

City Of Bloomington - Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes | Tuesday, March 17, 2026 | 4:00 p.m. | McCloskey Conference Room, City Hall

Meeting Information

Date: Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: McCloskey Conference Room, City Hall, Bloomington, Indiana

Notice: Meeting was appropriately posted and noticed.

Attendance

Commissioners Present:

Kurt Zorn, President

Isak Asare, Vice President

Tim Henke, Commissioner

Liz Feitl, Commissione

Vanessa McClary, Secretary (virtual)

Staff Present:

Jane Kupersmith

Andrea de la Rosa (virtual)

Guests:

Chris Emge, Randy Cassady

I. Call to Order

President Zorn called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM with four commissioners present in person, constituting a quorum. Commissioner McClary joined remotely partway through.

II. Approval of Minutes — October 21, 2024

One commissioner noted the minutes were more detailed than usual. Staff explained the density of that meeting's discussion warranted a fuller record, and noted that the level of detail should reflect the nature of the content – more thorough when the discussion is substantive, more summary when it is not. Commissioner Asare supported the approach. No change to the standard format was directed.

Motion to approve passed unanimously.

III. New Business: Election of Officers

Commissioner Asare nominated President Zorn to continue; the nomination received broad support. Staff confirmed the prior slate upon review. Motion to retain the existing slate passed unanimously.

President: Kurt Zorn | Vice President: Isak Asare | Secretary: Vanessa McClary

Commissioner Asare noted the Commission's broader goal of functioning more proactively as an advisory body.

IV. Staff Report and Discussion Items

A. Meeting Cadence

Staff described a proposal to retain all monthly meeting dates while designating quarterly meetings for substantive business. The May 19 meeting was confirmed to accommodate the tax abatement annual report, which must be reviewed by the EDC before the June 10 City Council presentation. The April 21 meeting remains scheduled but unconfirmed. No formal vote was taken; staff will notify commissioners in advance of each date.

B. MCCSC Business Roundtable and High School Diploma Workforce Requirements

Staff reported attending quarterly MCCSC business roundtable meetings and flagged a significant development: Indiana's new diploma requirements now include a workforce component across all tracks. Students must log a minimum of 75 workplace hours during high school; higher-tier credentials require 150 or more. Requirements are already in effect.

MCCSC is assembling a 40-member community advisory council – Strong Schools, Strong Community – with applications available online. Contact: jane.kupersmith@bloomington.in.gov.

Discussion was substantive. Commissioners acknowledged the program as an unfunded mandate with real administrative burden for schools, but saw meaningful opportunity: staff emphasized the potential for lasting connections between young people and local businesses, particularly small and Main Street businesses, as a driver of community attachment and long-term retention. President Zorn suggested reframing the central question from student placement logistics to economic development impact – matching placements to genuine community needs. He noted Superintendent Dr. Winston is forming a subcommittee toward that end.

C. Opportunity Zones – Permanent Authorization

The Opportunity Zone program was made permanent by the Trump administration in 2025. The city is identifying eligible census tracts for new designations in coordination with the state lobbying organization and Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI), with a regional rather than Bloomington-only lens. Some previously eligible tracts no longer qualify; staff expressed optimism about Hopewell. The New Markets Tax Credit program was also made permanent and may apply to Hopewell.

D. Seminary Square Area – Assessed Value Reduction and Incentive Strategy

Seminary Square-area property owners recently secured a significant assessed land value reduction from the County Assessor. Commissioner Henke, newly appointed to the Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals, confirmed the reduction was substantial and that high assessed values have historically deterred private investment.

Staff indicated they have been considering the area in relation to Hopewell and the anticipated convention center and proposed assembling the full incentive suite – Enterprise Zone, Opportunity Zone, and others – to support increased activity. Commissioners described the area as highly visible, damaging to downtown perception and foot traffic, and creating a business activity vacuum. Commissioner Asare suggested identifying a strategic anchor use rather than deploying incentives without a broader vision.

On tax abatements: President Zorn noted that the city has 52% of properties tax-exempt, making broad abatement use difficult; however, commissioners agreed that abatements on new investment still net additional revenue over the status quo. Staff raised concern about retaining Kroger at its current location, noting its loss would significantly impact Hopewell, Prospect Hill, and the near west side, and that Kroger’s site control practices could limit alternatives.

Next steps: Staff will schedule a conversation with County Assessor Judy Sharp to explore how city abatements might complement the assessed value reduction, and will inventory available incentive tools for the area.

[The Commission discussed broadening abatement criteria to include business retention. Whether criteria are in ordinance or policy, and whether expansion is permissible under State statute, requires confirmation before any revision is pursued.]

E. SB 89 – Additional Three-Way Alcohol Permits

SB 89 allocates two additional three-way permits to Bloomington with explicit economic development language. Each permit is valued at \$40,000. The city must establish qualifying criteria and execute a commitment agreement with each recipient before permits can be activated. Permits revert to the state if a business fails to meet its commitments; whether the \$40,000 fee is retained in that scenario is unclear.

Commissioner Asare, as a City Council member, stated his intention to draft legislation consolidating criteria across permit categories – SB 89, historic downtown, and any future Riverfront District permits – referencing Valparaiso’s approach as a model. He invited EDC input on priorities such as local ownership criteria. Staff noted the need for careful framing given public skepticism during 2025 discussions. President Zorn agreed to add this to the EDC agenda in the future.

F. UDO Small Business Omnibus Update

Planning Director David Hittle is developing Small Business Omnibus updates to the UDO, expected to advance in fall 2026. He is conducting business outreach, including conversations with businesses that failed to launch due to UDO barriers. Staff is supporting the effort. Commissioner Henke recommended including City Utilities (CPU), given utility requirements as a barrier; staff will pass that to Hittle. Staff are also committed to reporting back on the status of the permitting audit and will explore scheduling Hittle for a future EDC meeting.

V. General Discussion

Guests Chris Emge and Randy Cassady emphasized cross-institutional collaboration – EDC, City, RDC, and County Council – as essential to rebuilding the city’s economic infrastructure and tax base, noting that assessed value reductions on South Walnut affect all taxing jurisdictions.

VI. Staff Update – Hiring

Round 1 interviews are complete for the Special Projects Manager position (103 applicants). The Assistant Director for Arts and Culture position closed Sunday with approximately 53 applicants. Staff expressed interest in adding a standing staff report item to future agendas, modeled on the Indiana Finance Authority format; the Commission was supportive.

VII. Summary of Action Items

- Staff – Schedule conversation with County Assessor Judy Sharp re: Seminary Square incentive strategy and abatement options.
- Staff – Invite Planning Director Hittle to a future EDC meeting re: UDO Small Business Omnibus update.
- Staff – Connect Hittle's team with City Utilities (CPU) as a UDO stakeholder.
- Staff – Report back on permitting audit status.
- Commissioner Asare – Draft consolidated three-way permit criteria legislation; bring to a future EDC meeting for input.
- Staff – Add a standing staff report item to future EDC agendas.
- Staff – Confirm whether abatement criteria are in ordinance or policy; determine whether expansion to include retention is permissible under State statute.
- Staff – Monitor MCCSC Strong Schools, Strong Community implementation; bring updates to future meetings.

VIII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned. The May 19, 2026, meeting is confirmed.