

Bloomington Common Council-Budget Hearing Minutes
Bloomington Council Chambers, City Hall, 401 N. Morton Street, Bloomington, Indiana
Wednesday, August 27, 2025, 5:30pm

CALL TO ORDER [5:32pm]

Andy Ruff, Chair, called the meeting to order.

1. ROLL CALL (*Indicates participation via Zoom) [5:33pm]

Councilmembers present:

Isak Nti Asare	At-Large
Courtney Daily	District 5, Council Parliamentarian
Matt Flaherty*	At-Large
Isabel Piedmont-Smith	District 1, Council Vice President
Dave Rollo	District 4
Kate Rosenbarger (arrived at 5:41pm)	District 2
Andy Ruff	At-Large
Hopi Stosberg	District 3, Council President
Sydney Zulich (left at 8:07pm)	District 6

City staff, officials, and guests present:

Nicole Bolden	City Clerk
Lisa Lehner	Council Attorney
Christine Chang	Temporary Council Researcher
Kari Bennett	Deputy Council Attorney
Kerry Thomson	Mayor
Gretchen Knapp	Deputy Mayor
Jessica McClellan*	City Controller
John Connell	Bloomington Transit, General Manager
Christa Browning	Bloomington Transit, Controller
David Hittle	Planning and Transportation, Director
Andrew Cibor	City Engineer
Adam Wason	Public Works, Director
Nate Nickel	Public Works, Data Analyst and Manager

2. TOPICS DISCUSSED [5:33pm]

This week’s budget hearings will include budget presentations from each city department. Each night, department heads will present on their proposed 2026 budgets along with the goals and outcomes they hope to achieve for their departments in 2026. These presentations are a preview of what each department is hoping to see reflected in the 2026 budget as a whole.

There will be no council votes taken this week on each department’s proposed budget because the adoption of the 2026 budget will not include department-by-department votes. Instead, councilmembers will make comments during council comment periods as to what changes they wish to see in each individual department’s budget before later this fall, when the Council is scheduled to consider the budget as a whole through a vote on three appropriation ordinances and four salary ordinances.

The three appropriation ordinances include the civil city budget, the Utilities Department budget, and the budget for Bloomington Transit. The three salary ordinances will include salaries for officers of the police and fire departments, salaries for appointed officers, non-union, and A.F.S.C.M.E. employees for all the departments of the city, and salaries for elected officials.

Council discussion and a public hearing on these items of legislation are scheduled for September 24th beginning at 6:30pm. The budget adoption meeting is scheduled for October 8th beginning at 6:30pm. There

may still be changes between this week’s presentations and the seven budget ordinances that come to Council later in the fall. Throughout the remainder of August and September, the administration will work with the Council and various departments to prepare a final version of the 2026 budget for the City.

Stosberg moved and Rollo seconded to amend the agenda for this evening's Departmental Hearing for 2026 Budget to add an item following the report by Department of Public Works Parking Services Division. The added item is "Common Council Discussion and Reflection on the Proposed 2026 Budget including Consideration of Reductions and Consideration of Increases." This added item would be a discussion item only; no vote would occur. The motion received a roll call vote of Ayes: 8, Nays: 0, Abstain: 0. (Rosenbarger arrived at 5:41pm).

Deputy Mayor Gretchen Knapp introduced the Transportation priority area and noted the departments and divisions whose mission was largely centered in transportation. Presentations that evening would include a list of 2025 and 2026 projects, personnel requests, and more. There was brief council discussion on the Walnut Street and College Avenue study as well as projects that were already underway, like on High Street.

There was no public comment.

Piedmont-Smith expressed concern about planning new projects before finishing current ones.

John Connell, Bloomington Transit (BT), General Manager, presented BT’s proposed 2026 Budget. Christa Browning, BT Controller, was also in attendance. The board consisted of three members appointed by the council and two by the mayor. He gave a brief history of BT which contracted with the city for services like information technology, legal guidance, and insurance. Connell summarized the Economic Development Local Income Tax (EDLIT) investments, and uses-to-date, and highlighted the 2025-2026 project updates. He noted BT’s expenses and revenues including sixteen new electric buses and spoke about passenger fares. He discussed federal and state revenue and 2026 goals like transitioning to a sustainable new facility, preparing for the impacts of Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA 1), and expanding Blink microtransit coverage.

