

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY

MEETING PACKET

McCloskey Conference Room — City Hall
Tuesday, April 8, 2025, 6:00 p.m.

Or virtually at:

<https://bloomington.zoom.us/j/84327085962?pwd=naI8LVmKZSoinPUHbXuw3h7oqMyi5g.1>

Meeting ID: 843 2708 5962

Passcode: 034238

CONTENTS

- 1. Agenda**
- 2. Chair Report**
- 3. Sustainability Assessment Report Draft v2**
- 4. BCOS Bylaws Review**
- 5. BCOS 2024 Annual Report Draft**



CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY

NOTICE AND AGENDA

Tuesday, April 8, 2025, 6:00 p.m.
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<https://bloomington.zoom.us/j/84327085962?pwd=naI8LVmKZSoinPUHbXuw3h7oqMyi5g.1>

Meeting ID: 843 2708 5962 | Passcode: 034238

Note: Agenda item times are approximate and subject to change

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. | Call to Order | 6:00 pm |
| 2. | Roll Call | |
| 3. | Approval of Agenda | |
| 4. | Approval of Minutes: March 11, 2025 | |
| 5. | Public Comment
<i>up to 3 minutes per person</i> | 6:05 pm (10m) |
| 6. | Reports from Commissioners | 6:15 pm (20m) |
| | A. Chair (Justin Vasel) | 6:15 pm (5m) |
| | B. Waste Management Working Group (Matt Austin) | 6:20 pm (5m) |
| | C. Ad-Hoc Committee: Sustainability Assessment Report (Tara Dunderdale) | 6:25 pm (5m) |
| | D. Council Ex-Officio (Dave Rollo) | 6:30 pm (5m) |
| 7. | Discussion of Topics Not the Subject of Resolutions | 6:35 pm (40m) |
| | A. BCOS Bylaws Review (Justin Vasel) | 6:35 pm (20m) |
| | B. BCOS Annual Report Draft (Justin Vasel) | 6:55 pm (20m) |
| 8. | Resolutions for Second Reading and Discussion | N/A |
| 9. | Resolutions for First Reading and Discussion | N/A |
| 10. | Report from Staff Liaison (Shawn Miya) | 7:15 pm (10m) |
| 11. | Member Announcements | 7:25 pm (5m) |
| 12. | New Business | 7:30 pm (0m) |
| 13. | Adjournment | 7:30 pm |

Next Regular Meeting: May 13, 2025 at 6 pm

As a quorum of the Commission or its committees may be present, this gathering constitutes a meeting under the Indiana Open Door Law (I.C. § 5-14-1.5). For that reason, this statement provides notice that this meeting will occur and is open for the public to attend, observe, and record what transpires.



CITY OF BLOOMINGTON
COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY

Chair Report

April 8, 2025

Justin Vasel

Upcoming BCOS Calendar (Tentative)

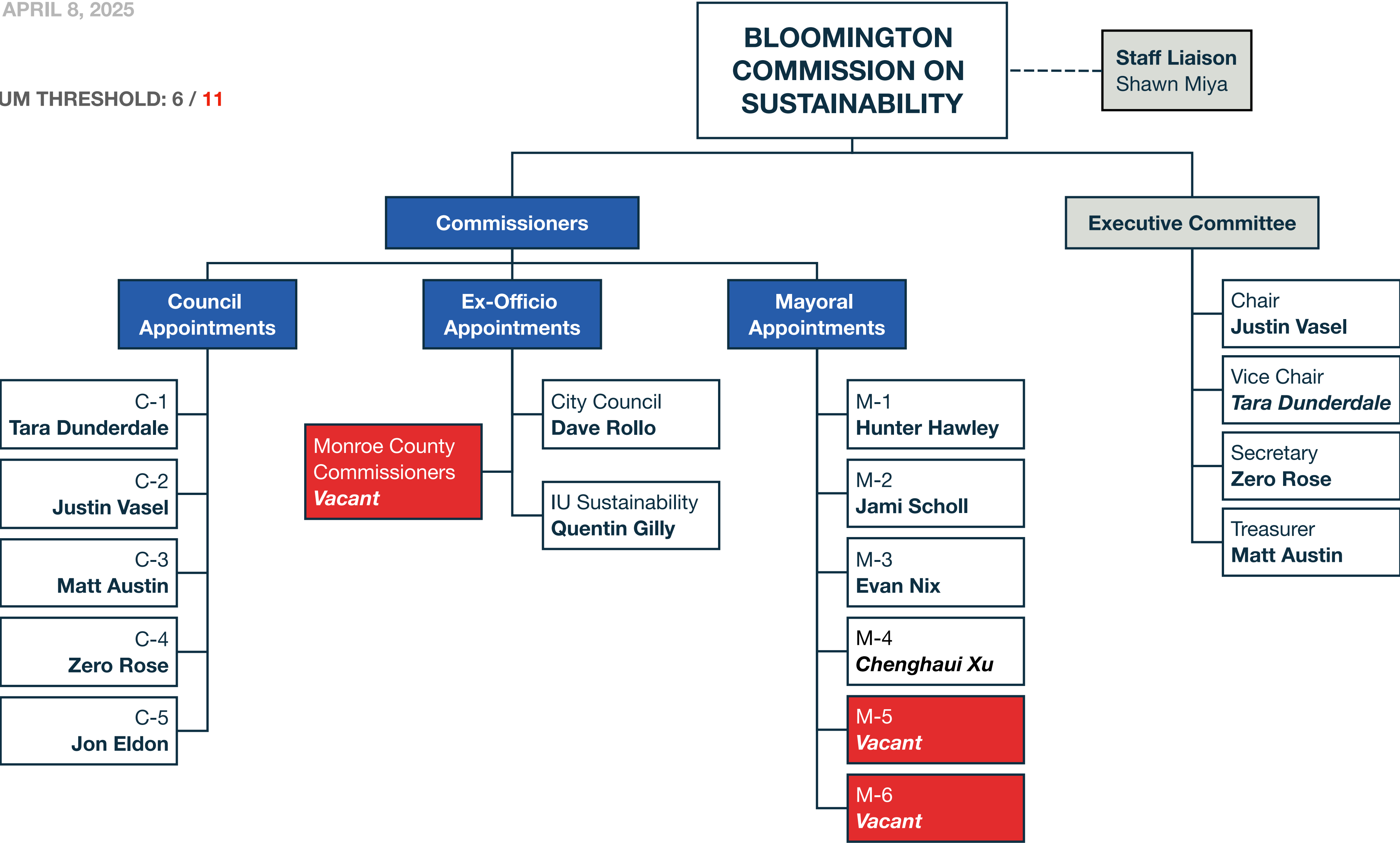
		Date	Event			Date	Event
Today		April 8, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting			August 12, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting
		April 22, 2025	BCOS Work Session			August 26, 2025	BCOS Work Session
		May 13, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting			September 9, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting
		May 27, 2025	BCOS Work Session			September 23, 2025	BCOS Work Session
		June 10, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting			October 14, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting
		June 24, 2025	BCOS Work Session			October 28, 2025	BCOS Work Session
		July 8, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting			November 11, 2025	Regular BCOS Meeting
		July 22, 2025	BCOS Work Session				

BCOS Organization Chart

CURRENT AS OF APRIL 8, 2025

CURRENT QUORUM THRESHOLD: 6 / 11

RED = VACANT



Upcoming Events

Time	Location	Event
April 19	Switchyard Park	Earth Day 2025 BCOS presence

General Updates

- 2024 Annual Report

Draft is ready for review

- Bylaws Reform

Step 1: Identify outdated/confusing aspects of current language and any gaps; discuss with Commission.

