

Bloomington Common Council-Special Session Minutes
Bloomington Council Chambers, City Hall, Bloomington, Indiana
Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 2026 at 6:00pm

Gretchen Knapp, Deputy Mayor, welcomed everyone and thanked Kathleen Bennett, for her work as the American Sign Language interpreter. Knapp introduced the color guard and Caleb Brinson, Police Officer, who sang the National Anthem. Knapp introduced Roger Kerr II, Fire Chief and Michael Diekhoff, Police Chief.

Kerr reflected on public safety over the previous year, and said that in September 2025, Fire had reached full staffing for the first time in nearly one decade. He noted the improvements to fire stations and discussed Fire’s mobile integrated healthcare program which provided things like screenings, vaccines, and follow-up care for mental health care and more.

Diekhoff spoke about the progress with staffing which had led to improvements in the community including decreases in property crime and crimes involving weapons. He spoke about focused enforcement, continued community engagement, and work across department divisions.

Knapp introduced Clerk Nicole Bolden and Council President Isak Nti Asare, to start the official proceedings.

Call to Order [6:11pm]

Asare called the meeting to order. Bolden called the roll. Asare noted the meeting would adjourn following the mayor’s remarks and introduced Mayor Kerry Thomson.

1. Roll Call: (*indicates participation via Zoom) [6:11pm]

Council Members:	
Isak Nti Asare	At-Large, Council President
Courtney Daily	District 5, Council Parliamentarian
Matt Flaherty (absent)	At-Large
Isabel Piedmont-Smith	District 1
Dave Rollo	District 4
Kate Rosenbarger (absent)	District 2
Andy Ruff	At-Large
Hopi Stosberg (absent)	District 3
Sydney Zulich	District 6, Council Vice President

City staff, officials, and guests present:	
Nicole Bolden	City Clerk
Gretchen Knapp	Deputy Mayor
Roger Kerr II	Fire Chief
Michael Diekhoff	Police Chief
Kerry Thomson	Mayor

1. Topics Discussed [6:12pm]

Mayor Kerry Thomson offered remarks regarding the state of the city. The remarks, as provided by the Office of the Mayor, are attached to these minutes.

2. Mayors Remarks Concluded [7:07pm]

March 31, 2026

APPROVED by the Common Council of the City of Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana, upon this day: 29 of July, 2026.

APPROVE:



Signature of Isak Nti Asare, Common Council President

ATTEST:



Signature of 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 Common Council meetings can be accessed on the following websites:

- [Community Access Television Services](#)¹ (CATS)
- [City of Bloomington YouTube](#)²

[Background materials and packets](#)³ are available on the Common Council website.

¹ <https://catvstv.net>
² <https://youtube.com/@citybloomington>
³ <https://bloomington.in.gov/council/meetings>

5:30 p.m. - Doors open to the public.

6 p.m. - Program begins. **Gretchen Knapp** to the podium; welcomes the audience & introduces Color Guard & Officer Caleb Brinson to sing the National Anthem.

Gretchen Knapp

- Good evening, everyone! Welcome to the 2026 State of the City Address.
- I'm Deputy Mayor Gretchen Knapp. Thank you for being here tonight.
- Tonight is our chance to take a look at the work happening across Bloomington and the opportunities ahead.
- To begin, we'll start with the Presentation of Colors by the Bloomington Police and Fire Departments, followed by the National Anthem, performed by Officer Caleb Brinson.
- Officer Brinson joined the Bloomington Police Department in May of last year. His time as a student at Indiana University—and his experiences across Bloomington—shaped a lasting connection to this city, one that led him to serve it.
- Please rise.

6:02 p.m. - **Gretchen** steps back to the podium, but remains on stage. **Color Guard presents**, followed by the National Anthem (**Officer Brinson**).

Color Guard and National Anthem

Gretchen Knapp

- Thank you to our Police and Fire Departments and to Officer Brinson for that powerful opening.
- You may be seated.
- Now, to begin tonight's program, I'd like to introduce Fire Chief Roger Kerr II and Police Chief Michael Diekhoff.
- Chiefs, the stage is yours.

6:07 p.m. - **Chief Kerr and Chief Diekhoff** walk to the stage together - Kerr goes to the podium to speak and Diekhoff stands slightly off to his left. After **Kerr** is finished speaking, he returns to the audience and sits down. **Diekhoff** moves to the podium and sits down after presenting his remarks.

Chief Kerr

- Good evening. I'm honored to stand alongside Chief Diekhoff as we reflect briefly on the past year in public safety.
- For many years, Bloomington Fire lost trained firefighters to neighboring departments offering higher pay, and maintaining minimum staffing required frequent reassignment and overtime.

- In September of 2025, our Fire Department reached full staffing for the first time in nearly a decade.