Piedmont-Smith asked about reserves and Connell responded that there would be \$10 million left. She asked about the union contract for drivers and Connell said they were currently in negotiations. There was discussion on contingency services which were designated for opportunities such as partnering with new developments after the city budget was formally adopted. Daily asked if BT had solar panels, and Connell said there were none at the Grimes facility. Rollo asked for details on the electric buses, and the capital investment into them, and Connell said they comprised 41% of the fleet and were a good investment, and gave reasons why. Asare asked about cost-per-passenger or per-ride and Connell said BT anticipated an increase in ridership due to having proper staffing levels to meet the capacity. He gave examples. There was discussion on the BLink microtransit program. Stosberg asked about the route to Ivy Tech and Connell said it had been successful with positive feedback and ridership improvements.

There was no public comment.

Stosberg appreciated improvements to several bus stops and gave examples. Rollo spoke in favor of electric buses and expanding BT’s geographic service.

David Hittle, Planning and Transportation (PT), Director, presented PT’s proposed 2026 Budget. He discussed the department’s structure and divisions and summarized the changes to PT’s budget from 2023-2026. He spoke about Development Services, the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), permits and cases, the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) and Plan Commission (PC) cases since 2024, and the timeline of petitions heard and staffs’ time. Additional topics were projects like a housing attainability study and improvements to the development review process. Hittle said Planning Services had won an award for its implementation of Safety Week the previous year as a part of the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) program. He summarized the ongoing 2025 Planning projects and then discussed the SS4A priority corridors. Projects for 2026 included the development of a Core Public Engagement Plan, the initiation of a new Comprehensive Plan study for focus areas and urban village centers, and more.

Rollo asked about the quality of city streets, and Hittle explained that was under the Engineering department's purview. Rollo asked if the BZA cases informed code updates and Hittle said yes; patterns were identified. Piedmont-Smith asked for clarification on the increase of zoning violations; Hittle stated the increase was likely due to a staff member being out on maternity leave the previous year. Piedmont-Smith asked about the linkage fee study. Hittle said that pertained to the affordability incentives for new developments and gave examples. Asare asked about permits and Hittle explained that permits were checked against the UDO. There was brief discussion on the Comprehensive Plan and the city's priorities and how that applied to permit requests. Stosberg wondered if there would be quality candidates for the open positions in PT; Hittle believed there would be. There was discussion on the Safe Streets Program Manager's responsibilities. Rosenbarger asked about possibly updating the Alternative Transportation Coordinator to exclude the word "alternative" since it was deemed outdated and negative. Hittle had not thought of that and would look into it. She explained one reason there were delays in the permitting process was due to the large amount of things that were conditional uses. Hittle agreed and noted that by right housing, especially for the missing middle, had been discussed. Rosenbarger asked about funding for the design phase of the Indiana Done Project and Hittle said the planning phase would be finished but was not sure about funding for design. Ruff asked if there were projects that would not be done, or would be outsourced, without the new employees and Hittle confirmed there would be.

Kevin Keough spoke about an external audit.

Christopher Emge, Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, appreciated Hittle's and PT's outreach.

Rollo was interested in projects' feasibility since there would be a period of austerity. He believed the city provided a good level of service, but was continually playing catch-up. He spoke about village centers, and praised a pollinator rain garden and landscaping at a recent development. Asare thanked Hittle and discussed the permitting process and compliance with the UDO. It was important to make the permitting process easier and more predictable while not compromising quality of review. Piedmont-Smith asked about the external audit including the permitting process. Hittle said the audit was not required but was the department's effort to clearly understand problems and then make improvements. Stosberg supported internalizing work done by consultants to staff. She expressed concerns about having plans without actions. Regarding the cross-department project list, she noted there were many things in the design phase and few in the construction phase. Rosenbarger said there were many types of housing that were not allowed, like the missing middle. It was important to remember the need for more housing. She reiterated that most of the delays in the permitting process were due to conditional uses. Ruff spoke in favor of internalizing work rather than using consultants.

