

In Bloomington, Indiana on Thursday, February 25, 2021 at 7:00pm with Council Vice President Sue Sgambelluri presiding over a Special Session of the Common Council. Per the Governor's Executive Orders, this meeting was conducted electronically.

COMMON COUNCIL
SPECIAL SESSION
February 25, 2021

Council Vice President Sue Sgambelluri called the meeting to order. She noted that the meeting would be considered adjourned when the Mayor's State of the City remarks concluded. She then asked Clerk Nicole Bolden to call the roll.

CALL TO ORDER [7:06pm]

Councilmembers present: Matt Flaherty, Isabel Piedmont-Smith, Dave Rollo, Kate Rosenbarger, Susan Sandberg, Sue Sgambelluri, Ron Smith, Stephen Volan
Councilmembers absent: Jim Sims

ROLL CALL [7:07pm]

Mayor Hamilton presented the State of the City Remarks (text provided by the Office of the Mayor), attached hereto.

STATE OF THE CITY REMARKS

The meeting was adjourned at 7:44pm.

ADJOURNMENT [7:44pm]


APPROVED by the Common Council of the City of Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana upon this 7th day of April, 2021.

APPROVE:

ATTEST:



Jim Sims, PRESIDENT
Bloomington Common Council



Nicole Bolden, CLERK
City of Bloomington

That was a very powerful reminder for our community of what we've been through. This is my Sixth State of the City, and it is a distinct privilege to serve as your Mayor. I feel great optimism about the years ahead. But, what a year we have just had. 2020 was extraordinary - challenging and clarifying. In our time this evening I'd like to spend a few minutes remembering this past most unusual year. And also talking about how we are now recovering and will recover. And finally, how I believe we can renew our community. Where we are headed next. These three things frame our time tonight: remember, recover, and renew. With this annual, formal gathering, held as usual in Black History Month, we begin by acknowledging the historical experience of Black people, whose immeasurable contributions to our country and our community have been in the face of 400 years of racial discrimination, which demands our current attention and energy. We also acknowledge at the outset that this land--southern Indiana--was first called home by indigenous peoples, including the Miami, Delaware, Potawatomi, Shawnee and others, also subject to centuries of discrimination and abuse, and to whom we owe ongoing respect and honor.

Part 1. REMEMBER. Let's begin tonight remembering. Think back just a year ago. Last year's State of the City was February 20th. I did not mention the words "coronavirus" or "COVID." I didn't foresee what was coming. The first reported U.S. COVID-19 death was just over a week away, in the state of Washington. Let's think back. What has happened to your family and you since then? To your workplace, or your school? Your friendships? Your daily patterns. Your home, and gatherings with others. Your plans. Your worries. A city is a great big family, a collection of thousands of individual family stories that make up Bloomington's story.

Those family stories have often been tragic. 160 Monroe County families lost loved ones, including my own family. Last April, my wife Dawn was hospitalized and very sick with COVID. She was in the Bloomington hospital, and her brother in another one near Indy, when her mother died alone in a third hospital, from COVID. Across the country more than 500,000 families share that burden, of empty chairs at family gatherings, lost to COVID. Broken hearts. And of course families lose loved ones for other reasons as well, and our hearts go out to them. It was a hard year for many of us.

The stories of 2020 have also been inspiring, as neighbors helped neighbors, as health care workers soldiered on through great risk and exhaustion, as essential workers made sure we had milk, and prescriptions, and food and electricity and water, and transportation and deliveries and public education and child care and public safety, and more. We cooperated with and cared for each other. We faced national misinformation and denial, but locally worked together and put tighter controls in place to help Bloomington be among Indiana's strongest communities in dealing with this deadly, enormously disruptive pandemic.

We will get out of this terrible hole, and likely this year, with vaccinations -- please get yours when it's your turn! (I'm looking forward to mine in mid-March) -- and with continued distancing and masking. Let's remember a few shared lessons from 2020.

