

# City of Bloomington, Indiana Common Council

## Deliberation Session Agenda

Wednesday, October 21, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.  
Council Chambers (Room 115), City Hall  
401 N. Morton Street, Bloomington, IN 47404

The meeting may also be accessed [remotely via Zoom](#).<sup>1</sup>

1. City Council Roll Call and Welcome
2. Review of Findings from September 9 Deliberation Session
  - A. Identified Priority Areas
    1. Public Spaces and Accessibility
    2. Community Care and Crisis Response
    3. Public Safety Response and Accountability
    4. Communication, Transparency, and Community Trust
  - B. Belonging, inclusion, and diversity will be considered across all four areas.
3. Small Group Deliberation
  - A. Core Inquiry: What can the City Council do to improve public safety in the different priority areas?
  - B. Community Agreements
  - C. Facilitated small-group deliberation
4. Reports from Each Group to All Attendees
5. Completion of Exit Survey
6. Closing Remarks About Next Steps
7. Adjournment

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<sup>1</sup><https://bloomington.zoom.us/j/86169920334?pwd=jWobRQKggupMy6xr4jNZls2ivaML8k.1>  
Meeting ID: 861 6992 0334 Passcode: 631040

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Bloomington City Council meetings can be watched on the following websites:

- [Community Action Television Services \(CATS\)](#)<sup>2</sup>
- [City's YouTube Channel](#)<sup>3</sup>

[Materials for this meeting](#)<sup>4</sup> are available on Council's website.

The City is committed to providing equal access to information. If you encounter difficulties accessing material in this packet, please contact the Bloomington Common Council Office at [council@bloomington.in.gov](mailto:council@bloomington.in.gov) or 812-349-3409 and provide your name, contact information, and a link to or description of the document or web page with which you are having problems.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://catstv.net/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/@citybloomington>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bloomington.in.gov/council/meetings/2026>

# What We Heard: Bloomington Public Safety Community Engagement Dialogue and Deliberation

## 1. Summary

### ***Purpose and Outcomes***

This report summarizes what we heard during the community dialogue held on September 9, 2026. The session was the first phase of the Bloomington Public Safety Community Engagement Dialogue and Deliberation sessions, an engagement process initiated by the Bloomington City Council and facilitated by the Community Justice & Mediation Center (CJAM) to help inform the Council's planning to improve public safety.

The goal of this first session was to move beyond broad or abstract definitions of public safety and better understand how residents experience safety in their everyday lives.

### ***Key Takeaways***

- **Social Connection and Belonging:** One of the most consistent themes was the connection between public safety and a sense of belonging. Participants described knowing their neighbors, feeling connected to their community, and being familiar with their surroundings as important factors in feeling safe.
- **Safety and Predictability:** Participants frequently connected safety to their ability to understand and interpret what is happening around them. When behavior and interactions feel unpredictable, participants described feeling less safe.
- **Infrastructure and the Physical Environment:** Participants identified specific physical conditions that affect their sense of safety, including inadequate lighting along the B-Line and in city alleys, as well as traffic safety concerns at high-volume intersections.
- **Visible Police Presence and Community-Based Solutions:** One of the clearest differences in perspective was between participants who wanted greater police visibility as a deterrent and those who emphasized investments in mental health, housing, healthcare, and other non-policing approaches to community safety.

- **Vulnerability and Compassion:** Participants also described safety as more than protection from a perceived threat. For some, public safety also means protecting people who are vulnerable, including unhoused residents exposed to dangerous environmental conditions.

## **Next Steps**

These findings will help shape Session Two, scheduled for October 21, 2026. The next session will build on what we heard by moving from understanding experiences of safety toward identifying community priorities and potential areas for City action.

## **2. Purpose and Scope**

The purpose of this project is to develop a shared understanding of how Bloomington residents experience safety in their daily lives. By beginning with understanding, the Council can better ground future policy and budget decisions in what residents actually shared rather than in assumptions about what safety means to the community.

### ***Scope of Influence***

Input gathered through these sessions will help inform:

- The City Council's long-term strategic planning.
- The municipal budget and resource allocation.

## **3. Engagement Process**

### ***Session and Data Collection***

The September 9 session used a small-group dialogue model facilitated by trained facilitators from the Community Justice & Mediation Center (CJAM). Notetakers documented what participants shared, and members of the City Council or a City Representative participated as Table Partners, with a primary role of listening and asking clarifying questions.

The small-group conversations served as the primary source of qualitative data for this report. These notes were considered alongside group report-outs and 23 valid exit survey responses collected following the session.

### ***Participant Context***

The September 9 session was held during a regularly scheduled City Council meeting. Participants were recruited by the City Council and participation was open to community members who chose to attend. As a result, participants were self-selected, and the perspectives represented in this report should not be understood as a statistically representative cross-section of Bloomington.