[Applause and pause]

- Since then, staffing levels have remained stable.
- We also completed long-overdue improvements to Fire Station 3, located on IU's campus.
- The station opened in 1963 and had not seen major modernization until last year. The renovation improved firefighter safety and added updated cancer-prevention features.
- Construction continues on the Operations and Training Center, which will bring training, logistics, and equipment into one place and strengthen training and daily operations when it opens this September.
- Another important part of our system is our Mobile Integrated Health program, whether that's at a residence, at a nursing home, or on the street.
- Led by the fire department, community paramedics provide screenings, vaccinations, and follow-up care, while helping connect people to mental health services, substance use resources, and ongoing support.
- I am proud to announce MIH handled 220 unique responses last year.
- Later this evening, the Mayor will speak in more detail about public safety and the work ahead.

- For now, it is my pleasure to introduce Chief Michael Diekhoff.

Chief Diekhoff

- On the police department side, we have made important staffing progress.
- Today, we are staffed at 94 officers out of 105 authorized positions, with 7 candidates moving through the Board of Public Safety hiring process.
- If those appointments move forward as expected, we anticipate reaching approximately 96 percent of authorized staffing in the near term.
- As staffing stabilizes, we are beginning to see improvements across our community.
- In 2025, Bloomington experienced substantial decreases in property crime and crimes involving weapons. These improvements reflect focused enforcement, continued community engagement, and the work of officers across the department's divisions.
- Patrol coverage is more consistent, specialized units are rebuilding capacity, and training schedules are returning to normal after several years of disruption caused by vacancies.
- Although staffing for both the BPD and Dispatch are improving, we must continue to prioritize how we deploy resources and focus on calls and incidents that most affect public safety.

- Even with these challenges, our officers continue to show up every day with professionalism, care, and commitment to this community.
- This progress is the result of their work—and we're proud of what's been accomplished, and what's ahead.
- Thank you.

6:11 p.m. - **Gretchen Knapp** to podium - thanks BPD & BFD, then introduces Clerk Bolden and Council President Asare.

Gretchen Knapp

- Thank you, Chief Diekhoff and Chief Kerr. To our Police and Fire Departments, THANK YOU.
- You serve with excellence and compassion every day, and when lives are on the line, the people of Bloomington know they can count on you. Thank you.
- At this time, I'd like to invite Clerk Nicole Bolden and Council President Isak Asare to begin the official proceedings.

6:12 p.m. - Transition. **Clerk Bolden** and **Council President Asare** to the podium to call the meeting to order and do roll call.

Council President Isak Asare

- Good evening, and thank you all for being here tonight. I am Council President Isak Asare. I'd like to call this Special Session of the Bloomington Common Council for Tuesday, March 31, 2026.
- Please note that this Special Session will adjourn following closing remarks from Mayor Kerry Thomson.
- And now, I'd like to invite the honorable Clerk Nicole Bolden to proceed with roll call.

Clerk Nicole Bolden

- Good evening, everyone—I am Clerk Nicole Bolden. It is nice to see so many familiar faces here tonight

[Proceeds with Council roll call]

6:15 p.m. - **Council President Asare** to the podium & introduces the Mayor.

Council President Asare

- Thank you, Clerk Bolden.
- I'm delighted to introduce Bloomington's Mayor, Kerry Thomson. Tonight, she will share the State of the City.

- Please help welcome Mayor Thomson to the stage.

6:16 p.m. - Transition. **Mayor Thomson** to take the podium and deliver the 2026 State of the City address.

Mayor Kerry Thomson

Opening—Bloomington's Moment

- Good evening, Bloomington!
- What is something happening right now that, years from now, will feel completely obvious?
- Something we'll wonder how we ever lived without.
- Because if there's one thing about this community—
- we don't always see the ending when we're in the middle of it.
- So tonight, I want to talk about what we're building now—
and what it might become.

[Transition]

- Before we go any further, I want to recognize the people whose work makes all of this possible.

- If you are a member of City Council, a county or state elected, or serve on one of our boards or commissions, please stand so we can thank you.
- And if you work for the City of Bloomington or for Monroe County, I also invite you to stand.
- These are your neighbors who solve problems most of us never see.
- They keep our City functioning—day after day and administration after administration.
- Please join me in thanking them.

[Applause and pause]

- One of the best parts of my job is how often people stop me to tell me why they love Bloomington.
- Entrepreneurs tell me about how in Bloomington, their startup business found its first investor, customer, or collaborator.
- Artists tell me about how they found a community of creatives, venues for their work, and a public that values arts and culture as central to Bloomington's identity.
- Retirees tell me about their many volunteer projects, the hours of service they've contributed, and the friends they've made while working together to improve our community.

- And of course, many people talk to me about the underrated quarterback who came to Bloomington, trained hard, and left with the Heisman Trophy and a National Championship.

[Transition]

- What is described, again and again, is a community where people make connections, invest in one another, and build businesses, nonprofits, culture, friendships, and traditions.
- Part of our job in city government is to create the conditions where those connections can happen and potential is unlocked.
- When we get those conditions right, we build and sustain a thriving community where everyone can belong.