Step 2: Draft new language; bring to Commission to discuss and collect input.

Step 3: Incorporate input into new language; bring to Commission for a vote.

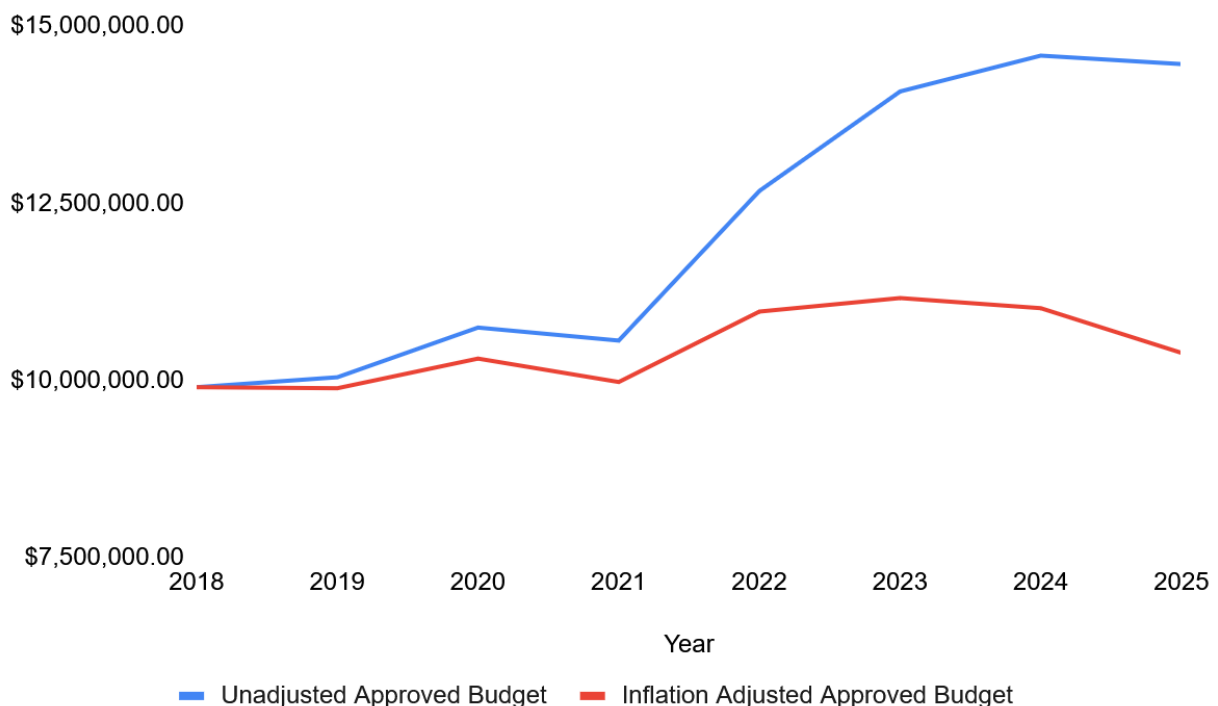
- Earth Day BCOS Table — April 19 at Switchyard Park

Sustainability Assessment part 2 - draft 4.8.2025

City Budget

This section reviews the annual approved budget for the City of Bloomington from 2018 to 2024 and highlights areas aligned with the goals of the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability including Parks and Recreation, Economic and Sustainable Development, and Housing. Figures X through x show the adopted budget numbers in current dollars as reported in the publicly available Open Finance data,¹ and the inflation adjusted numbers calculated using the Bureau of Labor Services CPI inflation calculator². While actual expenditures may vary from adopted budgets, this report utilizes these approved budget figures as a proxy for the city's overall intention to invest in areas that contribute to sustainability regarding Energy and the Built Environment. This section of the assessment looks at the city's fiduciary planning as a metric to assess the city's commitment to the Climate Action goals covered by this report.

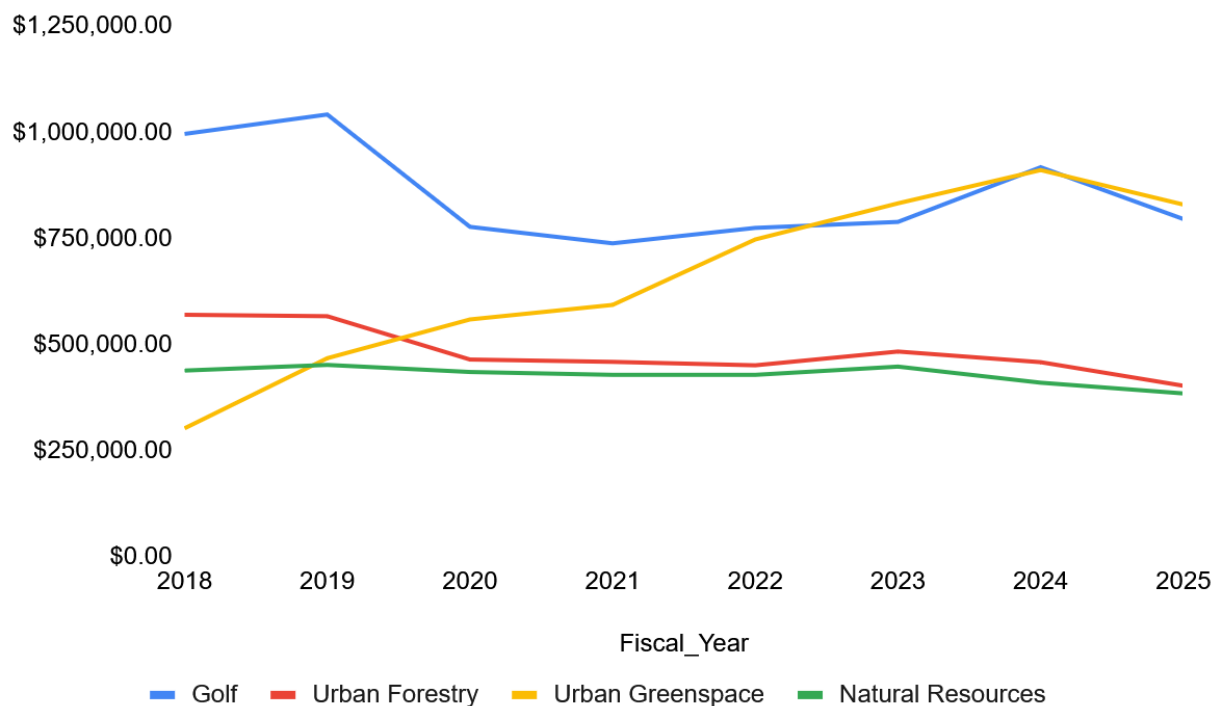
Since 2018, the City of Bloomington has continued to invest in the city's parks and recreation through sustained funding. The approved funding has increased noticeably in that time, though the increase is more modest when adjusted for inflation and decreased with the adoption of the 2025 budget (see Figure x).



