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2 Sponsor:

3 Zach Ammerman

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RESOLUTION 2026-03

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**CONCERNING THE PEDESTRIANIZATION OF KIRKWOOD AVENUE AND
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION**

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7 WHEREAS, the Bloomington Municipal Code establishes the Bloomington Commission on
8 Sustainability and Resilience to "promote and advance sustainable policies and
9 practices in Bloomington across environmental, social, and economic
10 dimensions"; and

11 WHEREAS, The Bloomington Municipal Code empowers the Commission to "advise and
12 make recommendations to the Bloomington Common Council, city
13 administration, and city boards and commissions on policies and programs that
14 infuse the work of city government with an operating philosophy based on
15 sustainability and community resilience"; and

16 WHEREAS, United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 ("Sustainable Cities and
17 Communities") calls upon signatories to provide sustainable transport systems and
18 universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces; and

19 WHEREAS, Kirkwood Avenue between the Indiana University Sample Gates and the
20 Courthouse Square represents the most iconic and heavily trafficked pedestrian
21 corridor in Bloomington; and

22 WHEREAS, the Bloomington Common Council unanimously passed Ordinance 2025-02¹
23 establishing a multi-year Kirkwood Outdoor Dining Program, with the stated
24 intent of providing businesses certainty and a clear path toward a more
25 pedestrian-oriented Kirkwood; and

26 WHEREAS, the administration's February 2026 proposal to suspend the seasonal street closure
27 program drew criticism from multiple councilmembers and members of the
28 public, who characterized it as violating the spirit of the ordinance and
29 undermining years of progress toward pedestrianization; and

30 WHEREAS, when configured for automobile traffic, motor vehicles dominate the streetscape,
31 relegating pedestrians to narrow sidewalks and excluding cyclists from a corridor
32 that lacks dedicated cycling infrastructure; and

¹ <https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/legislationFiles/5850>

33 WHEREAS, Church Street in Burlington, Vermont; Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado; and the
34 Main Street Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Virginia, demonstrate that
35 permanent pedestrian corridors in analog university communities can thrive
36 year-round economically while creating vibrant, sustainable public spaces; and

37 WHEREAS, research consistently demonstrates that business owners overestimate the
38 proportion of customers arriving by automobile, underestimate the percentage of
39 customers arriving by transit, biking, or walking, and that pedestrianized
40 commercial districts often experience increased foot traffic and economic
41 activity²; and

42 WHEREAS, the current uncertainty regarding Kirkwood's status, oscillating between
43 pedestrian and automobile setups, prevents businesses and the City from making
44 long-term investments in streetscape improvements; and

45 WHEREAS, the administration's primary quantitative justification for suspending the program,
46 an 8% decline in visitor traffic along the Kirkwood corridor, is derived from an AI
47 analytics firm with no available methodology, falls barely outside the firm's own
48 self-reported 5% margin of error for visit data, and does not account for
49 confounding factors including broader national economic and political conditions,
50 making it an extraordinarily thin evidentiary basis for abandoning a popular
51 public program; and

52 WHEREAS, the administration has framed the Kirkwood program as a revenue question by
53 comparing approximately \$80,000 in forgone parking meter revenue to
54 approximately \$17,000 in outdoor dining permit fees, yet these figures combined
55 represent a negligible fraction of the City's annual operating budget (the amount is
56 equal to 0.0004% of the 2025 operating budget), and decisions about the use of
57 public space should not hinge on such comparisons; and

58 WHEREAS, the Mayor, in a February 18 interview with Indiana Public Media, stated that
59 “only five” businesses along the corridor expressed support for the
60 pedestrianization program, but according to the city’s published survey results, at
61 least 20 businesses surveyed along the corridor expressed “strong support” of
62 continuing the program, the largest category, with more than 50% indicating
63 support of any degree, but that such decisions nonetheless should not be made
64 based solely or largely on the opinions of individuals who happen to own
65 businesses nearby, but rather primarily on the benefits of the program to the
66 Bloomington community as a whole; and

67 WHEREAS, the administration plans to unilaterally abandon the Kirkwood pedestrianization
68 program starting in summer 2026, violating the spirit if not the letter of Council
69 Ordinance 2025-02.