We learned that Change is Possible. As a community, and as people, we really can change, and very quickly sometimes, and radically when we have to. Our Schools. Our Workplaces. Our Families. Our recreation and socializing? How dramatically did we have to change **so many** of our ways? It's good to know we have that capacity. Inside city government, within two weeks last March, we revamped entire departments and work styles. From zoom council meetings to the drive-through Farmers Market to remote police roll calls. I convened two community-wide working groups, to support the economic recovery, and our safety net, and established weekly press conferences with the city, the county, and IU, to keep everyone informed. We trained tenants to do their own apartment inspections with kits left at their doors. We closed Kirkwood to cars to allow safer outdoor dining. New high efficiency filtration systems at firehouses provided safer air against the pandemic.

And of course, stores, restaurants, retailers, performing arts groups and galleries, therapists and exercise classes, schools and pupils and teachers -- everyone had to adapt so dramatically and so quickly. We even had to learn new language: parklets and PPE and PUDO zones!

We learned that One Emergency doesn't make others disappear. The pandemic was an unusual emergency. But other emergencies persisted and intensified. Climate Change marched inexorably on. Whether we pay attention or not, our climate emergency threatens our lives and our planet. Economic hardship and inequality, in jobs and in housing were exacerbated terribly by the pandemic. People suffered from substance use disorder, and experienced homelessness. Mental health issues rose.

Racial bigotry and bias took center stage during 2020. Bloomington witnessed our largest racial awareness and inclusion demonstrations of a generation or more. Affirming that Black Lives Matter. Even as the pandemic disproportionately took the lives of people of color. Black and Latino Americans were hospitalized at twice the rate and died from COVID at three times the rate of white Americans.

We learned that Trust is Essential. We had to trust science and facts to get through the pandemic. Hoping and fantasizing or arguing and pontificating don't protect us from the virus. Nor drinking bleach. Masking and distancing do. Testing does. The vaccine does. We learned we need to trust each other to protect each other. Dave Chappelle noted that trust wasn't evident when COVID started, when people bought bullets and hoarded toilet paper. It was hard to trust government when the President focused not on science and facts but on bluster and denial. But thankfully we are on steadier ground nationally now, and locally we have worked extremely closely together from the start, with real trust, to take steps needed.

And we re-learned that We all Count – We all depend on each other, and we need all to be involved and included, as we re-learned in new ways this year. Our health depended on thousands of workers willing to show up and step up. Our community's very survival depended on essential workers of all kinds being on the job every day, even at risk to themselves and their families. Thousands of students depended on their teachers learning new skills. Communities survive, with resilience, cooperation and vision. Even when those essential qualities are missing elsewhere, we can nurture and cherish them here. Bloomington was able to do as well as we did thanks to the exceptional teamwork from and with Penny Caudill and the county health department, Lauren Robel and Indiana University, Brian Shockney and IU Health system, with our local public schools, and with so many others.

Local arts organizations faced this crisis that decimated their audiences and threatened their own survival. Our artists--so central to Bloomington's identity and so powerful in these troubled times--showed resilience and adaptability and yes great creativity. Let's take a moment now to appreciate how a couple organizations, among the many we so esteem, took their arts into new territory so the show could go on. Thanks to Cardinal Stage Company, first, for taking us behind the scenes of making their "Walkabout Radio Plays" for folks to enjoy on earbuds while strolling outdoors; then thanks to the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra for showing us how they spread out and masked up in the Buskirk Chumley Theatre to celebrate Beethoven's birthday in style. 2020 was tough; our artists made it more bearable. I hope you enjoy the examples.

Part 2. RECOVER. We are so touched by how many people, including artists, found ways to cope and create, during the last tough, tough year. As we remember, let's consider our recovery. Where are we now, in early 2021? The short answer is, and it's no surprise: we still face major threats as a community. The worst pandemic in a hundred years isn't over. That is job one - to climb out of it, and save lives. We will, but it will take many more months, perhaps all year. Continued strong cooperation among our health sector players, and continued good individual actions, distancing and masking, are essential, and will steer us to calmer waters. Please, we have to stay the course, even while relief is in sight.