¹ <https://bloomington.finance.socrata.com/#!/view-data>

² https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm?os=win

Disaggregating some of the Parks and Recreation operating budget shows a significant investment from the city since 2018 in the Urban Greenspaces. Adjusting for inflation, investment in Urban Greenspaces as measured by the approved annual budget tripled from 2018 to 2024 (see Figure x). However, investment in greenspace throughout the city has only matched investment in Golf in recent years. Adjusting for inflation, budgeted funds for all of these services decreased with the adoption of the 2025 budget. The stagnation of the Urban Forestry budget is of note as the city has dramatically increased the number of trees for which this department is responsible over the same time period. Data available in 2019 reported approximately 12,000 trees maintained by the city.³ As of early 2025, the city maintains at least 23,000 inventoried trees.⁴ According to calculations from the tree inventory, these plantings save the city more than \$60,000 annually in carbon sequestration, stormwater mitigation, and air pollution removal.⁵ While Urban Forestry has seen budget increases in the period of time covered by the Climate Action Plan, when adjusted for inflation this critical component of sustainability has been approved for a budget that each year requires doing more with less.



One area where the city has made noteworthy increases in financial investment is the office of Economic and Sustainable Development (ESD). This department, which serves as liaison between the commission authoring this assessment, is charged with supporting the city's efforts in sustainability.⁶ The city has demonstrated a continued interest in the work of this office through large annual budget increases. However, though not in the adopted budget, a significant portion of the actual amount spent for this department went to the Tech Trades

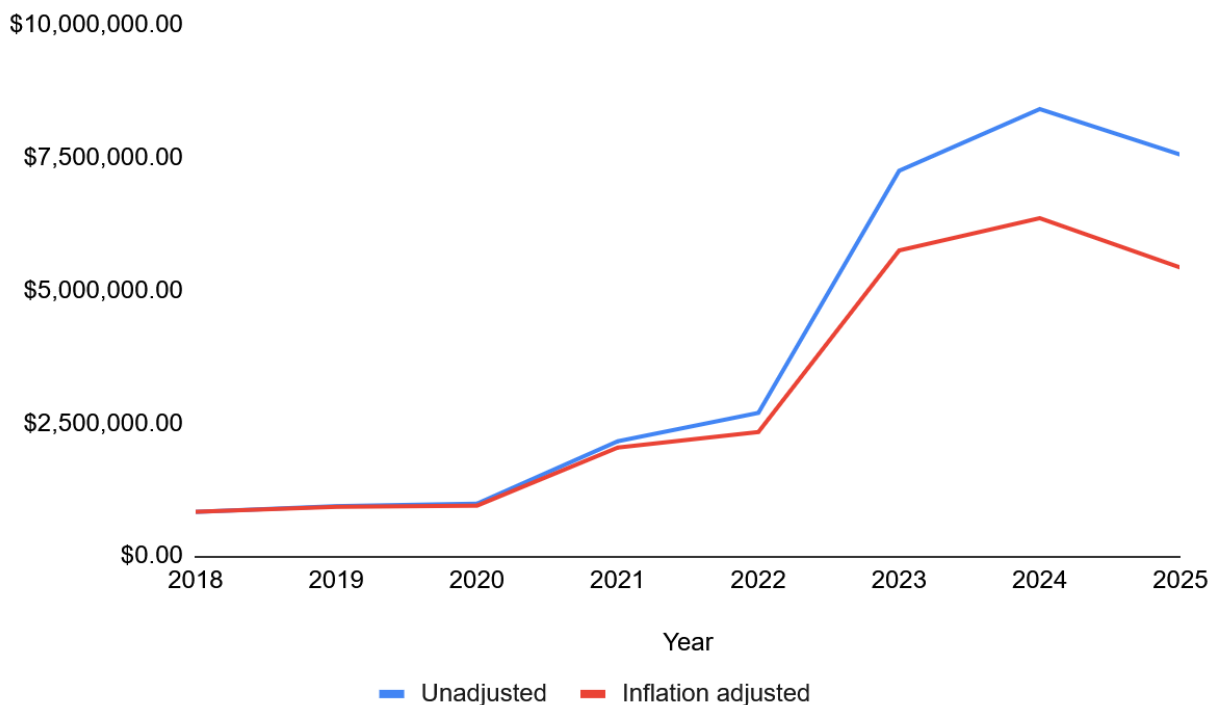
³ <https://bloomington.in.gov/about/trees/urban-forestry-plan> Accessed 3.14.2025

⁴ <https://bloomingtonin.treekeeperssoftware.com/>

⁵ ibid

⁶ <https://bloomington.in.gov/departments/esd>

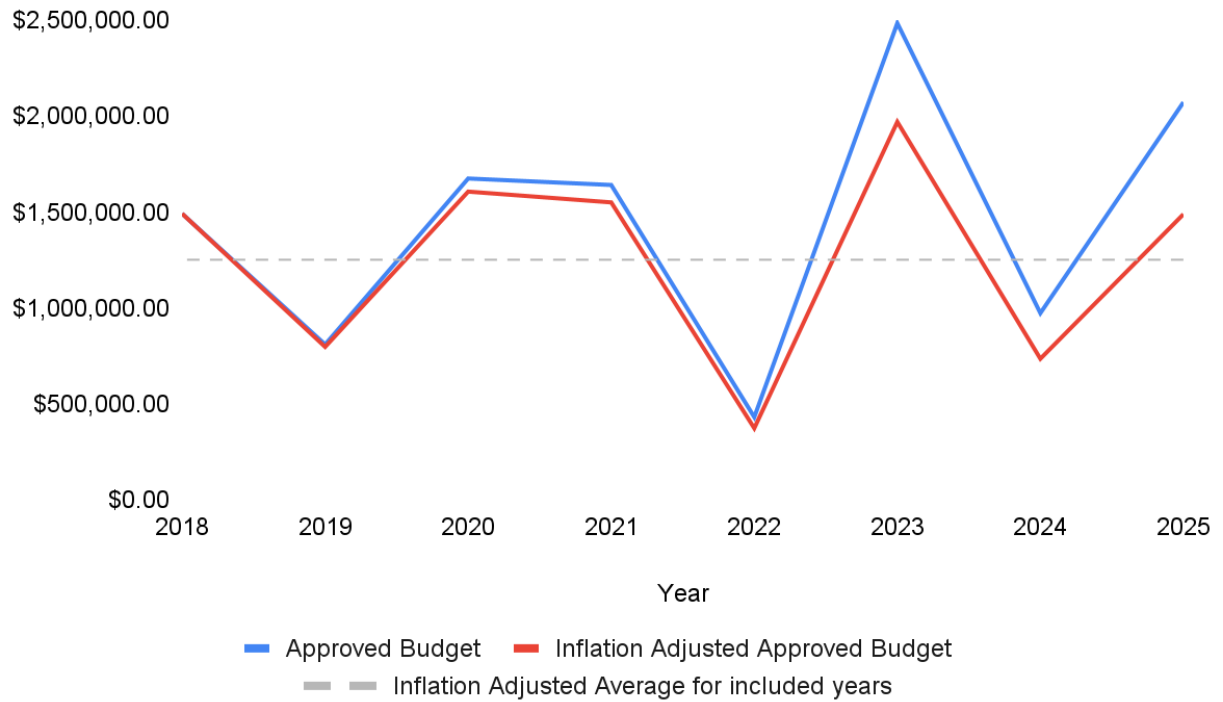
Development, rather than sustainability efforts specifically. Further, the 2025 adopted budget reflected a reduction in planned expenditures for this office. Because other efforts are embedded in the ESD budget, a better metric for the city's financial investment in sustainability may be the annual outlays for sustainability focused grants and projects.



