Breakout group exercise #1

Discussion questions

From your personal experience and perspective, related to the hand-out information, what stands out to you -- or what it important to you about the issue of street homelessness in Bloomington?

Again, related to the possible steps on the handout - legislation, budget matters, or convening - what priorities for action would you recommend to the Council?

Report-out from breakout group exercise #1

Group 1: (Facilitator: Councilmember Matt Flaherty)

1. Resources stretched from use by people outside the county
2. Concerns of individual safety and security
3. Lack of basic services, like bathrooms
4. What does it mean to be "from here?"
5. Misalignment between available services and needs
6. No alternatives when people are displaced from "clearing camps"
7. Need to work together, coordinate at levels of government, businesses, and organizations
8. Need more resources – reallocate or make better use
9. Storage for belongings, safe sleeping needs, provision of supplies

Group 2: (Facilitator: Councilmember Isak Asare)

1. Significant pressures on community resources
2. Humanity of those experiencing homelessness
3. We should not accept the current situation
4. Focus on work force and skill development
5. Organize govt to deal with issue, centralize staffing and budget allocations
6. Funding, capacity for sharing data
7. Need for public bathrooms, showers, storage
8. City as convener to help parts work together
9. Important of rapid rehousing and temporary housing
10. Need to use groups to take on certain tasks
11. Access to grants for organizations
12. Responsiveness to needs from City

13. Funding for eco-housing, transitional housing, etc.

Group 3: (Facilitator: Councilmember Hopi Stosberg)

1. Urgency of this issue for health and safety of population
2. Desire to learn more about the situation
3. Mental health needs not being addressed
4. More trash pick-up, need for bathrooms
5. Increase lighting, security, might move people to other areas
6. Increase street outreach teams
7. Add to different housing types/models
8. Restrict sleeping in public areas
9. Incentivize landlord for applications, avoid eviction
10. Provide day labor opportunities for unhoused people
11. Clarify means of communication about issues with unhoused people (other than 911)

Group 4: (Facilitator: Councilmember Andy Ruff)

1. To address issue, start from sense of respect and dignity for those experiencing homelessness
2. Prioritize policies in any way to encourage affordable housing
3. Need better mental health care and addiction services
4. Learning from methods of other communities
5. IU as source of contributions of human resources and funding, collaboration
6. Council's power to convene used to bring together different parts of government and organizations to collaborate and centralize

Group 5: (Facilitator: Councilmember Sydney Zulich)

1. Support for people in transitions of housing
2. Discrimination for qualifying for housing and health care
3. How to make housing available for unrelated individuals
4. Increasing funding and staffing for current programs, like through Jack Hopkins grants

Group 6: (Facilitator: Councilmember Courtney Daily)

1. Not enough low-income housing or shelters, especially for women
2. Where do the individuals in need WANT to go, what do they care about
3. Honor people's choices in what they are looking for
4. People who have been in encampments for a long time may need different priorities
5. Moving them can re-traumatize them
6. Barriers to shelter may be animal ownership, people staying together
7. Difficult to take steps toward long-term housing

Part 1: Dialogue
Discussion questions

- From your personal experience and perspective, related to the hand-out information, what stands out to you -- or what it important to you about the issue of street homelessness in Bloomington?
- Again, related to the possible steps on the handout - legislation, budget matters, or convening - what priorities for action would you recommend to the Council?

Recommended actions that City Council should take:

1. Meet people where they are at, including hosting sessions in spaces where unhoused folks already are
2. Zoning reform to allow supportive housing and more permanent shelter space in City limits
3. Reverse ban on temporary structures (tents) in parks
4. Collect data on support for differing policy proposals
5. Deploy temporary compassionate programs that other cities with high incidents of homelessness (like Portland, OR's Safe Rest Villages www.portland.gov/shelter-services/safe-rest-villages-program-overview) have done until more permanent shelter space is built
6. Pass legislation that does not allow removal of homeless encampments absent a legitimate threat to public safety that cannot be remedied by providing folks with safe equipment (ie, fire pits). The goal is to reduce/eliminate removal of currently existing encampments that results in the displacement unhoused members of the community who may have tensions with other members in other encampments, areas, shelters, etc.
7. Stop responding only with police to push unhoused folks out of sight. Reduce the number of drug bust operations as a justification to do so just before the IU semester begins. Recognize the limits of the criminal justice system to actually address drug addiction when the system is not designed to rehabilitate but punish.
8. Provide security, social workers, and mobile access to designated camp grounds for unhoused folks on an urgent or emergency basis to bring resources to a designated area for emergency immediate short term needs until more long term options become available.
9. The city should provide funding to more mutual aid and addiction recovery programs
10. The city should provide more bathrooms in public spaces, especially parks closer to where unhoused folks are, with newly allocated cleaning staff to regularly clean them

Part 2: Deliberation
Discussion Questions
From the suggestions that came up, let's choose one possible action step.
        o What would it take to do this?

o What are some tradeoffs or possible losses that could result?
o What might we have to give up to make this happen?
o How does it support community needs and values?

Discussion notes
- A trade-off of investing in permanent solutions, housing, bathrooms, etc., is that it will cost money to implement these things. However, it will pay off in the long term because there will be less need for services that "treat the symptoms".
- Zoning should be acted on and set in motion now. Zoning for supporting housing opens the door for systemic changes in the long term that can be addressed in more zoning-related talks.
- Prioritize a quickly deployed, hopefully not strictly temporary, shelter space like The Safe Rest Villages implemented in Portland, OR. A "Safe Rest Villages" style program would draw people away from sleeping on the streets or camping outside and bring them into a cleaner, more controlled environment, where more needs are met. This type of program sounds like a great jumping off point for rehabilitation, job training, and case workers in general. This would come with a considerable cost, but again every person who gets off the streets reduces the strain on our nonprofits, charities, city services, even things like the police. It would not be unreasonable to pair this program with a reduced police budget and less policing in areas which previously saw higher concentrations of unhoused folks.
  Other costs/trade-offs:
  - Land needs to be allocated from somewhere
    - Is it possible to build these where there had previously been encampments?
    - Additional zoning questions
  - Anywhere these are built, nearby residents are likely to complain, even if there are no signs of real public safety threats
  This program would show that Bloomington is strongly committed to real, long-term solutions and is willing to invest resources to reach those solutions. It would display a compassion for all residents of Bloomington, unhoused or not, and a commitment to equity that surpasses a vast majority of cities in the country.

Bloomington City Council - August 14, 2024

Group 1:   Facilitator: Councilmember Matt Flaherty (Susan Klein, CJAM)

WHAT IS IMPORTANT?
1. Safety downtown "my store has been vandalized several times in the last few months with property damage"
2. These are our community members
3. Addictions have led some to being "out there"
4. We have great resources; we also attract a lot of others from elsewhere
5. We need support system to enable transitions
6. What is root cause?
7. How do we get people to work together/ collaborate?
8. Keep in mind the businesses
9. Unhoused may not be from Bloomington ….who should get the resources we have?
10. How do we advocate better as individuals?
11. Mayor's policy to "clear out the encampments" was cruel; financial needs dictate behavior
12. Missing are public restrooms, trash cans, places to sleep
13. Services in place are not meeting needs
14. People who are working with unhoused need to be listened to
15. Pick a strategy and go forward
16. Who are the "we?"   How do "we" define ourselves?