[Transition]

- What exactly is a thriving community? First and foremost, it's well-maintained, clean, and safe.
- It has a variety of housing that meets the needs of diverse residents.
- It offers viable business and job opportunities that lead to wage growth, economic diversity, and a sustainable future for individuals and the community.
- And it has a government focused on getting the right work done, in service to the public.
- All of that makes it possible for each person to bring their gifts and talents to fruition and find community and support in a creative,

innovative culture.

- Tonight, I'd like to talk about what we're doing to build a thriving community where everyone can belong.

A City That Takes Care of What It Has

- A thriving community starts with a well-maintained, tidy city.
- Over the years, Bloomington has funded amazing assets.
- The B-line Trail, Switchyard Park, and Hopewell Commons are just a few of those.
- We also have built assets we walk and drive on every day: sidewalks, roads, and multi-use paths.
- We've invested in preserving historical assets like this building we're in tonight, City Hall, and the Waldron.

[Transition]

- it costs money to maintain those assets, as well as critical infrastructure like our water and wastewater treatment plants, our storm systems, and the facilities for the animal shelter, sanitation, fleet and street, public safety, just to name a few.
- It is also true that deferring maintenance and repairs only serves to drive costs up and increase risks.
- We've committed, first and foremost, to ensuring that City investments are well-maintained.

[Transition]

- If we're going to make decisions about bonding, infrastructure, and long-term investment, we need more than good intentions.
- We need data, clarity, and a trajectory.
- We're putting a full asset and capital plan in place.
- Now I'll touch on some of the work we've already done...

[Transition]

- In the first two years of my administration, we paved over 32 miles of streets.
- To put that in perspective, that's more than the City paved in the previous FOUR years combined.
- That investment is important to stabilize our road network and prevent further decline and increased costs.
- We have more work to do to ensure we don't fall further behind.

[Transition]

- Traditional funding sources are no longer what they used to be.
- Our road system requires an additional \$3 million annually just to maintain current conditions as they are.
- With the number of pothole calls coming into the Mayor's Office these days, we know that's the bare minimum.

- So we're getting creative, using grants and partnerships to extend our local tax dollars.

[Transition]

- Through the INDOT Community Crossing Matching Grant program, we've been able to extend our tax dollars for street paving *and* add ADA-compliant ramps, and we'll continue to leverage that resource.
- In 2026, Parking Meter funds will help us complete over \$400,000 in paving and infrastructure projects downtown that would otherwise have been very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.
- Through a partnership with IU, we'll be able to repair and maintain the brick sidewalks along Kirkwood, keeping Bloomington safe and beautiful.
- We'll also renovate some downtown alleys, along with building on the downtown beautification efforts made last year to repair concrete and planter boxes, powerwash, and improve landscaping.

[Transition]

- In 2026, we'll implement the results of the parking and sidewalk studies begun last year, to ensure we understand the costs, the needs, and have a strategic plan for those resources.
- In April, the Transportation Commission will review the Parking Study and Comprehensive Plan.
- In May, they'll review a draft Pedestrian Facilities Operations Plan outlining sidewalk repair and maintenance.

[Transition]

- We're preparing to release the Parks Master Plan results, which will guide how we prioritize investments across our park system.
- That matters because we have real needs to address:
- Two pools and an ice rink in need of repair, sports centers and courts to maintain, and a wide range of parks to care for.
- To give you an idea, Switchyard Park alone will cost somewhere around \$125,000 to maintain annually. Our controller is working with Parks to create a sustainable future.

[Transition]

- At Utilities, fluoride is flowing again; we've secured \$1.25M for upgrades to wastewater treatment with the help of Senator Erin Houchin, and we're preparing to make long-delayed repairs to the Monroe Water plant.

[Transition]

- We're also looking at how to build and fund Public Works facilities that adequately serve the City's needs and protect our investments in sanitation trucks, snow plows, fire engines, police cars, our electric fleet, and more.
- Equipment that costs over \$100,000 or more should not be left outside to deteriorate in weather. Maintaining that equipment requires storage space and modern tools and facilities.
- Finally, we are looking at how best to use the Showers West space, given the bond restrictions, the City's need for space, and the current state of its aging systems.

[Transition]

- The Fire Department moved into its new headquarters last year, as planned in the bond, and we are now negotiating final agreements with the remaining tenants.
- Since then, we've used Showers West to meet immediate needs across the organization, supporting City Council, accommodating departments during renovations, and creating space where it's needed most.
- Most recently, Engineering relocated to Showers West, affording Planning and Housing and Neighborhood Development the space they have long needed within City Hall.
- As we look ahead, we are actively assessing how the whole building should function long-term—
- —evaluating departmental space needs, conference room capacity, how teams that work closely together are physically aligned, and how the public moves through the space.
- We are also incorporating safety planning into that assessment.
- We will soon hire the City's first Emergency Management Specialist to create a building safety plan for City Hall and other buildings, train staff, and run regular safety exercises to ensure that we are prepared to respond to emergencies.

[Transition]

Community Safety

- And that leads us to another important commitment of my administration, and a key responsibility of government: public safety.
- A city does not thrive without safety.
- Everyone in Bloomington deserves to be safe—and to feel safe.
- To do that, we must ensure our public safety teams operate at their best.
- For too many years, both BPD and BFD operated below their authorized staffing levels, which strained response, increased overtime, and made it harder to retain personnel.