Andrew Cibor, City Engineer, presented the Engineering Department's proposed 2026 Budget. He gave a brief review of the department and its responsibilities, and staff. He summarized the budget. There were other funding sources including bonds and grants in prior years, and for 2026, there was funding from the EDLIT. He discussed changes in the budget including a reduced capacity to bond. Cibor noted changes to personnel, capacity constraints for projects and interdepartmental collaborations, reduced consultant costs due to internalizing work for new staff, and reducing risks in construction and maintenance. He praised the department's excellent staff and noted the difficulty with staff retention. He spoke about the Transportation Commission and its duties. He described the life cycle of a typical city capital project with five stages; planning, design, right-of-way acquisition, construction, and operation and maintenance. He noted the multiple departments involved in that cycle. Cibor highlighted other initiatives like support for Hopewell and the Summit Planned Unit Development (PUD), the citywide fiber project, and developing standards like drawings, operating procedures, and having enterprise permitting and licensing.

Stosberg asked about the difficulty of filling vacant positions. Cibor was hopeful the positions would be filled though it might be difficult. Rollo asked about the \$1 million bond and Cibor said when a third party worked in the city's right-of-way, they were required to provide a bond. Rollo said that with austerity, he was concerned with continuing a good level of service for things like road maintenance. Cibor clarified that there were many components with level of service and additional discussions would occur. When asked if a road service study had been completed for the Summit PUD, Cibor said yes, but a memorandum of understanding

had not been. Ruff asked about obtaining the right-of-way on High Street and Cibor said it was in process. Piedmont-Smith asked if the expense for new staff positions would be offset by not needing as many consultants, and Cibor said yes and gave examples.

Steve Volan, Transportation Commission, Chair, appreciated filling positions and right-sizing departments. He hoped the two vacancies on the commission would be filled soon.

There were no council comments.

Adam Wason, Public Works, Director, presented the Street and Traffic Division’s proposed 2026 Budget. He summarized the responsibilities of the division including road maintenance and repair, infrastructure upgrades, American with Disabilities Act compliance, and the collection of data. Street Division staff were first responders for things like snow storms, flooding, tornadoes, and more. There was great success with paving in 2024-2025 for streets and for sidewalk maintenance. There was ongoing modernization of street lights with the traffic management software, Centracs System. Wason described anticipated challenges like balancing safety and infrastructure needs with community expectations and limited resources. Retention of qualified, trained staff was another challenge.

Rollo asked if there was adequate funding for street repaving and Wason said traditional funding sources like local road and state funding would be dwindling. The goal was to leverage outside funds. Wason explained that the Pavement Condition Index study, presented to council three times, showed exactly what was needed to maintain or improve the pavement. Stosberg asked if the street lights and traffic signals line item had been cut in half. Decisions had to be made to balance needs, for example if paving would continue at the same rate, then the replacement of light-emitting diode (LED) would be reduced. There was additional discussion on budget cuts. Piedmont-Smith asked about community health and vitality goal of parks, trails, greenspace, and urban forestry. Wason said that was a partnership with the Parks and Recreation department to maintain the urban forest.

Emge praised the Streets Division and its staff.

Rollo appreciated the data maps pertaining to street quality. He thanked Wason and staff for their work. Stosberg noted where the public could find the maps.

Wason presented Parking Services Division proposed 2026 Budget and described the division’s initiatives including a Parking Rate Study and more. Beginning the previous year, there had been a master planning process for all things relating to parking. He said the Parking Enforcement team was the most verbally-abused group in the city. He described other issues like problems with an elevator vendor in the parking garages. He discussed changes in the budget and 2026 initiatives like more accessible parking spaces and updating parking space markings. Wason then described anticipated challenges like budget reductions and parking rate changes.