The last area of budget priorities this assessment evaluated is Housing. In 2021 The Bloomington Commission on Sustainability adopted a resolution recommending that the city utilize a housing first approach to housing policy.⁷ Housing first posits that barriers to affordable and safe housing must be addressed first in order to tackle other areas of health and wellness. Evidence from cities that have adopted housing first approaches show this policy is not only beneficial to the well-being of residents but is the most fiscally responsible, saving municipalities \$20,000-\$30,000 per-person per year. The commission remains committed to this recommendation (get sign off from commissioners) and therefore views housing, particularly in context of the built environment climate action goals, as a critical component of sustainability. The city's investment in Housing as measured by the adopted budget has fluctuated since 2018. As shown in the figure below, adjusting for inflation, adopted annual city budgets have appropriated funds as low as \$373,000 and as high as \$1.48 million with an inflation adjusted average of about \$1.21 million approved annually for the city budget. To put in context these dollar amounts, in the 2024 budget the city of Bloomington approved roughly comparable dollar amounts for Housing as they did for Golf Services. While 2025 showed a noticeable increase in the adopted budget for Housing, the volatility of this value in recent years means that one year

⁷ <https://bloomington.in.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/Resolution%20on%20Housing%20First.pdf>

increase is not necessarily indicative of an intention of long term increased investment.



Other City actions and policies

- From CAP dashboard
 - Renewable energy
 - Energy efficiency
 - Sustainable development policy
 - Heat island study
 - Green Building Program



To Bloomington Commission on Sustainability
From Justin Vasel, BCOS Chair
Date April 7, 2025
Subject Proposed Approach to Bylaws Amendment Process

After reviewing our current bylaws, I believe we have an opportunity to improve them for greater clarity, flexibility, and effectiveness. As we consider amendments, I'd like to share my proposed approach and key focus areas for your consideration.

Rationale for Amendment

Our current bylaws have served us well, but several issues have emerged:

1. The structure can be difficult to navigate and reference
2. Some requirements have proven unnecessarily burdensome for a volunteer commission
3. The inclusion of verbatim Municipal Code language creates maintenance challenges
4. Some procedural requirements limit our ability to respond efficiently
5. Certain terminology lacks clear definition, leading to inconsistent application

Proposed Focus Areas

I recommend focusing our amendment process on the following key areas:

1. **Structural Reorganization**
Renummer and reorganize sections using a consistent, intuitive format (e.g., 1.1, 1.2, etc.) to make the bylaws more navigable and easier to reference during meetings.
2. **Editorial Improvements**
Correct grammar, spelling, and formatting inconsistencies throughout the document to improve clarity and professionalism.
3. **Municipal Code References**
Replace verbatim quotations of the Bloomington Municipal Code with concise references to avoid potential conflicts when the Municipal Code is amended.
4. **Annual Meeting Requirements**
Remove the requirement to annually review the bylaws at the Annual Meeting. This can be done as needed rather than by automatic annual mandate.
5. **Sustainability Assessment**
Remove the Annual Meeting requirement for providing a sustainability assessment, allowing this work to be conducted at a more appropriate time in our annual cycle.
6. **Meeting Structure Flexibility**
Revise the prescribed order of business to provide more flexibility in meeting structure while maintaining necessary elements.

7. **Resolution Definition**

Clearly define what constitutes a "resolution" versus other commission actions to address confusion about which items require formal resolution procedures.

8. **Two-Readings Rule Revision**

Reconsider the "two-readings" rule for resolutions to improve our responsiveness while maintaining appropriate deliberation for significant matters.

Next Steps

We will discuss this in more detail at our next meeting, and if the Commission approves this general approach, I propose the following process:

1. I will prepare a draft of the amended bylaws addressing these focus areas
2. The draft will be distributed to all Commissioners for review
3. We will discuss the proposed amendments at our next meeting
4. Based on feedback, we will refine the draft for formal consideration
5. We will follow our existing amendment process as specified in Section V.1

Please review these focus areas and bring your thoughts to our next meeting. I welcome all your input on this as we move forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Vassel', with a stylized, flowing script.

Justin Vassel, Chair
Bloomington Commission on
Sustainability

Attachments:

- (1) BCOS Bylaws

Exhibit 1

City of Bloomington, Indiana Bloomington Commission on Sustainability Bylaws

Article I. Members

Appointment and Residency. BMC § 2.12.100(3) The commission shall consist of fourteen (14) members. Six (6) of the members shall be appointed by the mayor and six (6) shall be appointed by the common council. No more than two of the mayor's appointments and no more than two of the common council appointments may be citizens who live outside the corporate city limits of Bloomington and within Monroe County. One of the six common council appointments shall be a member of the common council. One of the members shall be appointed by the Monroe County Commissioners from Monroe County government. The Director of the Indiana University Office of Sustainability or his/her designee shall serve as the ex-officio member from Indiana University. All members shall have a vote and shall serve without compensation.

Article II. Officers

II.1 Election. BMC § 2.12.100(5) Officers shall be elected by vote of the commission members annually at the Annual Meeting by a majority of the current membership of the Commission. It shall be the right of the Commission to decide annually on the Structure of the Executive Office/s. The Commission will decide by vote at each annual election whether to elect officers as Co-Chair or Chair and Vice Chair.

II.2 Eligibility. All officers shall be members of the Commission and no member shall hold more than one office at a time.

II.3. Term. Officers shall be elected to serve until the next Annual Meeting. Their terms of office shall begin at the close of the meeting at which they are elected. Officers may serve more than one term. Officers shall deliver to their successors all accounts, papers, records, and other Commission property within two weeks of their expired term.

III.4. Removal. An Officer of the Commission may be removed from office for cause. Cause shall include, but not be limited to, misuse of office, improper representation of the commission, failure to carry out minimum duties of office, failure to attend three consecutive regularly scheduled meetings in any twelve month period or four regularly scheduled meetings in any twelve month period without just cause as determined by the Commission; provided, that any member may submit in writing to members of the commission any extenuating circumstances. Such written submission shall be made within five business days before the formal decision to remove is reached. A member or members of the commission shall submit a signed statement outlining the charges to

the Commission and, following the proper procedure, cause is established. Proper procedure includes distribution of the statement to all Commission members. Decision as to removal will be made by majority vote at the next scheduled meeting. Removal from office is not a vote for dismissal from the Commission.

II.5. Types of Officers and Duties. BMC § 2.08.020(9) The commission shall elect a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer and such other officers as may be necessary.