[Transition]

- In the past 2 years, we made targeted changes to pay and policies to address that, enabling Bloomington to compete again.
- In 2024, we successfully negotiated two union contracts with Police and Fire to increase pay to be competitive in the market, and both passed with a unanimous vote.
- The 2026 collective bargaining discussions have already begun, and we anticipate two more successful union negotiations.
- Let's be clear— unanimous union votes are a once in a lifetime mayoral experience, but our transparent and honest process has led to negotiations that work for all.

- For the Fire department, in the most recent hiring cycle, 272 applicants applied to join BFD.
- That is a 213% increase from the number of applicants in 2024.
- That's pretty awesome, but public safety is not only about how many people we have.
- It's about how our police officers and firefighters show up in this community—building relationships, preventing harm by solving problems early, and being part of the fabric of this city.

[Transition]

- For the police department, full staffing allows us to reduce turnover, stress, the risk of injury, and overtime costs, so service is consistent, response is reliable, and the system isn't stretched too thin.
- It also creates space to be present in the community, where officers are known and where relationships come before response is needed.
- When people know their local police, trust increases—and safer, more connected neighborhoods follow.

[Transition]

- In 2025, we saw obvious forward movement.
- BPD welcomed eleven new officers in a single class—the largest group in more than three decades.

- One of those individuals was Officer Brinson, who opened this evening with the National Anthem.

[Transition]

- Several officers from that recruitment class were already certified, allowing them to enter service more quickly, and one veteran officer returned to Bloomington after more than twenty years of prior service.
- We are making progress, but we are not finished.
- Not every recruit completes training. Some officers will retire. Others may leave the profession.
- But this is my commitment: we will reach full staffing by the close of this calendar year.

[Transition]

- And just as staffing matters, so does how we respond. Not every call requires the same response.
- Some situations require enforcement. Others require medical care, mental health support, or connection to services.
- We continue to build a structure of care that reflects that reality.

[Transition]

- Stride is our community's nonprofit, 24/7 mobile crisis response team, made up of trained mental health professionals who respond in real time to substance use and behavioral crises.

- **Stride works closely with our police, fire, and dispatch teams, ensuring that calls are routed to the most appropriate response.**
- **They meet people where they are, on a sidewalk, in a park, at a business, and connect them to care.**
- **In many cases, Stride resolves situations before they escalate, reduces unnecessary emergency room visits and arrests, and builds trust with residents who may not otherwise engage with traditional systems.**
- **My gratitude to Cook Medical for working with us and Stride to create the bus wrappers and other marketing campaign tools to promote their work.**

[Transition]

- **The City's Downtown Resource Officers, Police Social Worker, and outreach teams work together to respond to individuals in crisis and reduce repeat calls for service as well.**
- **Last year, we embedded a mental health professional within Central Dispatch to help triage certain calls in real time and direct them to the appropriate response.**

[Transition]

- **Later this spring, we'll launch an analysis how we could potentially integrate an alternative response into 911 dispatch.**
- **LEAP, the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, will analyze current calls and community resources to identify where alternative responses can expand while maintaining a strong, fully capable police and fire presence**

for the most urgent public safety needs.

- This work is deliberate, grounded in data, and informed by our local situation—our local providers, our financial constraints, our systems and staffing levels—to make sure that the results are pragmatic, actionable, and safe for all.

[Transition]

- Those same principles apply to the tools we use to support safety in our community.
- The City is currently reviewing our contract for Flock cameras and will be presenting our findings on April 15 to the City Council based on their recent resolution.

[Transition]

- Safety stabilizes a community. Housing stabilizes people.
- That's where we turn next.

[Transition]

Attainable Housing and Homelessness

- For 25 years my professional work centered solely on housing.
- It was a top commitment of mine when I ran for office, and it remains our City's greatest priority.
- We need more houses, of more sizes, for more people.

- We need housing diversity.
- The largest opportunity to do that is Hopewell.

[Transition]

- We have a community that cares deeply about getting this right—
- and in Bloomington, even when we agree on the goal and what needs to be done, it can still take a very long time to move forward.
- Government and politics in our community tend to take the scenic route.
- And the trip is never boring!

[Transition]

- This isn't the first time there have been lively conversations about problems and their solutions.
- At different points, we've debated:
- An abandoned rail line.
- The hospital leaving downtown.
- An outdated Convention Center.
- Changes around the Tech Park.

- Chickens.
- Before that, our community confronted the possible loss of the Courthouse
- And even of this very building.

[Transition]

- And look at where that process has led us.
- We saved the Courthouse.
- We developed the B-Line Trail.
- We purchased, designed, and built out the Trades District.
- We moved forward on the Convention Center.
- We built out bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure across the city.
- We constructed the Bloomington Transit Hub.
- We established the Bloomington Entertainment & Arts District—including the building we're in tonight.
- And soon, we will, one way or another, have Hopewell, a once in a generation neighborhood which all of us will be proud.

