DOWNTOWN SAFETY, CIVILITY, AND JUSTICE PROJECT:
REPORT SUMMARY
What the Community Said

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SUMMARY: WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Introduction. On August 10, 2016, Mayor John Hamilton introduced a new City initiative to address downtown safety and civility issues, because "our public spaces must be and must feel safe." He observed that as "we come together as community members, we will encounter neighbors from all walks of life and must ensure that we are able to do so in a way that is safe and expresses the value that each of us brings to our community." He also announced the City had undertaken to study and make recommendations to resolve some of the issues that lead to these behaviors. The Mayor asked the Community Justice and Mediation Center (CJAM) to develop a public deliberation process as part of this overall initiative. CJAM is a non-partisan nonprofit organization that has provided community mediation services and training for over 20 years in Bloomington and Monroe County. CJAM is submitting this report in completion of its part of the initiative. The Mayor has established a Task Force to consider these findings, conduct further research on best practices, and make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council.

CJAM invited a Steering Committee to collaboratively design and carry out the process. It designed a three-stage process: Stage 1) Focus Groups; Stage 2) Large Group Stakeholder Dialogue; and Stage 3) Public Deliberation. The Steering Committee identified different stakeholder and constituent groups in the community and invited participants: 147 were invited to Stage 1, of which 119 agreed to attend, and 108 actually attended. Of Stage 1 participants, 39 were nominated or volunteered for Stage 2. Of these, 33 agreed to attend and 31 actually attended. In Stage 3, approximately 70 members of the public attended. In addition to participants, CJAM volunteers and Indiana University students participated as co-facilitators and note-takers. This report represents summaries of perceptions, comments, and observations by the almost 200 participants. This represents qualitative data, which means it reflects the perceptions, opinions, and words of those who participated. The participants were not a random sample, but purposefully chosen to represent different perspectives among different stakeholder groups in the community.

The following report summarizes the findings from these three stages in five parts and includes transcribed comments from each stage in three appendices:

- Part I. Stage 1 Focus Groups: Identifying Perceived Problems
- Part II. Stage 2 Large Group Stakeholder Dialogue: Brainstorming Constructive Actions
- Part III. Human Needs, Behaviors, and Social Problems: Mapping System Dynamics
- Part IV. Stage 3 Public Deliberation: Discussing Ideas for Action
- Part V. Information Needs for Further Research
- Appendix A. Qualitative Data from Stage 1
- Appendix B. Qualitative Data from Stage 2
- Appendix C. Qualitative Data from Stage 3

Stage 1 Focus Groups: CJAM volunteers facilitated small focus group discussions. There were seven focus groups: members of the people experiencing homelessness and/or panhandling community, advocacy and community organizations, businesses, local government, the justice system, service organizations, and patrons. Participants' comments fell into eleven categories or themes:

- Theme 1: Safety and Civility: Feeling Unsafe and Public Health Concerns
- Theme 2: Mapping the Community Dynamics on Safety and Civility
- Theme 3: Aggressive Panhandling
- Theme 4: People experiencing homelessness
- Theme 5: Substance and/or Alcohol Abuse or Addiction and Mental Health
- Theme 6: Costs
- Theme 7: Resources and Justice
- Theme 8: Policies and Enforcement
- Theme 9: Indiana University's Role and the Intersection with the Community
- Theme 10: Data, Information, Research, Best Practices, and Education
- Theme 11: Steps Forward and Ideas for Action

The focus groups' information provides insight into the various dynamics related to aggressive panhandling, people experiencing homelessness, substance or alcohol abuse and/or addiction, and mental health. These initial conclusions were based on qualitative, not quantitative, data from the participants in Stage 1 and require further research.