- 1) **Duties of the Chairperson.** The Chairperson shall prepare the agenda for all meetings, and preside over all meetings (except when she/he designates the Vice-Chairperson). The Chairperson shall distribute the agenda (see Sample Agenda) and related documents no less than 48 hours prior to a scheduled meeting. The Chairperson, in coordination with other members of the Executive Committee, shall be responsible organizing and submitting the Commission's Annual Report, as required by BMC § 2.12.100(8)(D).
- 2) **Duties of Co-Chairs.** In the event that the Commission elects two Co-Chairs, instead of a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, then the following shall apply. The newly elected Co-Chairs shall decide how to divide the responsibilities enumerated for the Chair and Vice Chair and shall ensure that all of these responsibilities are explicitly assigned to an individual. This list of responsibilities shall be presented in written format to the Commission by the next regular meeting.
- 3) **Duties of the Vice-Chairperson.** The Vice-Chairperson shall serve as the Chairperson in the absence of the Chairperson; shall perform all duties that may be delegated by the Chairperson; shall aid the Chairperson on request; shall post notice of vacancies of the Commission's Advisory Committee positions and the requirements thereof; and shall perform such other duties applicable to the office as prescribed by the parliamentary authority adopted by the Commission. In the absence of the Secretary, the Vice-Chairperson shall serve as or appoint a Member to serve as Secretary.
- 4) **Duties of the Secretary.** BMC § 2.08.020(10) The secretary shall keep, for every meeting, written minutes in which the results of any vote are recorded and, when appropriate, specific findings of facts and conclusions are set forth.
- 5) **Duties of the Treasurer.** The Treasurer shall facilitate the preparation of the annual budget as required by BMC § 2.08.020(13). Additionally, the treasurer shall facilitate the efforts of commission members to identify funding sources in order to execute the strategic goals of the commission as authorized by BMC § 2.12.100(8)(A).

II.6. Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall consist of the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson, the Secretary, and the Treasurer.

- 1) The executive committee shall be responsible for organizing the creation of the Commission's annual report, as required by BMC §2.12.100 (8) (D).

Article III. Meetings

III.1 Meetings. BMC § 2.12.100(6) The Commission shall meet one time each month, every month of the year, unless it decides to cancel the meeting.

III.2 Annual Meeting. At the Commission's monthly meeting in March of each year, the following activities shall occur:

- 1) Annual selection of officers
- 2) Annual review of bylaws
- 3) To provide, in cooperation with other city boards and commissions, an annual "sustainability assessment" based on said indicators. The assessment shall be included in an annual report and provided to the common council, mayor and the public.

IV.3 Majority Vote. BMC § 2.08.020(6) A "majority vote" means a majority of the Commission who are present and voting.

III.4 Quorum. BMC § 2.08.020(7) Unless otherwise specified, a majority of the currently filled seats, excepting the nonvoting ex officio members, constitute a quorum for purpose of conducting the official business of the commission.

III.5 Parliamentary Procedure. BMC § 2.08.020(8) Meetings shall be conducted according to procedures set forth in Roberts Rules of Order. All members of the commission are to be provided with a set of rules that will be used during the monthly meetings.

III.6 Conduct of Meetings. The order of business of all meetings shall be as follows:

- 1) Call to Order;
- 2) Roll Call;
- 3) Approval of Agenda;
- 4) Approval of Minutes;
- 5) Reports from the Public;
- 6) Reports from Commissioners;
- 7) Discussions of Topics Not the Subject of Resolutions;
- 8) Resolutions for Second Reading and Discussion;
- 9) Resolutions for First Reading and Discussion;
- 10) Report from Staff Liaison;
- 11) Member Announcements;
- 12) New Business;
- 13) Adjournment.

Members of the public will be allowed to speak only once within a maximum

timeframe of 5 minutes

III.7. Votes. Each voting Member shall be entitled to one vote. Routine business may be conducted by voice vote. The outcome of a vote shall be determined by the majority of the serving Members present and eligible to vote and voting. A member who wishes not to vote may remain silent during a voice vote or roll call vote, or may submit a blank ballot during a ballot vote. No member may be forced to vote.

III.8. Special Meetings. BMC § 2.08.020(11) A special meeting of the commission may be called by the chairperson, the mayor, or by a majority of the members then serving on the commission requesting such meeting in writing. Upon receiving such request, the chairperson shall thereafter call a special meeting to be held within twenty days.

Article IV. RESOLUTIONS

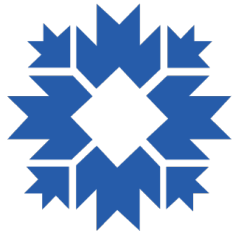
IV.1. Resolutions. The Commission shall have the authority to adopt resolutions. Resolutions shall be given two readings before a vote may be taken on its passage and no resolution shall be adopted on the same day or at the same meeting as it is introduced except by unanimous consent of the Members present, at least two-thirds of the currently filled seats being present and voting. Resolutions will be designated by year and by order of introduction in that year (e.g., Resolution 2017-01).

IV.2. Recommendations. Published recommendations of the Commission and the Annual Report shall be adopted and approved by Resolution.

IV.3. Recorded Votes. For Resolutions considered by Commission, the Secretary shall record the total votes, the results which shall be published in the minutes of the Commission's meeting.

V. Amendment of Bylaws

V.1. Amendment. A two-thirds (2/3) majority of the Commission as currently serving may vote to amend these by-laws only after discussing proposed amendments during at least two regularly scheduled Commission meetings that have been called with the notice required by Indiana's Open Door Law (Indiana Code 5-1.5) then in effect.



CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY

Bloomington Commission on Sustainability 2024 Annual Report

Version 1

April 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bloomington Commission on Sustainability (BCOS) experienced a year of rebuilding and renewal in 2024. Despite challenges with commission vacancies and meeting quorum requirements, BCOS made significant strides in advancing sustainability initiatives across Bloomington. The Commission successfully awarded grants for innovative community projects, engaged with urban agriculture and waste reduction initiatives, and provided input on municipal code revisions affecting sustainability.

BCOS also expanded its collaborative approach by initiating regular work sessions, developing stronger relationships with other city commissions, and establishing an ad-hoc committee to conduct a comprehensive sustainability assessment. Notably, the Commission passed Resolution 2024-01 to affirm and clarify its unique role within the city's governance structure.

As we look toward 2025, BCOS is positioned to build on these accomplishments with a focused approach to contribute meaningfully to city policy, engaging community partners, promoting educational initiatives, and continuing to fund grassroots sustainability projects.

INTRODUCTION

The Bloomington Commission on Sustainability serves as the city's primary advisory body for advancing the sustainable socio-environmental-economic well-being for all Bloomington residents. Established in 2005, BCOS has evolved to address the increasingly complex and interconnected challenges of climate change, social equity, and economic resilience.

The Commission's mandate, as outlined in Bloomington Municipal Code (BMC) §2.12.100, includes advising the City Administration on sustainability and resilience issues, recommending policy changes, facilitating community education, and coordinating with other governmental and non-governmental organizations. In 2024, BCOS focused on strengthening its operational foundation, fostering collaborative relationships, and supporting community-based sustainability initiatives through targeted grant programs.

This annual report documents the Commission's activities, accomplishments, and challenges during 2024, while outlining strategic priorities for the coming year. Our work reflects a holistic approach to sustainability that integrates environmental protection, social equity, and economic vitality—recognizing that true sustainability requires balance among all three domains.