[Transition]

- **We all agreed to high standards when it comes to our neighborhoods. We all want housing that is safe, sustainable, and built to last.**
- **But we also have to be honest about the moment we're in.**
- **Costs are rising. Wages are not keeping pace.**
- **Just yesterday, Novo announced layoffs impacting 400 people.**
- **At the same time, state and national decisions continue to influence wages and costs in ways we don't control locally.**

[Transition]

- **Like all projects of this significance, the proposal has been shaped through expansive outreach and engagement.**
- **We have engaged experienced planners and designers renowned throughout the country for their innovative work to advance housing that is attainable,.**
- **Local lenders, builders, developers, and housing experts have weighed in on what works in Bloomington to make a project like this viable.**
- **We have collaborated with the public,**
- **with City Council,**
- **with City departments**

- and the Redevelopment Commission and Plan Commission.
- It takes time for a project to reach a point of action.
- Hopewell would be difficult to deliver in today's environment without sustained public leadership.

[Transition]

- Together with our City Council I agree: this project is worth the work.
- And we all share the same vision for it:
- Attainable housing in Bloomington.

[Transition]

- Hopewell South is the first phase of a much larger neighborhood.
- For this phase, the administration made a clear choice to focus on two things:
- HOMEOWNERSHIP that more people can attain at market rates.
- And a neighborhood that connects to opportunity.
- On those goals, this plan delivers.
- It doesn't resolve every challenge.
- No single project does.

- But it moves us forward.
- And in a housing crisis, that matters more than perfection.

[Transition]

- As an administration, we take responsibility for our part of the ongoing housing puzzle:
- Clarify expectations and legal boundaries, align departments, reduce red tape, and generate a clearer path from concept to construction.
- Our existing UDO does not always allow us to build the kind of housing we say we want.
- That is why we use tools like a PUD—to create a path to actually build housing.
- We will keep improving our code. Refining our tools. Learning from this work.
- This is not either/or.
- It's both.

[Transition]

- We have to stay focused on the outcomes.

- Where process adds costs without improving the result, it moves in the wrong direction.
- We have capable local builders and we have standards that support energy efficiency.

[Transition]

- This is where we shift from discussion to delivery.

[Transition]

- I'm confident we will get to the finish line with Hopewell, because we share the same vision for attainable housing in Bloomington—and that alignment matters most.

[Transition]

- Housing attainability also requires strengthening the systems we have.
- We have enforced Title 16 housing standards, held negligent landlords accountable, and revoked permits for chronically unsafe properties.
- In one case, a long-time property owner whose repeated life-and-safety violations persisted for decades—and spanned 31 properties within city limits—is now prohibited from operating rental units in Bloomington for the next two decades.
- Unsafe, unmaintained housing will *not* be tolerated in Bloomington.

[Transition]

- In parallel, we are working to reposition local builders and developers to succeed by shifting internal processes.
- Two permitting audits are underway—one where the City acts as a zoning petitioner to identify real friction points, and a second comprehensive review of every step in the development process across departments.
- These audits will lead to tangible change in the time and process for creating housing.
- This work is paired with updates to the Unified Development Ordinance and a redesign of permitting systems to reduce red tape and make housing development more predictable and therefore more affordable.

[Transition]

- Builders and developers consistently report shifting interpretations, conflicting departmental guidance, and unpredictable review timelines—
- Challenges that hit small single-family projects the hardest.
- And when local builders leave the table, we lose local jobs, local investment, and the ability to keep that economic activity here at home.
- When housing production slows, the entire housing system tightens—from starter homes to rental units to the safety nets people rely on when life gets difficult.
- If you are a housing builder or developer watching tonight, here is what I would say:
- Pick a lane and build it well.

- We need many kinds of housing in Bloomington. And your city wants to make it easier to create it.
-

[Transition]

- Housing supply alone does not solve the full challenge.
- We're also working to address what happens when housing is lost.

[Transition]

- Homelessness does not happen overnight. It is the result of a longer chain of housing instability
- We are seeing the same pressures that communities across the country are seeing.

[Transition]

- Many residents feel two things at once: compassion for individuals living and crisis and concern about impacts in parks, along trails, and in neighborhoods.
- Both are real. Both come from a place of caring about a thriving Bloomington.
- And both deserve a response that is thoughtful, consistent, and effective.

[Transition]

- While City government alone cannot solve homelessness, we play a direct role in response.

- We support shelter and service providers.
- We coordinate across departments.
- And we bring partners together to move people toward housing and stability.
- Our nonprofit partners do critical, day-to-day work—building relationships, providing care, and helping people take the next step.
- Our job is to support that work, strengthen it, and make sure it leads to real outcomes.

[Transition]

- Let me remain clear: we cannot arrest our way out of homelessness.
- We prioritize housing, treatment, support, and connection because *that* is how people stabilize and begin to rebuild.
- At the same time, cities must operate within the laws that govern public space.