In the meantime, our economy is in a serious recession. Certain sectors in a depression. In the past 12 months our metropolitan area lost thousands of jobs -- at one point nearly 12,000 and still many thousands are gone. That's an enormous ongoing cost. Family income lost. Employers gone or at risk. Treasured nonprofits hanging on by fingertips. Restaurants and venues and events may go under. Families face eviction or foreclosure. Our country is down nearly 10 million jobs in the past 12 months.

Federal support efforts are finally ramping up, thank goodness, with more sensible, responsible leadership in Washington. I'm so glad city council and my administration teamed up with "Recover Forward" to support job growth, and job training, and nonprofits who help support those in need. "Recover Forward" began last summer, dedicating about \$8 million to help claw up from this economic calamity, reflecting a shared commitment of our administration and city council to be a countercyclical force, providing vital economic stimulus and support. This is how government can indeed help, to support and sustain our local economy, and our local people. That's what we did and should continue to do.

Beyond these front-burner efforts on our pandemic and our recession, many other significant projects and efforts are on our plate right now, Here are five big ones:

One: Many Bloomingtonians face serious housing insecurity. Together in the past five years we've created or preserved nearly 1,400 bedrooms of affordable housing -- and another 5,000 market rate. Even as we continue this focus, we know many more are needed to address the real pressures felt by so many of our neighbors or future residents. And the pandemic only intensifies the need and the risks. I appreciate our United Way and Community Foundation stepping up to coordinate a regional response for our community.

Two: we have big Infrastructure projects underway and in the pipeline. Thanks to the Bicentennial Bonds, we anticipate four major new trails, at the 7-Line, at Griffy Lake, at Cascades, and from Switchyard past RCA Park. We will open two downtown garages this year, one replacement and one supporting new jobs in the Trades District. We are investing nearly forty million dollars for historic upgrades to our downtown stormwater system, wastewater plant expansions, and water main replacements. We're adding electric buses and improving bus stops and expanding sidewalks and activating downtown alleys. All this investment helps our city and supports hundreds of precious local jobs too.

Three: We embrace the extraordinary opportunity of a new neighborhood in our city's core -- with the recently completed Hospital Re-use Master Plan, and years of collaborative development ahead, to create new homes for people from all walks of life, as well as great new public spaces and sustainable places for jobs and retail and entertainment.

Four: two significant planning efforts will conclude this year, with the zoning map and Unified Development Ordinance, as well as our first comprehensive Climate Action Plan. We also look forward to the continuing work of the Divided Communities Project's Racial Equity, and Future of Policing task forces.

Finally, we have two significant reviews underway: what is the future for the Convention Center and its planned expansion? And what is the future for the Waldron, which the City again owns.

That's a big to-do list. Now, remember our plate has been very full not just last year but for five years, and our shared accomplishments are many. To borrow from a local songwriter: "We can do these hard things." Don't be daunted by a big to-do list! Remember **just a sample** of our community's recent accomplishments that have positioned us so well: Opening the jobs-focused Trades District, with the state's fastest-growing co-work space, The Mill. Opening Switchyard Park, our biggest parks project in history. Helping employers expand, such as Catalent tripling to 2,200 local jobs, and opening later this year the new 550 million dollar IU Health Regional Academic Health Center, our community's biggest-ever single economic development project. The City bought the current hospital property and completed that Master Plan for redevelopment. We added those fourteen hundred affordable bedrooms. We enhanced our basic services with a Public Safety Local Income Tax. We planted thousands of new trees, upgraded our citywide trail network, and dramatically expanded solar energy production. We reimagined and reformed our Sanitation Department, our Utilities department, and our Housing Authority. We doubled our investments in basic city infrastructure, and completed a Comprehensive Plan, a Transportation Plan, and a Sustainability Plan. Our Parks department won a national Gold Medal and our City just won LEED for Cities designation. I can't help mention the importance of passing a school referendum and a Food and Beverage tax, and oh yes, dealing with a new interstate highway that opened nearby.