COMMISSION OVERVIEW

Commission Composition and Membership

BCOS is composed of 14 members as defined in BMC §2.12.100: Five seats appointed by the Bloomington Common Council, six seats appointed by the Office of the Mayor, and three ex-officio seats held by designees of the Monroe County Commissioners, the Bloomington Common Council, and the IU Office of Sustainability. Four members are annually elected by the Commission to fill four executive offices: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Commission also has a staff liaison from the Department of Economic & Sustainable Development (Figure 1).

BCOS experienced significant membership transitions throughout 2024, which affected the Commission's ability to maintain quorum and conduct business at times. The Commission elected new leadership in May 2024, with Justin Vassel serving as Chair, Andrew Guenther as Vice Chair, and Matt Austin as Treasurer. The Secretary position remained unfilled until August when Zero Rose was elected to the role. Shawn Miya served as BCOS Staff Liaison throughout the year.

New commissioners joining BCOS in 2024 included Andrew Guenther, Jami Scholl, Zero Rose, Tara Dunderdale, Evan Nix, Hunter Hawley, and Quentin Gilley (representing IU's Office of Sustainability). The Commission bid farewell to Kate-Lyn Edwards, who announced her departure in May 2024.

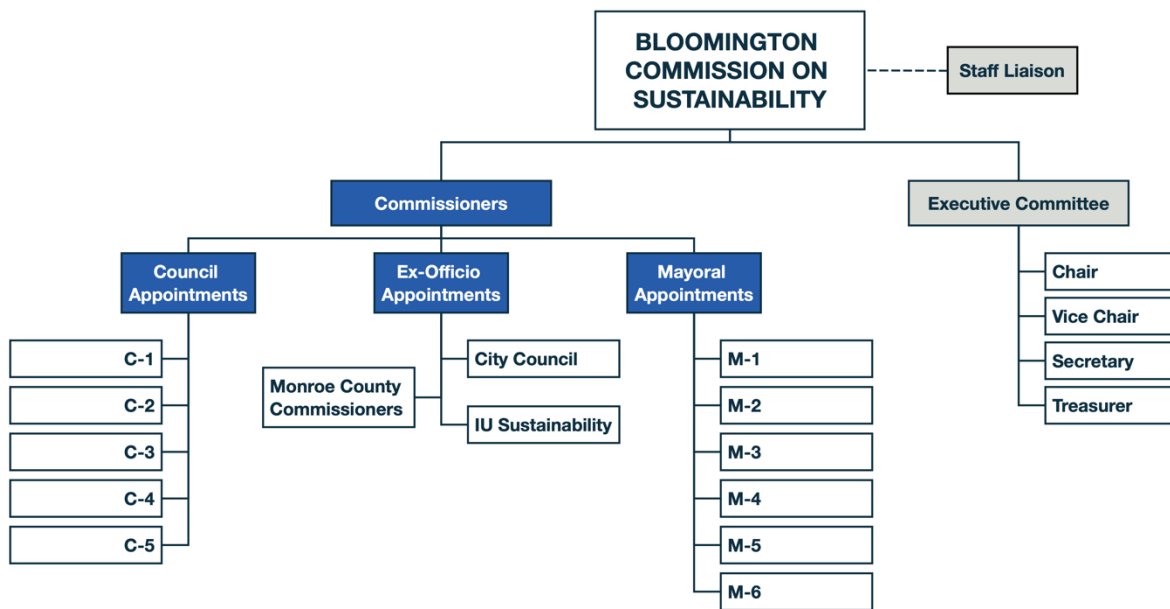


Figure 1. Structure of the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability.

Meetings and Attendance

BCOS held nine regular meetings during 2024, with scheduled meetings in April and July canceled due to anticipated lack of quorum and the State of the City event. The Commission struggled with quorum issues early in the year, particularly during the March meeting when incorrect guidance about counting ex-officio members and vacancies initially led to a misunderstanding about whether quorum had been achieved.

In September 2024, BCOS initiated a new approach to increasing productivity by introducing work sessions separate from regular business meetings. These work sessions, held at the Monroe County Public Library, provided an informal setting for commissioners to collaboratively advance projects without the time constraints of regular meetings. Two work sessions were conducted in September and proved valuable for developing grant proposals and discussing strategic initiatives.

Regular business meetings were held in the McCloskey Conference Room at City Hall, with hybrid attendance options available for commissioners unable to attend in person. The Commission's meeting minutes document a gradual improvement in attendance throughout the year, with more robust participation evident in the second half of 2024.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2024

Grants Programs and Projects

The Commission facilitated several impactful sustainability initiatives through its grant programs in partnership with the Department of Economic and Sustainable Development (ESD).

Sustainable Neighborhoods Grant Program

This program, established in 2023, provides \$10,000 annually to support small-scale neighborhood sustainability projects, typically limited to \$1,000 per project. In 2024, BCOS oversaw the implementation of previously approved grants and approved new initiatives.

TerraCycle 1.0. A \$1,000 grant awarded to GardenQuest in late 2023 was successfully implemented throughout 2024. The project procured specialized recycling boxes from TerraCycle

to divert hard-to-recycle materials from landfills. Data collected showed that laminated paper products constituted the highest percentage of household trash diverted, followed by food wrappers. The program trained ten neighbors and collected valuable data on household waste management practices, with participants expressing strong interest in continuing and expanding the program.

TerraCycle 2.0. Building on the success of the first phase, BCOS approved a follow-on \$1,000 grant in December 2024 to test a hybrid approach comparing time-savings versus cost-savings models. The project will focus on the most popular recycling categories from phase one and continue collecting weight and volume data to assess impact.

New Pollinator Gardens. In November 2024, the Commission approved a \$1,000 grant proposal to purchase pre-made pollinator garden kits for installation in a neighborhood. The project aims to increase native pollinator habitat and provide educational resources to residents about the importance of native plants.

Working Group Grant Program

This program provides \$10,000 annually for Commission-initiated projects. After significant effort to navigate the city's approval processes, BCOS approved two important projects in late 2024 and developed a proposal for a waste redirection effort that it hopes to pursue in 2025.

CanopyBloomington Tree Planting. The Commission approved a \$4,000 Working Group grant to support CanopyBloomington's tree planting initiative, representing one of the most substantial sustainability investments BCOS made in 2024. This project will replace 16 trees in areas of Bloomington previously identified as high-need neighborhoods where tree mortality had occurred. The Commission chose to partner with CanopyBloomington, a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding and maintaining Bloomington's urban forest, based on their demonstrated expertise in tree selection, planting, and long-term care.

The proposal, championed by Commissioner Andrew Guenther, underwent extensive development with input from multiple BCOS members. It received unanimous support after careful consideration of its alignment with the city's Climate Action Plan, which identifies urban tree canopy expansion as a key climate adaptation strategy. During the extensive discussion process, the Commission emphasized the importance of selecting native species that demonstrate resilience to changing climate conditions, supporting biodiversity while ensuring the long-term survival of the investment.

A distinguishing feature of this project is its comprehensive maintenance plan. Each planting site requires a signed letter of intent from the property owner or manager committing to tree maintenance for a minimum of three years, addressing a common shortcoming in many tree planting initiatives where insufficient aftercare leads to high mortality rates. CanopyBloomington supplements these commitments with professional oversight and technical support for tree stewards.