WHAT IS POSSIBLE. (Priorities for City Council)
1. Leaders and councils need to come together and bring funds together
2. More street outreach workers are needed
3. Downtown needs public restrooms and trash cans
4. A structured space is needed and identified, outside of shopping districts
5. Access/support Housing Development Fund
6. Think about local resources
7. Dedicate revenue
8. Keep resources in one spot
9. There is not ONE solution
10. Make unhoused folks a priority
11. Locate storage facilities

DELIBERATION
Public bathrooms
        Providing access for everyone, not just unhoused

Educating public that unhoused are not dangerous
What would it take? Maintenance, Safety, Privacy, Location, Money
Look at examples from other countries

Group 2: Facilitator: Councilmember Isak Asare - (V. Roberts, CJAM)

Intro go round: What stands out to you as most important?
1. Last several years have seen an increase in the number of people experiencing street homelessness; the increase adds pressure and difficult to handle for everyone
2. Opportunity and leverage = housing
3. "Tent cities" being dismantled – what do they do then?
4. Loss of life (due to violence, conditions)
5. Whatever the city council has been doing isn't working; housing should be provided; treating symptoms not the problem
6. Addicted, mentally ill become homeless
7. Environmental solutions aren't being considered; there are models that work (i.e., Dignity Village); environmental solutions have been proposed to city county with no response
8. Barriers (cost of processing, fees, inability to navigate technology, agencies don't have enough people to help navigate all of the above
9. Good people are overwhelmed; there is a limit to what agencies and individuals can do

Part 1 Dialogue: What priorities would you recommend to the Council?
1. IU needs to get involved
2. There needs to be a city department with responsibility and accountability for managing this problem (with the specialized resources needed); access to emergency housing
3. Provide places where street homeless can address personal hygiene (showers, rest rooms)
4. Veterans should have our immediate attention
5. Allow legally more affordable housing choices
6. Incentivize waiving fees, signing up for section 8
7. Engage directly with social service agencies
8. Get accurate data – identify the true scope of the problem; identify what the immediate need(s) is(are)
9. City owns empty buildings that can be used
10. Lower the barriers
11. Implement quick solutions (i.e., porta pots)
12. Assess the barriers created by zoning
13. Buses need to be running when needed (or other transportation options)
14. Eliminate bureaucracy around communication (i.e., social media)

15. Reach out to understand what social service agencies are saying (not pushing back because of "status quo"

Part 2 Deliberation
The group spent time deliberating which of these action steps to focus on:
1. Identify a property for short term and long-term housing solutions
2. SRO (single residency options)
3. Create a department with city council oversight with responsibility/accountability for solutions

They agreed on SRO with these trade-off and obstacle considerations:
- Zoning
- Resources (cost, labor)
- Community buy-in
- Collaboration with supportive care units
- Ordinances (e.g., HAND)

Group 3: Facilitator: Councilmember Hopi Stosberg - (John VanderZee, CJAM)

Part 1: Dialogue

A. What stands out to you, or what is important to you about the issue of homelessness?
1. Provide more services to the unhoused
2. Concern about the safety of, esp. children and older people walking through Seminary Park.
3. People living in their cars in my neighborhood
4. Concern not only about street homeless but also people who are ill-housed or on the verge of homelessness
5. How can we make the homeless population smaller?
6. The concern is for the 10 to 15% who are chronically homeless as opposed to others living with family or others.
7. Runners come in contact with homeless and are often threatened
8. Provide alternatives to public parks for homeless
9. We need input from the homeless themselves
10. Homeless are not using the resources that we already have
11. Need for winter shelter and women's shelter
12. Don't take away access of homeless to public parks
13. Restrict homeless access to public parks
14. There are Centerstone employees who work for the city to assist with mental health problems for the homeless

B. What priorities for action would you recommend to the Council?
Legislation

1. Make available co-housing and single room occupancy buildings
2. Laws restricting access of homeless to public parks and spaces
    a. But do punitive measures really work?
3. Regulations determining how to decide when an encampment is safe
4. Determine a process for day-labor opportunities
5. Require all parks to have public restrooms available 24/7
6. Require trash pickups at larger encampments
7. Provide better lighting in public parks and spaces

Budget

1. Provide application and fee waivers for renters may lessen homelessness
2. City should forgo or strict new construction plans of more expensive housing

Community building

1. Clarify the role of the community resource officer and the dispatcher
2. Provide more communication on how to contact homeless services when help is needed in specific situations that one encounters

Part 2: Deliberation

From the suggestions that come up, choose ONE possible ACTION STEP

Action Step

City should provide a Communication Portal for people to report concerns about homeless or for homeless to access services

What would it take to do this?