[Transition]

- Recently, the State passed Senate Bill 285, which prohibits public camping beginning July 1.
- This is not a law we supported, but came with a mandate from the state to empty camps,

- I am determined to use this as a deadline to see just how many people we can get housed, into services, and into a place where they never have to sleep outside again.

[Transition]

- In January 2024, there were more than a dozen encampments on City-owned property.
- Today, there is only one.

[Transition]

- As a result of sustained outreach and coordinated response prior to SB 285, only one established encampment remains on City-owned property, and our teams remain engaged with those residents every day to help move them toward stability.
- This is the result of focused, coordinated work:
- Daily engagement.
- Cross-agency collaboration.
- And consistent follow-through by City teams.

[Transition]

- In 2024, our administration put clear protocols in place so that when encampments must close, they do so humanely and with structure.
- Encampments receive notice.

- Outreach teams connect residents to shelter, services,
- and reunification with family or support networks whenever that option exists.

[Transition]

- In fact, reunification is one of the tools we pursue most aggressively, because reconnecting someone with people who already know them and care about them is often the fastest path back to stability.
- Last year, our Bloomington Police Department facilitated the reunification of 50 individuals. They also identified 139 individuals experiencing homelessness who were new to Bloomington.
- Stride, our community's mobile crisis response team, reunified an additional 78 individuals.
- Even accounting for some overlap between those efforts, that means at least 117 people were reconnected to support systems in the past year.

[Transition]

- The larger reality is that Bloomington currently carries a disproportionate share of services for individuals experiencing homelessness across our region.
- Our community has stepped forward to help, but too many people are still without housing or support.
- Our current resources cannot meet the scale of the need and the need is great.

[Transition]

- If we want to make a meaningful impact on individual lives—and on the health of our community—we must acknowledge our limits.
- That means setting clearer expectations about how services are delivered across the region.
- The City continues to call for a temporary approach to regional service boundaries within our six-county HUD region.
- Regional service boundaries are not a test of whether someone belongs in Bloomington.
- Boundaries are not a barrier to immediate food, shelter, or reunification help.
- Instead, regional service boundaries are a temporary framework that prioritizes scarce shelter beds, case management, and housing resources for people whose care networks are in Bloomington and our surrounding counties, so the help we offer is real and sustainable.

[Transition]

- We are also making something clear to other jurisdictions: stop transferring people to Bloomington without a local connection or follow-up plan.
- Taking someone out of their community and dropping them somewhere they have no support and cannot access services does not lead to recovery.

- I'd like to thank Heading Home for their leadership in thinking through, and exploring training a group, on next steps for encampment closure.
- And for our County colleagues, especially Commissioner Madeira, for taking this so seriously and having an approach of partnership.
- Solving homelessness requires both compassion and structure: housing, services, and a region willing to take shared responsibility on collaborative and often times iterative solutions.

[Transition]

Economic Development

- Housing stability allows people to build a life.
- Economic opportunity allows them to build a future.
- Our commitment is to grow the workforce population, grow wages, and strengthen the economic base that supports the services our community depends on.
- The single most important action we can take to support that is removing barriers to housing.
- If families cannot find a place to live, they cannot take a job here.

[Transition]

- Housing and economic development move together. You cannot solve them in isolation.

- When housing supply grows, employers can hire the workers they need.
- When businesses grow, wages rise, and housing instability falls.
- And when the economy grows, the revenues generated by local income, property, and food and beverage taxes allow the City to reinvest directly in our built environment, safety, and public health.
- Under Senate Enrolled Act 1, or SEA 1, that connection becomes even more important.

[Transition]

- Cities like Bloomington are increasingly dependent on income tax tied directly to the workforce.
- Our role is to create the circumstances where people and businesses can succeed.
- One of the most visible investments supporting that work is the Convention Center expansion.
- Our community has worked toward this moment for nearly 20 years.
- That work required blood, sweat, tears, partnership between the City and County, the creation of the Capital Improvement Board, and a long-term commitment to investing in Bloomington's future.
- Today, that vision is becoming real—rising at 3rd and College, connecting our past to our future.

- The expanded Convention Center is expected to bring millions of dollars in new outside spending into Bloomington each year.

[Transition]

- This investment is not in isolation.
- It is part of a broader pattern of progress concentrated in the corridor stretching across South Rogers, South Walnut, and the Hopewell redevelopment area.
- For years, this area has been a gap in the center of the city.
- Now, it is becoming a place where we are intentionally restoring connection and continuity.
- The Convention Center expansion. The Hopewell neighborhood. The proposed future location of public safety infrastructure.
- When we locate housing, jobs, and services in close proximity to one another, the system works better.
- People live closer to where they work and businesses benefit from the steady base of residents and visitors.

[Transition]

- Then, just up the B-Line, The Trades District continues to grow: new employers, expanded workspaces, a new hotel, and more public art and programming on the horizon.