Through this partnership, BCOS is helping to advance multiple sustainability goals simultaneously: mitigating urban heat island effects, sequestering carbon, reducing stormwater runoff, providing habitat for native species, and enhancing neighborhood aesthetics and property values. The project also demonstrates the Commission's commitment to equitable distribution of environmental benefits by focusing planting efforts in underserved areas of the city where tree canopy is often disproportionately sparse.

Cob Bench Project. The Commission approved a \$1,000 Working Group grant to support the creation of an innovative community gathering space at Redbud Books on Kirkwood Avenue, featuring benches constructed using the ancient cob building technique. Commissioners Zero Rose and Evan Nix championed this project, drawing on their expertise in sustainable building practices and community engagement to develop a proposal that seamlessly integrates multiple sustainability principles. The project encompasses not only the construction of cob benches—made from a mixture of clay, sand, and straw—but also the installation of an arbor, bike racks,

native pollinator gardens, and edible landscaping, creating a multifunctional community hub in a high-visibility downtown location.

This initiative stands out for its strong community support, with over 20 neighbors signing letters of support and more than 30 individuals volunteering to participate in the construction process. The project exemplifies BCOS's commitment to demonstrating practical sustainability solutions that engage citizens directly in implementation. By using site-sourced clay, reclaimed limestone, and other local materials, the Cob Bench Project will serve as a living educational tool for sustainable building techniques while enhancing neighborhood connectivity and providing ecological benefits through native plantings. Commissioner Nix secured partnerships with Redbud Books, which is providing a \$200 in-kind contribution, and Blue Bee Ecological Endeavors, which will donate plants, soil, and seeds.

Bokashi Composting Initiative. The Commission's Waste Management Working Group, led by Commissioner Matt Austin, developed a comprehensive proposal for a \$5,000 project to establish a Bokashi composting training and implementation program across Bloomington. This innovative initiative emerged from extensive community needs assessment and collaboration with multiple local organizations including Garden Quest, the Lotus Festival, Purdue Extension, and the Waste Reduction District of Monroe County (WRDMC). The proposal exemplifies BCOS's commitment to addressing food waste—a significant contributor to landfill emissions and a key concern identified in the Climate Action Plan. The Commission has structured the project as a public-private partnership, successfully securing matching funds of \$5,000 from WRDMC, effectively doubling the initiative's impact and demonstrating the Commission's skill in leveraging limited resources.

The Bokashi method offers distinct advantages over traditional composting, particularly for urban settings, as it uses an anaerobic fermentation process that can safely process all food waste—including meat, dairy, and oily foods typically excluded from conventional composting. Commissioner Austin highlighted that this approach is especially valuable for apartment dwellers and those with limited outdoor space, making it an equity-focused solution that expands composting access beyond homeowners with yards. The project design incorporates both practical implementation and educational components, with plans to establish a "Compost Captains" volunteer training program modeled after successful initiatives in other communities. While final approval of this ambitious proposal remained pending at year's end due to administrative processing requirements, the groundwork laid in 2024 positions this initiative for immediate implementation in early 2025, with potential to significantly reduce landfill waste while building valuable soil resources for community gardens.

Policy Development and Municipal Code Engagement

BCOS actively participated in discussions about its own role within city governance and provided input on sustainability-related policies throughout 2024. The Commission engaged meaningfully with proposed changes to the Bloomington Municipal Code, particularly as they related to the Commission's purpose, structure, and responsibilities.

In the wake of the 2022 Novak Report, which recommended potentially merging BCOS with the Environmental Commission, BCOS devoted significant attention to clarifying its unique identity and value within the city's governance framework. This included detailed discussions spanning multiple meetings about the Commission's integration of environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability—a holistic approach distinguishing BCOS from other advisory bodies.

Resolution 2024-01. In December 2024, the Commission unanimously passed its first formal resolution of the year, expressing support for proposed changes to BMC §2.12.100 with specific recommendations to maintain the Commission's broad advisory role to the City Administration and incorporate resilience into the Commission's purview

Knowledge Building and Assessment

BCOS took significant steps to enhance its understanding of sustainability challenges and measure progress toward city climate goals.

Sustainability Assessment Ad-Hoc Committee. In September 2024, the Commission established an ad-hoc committee to conduct a comprehensive sustainability assessment. After surveying commissioners to prioritize focus areas, the committee began developing a framework to evaluate the city's progress on climate action goals, focusing initially on energy and the built environment, green space and ecosystems, and local food and agriculture.

Educational Presentations. The Commission hosted informative presentations throughout the year, including a detailed overview of the Summit Development project on Bloomington's southwest side, examining its sustainability features and potential impacts on housing, transportation, and natural resources.

Engagement and Collaboration

BCOS strengthened relationships with other commissions and community organizations.

Cross-Commission Coordination. Commissioners began attending meetings of the Environmental Commission, Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs, and other city boards to identify opportunities for collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.

Strategic Engagement Planning. The Commission developed a formal engagement strategy with three primary objectives: identifying related organizations, maintaining awareness of their activities, and pursuing collaboration opportunities.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

BCOS managed two primary funding streams in 2024, both provided through the Department of Economic and Sustainable Development (ESD):

Sustainable Neighborhoods Grant Program: \$10,000 annual allocation

- Funds committed in 2024: \$2,000 (TerraCycle 2.0; New Pollinator Gardens)
- Projects completed using prior year funding: \$1,000 (TerraCycle 1.0)

Working Group Grant Program: \$10,000 annual allocation

- Funds committed in 2024: \$5,000 (CanopyBloomington—\$4,000; Cob Bench—\$1,000)
- Additional proposals pending: \$5,000 (Bokashi Composting Initiative)

Both grant programs operate on a calendar year basis, with funds that must be encumbered by December 31. The Commission worked diligently in the latter part of 2024 to identify and approve high-impact projects to utilize available funding before year-end.

In November 2024, ESD announced that beginning in January 2025, Sustainable Neighborhoods Grants would be administered directly by ESD without requiring BCOS approval. While this change streamlines the process for applicants, the Commission expressed interest in maintaining an advisory role to ensure alignment with broader sustainability priorities.

CHALLENGES IN 2024

Commission Functionality & Productivity

The Commission faced several operational challenges that affected its efficiency and effectiveness:

Leadership Transition. BCOS operated without permanent leadership for the first four months of 2024, with Commissioner David Maenner serving as Acting Chair until elections were held in May. While Acting Chair Maenner performed commendably, this transition period limited the Commission's ability to advance strategic initiatives and maintain momentum.

Document Management. The Commission and City staff worked to find solutions for document storage and collaboration that would meet both the practical needs of commissioners and the City's legal and policy requirements, though this remained a challenging balance to achieve. This stemmed primarily from concerns about Indiana's Open Door Law (ODL), which regulates how public bodies conduct business and maintain transparency. The City Attorney's office expressed concern that commissioners collaboratively editing documents outside of public meetings could potentially constitute a "meeting" under the ODL if a quorum of members were involved in the editing process, even asynchronously.