I do not know of any other five-year period in Bloomington history with this much major activity. We can do, we did, these hard things, and are dealing with a pandemic and a recession too. This is what we do -- even when times are hard and when it's easy to get down. City government doesn't stop. We work on. Let's pause just a moment and share some special thanks. First thanks to all our city employees, who have gone above and beyond this past year, and these past five years. They are true public servants; they are a treasure to our community, all 850 people who work for the City of Bloomington and our affiliated entities. So please join, however you can, in a big, big thank you to our public servants. Second, I want to give a special shout out to two stalwart and stellar city employees: Doris Sims who retired last month as Director of Housing and Neighborhood Development, and Mick Renneisen who is retiring in April as Deputy Mayor. I cannot imagine the past five years without their leadership and efforts, so please join me in expressing a big Bloomington thank you for their combined 78 years of city service!

As we review this recovery-in-progress, these efforts to support individuals and families and our community, we'll share a brief video tribute to those city employees who've helped us recover this far and will keep at it--by showing up, every day and late into the night, rain or shine, snowing or flooding or steaming, good times and bad--to make sure residents are protected and served. After that, we'll have the

privilege of hearing a more personal expression of how important recovery is -- how what we do as a community can change lives, together, as we hear from a member of Women Writing for a Change, a program serving women in incarceration in our community, read by the creative director Beth Lodge-Rigal.

Part 3. RENEW. Thank you to Beth Lodge-Rigal and Olivia STROH-zhur for that poem and message, and for Women Writing for (a) Change and New Leaf, New Life.

Recovery, both community and individual, is critical, and front burner. It matters to real people, right now, right here. And we must recover forward. That's renewal. If 2020 was a low point, we make 2021 a turning point. Pivot out of the pandemic and recession, into the future we want to live in. To Renew our community takes vision, and grit, and cooperation. President Biden calls it Build Back Better.

The fundamental question in our renewal is who do we want to be? As we pivot from the debilitating, deadly start of 2020, how will we act in the rest of the decade? What is the role of a progressive community like Bloomington, in the heartland of America, as we navigate the next 10 years? I hope we all can agree that when Bloomington thrives, our county thrives and our region thrives. If Bloomington falters or weakens, so too our county and region. With Bloomington as the economic, social and cultural engine of the region, our renewal, our future, depend on us doing the right things, and being the Bloomington we should be.

Early last year, I highlighted what I see as the two major challenges, and opportunities, facing us -- the issues of the decade: **Inclusion** and **Sustainability**. Inclusion: does everyone in fact belong? And **feel** they belong? And experience justice and fairness and opportunity? Whatever your income. Or skin color. Whatever language you speak or god you worship. Whatever your ability or disability. Whomever you love. Whatever your age or gender identity. Does everyone feel a part of, belong to, our community, and our future? Can everyone succeed and thrive here? We are politically more liberal, but demographically less diverse than America. We are more educated, but poorer than America. How do we become more diverse, more just, and more prosperous, for all?

And Sustainability. Do we advance climate justice and do our part? Are we helping all our residents live high-quality lives with low-carbon impact? We have a higher carbon footprint than the average American community. How do we adequately lean into the climate emergency all around us? Here's the good news -- when we make our community more inclusive and more sustainable, we are making our quality of life better and better. It's making Bloomington reflect our values and also helping us just be a great place to live.

Good things are already underway. Our community has been working on these two issues for years. On Inclusion: investing in economic recovery with more and better jobs, and more housing security. Our Divided Communities racial equity plan and new taskforces. Anti-Racism training. On Sustainability: a Climate Action Plan this spring, building on last year's Sustainability Action Plan. A Green Ribbon Panel by fall. And all the many efforts toward a more walkable, greener, high-quality city. As next steps, perhaps we should name some new goals to aim for, like an expanded, more-subsidized network of public transportation serving more people more effectively; like 300 new affordable housing units every year; like 500 new good-paying jobs every year; like increasing our diversity and lowering our per-capita carbon footprint.