A Spanish-speaking discussion group was also offered as part of the session. Based on attendance that evening, the group was combined with another table where a bilingual facilitator was available to support Spanish-speaking participants.

## ***Process Limitations***

The facilitation team identified two important limitations that should be considered when reviewing these findings:

- **Demographic Skew:** Participants were predominantly white and middle-to-upper class.
- **Missing Voices:** Youth, people of color, and unhoused residents were not sufficiently represented in the session. These perspectives are important to understanding public safety across Bloomington and should be more intentionally included in Session Two.

## **4. What We Heard: Thematic Analysis**

### ***Theme 1: Familiarity, Social Connection, and Neighborhood Belonging***

**Prevalence:** Broadly recurring across all table groups, small-group notes, and exit survey responses.

#### **Overview and Central Pattern**

Across small-group conversations and written feedback, participants consistently connected feeling safe in Bloomington to interpersonal relationships, social familiarity, and neighborhood connection. Knowing the people around them, recognizing familiar faces, and experiencing a sense of mutual community support helped participants describe public spaces as feeling safer and more welcoming.

#### **Key Values, Concerns, and Ideas**

- **Neighborly Trust and “Eyes on the Street”:** Participants emphasized that knowing neighbors by name and having active, well-populated public spaces

can create an informal sense of safety where community members look out for one another.

- **Vibrant Public Spaces and Events:** Positive experiences of safety were frequently connected to community gatherings, seasonal festivals such as the Fall Festival/Fiesta de Otoño, populated parks, and shared celebrations such as the solar eclipse. Participants described these experiences as creating a collective sense of community presence and belonging.

### **Differences in Perspective**

While some established residents described a strong sense of safety built through long-term neighborhood relationships, newer residents, students, and some participants from marginalized communities noted that this same familiarity can sometimes create a sense of exclusion or take time and effort to navigate.

## **Theme 2: Unpredictability, Street Harassment, and Infrastructure Gaps in Shared Spaces**

**Prevalence:** Broadly recurring across all table groups and survey responses.

### **Overview and Central Pattern**

Situations that caused participants to feel less safe were frequently connected to unpredictability in shared spaces. This included unpredictable behavior, people experiencing mental health crises in public, verbal street harassment, aggressive driving, and physical infrastructure concerns such as inadequate lighting.

### **Key Values, Concerns, and Ideas**

- **Street Harassment and Vulnerability:** Female participants, LGBTQ+ participants, and participants of color raised concerns about verbal harassment, unwanted catcalling, and intimidation when walking alone or at night, particularly along areas such as the B-Line Trail, downtown alleys, and streets adjacent to campus.
- **Physical Infrastructure Needs:** Participants identified practical municipal interventions that could improve their sense of safety without relying on policing. These included brighter lighting in dark alleys, including areas near Rogers Street, improved pedestrian crosswalk visibility, and sidewalk repairs.
- **Traffic and Driver Safety:** Speeding, red-light running, and reckless driving were identified as everyday physical safety concerns that some participants viewed as equal to or greater than concerns about crime.

## **Differences in Perspective**

Some participants focused on the impact that unpredictable behavior or storefront loitering can have on businesses and public spaces. Others emphasized that unhoused individuals face significant safety concerns themselves and need supportive services rather than displacement.

## ***Theme 3: Firearms in Public and Gun Safety Concerns***

**Prevalence:** Smaller but meaningful perspective.

### **Overview and Central Pattern**

The presence of firearms in public community spaces, including parks, community pools, cafés, and youth events was identified by some participants as a significant source of fear, distress, and uncertainty.

### **Key Values, Concerns, and Ideas**

- **Unpredictability of Public Carry:** Participants who raised concerns about firearms described uncertainty about the training, intent, or behavior of individuals carrying weapons in public. For these participants, the presence of a firearm could create fear rather than a greater sense of protection.

## **Differences in Perspective**

While most comments raised during the session about firearms expressed concern about their presence in public spaces or a desire for greater restrictions, a minority perspective described carrying personal defense items or firearms as a way to increase individual safety.

## ***Theme 4: Different Approaches to Building Community Safety***

**Prevalence:** Broadly recurring, with competing perspectives across the session materials.

### **Overview and Central Pattern**

One of the clearest differences in perspective was how participants believed the City should approach and invest in public safety. Some participants emphasized the importance of visible, approachable law enforcement and active management of

public spaces. Others emphasized non-policing approaches, including investments in housing, healthcare, mental health services, and other community supports.

### **Key Values, Concerns, and Ideas**

- **Support for Problem-Solving Police Presence:** Some residents and business representatives advocated for visible, approachable, and problem-solving police officers, including foot and bike patrols, as a way to deter nuisance behaviors, respond to street conflicts, and build positive community relationships. (Note: Off-duty/on-duty police officers attended Session One as self-directed community members in uniform to listen and share personal viewpoints).
- **Support for Non-Policing Solutions:** Other participants emphasized that public safety cannot be addressed through policing or surveillance alone. Suggestions included greater investment in non-police crisis response, permanent supportive housing, mental health treatment, and harm reduction services related to substance use.