Despite extensive discussions with City staff and legal counsel throughout the year, a satisfactory resolution remained elusive. The Commission explored various approaches to balance efficient document collaboration with strict ODL compliance, including the creation of read-only document repositories and establishing clear protocols for sequential document editing. However, in December, the City Attorney ultimately recommended all document management occur exclusively through OnBoard rather than through shared drives created by commissioners. This solution prioritized legal compliance but created practical difficulties for collaborative work on complex documents like the Sustainability Assessment Report. This tension between administrative efficiency and legal compliance represents an ongoing challenge for the Commission's productivity that will require continued attention in 2025.

Meeting Format Limitations. Standard monthly business meetings proved insufficient for the Commission's workload, leading to truncated discussions and deferred agenda items. In response, BCOS introduced work sessions in September to provide dedicated time for more in-depth collaboration and project development.

Procedural Guidance. The Commission and staff navigated complex procedural questions throughout the year, including during the March meeting when differing interpretations of quorum calculation requirements led to uncertainty about whether official business could be conducted.

Grant Process Complexity

Administrative Hurdles. Both grant programs administered by BCOS involved multi-step approval processes requiring coordination between the Commission, ESD staff, and city financial departments. The time required to move projects from concept to implementation created challenges for timely project execution.

Funding Authority Limitations. Questions arose about the Commission's authority to seek external funding or engage in fundraising activities, with differing interpretations of the Commission's mandate creating uncertainty about potential revenue sources beyond city allocations.

Loss of Grant Oversight. In November, ESD announced that Sustainable Neighborhoods Grants would no longer require BCOS approval beginning in January 2025. While intended to streamline the process, this change raised concerns about the Commission's diminishing role in community sustainability initiatives and reduced opportunities for commissioner expertise to inform project selection.

Commission Continuity Issues

Membership Gaps. Throughout 2024, BCOS operated with vacant positions and experienced turnover in membership, creating knowledge gaps and increased workload for remaining commissioners.

Quorum Challenges. Meeting quorum requirements proved challenging at times due to the combination of vacant positions and unavoidable commissioner absences, leading to the rescheduling of planned meetings in April and July. When meetings proceeded with minimal attendance, the Commission's ability to take formal actions was limited.

Lessons Learned

The challenges faced in 2024 yielded valuable insights for future Commission operations:

Flexible Meeting Structures. The introduction of work sessions demonstrated the value of supplementing formal business meetings with more collaborative formats, allowing for deeper engagement on complex topics without the constraints of formal meeting procedures.

Strategic Focus. The experience with the Sustainability Assessment Ad-Hoc Committee highlighted the importance of prioritizing and narrowing focus areas to achieve meaningful outcomes within the Commission's limited capacity.

Advance Planning. The year-end rush to approve grant projects underscored the need for earlier identification and development of potential initiatives to allow adequate time for administrative processing.

PLAN FOR 2025

Building on the foundation established in 2024, BCOS has identified two strategic priority areas for 2025. Rather than selecting specific projects, the Commission has chosen broader thematic domains to provide strategic direction while maintaining flexibility for commissioners to pursue various initiatives within these areas.

Priority 1: Housing and Zoning Policy

The Commission has identified housing and zoning policy as a critical area where sustainability principles can significantly impact Bloomington's development trajectory. This priority encompasses several interrelated components:

Housing Affordability and Accessibility

The Commission will engage with the social equity components of housing policy by exploring how green building practices can improve both sustainability and affordability, investigating alternative housing models such as tiny home zoning, and addressing the balance between rental properties and owner-occupied homes. The Commission will also monitor major developments like Summit District for adherence to sustainability principles.

Food Resilience & Urban Agriculture

Priority 2: Education, Outreach, and Coalition Building

Recognizing the limitations of its meeting schedule and procedural constraints, BCOS will leverage its position to amplify existing community initiatives through strategic education and partnership efforts:

Resource Amplification

The Commission will connect community members with available sustainability resources by promoting city grant programs, educating the public about BCOS Working Group Grants, and creating informative materials about sustainability initiatives and best practices.

Coalition Building

BCOS will strengthen connections with organizations already engaged in sustainability work, focusing on partnerships rather than duplicating efforts. This will include inviting organizations to present to the Commission and identifying partnership opportunities with other city commissions and boards.

Public Engagement

The Commission will increase direct interaction with community members by maintaining a presence at events such as Earth Day, developing interactive educational activities, creating surveys to gather community input on sustainability priorities, and encouraging public attendance and comment at BCOS meetings.

Implementation Strategy

To ensure effective progress on these priorities, BCOS will:

- Initiate Working Group Grant processes early in the year to avoid end-of-year rushes and allow for thorough project development;
- focus attention on time-bound opportunities such as providing input on the UDO amendment process;
- track the city's implementation of the Climate Action Plan through the Sustainability Assessment Report;
- monitor budget allocations related to sustainability initiatives to ensure alignment between financial commitments and stated priorities; and
- maintain flexibility to address emerging opportunities and challenges in Bloomington's sustainability landscape

This strategic approach will allow BCOS to maximize its impact despite limited resources, focusing on areas where the Commission can provide the greatest value to Bloomington's sustainability.

CONCLUSION

The Bloomington Commission on Sustainability demonstrated resilience and determination in 2024, overcoming operational challenges to advance important sustainability initiatives. By successfully funding innovative community projects, providing thoughtful policy input, and laying the groundwork for the first Commission-authored sustainability assessment in many years, BCOS has reinforced its value to the city's governance structure.

As Bloomington faces the intensifying challenges of climate change, resource constraints, and equity concerns, BCOS's integrative approach to sustainability—bridging environmental, social, and economic considerations—provides an essential perspective for city decision-making. The Commission enters 2025 with renewed focus, improved processes, and a commitment to measurable progress toward Bloomington's sustainability goals.

The Commission extends its appreciation to the Department of Economic and Sustainable Development staff, particularly Shawn Miya and Jolie Perry, for their dedicated support throughout the year. We also thank the community partners who collaborated on grant-funded projects and the city leadership for their continued commitment to a sustainable future for all Bloomington residents.

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APPENDIX A: 2024 MEETING SCHEDULE

Date	Meeting Type
January 9, 2024	Regular Meeting
February 13, 2024	Regular Meeting
March 12, 2024	Regular Meeting (No quorum for official business)
April 9, 2024	Meeting Canceled
May 22, 2024	Regular Meeting
June 11, 2024	Regular Meeting
July 9, 2024	Meeting Canceled
August 13, 2024	Regular Meeting
September 3, 2024	Work Session
September 10, 2024	Regular Meeting
September 24, 2024	Work Session
October 8, 2024	Regular Meeting
November 12, 2024	Regular Meeting
December 10, 2024	Regular Meeting

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APPENDIX B: 2024 GRANT SUMMARY

Grant	Recipient/Project	Amount	Status
Sustainable Neighborhoods	GardenQuest—TerraCycle 1.0 (2023)	\$1,000	Completed
Sustainable Neighborhoods	GardenQuest—TerraCycle 2.0	\$1,000	Approved
Sustainable Neighborhoods	New Pollinator Gardens	\$1,000	Approved
Working Group	CanopyBloomington	\$4,000	Approved
Working Group	Cob Bench Project	\$1,000	Approved
Working Group	Bokashi Composting	\$5,000	Pending

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APPENDIX C: COMMISSIONER ROSTER (AS OF DECEMBER 2024)

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