1. Bloomington and Monroe County appear to be operating and supporting what is in effect a multi-county, regional system to address a problem shared across communities in south central Indiana; this is placing a growing burden on public, nonprofit, and private sector agencies and organizations.
2. State agency policies and insufficient state support for needs like mental health services may be contributing to the regional dynamic of an increasing population in need of services in Bloomington and Monroe County.
3. Participants report insufficient resources in the community to address the current human needs, or to support nonprofit, government agency, and justice system responses related to people experiencing homelessness, substance and/or alcohol abuse or addiction, and mental health.
4. There is need for more organized collaboration or a collaborative public management system across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to address these various issues.
5. All sectors (public, private, and nonprofit, including the faith-based community) report experiencing new burdens or costs and new stress on their staff or volunteer capacity. Participants report this in a) meeting the combined growing human needs in relation to people experiencing homelessness, substance and/or alcohol abuse or addiction, and the mentally ill, and b) increased safety risks related to aggressive panhandling.
6. There is a dynamic suggesting a need for more town-gown communication and coordination on boundaries of Indiana University in relation to student alcohol consumption, particularly on the east end of Kirkwood Avenue.

7. There is a dynamic of panhandling along Kirkwood, its sidewalks, and public spaces that may be related to the availability of inexpensive alcohol that can be purchased for take-out.
8. There is a dynamic related to what may be an organized, systematic panhandling group located at certain specific locations, including Walnut and College Avenues, Route 37 ramps on the west side, College Mall Road at the Third Street intersection on the east side, and other locations. This group is independent from individual, peaceful panhandlers. The high traffic in these locations may disproportionately affect perceptions of safety and civility.
9. Dynamics in Peoples Park, Seminary Park, the B-Line Trail, downtown alleys, and the Monroe County Public Library affect public use and perceptions of safety disproportionately to other locations, which may be creating a sense of lost public spaces downtown.
10. Participants recognized that the focus group process addressed only participants' perceptions, experiences, and observations; there was broad agreement on the need for additional objective data collection and analysis from a variety of sources, including 211 calls, 911 calls, and justice system records.

Stage 2 Large Group Stakeholder Dialogue: CJAM convened a large group stakeholder dialogue comprised of delegates who had participated in a focus group in Stage 1 and had volunteered or been nominated by their peers to continue to Stage 2, with a few participants invited to substitute for others who could not attend. These participants engaged in brainstorming and prioritizing ideas for actions that organizations or agencies in the public, private, and/or nonprofit sectors could take as well as actions for the general public. Participants prioritized these ideas for action by an informal dot voting process, with the following results in order of priority:

- Build a public bathroom downtown (19)
- Address housing for those in need (19)
- Address substance addiction and abuse (19)
- Holistically tackle mental health needs of people in public spaces (16)
- Reduce street-based addiction via detox and create detox center and long-term treatment facilities (15)
- Establish a work release program (13)
- Task key stakeholders (IU, city, county, state, federal agencies, out of town business owners, service organizations) to address the problems (13)
- Evaluate and improve employment opportunities (10)
- Increase and inform police enforcement (8)
- Bridge groups in public spaces; provide public space opportunities and downtown improvements (7)
- Involve IU to be more accountable; educate IU students (5)
- Use legislation to address prioritized problems (3)

Public Spaces and Place-Based Dynamics. In the course of their deliberations, participants in both Stage 1 and Stage 2 identified specific physical locations in which people or

groups and institutions interacted in ways they observed gave rise to concerns about safety, civility, and justice. The specific most salient areas identified included sidewalks, streets, alleys, and parking lots near the Square downtown, near parks (including Peoples Park, Seminary Park, and to a lesser extent Bryan Park), in and around the Monroe County Public Library, and certain high traffic intersections indicated on Maps 1, 2, and 3 in Part III of this report.

In each of these areas, there were varying dynamics related to people's behaviors and interactions. While the public has expressed concerns to local government and the news media about panhandling, participants distinguished between legal panhandling, systemic panhandling, and aggressive panhandling. Legal panhandling is peaceful and conforms to the ordinance. Systemic panhandling (e.g., observed at entry and exit ramps to State Highway 37, at intersections with Walnut and the Bypass, or 3d Street and College Mall, Pete Ellis Drive, or Clarizz Blvd.) may be a business which may or may not be legal, depending upon its location and timing. Aggressive panhandling may violate the ordinance and law. Participants brainstormed about steps to reduce the financial incentives related to panhandling and increase both regulation and enforcement.

