commented that they appreciate having a lot of things to do, such as the Discovery Center, the YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, Dickerson Park Zoo, restaurants and shopping and amusement parks in the vicinity.

They recognize the value of the health-care community and they generally feel safe. They appreciate their neighborhood schools, and particularly the international baccalaureate program, considering two of the sessions were held at IB schools.

What would you most like to change?

“More no-kill animal shelters.”

“Do not allow smoking in bars and restaurants.”

“Celebrate our diversity more.”

What the students said they wanted to change segued with the traits they value and what they want to see in Springfield in 2030. They are concerned with poverty, homelessness, the north-south divide, lowering energy costs, and crime. They seem to be well aware of the potential downsides of the society they will inherit. The

changes they would choose include energy efficiency, recycling, public safety ranging from storm shelters to more police; finding solutions to poverty and homelessness and conserving resources ranging from coal-fueled energy to old buildings.

They would like more attractions and activities, particularly low-cost ones and those focusing on the natural environment. The general interest in animal welfare was a consistent thread among the students that was much more pronounced than in the earlier Listening Tours.

What is your vision for 2030?

“A greener Springfield.”

“Cars that run on vegetable oil.”

“Make the city compact so people can walk more.”

Again in this question, the responses were consistent with the earlier themes of a “green” Springfield in all of its connotations; more parks and trails for both recreation and transportation; and more animal shelters. They also are looking ahead to a job market where they’d like to see more high-tech jobs, more internship opportunities, better Internet access and an inclusive society where younger people’s opinions matter.

The strongest thread – a city that works to protect its environment – included comments about wanting solar- or wind-powered appliances and homes, biodegradable materials, natural-gas powered cars, clean water, and school gardens.

How can you help us get there?

“Give teenagers a little more push and they will help when needed.”

“Donate time to animal shelters and schools.”

“Help conserve water by not leaving the water running when brushing your teeth.”

The students’ responses tended to be action oriented – vote, volunteer, start clubs and businesses around specific interests. They suggested doing community service, tutoring, donating money, time and food.

They recognized the need to get engaged by voting, attending City Council or School Board meetings.

To sum up, as one student put it: “Set a good example and get a good education.”