

Bloomington Common Council-Special Session Minutes
Bloomington City Hall, 401 N. Morton Street, Bloomington, Indiana
Wednesday, October 08, 2025, 6:30pm

CALL TO ORDER [6:31pm]

Council President Stosberg called the meeting to order.

1. ROLL CALL (* indicates participation via Zoom) [6:32pm]

Members:

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	District 2
Andy Ruff	At-Large
Hopi Stosberg	District 3, Council President
Sydney Zulich	District 6

City staff, officials, and guests present:

Nicole Bolden	City Clerk
Lisa Lehner	Council Attorney
Kari Bennett	Deputy Council Attorney
Christine Chang	Council Legal Research Specialist
Jessica McClellan	City Controller
Gretchen Knapp	Deputy Mayor
John Connell	Bloomington Transit, General Manager
Katherine Zaiger	Utilities, Director

2. AGENDA SUMMATION [6:32pm]

Stosberg summarized the agenda.

3. REPORT FROM COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE [6:33pm]

Zulich reported that the Committee of the Whole considered three budget ordinances, Appropriation Ordinance 2025-11, Appropriation Ordinance 2025-12, and Appropriation Ordinance 2025-13, during the Committee of the Whole meeting on September 24, 2025, and made the following recommendations: the adoption of Appropriation Ordinance 2025-11, Appropriation Ordinance 2025-12, and Appropriation Ordinance 2025-13.

4. LEGISLATION FOR SECOND READINGS AND RESOLUTIONS [6:34pm]

4.1. Appropriation Ordinance 2025-11

An Ordinance for Appropriations and Tax Rates (Establishing 2026 Civil City Budget for the City of Bloomington)

Daily moved and Piedmont-Smith seconded that Appropriation Ordinance 2025-11 be introduced and read by title and synopsis only. The motion was approved by voice vote. Clerk Nicole Bolden read the legislation by title and synopsis.

Daily moved and Piedmont-Smith seconded to adopt Appropriation Ordinance 2025-11.

Jessica McClellan, City Controller, presented the 2026 Civil City Budget including the Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF)-reviewed funds equaling \$110,184,108, and the non-DLGF reviewed funds equaling \$52,986,449. There was discussion on the deficit and increase in revenues from property taxes. The planned cash balance in the General Fund at the end of 2026 was \$26,161,215. There was additional discussion on outstanding debt obligation, interest payments, and principal balances. Additional documentation would be shared with council.

Eric Ost commented on the city's debt and bond capacity, state laws, debt management, and transparency.

Kevin Keough expressed concern that there was not an explanation on errors in the budget deficit.

Rollo asked for clarification on the budget deficit. McClellan explained there would be increased revenues, and gave details. She reiterated that every error had been reconciled and was in the current proposal correctly.

Piedmont-Smith referenced the spreadsheet provided to her upon request delineating all the corrections, and council staff would post it on the website. There was discussion on the city's bond rating, the cost of living adjustment (COLA), and an article by the Herald Times listing an incorrect COLA.

Flaherty stated he would not be voting in favor of the Civil City budget because it was not an ideal accountability mechanism. Conversation, collaboration, negotiation, and agreements with the administration had proven ineffective. The city was failing to meaningfully center equity, which was central to him as an elected official. He believed the community was being harmed by the administration's failure to prioritize and pursue outcomes set through community-driven legislative processes. There had been incremental progress but the current year was the first time Flaherty felt that the city was taking steps backwards. He referenced council's request to the administration for plans pertaining to equity. Eventually, and after council action, council received one paragraph from the Deputy Mayor Gretchen Knapp stating that the administration would not allocate funding or work on equity due to the Trump administration's opposition to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. It could put the city at risk to lose federal funds. Margie Rice, Corporation Counsel had agreed. Flaherty said now more than ever was the time to stand up for values. He believed the city was falling short on community-driven city policies and outcomes, particularly with climate action and housing. The mayor actively opposed or obstructed implementation of city policies. There was also a lack of trust with the administration; he had not been dealt with honestly. The administration had disregarded legislation which appropriated nearly \$30 million exclusively for public safety facilities; the Showers West building for new police and fire headquarters. Flaherty had spoken with the bond council, corporation counsel, former council attorney Stephen Lucas, and the mayor, and in his view the city might be in violation of the bond ordinance. Many things negotiated in the previous year's budget had not done by the administration and it undermined productive negotiations for improvements. He would like to spend more time in the future working on the structural challenges.