We are making progress, but we don't have all the answers to keep advancing on these two big opportunities of Inclusion and Sustainability, and how to reach the next level, to lift up every one of our people, and to help save our fragile planet. I have ideas, and so do you. Council and administration, let's get together. City and county and region, let's get together. Government and residents and private sector, let's get together. Town and gown, let's get together, so our community can and will rise up to meet these challenges in the coming decade.

As we pivot out of 2020 two structural issues also face us, both basic to Bloomington's long-term future.

Just over four years ago, in February, 2017, we began a long-overdue annexation process. That orderly, public effort was unceremoniously and unconstitutionally interrupted by a radical, overreaching act of our State Legislature. The Indiana Supreme Court just recently ruled in Bloomington's favor and said the legislature acted illegally, violating the state constitution. We now must choose how to move forward.

Strong and healthy cities grow through time -- it's natural and it's important. For the first 185 years of our history, our boundaries grew steadily in tempo with our population. But since 2004, despite steady population growth, we have been frozen in size. A city whose boundaries don't grow with its population becomes an unhealthy mishmash of services, planning, oversight, and political accountability. We are stronger together. An integrated, vibrant Bloomington can thrive and help all the people of our entire region prosper. We can sustain and protect that important healthy regional balance between urban and rural areas. I look forward to working with city council and all our partners to chart a path forward in the coming months.

Second, last year, I urged the importance of new revenue to match our community's goals and purpose. Meeting great ambitions and putting values into practice requires resources. Is Indiana's most progressive community generating revenue commensurate with our values and goals? Do we have the resources to invest in putting our values into practice? To address inclusion and sustainability? We have very low combined local property and income taxes -- among the lowest of Indiana's 30 largest cities. We have a lower income tax rate than three quarters of Indiana's counties, and lower than all six of our contiguous counties. I believe as we pivot in 2021 to the future, to renewal, we will need thoughtfully to align our ambitions and goals -- our expectations for our community and ourselves -- explicitly with our available resources. I look forward to working again with city and county partners on this issue. And we can hope and urge that Congress will quickly pass pandemic relief packages including support for local governments like ours.

I believe we need big dreams and ambitious goals, and also need to work in the quotidian messiness of improving things day by day and year by year. Our vision for the decade and beyond should be audacious and bold. Our approach must be practical, as we work to make actual progress on the ground, step by step. And as we work to get things done, we need to find **the helpers**, the positive forces for change, the people and institutions who cooperate and roll up their sleeves. Negativity and attacks are often easier than positivity and trust. Our social media culture and our finger pointing and what-about-ism and virtue signaling can sometimes overwhelm the nitty gritty day-to-day hard work of making progress through dialogue and compromise and mutual aid. We have to find a way to work together on hard things, with trust, and positive energy -- to help each other.

Didn't the pandemic, after all, show us, teach us, **just this** -- that we can work together, we can meet extraordinary challenges, one step at a time, with trust? That we can change quickly? With the helpers in the lead? With good will and with reason? With transparency and accountability.

The pandemic taught us the stakes of having racial equity in health care. Of caring for and respecting **all** our workers and residents. Inclusion matters. The pandemic taught us that distant events around the globe or over time can dramatically change things right here in Bloomington. Whether tiny viruses or molecules of CO2. Sustainability matters. We learned that we can do so much together, when we set our minds to it, to protect and strengthen our beloved community.

Tonight we Remember. We remember loved ones and friends we lost. We remember heroes and doers and helpers we cherish. We Recover. We recover, together, out of a pandemic and out of a recession, holding hands and connecting hearts, pulling out of a dismal hollow onto higher ground. And we Renew. We renew our vision and our optimism, pivoting into what could and should be a grand decade to chart and change our future. Toward Inclusion. Toward Sustainability. We pivot To Better Times Ahead. When Bloomington thrives, our county and our region thrive. We need to lead the way To Better Times Ahead. And I am confident that that is just what we can do. We're going through some very tough times, but the state of our city is strong, and our future is bright. Remember. Recover. Renew.

Thank you city council. Thank you all, for participating in this event. Please enjoy a final video tribute now, and be well. The meeting is officially adjourned at its conclusion.