Participants also identified behaviors related to mental health issues (loud noises, yelling, erratic behavior) and substance and/or alcohol abuse and addiction (fighting, aggressive panhandling to purchase drugs or alcohol, public health risks such as discarded needles and human waste). In contrast to peaceful panhandling on specific high traffic street corners, participants associated these behaviors with public spaces, including certain parks as well as streets, sidewalks, and parking lots or public spaces on Kirkwood Avenue east to the IU Campus boundary. In these locations, particular concerns were expressed about student alcohol and drug use and the question of accountability and IU involvement in holding students accountable for excesses. There were also similar behaviors related to mental health, substance abuse and dealing, as well as alcohol in the area of Seminary Park and nearby groceries, services from Shalom, or the U.S. Postal Service. This area generally did not involve students except as nearby residents and related trespassing on rental property.

In addition, these dynamics occur in the same public spaces that people experiencing homelessness use, including parks and the Public Library. Participants in Stages 1 and 2 emphasized that *people experiencing homelessness generally do not engage in panhandling*. However, they need somewhere to sleep, food, sanitary facilities, access to water, and other basic needs; they include families with children in the public schools who need somewhere to do homework. Participants believed that some members of the public may be unable to distinguish among various groups or their needs or behaviors. Participants agreed on the need for information and education to the public regarding these different groups and available public services.

Stage 3 Public Deliberation. As evidenced by participants in these deliberations, the community as a whole has substantial sympathy for the homeless and mentally ill and recognizes their needs. Circle topics involving housing and shelter, public bathrooms, work release/employment, and mental health care strategies drew substantial participation and interest. Participants wanted community support and discussion addressing these issues to continue.

While the positive outreach efforts of non-profits are recognized, increased collaboration and coordination among non-profits and governmental units is seen as a pressing need both to make better use of existing services and to find resources to close gaps in services (such as detoxification, insufficient long term treatment, work release, and employment opportunities suitable for the homeless population). We observed in all stages of these deliberations networking occurring among affected agencies.

Gaps in services are to some degree driven by inadequate resources with organizations confining themselves to services they have the resources to provide and leaving gaps for other organizations to fill. Law enforcement and criminal corrections are part of this picture. While it is generally recognized that the community cannot arrest its way out of substance abuse, petty theft, and interpersonal conflict that are confronted in downtown areas, law enforcement capacity is limited by available personnel both in local police departments and state enforcement of liquor laws. And law enforcement and corrections personnel are frustrated that individuals arrested and taken through the courts will be released shortly from the jail (which is under a court mandated cap) or from the hospital back to environments in which drugs and alcohol are readily available. Participants noted that homeless people are themselves a potential resource for managing the situation and that some could be employed for the purpose.

Public education directed both to IU students and to citizens generally is considered an important step. Matters on which public education could be productive include:

- The dysfunction of giving to panhandlers
- The legal limitations on controlling panhandling
- The diversity of the population experienced as problematic
- Getting to know the homeless
  The ways in which citizens can contribute to amelioration of problems

Information Needs. At each stage of the process, participants expressed the need for quantitative data related to the identified substantive issues. Participants did not themselves prioritize these information needs. The following list identifies information gaps not in order of priority:

1. Distinguish between the various groups of people who are people experiencing homelessness, panhandling, mentally ill, or suffering from substance and/or alcohol abuse or addiction and obtain information to help educate the public.
2. Determine the number of people in each category, the extent of need for services, and available resources and organizations providing which resources in relation to these needs (e.g., housing for those in recovery from substance and/or alcohol abuse or addiction, detox facilities, available meals, etc.).
3. Determine the source and causes for a perceived increase in the number of people downtown in need of services or assistance because they are experiencing homelessness, have mental health issues, or have problems related to substance and/or alcohol abuse or addiction.
4. Determine whether Bloomington and Monroe County are operating what amounts to a regional, multi-county center for services for people in need, whether due to problems