- In late 2024, a \$16 million Lilly Endowment grant, awarded to Indiana University in partnership with the City and The Mill—now Amplify Bloomington—is accelerating that work.
- Last year, the City added a position to deliver on that partnership and move projects forward.
- That investment is already showing up on the ground.
- The Forge, a new Class A office building, is now home to companies like Vivum AI, Folia, and Bloom.
- Amplify Bloomington is expanding inside The Mill, adding new workspaces, offices, and conference capacity.
- Next door at the Kiln, Paragraph is fueling new startups with funding, and Soma Coffee is fueling us all with caffeine.

[Transition]

- Last Wednesday, we closed on a new hotel in the Trades District.
- We're on track to break ground this summer, adding rooms, meeting space, and street-level activity that connects directly to downtown.
- When we don't have enough hotel capacity, demand spills into short-term rentals, often taking whole homes off the market for residents.
- This is about putting the right supply in the right place and staying competitive.

- **Bloomington has fewer hotel rooms than comparable markets, even if we include planned projects.**
- **The Trades District hotel will help close that gap and strengthen a key part of our economy: destination tourism and events.**

[Transition]

- **We are correspondingly investing in the district's experience by activating it with art, events and programs so it works for residents, too, not just visitors or tenants.**
- **This is economic development at its best—jobs, business activity, and investment that move beyond one district and strengthen the entire community.**

[Transition]

- **We are also making decisions about how people experience our city day to day.**
- **Kirkwood Avenue is a good example.**
- **And I want to acknowledge—Kirkwood's outdoor dining experience has meant a lot to people. I care about it too.**
- **The full closure created moments people loved.**
- **But the day-to-day reality did not consistently match the intent of the program.**

[Transition]

- The City's adopted Transportation Plan identifies Kirkwood as a shared street.
- It carries businesses, deliveries, emergency access, and daily movement. It also carries a critical sense of place at the intersection of city life and campus life.
- Our responsibility is to balance all of that, not just on the best day, but every day.

[Transition]

- We looked at the data, business participation, and overall community impact. The recommendation—and the Board of Public Works decision—is to continue with a shared street model this year.
- And this season, we're working with partners to expand activations so the space works harder for the community.
- More events. More programming. More reasons for people to be there beyond outdoor dining.
- Because how a place functions day to day shapes how people experience it.
- And how people experience a place shapes whether they stay, invest, and build something here.

[Transition]

- That brings us to something we should have done a long time ago: we need to be clear about who we are as a city.
- Nearly a decade ago, the City's Wage Growth Task Force recommended that Bloomington define a shared identity.
- That work did not move forward.
- It is now.

[Transition]

- Later this year, we will roll out Bloomington's city and place branding.
- We partnered with a national firm, CivicBrand, to build the framework, but our story comes from Bloomington.
- Over the past 12 months, residents, business owners, students, artists, and community partners have shaped it through surveys, committees, workshops, and direct conversations.
- That input continues as we refine the design and strategy in real time.

[Transition]

- If you ask someone why they love Bloomington, they will not give you a one-line answer.
- They will give you twenty or thirty minutes.
- That is a strength and also a challenge.

- Right now, Bloomington has a strong identity, but we have not always told that story clearly or consistently.

[Transition]

- Cities that compete for talent, investment, and growth do not leave their stories undefined.
- They state it clearly, reinforce it constantly, and use it to guide decisions.
- The goal is to make sure we communicate Bloomington plainly enough that people can see it, understand it, and choose to be part of it.

[Transition]

- At a time when national conversations pull attention in every direction, we stay focused on what we can actually shape.
- We can control the systems we build, the investments we make, and the expectations we set for ourselves as a community.
- When those are clear and consistent, people do not have to guess whether they belong here.
- They know.

Government That Works

- To truly build a thriving community, we have to start by listening.
- Leadership begins with listening.

- Many of you have said the same thing.
- You see Team Bloomington out and about, and you know how to reach us.
- Over the last two years, we have made listening a regular part of the job:
- Monthly door-knocking in neighborhoods.
- Town Halls and Office Hours where residents can speak directly with us.
- And regular listening sessions with nonprofit and faith leaders who see challenges up close and personal.
- Our sequence is simple: Listen. Discern. Lead. Deliver.

[Transition]

- We've worked diligently to get our financial reporting up to date.
- In 2024, we closed out the delayed 2022 audit.
- in 2025, we closed out the 2023 audit.
- and on Thursday we meet with auditors for the exit conference on the 2024 audit.
- We will now be able to complete the 2025 audit on time and be back in compliance with reporting deadlines for the first time in years.
- In addition, we completed the long-overdue update of the City's financial account numbers, to comply with State law.

[Transition]

- Our Housing and Neighborhood Development Department worked hard to return to reporting compliance with HUD and has even been invited to present at their conference.

[Transition]

- We've updated our public records request processes and uReport processes, eliminating a backlog of hundreds of overdue requests.
- There's more to do, and we continue to clean up and improve the systems.
- But increasingly, we are leading the way rather than playing catch up.