1. An abbreviated phone number to call (alternative to 211, 988, etc.)
2. City of B'ton should provide this out of their offices
3. It is a low-cost solution
4. Community resource officers and mental health counselors would need to coordinate their efforts
5. Education of the public

How does it support the community's needs and values

- People want to help, and this affords an opportunity to do something (i.e.,
- "See something, say something")
- Homeless can use this to access services

What are the tradeoffs, possible losses

- People may use this to vent negative things about homeless people
- May contribute to confusion about what community support numbers to call
- Roll out may take time to implement

Group 4: Facilitator: Councilmember Andy Ruff - (Joelene Bergonzi, CJAM)

Part 1: Intro & Dialogue

Intro go round: What stands out to you as most important?
1. Affordable housing is the most important need
2. Need to increase non-shelter options as listed
3. Throwing a pizza party can't fix the harassment nor the circumstances
4. Budgetary matters need to be a priority
5. Council only can 'request' re: budget; advocacy to mayor is important
6. There need to be more rental guidelines to protect tenants
7. Township is having difficulty finding funds to meet increased rental costs
8. Different strategies needed for homelessness vs. street homelessness
9. Having never before seen a plan of action, glad to read the Heading Home plan
10. A lot of change is needed: Council could start by convening an executive council of nonprofits and other support organizations
11. If City provides trash bins/bags & pickup to homeless camps, they will pick up trash
12. Need to recruit trained mental health staff as a 'care corps' to provide services
13. In context and with collaboration of county, state, feds: bring is support, coordination, different methods. Results will be stronger when multiple levels involved, gov + non-gov
14. Council can serve leadership role to set priorities for funding
15. Multi-level collaboration and coordination is needed to solve the issue

Part 1 Dialogue: What priorities would you recommend to the Council?
1. Convene people experiencing homelessness for input on solutions
2. Look into solutions from other locales, outreach to other areas needed
3. Convene with IU for help, need to use funds, interns, expertise to address this issue o Why are we tearing down existing structures that could serve as shelter?
4. Start from a position of care and love for people experiencing homelessness, knowing that they matter and deserve respect and services
5. Start to address core economic issues by advocating for state policy changes around rent capping
6. Extend programs/services to avoid eviction
7. Convene care providers to coordinate care for each individual with regular check-in
8. More mental health care providers are needed, esp for addiction and detox issues

9. Look for long-term revenue sources and coordinate for budgeting & communication
10. Coordinate system-wide so people who need services can more easily navigate
11. *Tear down walls*: be open to more user-friendly ways of coordinating
12. Coordinate to share services for 'wrap-around' care; convene with other parts of govt to help people get care; make a collab, co-working space for non-profits (like the Mill)
13. Convene different parts of community to foster connectedness and loving care, e.g., partner a faith community with a group of people in need of care
14. With all the local challenges, our community is still one that has seemed 'friendlier' than other areas, which is why we will continue to have an influx

Part 2: Deliberation—Different options to choose

1. (long-term) Lobby state to start providing vouchers for Medicaid services
2. (immediate) Utilize City buildings (like park pavilions) as shelters and to provide emergency care services (like for mental health, addiction, detox)
3. (long-term) Convene county and other officials statewide to build advocacy and power for future plans
4. With older adolescents/young adults especially, who may soon lose coverage and parental care, increase community outreach personnel who can extend 'umbrella of care' toward prevention of drug use and homelessness

Trade-offs and obstacles
1. Share solution-building and success across organizations in a *cooperative, collaborative* stance instead of competing for funding, which increases divisiveness and dilutes effectiveness of strategies
2. For immediate step of using City shelters: we would be giving up other uses and experiencing discomfort in public spaces, giving up family comfort of parks
3. Cost to City and what would need to be given up in the budgetary trade-offs
4. Could be addressed by bringing in collaborative partners, like IU, county, state, other
5. Council needs to take greater role as convener for long-term collaboration among govt levels, IU, businesses, and organizations