Piedmont-Smith commented that the year had been frustrating and complex due to the change to outcomes-based budgeting. It had been a slow process, without clear prioritization of the outcomes. It was a heavy lift to organize how to think about expenditures. It was important to discuss the desired outcomes and how to use the city's limited funds to achieve the outcomes. In her opinion, that had not been done. She hoped council would be actively involved and priorities would be discussed. She appreciated McClellan's openness and presentation of data. There had been a learning curve for all, so the following year should be easier.

Rosenbarger thanked Controller McClellan for her work and expertise. She stated that she, and potentially other councilmembers, lacked trust with the administration and gave an example. In late 2024 and early 2025, there were four resolutions to amend the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to further city goals and plans, specifically housing updates, affordability updates, and climate updates. Two were passed in 2024 but the other two were voted down for an introduction and reading without a chance to deliberate, which was very rare for the council. Rosenbarger had spoken with councilmembers, one of whom stated that the mayor had reached out to say that the legislation had been developed in a vacuum without the

administration or staff. That was false because the mayor, deputy mayor, and planning staff had been in multiple meetings and included in emails. This led to great mistrust in the administration.

Rollo appreciated the administration and controller for meeting the challenges of state legislation, changes in taxation and reduced revenue, and for being open and responsive during the budget process. He appreciated the mayor's efforts to find a proper location for a police station, and reminded all that he had voted against purchasing Showers West. He reiterated that the police department had not wanted to move to Showers West. Many of his negative comments regarding the budget were based on past growth in the city and the resulting effect on fees, taxes, city services, and spending. He commented on redesigning major streets but wondered if it was feasible given the reduced revenues. He was pleased with the COLA and would support the proposed budget.

Ruff thanked the administration for providing information in a timely manner as it was requested. He questioned spending large sums of money to redesign, engineer, and reconstruct infrastructure that was serving the community relatively well. He believed it contradicted austerity concerns and the uncertainty of future revenues according to state laws. He noted that the timer had started early for Flaherty and believed Flaherty should have another thirty seconds.

Stosberg stated she would support the proposed budget but also appreciated the comments from Flaherty and Rosenbarger. She believed the process had been collaborative and the administration had been responsive both via the Fiscal Committee and during questions throughout the budget hearings.

The motion to adopt Appropriation Ordinance 2025-11 received a roll call vote of Ayes: 7, Nays: 2 (Flaherty, Rosenbarger), Abstain: 0.

4.2. Appropriation Ordinance 2025-12

An Ordinance for Appropriations and Tax Rates for Bloomington Transportation Corporation for 2026

Daily moved and Piedmont-Smith seconded that Appropriation Ordinance 2025-12 be introduced and read by title and synopsis only. The motion was approved by voice vote. Bolden read the legislation by title and noted there was no synopsis.

Daily moved and Piedmont-Smith seconded to adopt Appropriation Ordinance 2025-12.

John Connell, Bloomington Public Transportation Corporation (BPTC), General Manager, requested the final approval of the 2026 budget. There had been no changes since it was presented at budget hearings. Flaherty said that a portion of the Economic Development Local Income Tax (EDLIT) went to BPTC, but would end in 2028, and asked about the impact to BPTC, and about debt service. Connell said the funds were primarily used as matching funds for federal grants. The microtransit program was attached to debt service and would be absorbed internally. Rollo asked about federal and state budget challenges and Connell said he was cautiously optimistic and gave examples. When asked, Connell stated that 42% of the fleet was electric or hybrid. Sixteen new buses were forty feet and had an extra battery pack and could be out all day.

There was no public comment. There were no council comments.

The motion to adopt Appropriation Ordinance 2025-12 received a roll call vote of Ayes: 9, Nays: 0, Abstain: 0.

4.3. Appropriation Ordinance 2025-13

An Ordinance Adopting a Budget for the Operation, Maintenance, Debt Service, and Capital Improvements for the Water and Wastewater Utility Departments of the City of Bloomington, Indiana for the Year 2026

Daily moved and Piedmont-Smith seconded that Appropriation Ordinance 2025-13 be introduced and read by title and synopsis only. The motion was approved by voice vote. Bolden read the legislation by title and synopsis.