² von Schneidemesser, Dirk, and Jody Betzien. 2021. “Local Business Perception vs. Mobility Behavior
70 of Shoppers” Findings, June 2021. <https://doi.org/10.32866/001c.24497>; and
71 <https://ggwash.org/view/96602/survey-most-shopkeepers-shoppers-overestimate-car-use>

72 NOW THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED BY THE BLOOMINGTON
73 COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY, THAT:

74 SECTION 1. The Commission finds that:

75 (a) Street design and transportation infrastructure implicate environmental, social, and
76 economic dimensions of sustainability and fall within the Commission's statutory
77 mandate.

78 (b) Pedestrian-oriented street design promotes sustainable transportation, public health,
79 social interaction, and economic vitality.

80 (c) The years-long pattern of seasonal closures has established a community expectation
81 that Kirkwood will function as a pedestrian space, and reversing this trajectory
82 undermines both business planning and public trust.

83 SECTION 2. Recommendations

84 The Commission respectfully recommends that the Bloomington Common Council and City
85 Administration:

86 (a) At minimum, reverse the decision made by the administration and continue the
87 seasonal closure of Kirkwood Avenue to vehicle traffic during summer months,
88 consistent with the intent of Ordinance 2025-02.

89 (b) Strongly consider taking measures in favor of the permanent, year-round closure of
90 Kirkwood Avenue to motor vehicle traffic between at least the Sample Gates and the
91 Courthouse Square, with provisions for emergency and limited service/delivery vehicle
92 access, and without including provisions that would allow the city administration to
93 unilaterally end the program without the consent of the council.

94 (c) Study Church Street in Burlington, Vermont; Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado; and
95 the Main Street Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Virginia, as models for successful
96 permanent pedestrian corridors in comparable university communities.

97 (d) Prioritize investment in permanent streetscape improvements, including planters,
98 landscaping, shade structures, seating, and accessibility enhancements that would
99 maximize the corridor's function as a public space.

100 (e) Move administration of the Kirkwood pedestrianization program from the Department
101 of Economic and Sustainable Development to the Department of Planning and
102 Transportation.

103 (f) Reframe the program from one of outdoor dining and economic development to one of
104 public space and sustainable transportation.

105 (g) Repeal Section 7 of Ordinance 2025-02, which gives discretion to the City Engineer
106 to unilaterally and permanently suspend the program.

107 (h) Cease framing the Kirkwood program in terms of parking revenue versus dining
108 permit revenue and instead evaluate the program based solely on its contributions to
109 public health, sustainable transportation, quality of life, and Bloomington's identity as a
110 walkable community.

111 SECTION 3. Statement of Values

112 The Commission affirms that sustainable cities prioritize people over automobiles, especially in
113 their most central public spaces, and that Bloomington's identity as a walkable, bikeable
114 community should be reflected in the design of its most prominent and iconic pedestrian
115 corridor.

116 SECTION 4. Transmittal

117 The Chair is directed to transmit copies of this resolution to all members of the Bloomington
118 Common Council, to the Mayor, to the Director of Planning and Transportation, to the Director
119 of Economic and Sustainable Development, to the City Engineer, to the Chair of the Board of
120 Public Works, and to the Chair of the Transportation Commission.

121 PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability and Resilience
122 upon this ____ day of _____, 2026.

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_____, Chair
Bloomington Commission on Sustainability and
Resilience

127 *The views expressed here are solely those of the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability and Resilience, as approved in their public meetings,*
128 *and do not necessarily reflect the views, policies, or positions of the City of Bloomington. Only the Office of the Mayor has the authority to issue*
129 *policy statements on behalf of the Executive Branch of the City of Bloomington.*