Rollo asked if the Fourth Street parking garage would be used for the Convention Center. Wason said the occupancy rates were strong and there would be some capacity for the Convention Center. Piedmont-Smith asked about license plate recognition (LPR) software, and noted privacy concerns raised by residents. Wason said there were privacy issues but using LPR was standard practice and efficient. LPR would only be used to verify payment for parking. Piedmont-Smith asked about accessibility accommodations due to problems with the elevator. Wason said individuals needing assistance could contact staff for a ride to or from their vehicle; contact information was posted but requests were not made often. Stosberg asked what consultant fees had been removed and Wason said it was the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) marking and striping projects, and the Walker parking study. Stosberg asked about bank charges which had increased for 2026. Nate Nickel, Data Analyst and Manager, said it was transaction fees for credit card purchases. It made sense to put those fees into the bank charge line item as a cost incurred by the city. Rollo asked about scooter enforcement. Wason said there were still violations and fines.

Emge commented on parking garage capacity at the Trades District.

Stosberg asked for clarification on LPR and Wason stated he would follow up with additional information. Asare asked about the Trades District parking garage and Wason noted that usage would increase as the district was built out with a hotel and more. Rollo commented on revenue sources, limited resources, and what would go before council. Wason clarified that some revenue was restricted by state code, such as the parking meter fund. Piedmont-Smith urged people to attend the Transportation Commission meetings. Asare commented on parking rates.

3. COMMON COUNCIL DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION ON THE PROPOSED 2026 BUDGET INCLUDING CONSIDERATION OF REDUCTIONS AND CONSIDERATION OF INCREASES

Stosberg summarized the reason for the discussion. Council discussion included cost of living increases, the budget process, council’s input on budget priorities and modifications, and common ground amongst council and the administration. Piedmont-Smith, Rosenbarger, Rollo, Ruff, Daily, and Stosberg stated their support for increasing the cost of living increase from 2% to 2.7%. Additional discussion pertained to special legal services, wage increases, and where budget cuts could be made. Several councilmembers identified potential budget cuts. It was possible to cut from areas that had been over-budgeted in the past. Council discussed deficit budgets that had been passed in the past, but had resulted with surpluses in the end, and if 2025 would also have a surplus. A question was raised if it was necessary to make budget cuts since the city had multiple surplus years. Knapp provided information on bonds, how personnel vacancies affected spending, and reasons for possibly padding the budget for unplanned opportunities. Wages, funding sources for payroll, and how to fund a cost of living increase were discussed. Jessica McClellan, Controller, agreed that there were limitations to funding sources for payroll and gave examples. Sometimes it was not known what the savings would be until the end of the year, when transfers could be done. Further discussion included council action pertaining to the budget, appropriation ordinances, council’s schedule, and project timelines and phases, like design plans, which had a shelf life. It was important to not do studies when the implementation took longer. Council asked for a list of projects, and what had been spent to date, and what remained. With constraints coming from SEA 1, it was noted that the city was in a much better position in comparison to other cities. There was robust council discussion on the city’s plans like the College/Walnut corridor study, and its high rate of injury, and the shelf life of plans. Lisa Lehner, Council Attorney, provided additional information on council’s input to the city budget, processes, and what council was allowed to do per state code. McClellan added information on the timeline and process.

4. ADJOURMENT [8:59pm]


Ruff adjourned the meeting.

APPROVED by the Common Council of the City of Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana, upon this 17 day of December, 2025.

APPROVE:


Hopi Stosberg, COUNCIL PRESIDENT

ATTEST:


City Clerk Nicole Bolden

Clerk’s Note: The above minutes summarize the motions passed and issues discussed rather than providing a verbatim account of every word spoken.

- Bloomington City Council meetings can be watched on the following websites:
- Community Action Television Services (CATS) – <https://catvstv.net>
 - YouTube – <https://youtube.com/@citybloomington>

Background materials and packets are available at <https://bloomington.in.gov/council>