### **Differences in Perspective**

Participants described different experiences of visible policing. Some viewed a visible police presence as reassuring and an important part of feeling safe. Others described armed policing and surveillance as something that can increase anxiety or decrease their sense of safety, particularly for people from marginalized communities.

## **Theme 5: Information, Representation, and Trust in Public Institutions**

**Prevalence:** Broadly recurring across exit surveys, facilitator notes, report-outs, and debrief records.

### **Overview and Central Pattern**

Participants connected their sense of public safety not only to their physical environment, but also to how information is communicated, whose experiences are represented in public decision-making, and whether they trust local institutions. Participants emphasized the importance of clear communication, meaningful representation, and transparent and accountable governance.

### **Key Values, Concerns, and Ideas**

- **Information Distribution and Alert Fatigue:** Participants described concerns about how negative local news coverage and rapid social media speculation can amplify fear and shape perceptions of community safety. Multiple participants also specifically raised concerns about frequent or redundant automated emergency alerts, including Indiana University safety notifications, describing these alerts as sometimes creating anxiety rather than helping them feel informed.
- **Including Underrepresented and Marginalized Voices:** Participants recognized that Session One attendees were predominantly white, middle-to-upper class, and established residents. Participants called for more intentional efforts to include people of color, unhoused residents, LGBTQ+ residents, Latinx/Hispanic families, youth, and other communities that were not well represented in the first session.
- **Institutional Transparency and Governance:** Participants also connected safety to confidence in civic leadership, transparent public safety spending, ethical governance, and responsive communication from elected officials. These comments reflected a desire for clearer connections between residents' experiences and City and City Council decision-making.

### **Differences in Perspective**

While some established residents felt their experiences and perspectives were reflected in the conversation, younger participants, participants of color, and community advocates emphasized that building institutional trust will require the City to go beyond traditional public meetings and create more intentional opportunities to engage communities that are often underrepresented in these processes.

## **5. Key Tensions and Unanswered Questions**

### ***Areas of Tension***

The purpose of Session One was not to resolve differences or ask participants to reach consensus. Instead, the dialogue helped identify several places where people may share a desire for a safer community while having different experiences of safety or different ideas about how that safety is achieved.

- **Predictability:** Concerns about both firearms and interactions with people experiencing a mental health crisis reflected a broader theme around predictability. Participants often described feeling safer when they could understand what was happening around them and reasonably anticipate how others might behave.

- **Visibility and Intimidation:** Some participants described visible police presence as reassuring and an important part of feeling safe. At the same time, other participants described increased policing as something that can decrease a sense of safety, particularly for people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Safety For and Safety From:** Different perspectives also emerged around unhoused residents. Some participants discussed behaviors associated with unhoused individuals as concerns for businesses and public spaces. Others focused on the safety of unhoused residents themselves and described exposure to freezing temperatures, violence, and inadequate shelter as public safety concerns.

## ***Unanswered Participant Questions***

Participants also raised several questions that were not answered through the Session One dialogue:

- What are the legal limits of the City Council's authority to regulate firearms under Indiana's state preemption laws?
- What is the City's official policy regarding immigration and coordination with federal agencies such as ICE?
- How can the City respond to street harassment that occurs in "gray areas," where behavior may feel threatening or alarming but is not necessarily criminal?
- What steps can be taken to improve the accuracy and tone of public safety alerts?

## **6. Closing the Loop**

This report will be shared with Session One participants and made available to the public. It will also serve as the foundation for Session Two on October 21, 2026.

Session Two will build on what we heard during this first conversation. Rather than beginning again with the question of what safety means, participants will have an opportunity to consider the themes and differences identified here and move toward a conversation about priorities and potential City actions.

It is also important to recognize the boundaries of this process. Some concerns raised by participants, including state-level firearm laws and federal immigration policies, are governed by jurisdictions beyond the City Council. Future conversations will therefore focus primarily on areas where the Council and City have the ability to act, including local budgeting, infrastructure, and municipal policies.

## **7. Methodology Note**

This report was developed through a qualitative thematic review of notes collected by facilitators and group notetakers during the September 9 session. Recurring themes were identified based on both how frequently ideas appeared and the depth with which participants discussed them. Table notes were considered alongside exit survey responses to help capture the range of perspectives shared during the session.

An important goal of this analysis was to preserve differences in perspective rather than create consensus where it did not exist. Where participants had different experiences of safety or different ideas about what contributes to a safe community, those differences have been intentionally maintained.

The purpose of this report is to give the City Council a clear picture of what was shared during Session One: where common themes emerged, where meaningful differences remain, and what questions should continue into the next phase of the engagement process.