[Transition]

- We've discussed our efforts to ensure that Public Safety is fully staffed.
- The same focus has extended across the rest of the City to ensure we are staffed with skilled public servants. Implementing the salary study has been a key piece of our success.
- As a result and as of this week, Engineering is fully staffed for the first time since October 2022.
- Other departments are also receiving more applications, and more qualified applications, for their open positions.
- We continue to work closely with the City's unions to build stronger relationships and better outcomes.
- We started that work early.

- In 2024, we negotiated two public safety contracts to unanimous vote.
- In 2025, we opened the AFSCME contract a year early and successfully negotiated a new contract that passed 82-7.

[Transition]

The New Reality – SEA 1

- While we've been rebuilding our foundation, the financial landscape for cities across Indiana began to shift.
- Last year, the State passed Senate Enrolled Act 1, or SEA 1.
- This law changes how local governments are funded.
- Income tax distributions will switch. Municipal revenue growth will slow. Bonding capacity will tighten.
- Those changes will compound over time.

[Transition]

- Cities across Indiana—including Bloomington—will have to make hard choices.
- Our response must be disciplined.
- Our role is to first ensure we deliver the essential services and responsibilities that only local government can provide.

- We will honor the commitments we've made, take care of our infrastructure and assets, and deliver core services well.
- If we want to do our essential work well, we have to prioritize.

[Transition]

- In a city full of smart people, ideas are never in short supply, but progress happens when we choose a direction and stay with it long enough to deliver real results.
- We are already struggling to address high-priority capital projects.
- We must pair our limited resources with our priorities and resist the temptation to chase every new initiative that comes along.
- To do that, we need to know what we spend, what results we get, and whether those investments align with what matters most.
- That work has begun.
- With our new controller, Geoff McKim, we are reviewing our budget through that lens.

Closing

- The State of the City is strong and moving forward.
- Not without bumps and not without limitations, but with purpose, clarity, and community.

[Transition]

- In 1996 we couldn't have seen this building in its current form, we would not have envisioned a trail along that abandoned rail corridor, and I bet we would not have dreamed we would be at the precipice of a transformational housing development where our hospital was.
- What is it that we are doing this year that we couldn't imagine living without in 2056?
- If we look ahead, over just the next two years, we can envision what that looks like:
- We'll see a Convention Center alive with activity: visitors moving through our streets, gathering in our restaurants, and stepping into the culture that makes Bloomington what it is.
- We'll see homes rising in Hopewell, a once-in-a-generation neighborhood taking shape, block by block, bringing new energy, opportunity, and pathways to belonging.
- We will see a downtown that feels vibrant and cared for.
- Events that bring people together.
- Clean and well-maintained streets and sidewalks.
- A clear, distinct sense of identity is reflected in our City branding.
- We'll see more public art, more activity, and more life in our shared spaces.

- We'll see couples on dates on the roof of the new Trades district hotel, entrepreneurs and small businesses heading into the Forge, the Kiln, and Amplify Bloomington to grow their success.
- We'll see our workforce population and wages grow.
- We'll see fully staffed police, fire, and City departments that are responsive and responsible, owning their work showing up every day to ensure you are safe and well-served and your problems are resolved.

[Transition]

- That is what a thriving community looks like.
- Wages that grow our economy. Housing residents can afford. Opportunities people can pursue. Safety that our neighborhoods rely on. And a government focused on getting the work done. A place to belong.
- But there is something else we can do that matters just as much.
- In a moment where national political rhetoric lends itself to “us and them” culture, we can do better.
- We can solve problems together, sitting face-to-face, and co-creating solutions.
- We can be tough on challenges *and* respectful of everyone working on them.

- We can rise above identity and party politics and see one another for what we are: a community full of people showing up every day to transform lives and improve our community.
- I believe this even more today than when I wrote this 24 hours ago.

[Transition]

- In the coming year, I'll be looking at ways we can continue to help set a different tone in Bloomington, where we can call people in instead of calling people out.
- Where we talk in person or in written communication, rather than targeted quips on social media.
- Because while there are dozens of challenges, hundreds of issues, and thousands of opinions before us—
- We are at our best, our strongest, and our most progressive when we are one Bloomington.
- Good government is not measured by a single headline, a single announcement, or a single meeting.
- The decisions we make today may take years to be felt, but their impact reaches across generations.
- And it is the way we come together, not the things that divide us, which define us in the end. It is that courthouse that Charlotte saved and now no one can remember wanting to demolish it.

- That is the long arc of this work.
- And Bloomington does not need anyone to invent its potential.
- It is already here.
- Our job is to keep unlocking it—through thoughtful discussion and decisions and through a shared commitment to this community.
- And that work is stronger when people stay engaged, and lean towards assuming goodwill and creating common ground.
- So thank you— for showing up this evening, for paying attention, and for being part of a community that continues to grow into its potential.

[Transition]

- We'll close in that same spirit.
- Because what you'll see next—through movement, timing, and connection—is another expression of what makes this community thrive.
- Please join me in welcoming Windfall Dancers.

6:49 p.m. - *Windfall Dance Company* performance: 10 min

7 p.m. - *Program concludes. Reception in the lobby begins.*