



## Springfield mayor: Investigation into businesses, immigration continues

City leader says the team formed amid influx of Haitian immigrants plans report of its findings.



Credit: Bill Lackey

### NEWS

By Vicky Forrest – Contributing writer

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Springfield officials were in the dark about the possibility of a large immigrant relocation to the area, Mayor Rob Rue said at the recent Springfield City Commission meeting, but a “network of businesses knew what was coming.”

Investigation by the city's Immigrant Accountability Response Team formed in October of 2023 has revealed the possibility "there were companies that knew they were going to make an effort to bring in individuals who were crossing the border based on federal regulations that they could do that," Rue said. "I'm upset at the fact we didn't get a chance to have an infrastructure in place if there were going to be 20,000 more people from 2020 to 2025. We didn't get to do that."

"Springfield is now saturated," Rue said during the meeting when talk turned to Haitian immigration.

Asked by a city resident how many more immigrants might be coming to the area and about city interactions "with the people who have planned this," Rue responded, "We're not interacting with them, we're investigating."

### **>> Springfield leaders talk growing Haitian population with federal government**

Rue later added the city investigations are ongoing, but he indicated a report will be forthcoming once they are assured that they can do so without compromising any potential legal action.

"We want to make sure that the investigation is complete and we don't ruin the investigation of anything before we're able to speak to it," he said, adding state and federal agencies also are involved in investigations.

The city formed the Immigrant Accountability Response Team in response to community outrage following a fatal accident involving a Northwestern school bus hit by a minivan driven by an unlicensed Haitian driver. The man crossed in front of the bus that then overturned, resulting in the death of an 11-year old boy and injuries to about two dozen children.

The driver is currently appealing involuntary manslaughter and fourth-degree felony vehicular homicide convictions.

Thousands of Haitians are in Springfield on Temporary Protected Status.

### **>> How could Temporary Protected Status extension for Haitians affect Springfield?**

Rue said the Immigrant Accountability Response Team is comprised of a group of city staff members and has focused its investigations into three areas: immigrant employment, housing

and driver instruction. The group is also consulting with state and federal investigative agencies in conjunction with those issues.

If they had known what to expect, he said, the city would have taken steps to “hire 25 more police officers and 25 firefighters ... along with making sure individuals already living here and faithfully paying rent would not be displaced because of the greed of landlords. We would have been ahead of that or tried to combat it ... we did not get to do that.”

Strides have been made by the Response Team, which has worked with the Ohio Department of Public Safety and Bureau of Motor Vehicles to develop drivers training programs tailored to address the language needs of Haitian immigrants and driver’s training needed to improve public safety. Advances have also led to expanded opportunities for Haitians to participate in English language classes locally.

### **>> Haitian-led community center identifies challenges, pressing needs for immigrant population**

Rue again clarified Springfield is not a sanctuary city in response to another inquiry.

While city officials adopted a resolution 10 years ago declaring Springfield a “welcoming city,” Rue said, “That doesn’t mean we are actively bringing immigrants into our community that can’t handle the influx of folks.”

Concerns about public safety have also been the focus of city efforts, as they have tried to get the attention of state and federal governments who have no programs or funding in place to help.

### **>>Haitian immigrants in Springfield face complex immigration system and long delays**

Rue criticized the federal government for permitting expanded immigration while providing no support to the communities absorbing thousands of new residents.

“We have taken this to our congressman ... we should have the right amount of safety forces to take care of everyone who is here. If we have 12 to 15 thousand more people than we have budgeted to care for, we’re in trouble,” the mayor said.

Another conversation at the commission session centered on housing affordability and the housing shortfall that has been driving up rents, often resulting in the eviction of long-time

tenants who can no longer afford to stay in their homes.

City officials shared the frustration expressed by residents about the increasing ownership of housing by Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs) from outside the community. Rue said the city is looking into what options might be available to address the problems created by LLC ownership of properties in the city.

### **>> Clark County officials talk in DC about needs with growing Haitian population**

Commissioner Bridget Houston indicated her recent exploration of the issue revealed one of five property purchases in the country is now by an LLC for investment purposes.

According to Rue, the Clark County Combined Health District will provide information and statistics from a new report about the influx of immigrants to the community at a work session preceding the next Springfield City Commission meeting on July 16.

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