with re-entry following imprisonment, mental health needs, substance and/or alcohol abuse or addiction, or lacking shelter or a residence.
5. Determine where people in need of services who are newly residing in Bloomington have come here from and why; e.g., are neighboring counties sending people here because they do not have sufficient resources or services?
6. Identify opportunities to establish a collaborative network with authorities in nearby communities, including state and local agencies, to determine the driving forces if any and coordinate efforts.
7. Determine what data exists and how to share it.
8. Determine the extent to which systemic panhandling as a business is occurring, and document the extent to which people engaged in it have permanent addresses and residences in the community or outside of it.
9. Determine the relation between those engaged in repeated, aggressive panhandling and the criminal justice system.
10. Research law and best practice for educating the public about the legality of peaceful panhandling.
11. Use big data or data-mining to explore 911 emergency calls, their reason and location; explore 211 calls, their reason and location; and criminal justice system records to help inform the answers to the above questions.
12. How effective are current approaches by the public, private, and nonprofit sectors for addressing safety, civility, and justice in relation to panhandling and various populations in need of help and services?
13. Research best practices for reducing economic incentives for panhandling (e.g., Nashville, TN and Seattle, WA newspaper sales).
14. Research best practices for meeting public health needs of people experiencing homelessness in terms of shelter, sanitary facilities, water, and food (e.g., public restrooms like Portland Loo, alternatives or additions to the Interfaith Winter Shelter, etc.)
15. Research best practices for reducing the number of community members who lose housing or their residence (e.g., foreclosure or eviction) and as a result experience homelessness.
16. Research best practices for transitioning people in need of services to gainful employment (e.g., work release center, day labor centers).
17. Within Bloomington and Monroe County, determine how nonprofits, government agencies, social services entities, the faith-based community, and private sector are each addressing the human needs (experiencing homelessness, have mental health issues, or have problems related to substance and/or alcohol abuse or addiction) and the extent to which they are cooperating and coordinating.
18. *What would an effective collaborative network look like in Bloomington and Monroe County?*

While this is not a comprehensive inventory of data needs, it reflects the extent and scope of questions participants raised during all three stages of the public deliberation process.

Conclusion: The community participants identified and expressed support for a number of specific steps or projects to address public concerns about safety, civility, and justice. Several

of these are specific projects that had already been discussed within the community before the Mayor launched this initiative. These include:

1. Build a public bathroom downtown.
2. Continue to address housing for those in need and pursue affordable housing.
3. Establish a work release program.
4. Create detox center(s) and long-term treatment facilities to address substance and/or alcohol abuse and addiction.

However, the participants also identified a key missing piece for Bloomington and Monroe County as to the previous analyses of these longstanding social issues and their community impacts. In the course of each focus group and stage of the process, people met each other and learned about how each participant's work either addressed or was affected by the various problems and problem behaviors giving rise to some public concerns about safety, civility, and justice. They recognized that while various entities in town collaborated with each other (e.g., police, courts, and probation with some nonprofits in relation to substance abuse and drug dealing; or mental health practitioners and health care facilities with relation to mental health problems), there was no overarching structure for information-sharing and collaboration across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. One action idea that received strong support was *to task key stakeholders to meet and collaborate to address these shared community issues*.

The community does not have adequate collaborative infrastructure. Depending on the specific social issue related to particular human behaviors that the public associates with concerns about safety and civility, the community has a rich array of organizations from the public, private, and nonprofit sector who can help address it. An incomplete list includes the city and its agencies or departments, county and its agencies or departments, state (including the Department of Corrections and our elected officials), federal agencies, the Chamber of Commerce and businesses (including out of town business owners), Indiana University, Ivy Tech, IU Health and other health care providers, United Way and nonprofit organizations, service organizations, and the faith community; all play critically important roles.

However, there is no shared information portal and no structured and comprehensive collaborative network fitted to the problems. This requires an assessment of what organizations exist and who can contribute what to the shared concern about safety, civility, and justice. The participants recommend that the community find a way to collaborate.