Daily moved and Piedmont-Smith seconded to adopt Appropriation Ordinance 2025-13.

Katherine Zaiger, Utilities, Director, summarized the budget which had no changes since the budget hearings.

Joshua Stockton, employee at the water treatment plant, formally invited council to tour the facilities.

Flaherty appreciated the Utilities Services Board for their diligence and thoughtful questions. He served as a non-voting member. He had high confidence in the board and its members.

The motion to adopt Appropriation Ordinance 2025-13 received a roll call vote of Ayes: 9, Nays: 0, Abstain: 0.

5. ELECTED OFFICIAL SALARY DISCUSSION [7:34pm]

Stosberg delineated the discussion period starting with statements from the mayor and clerk.

Mayor Kerry Thomson stated that the previous year, she had asked council to establish principles for elected officials' salaries to be evaluated each year, and was making the same request. Ideally, salaries were set with a single comprehensive set of principles. Non-union staff salaries were based on market. The Association of Indiana Municipalities (AIM) tracked salaries and in the recent rankings, Bloomington's mayoral salary ranked sixth in the state soon to be seventh, council ranked seventh, and clerk ranked third. She believed it was important to adjust the salaries for population size and scope of job, especially since not all elected officials had the same level of responsibility. Once the salaries were set, they could not be decreased. She referenced the idea of the mayor and clerk being paid as department heads, and stated there were three underpaid department heads based on the current salary structure. She suggested that elected officials receive a 2.7% COLA.

Clerk Nicole Bolden stated that it would be ideal to separate salary ordinances for clerk, council, and mayor. She believed a COLA increase for elected officials, to parallel that of the civil city staff, was appropriate, until there was a better understanding of impacts to city revenue due to state laws that would impact the 2028 election cycle. When the committee considered different processes, she offered perspectives on the options and would continue to do so if invited to. She clarified that the AIM salary study included self-reported data and was not fully inclusive. Reviewing second class cities' salary ordinances, or Gateway, for the information was best. She noted that while it was true that councilmembers, clerk, and mayor knew what the salary was prior to running for office, it was also true that salaries were set yearly, and not for a term. She reiterated that a COLA increase was appropriate and she was happy to participate in further discussions.

There was robust council discussion on COLA increase, revenues, principles for setting salaries in the future, and whether there should be a systemic, values-base, and a repeatable method for setting elected officials' salaries. Timing for implementing a new salary, recommendations from the previous committee, potentially not having a COLA, salaries for 2026 and then future years, and what guiding principles to use was deliberated. Council analyzed work done by the committee the previous year and its recommendations, and how that could be used to reconsider setting salaries. Council could compare other second class cities, workload for councilmembers, and the use of a consultant. Bolden reminded everyone that the committee had looked at all second class cities, salary data for the mayor, council president, council, and clerk. Additional data that had been analyzed was elected official salaries over a period of years for Bloomington, salaries for mayoral appointees and staff, population, and frequency of council meetings for second class cities. Using a percentage of the mayoral salary for councilmember salaries was considered as well as pay per regular meeting. Bolden reiterated that the committee had considered a large amount of relevant data. She noted that the cost of living should be considered when comparing Bloomington to other second class cities. She believed council should be paid more. More discussion included non-permanent salary increases,

and the general assumption that salaries should be increased. Stosberg clarified that the committee had not started with the assumption that salaries should be increased. Flaherty stated that he supported Clerk Bolden’s suggestion of separating the salary ordinances for clerk, council, and mayor. Rollo believed the committee had not been able to bring their recommendations to the full council prior to being included in a packet; the timing had not been ideal. Rosenbarger believed it was important to trust the process. Flaherty made suggestions on how to consider criteria for any salary increases.

Bolden reminded council and Mayor Thomson that two appropriation ordinances needed to be signed that evening.

6. COUNCIL SCHEDULE [8:24pm]

Stosberg reviewed the upcoming council schedule.

7. ADJOURNMENT [8:25pm]

Stosberg adjourned the meeting.

APPROVED by the Common Council of the City of Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana, upon this 04 day of February, 2026.

APPROVE:



Isak Nti Asare, 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>