



culture & identity

Overview

The City of Bloomington is fortunate to have a high quality of life that is supported by its rich culture and identity. Multiple sources have characterized Bloomington as one of the most livable communities both regionally and nationally. This chapter introduces subsections that define the culture and identity that help make Bloomington such a desirable and attractive community.

History and Culture

Bloomington is the county seat of Monroe County, Indiana. It was settled in 1816, the same year Indiana became a State. President James Monroe chose it as the site of the Indiana Seminary. Located on a trading route with available spring water, the new settlement attracted settlers. Following the creation of Monroe County in 1818, the settlement was given the designation of a town.

No precise evidence or record suggests the basis on which the name Bloomington was adopted. One theory suggests the name reflected the blooming flowers and foliage, while another theory suggests that the name was given in honor of William Bloom, one of the first settlers. By 1821, Covenanters had started to settle the area. Associated with the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, Covenanters had outlawed slavery in 1800 amongst all its members. Later on, Bloomington provided a route for escaped slaves traveling north on the Underground Railroad.

Limestone quarrying was one of the early major industries in Bloomington, and a long history of manufacturing brought many people and institutions to town over many decades. Since 1820, a major reason for the town's growth was and remains Indiana University. Indiana University attracts students and faculty from across the nation and around the world. The university has greatly contributed to the growth and development of the town. Indiana University contributes to Bloomington's its distinctively progressive, tolerant, diverse, and innovative character, as seen in its residents, businesses, and its cultural arts community. Bloomington will celebrate its bicentennial in 2018, an occasion for reflecting on our past while looking to the future. Likewise, Indiana University will celebrate its bicentennial in 2020. The Bicentennial Strategic Plan for IU is organized around a master plan and lays the groundwork to assure that the University as a whole continues to thrive.

Higher Education

There is more to education in Bloomington than Indiana University. Bloomington's current and future employees must have access to advanced technical training that results in employable skills in the 21st century. Ivy Tech Community College works closely with area employers to design curriculum and training programs that are advanced enough to provide the skills necessary for employment. Robust opportunities must be created for people to access cutting-edge workforce education and formal training programs.



Allowing people to be better prepared for emergent career fields will encourage existing employers to stay and expand, while attracting new employers to Bloomington.

Indiana University and Ivy Tech both offer a multitude of learning and cultural attractions for residents. Bloomington is fortunate to have higher education institutions that influence and shape the diversity of residents, the innovation of local businesses and industries, and the breadth and depth of the cultural arts. Bloomington's identity is interwoven with its higher education institutions: Approximately half of Bloomington's population is students.

Higher education brings people of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds that enrich the entire Bloomington community. In 2015, 7,875 incoming freshmen arrived at Indiana University. Almost all of Indiana's 92 counties were represented. More than 1,000 incoming freshmen were underrepresented minority students, and over 1,000 came from outside of the U.S. Estimates indicate that the 7,000+ foreign students and staff at Indiana University generate



3,500 local jobs and an economic impact of \$250 million annually.

Elementary and Secondary Education

The Monroe County Community School Corporation (MCCSC) is the primary public K-12 educational provider for the Bloomington area. It serves nearly 11,000 students. According to federal data, the overall high school graduation rate in the U.S. has reached 80% for the first time. Bloomington high schools exceed a 90% graduation rate. The community must be strong partners with the public school system that is the bedrock of Bloomington's educational success. Seven MCCSC schools received the prestigious 4-star designation from the Indiana Department of Education in 2014–2015. Bloomington also has a number of quality private and charter schools such as the Harmony School and the Project School.

Teaching students that have language barriers and integrating them into the educational system is another important issue facing public schools. Annually, MCCSC



typically classifies over 300 students as having limited English proficiency. Early childhood education is another critical area. Support for non-profit organizations that contribute to the backbone of services for early education is an important consideration. This is especially true for children from low- to moderate-income families. These early education support programs are crucial to preparing young children for regular school programs.

Diversity

Bloomington welcomes all. The fusion of nationalities, races, cultures, ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientations brings strength through diversity.

One area where Bloomington's diversity is well established is its history of embracing the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ) communities. Over 20 years ago, the City Council passed a Human Rights Ordinance that took a stand against denying people basic rights because of their sexual orientation. Additionally, the City of Bloomington was one of the first municipal governments in the Midwest and the nation to extend same-sex partner insurance benefits to its employees.

Ongoing efforts in program areas from volunteerism and healthy living to community outreach foster diversity. Bloomington's friendly and inviting atmosphere for all people is essential to building upon its historical tradition of inclusion. The open and collaborative culture and

environment attract all types of creative individuals who provide Bloomington with an economic advantage in developing those industries that need innovative and creative employees.

A 2007 U.S. Census report found that women owned businesses generated more than \$189 million in receipts, and minority owned businesses generated \$90 million, of a total of \$6.1 billion within the City. Women and minorities continue to be underrepresented in our country's economy, but expectations here continue to push diversity. Progress is being made. The comparable 2012 U.S. Census report found that women owned businesses generated more than \$1.2 billion in receipts, and minority owned businesses generated \$157 million, of a total of \$6.4 billion within the City. In order to unleash innovation, creativity, and productivity, Bloomington needs a much greater representation by women and minorities.

Diversity also encompasses key socioeconomic factors. While Bloomington is often portrayed by illustrating its collegiate youth, older adults contribute significantly to the vibrancy of the community. The 55-80 age group is active and a growing population in Bloomington, estimated at around one-third of the population. Safety concerns, a lack of awareness of available services, and the incidence of boredom or depression can limit and hamper the contributions these populations offer. Similar concerns affect the youngest one-third of the population. Building a community for a lifetime, from the very young to the very old, is a concept that furthers Bloomington's diversity.

The natural beauty of the area, the high quality of healthcare and supportive services, the high level of education, the outstanding sports and cultural activities, and the wealth of opportunities for lifelong learning help to build and sustain this concept. One example of sustaining momentum is Bloomington's Creative Aging Festival, sponsored by the Commission on Aging. It is the first of its kind in the nation and has become well known among national arts leaders as a model for other communities.

Arts and Tourism

Being a college town brings Bloomington distinct opportunities. With so many students, professors, professional staff, and local alumni living here, the link between "town and gown" is strong. As a venue for Big





Ten athletics, Bloomington is synonymous with Indiana University's sports teams. Similarly, the renowned IU Jacobs School of Music and the Lotus World Music and Arts Festival attract world-class musical talent and performances from around the world. Stage performances, concerts, and many other live entertainment options can be enjoyed locally at the Musical Arts Center, the IU Auditorium, the Buskirk-Chumley Theater, and the Bloomington Playwrights Project – just to name a few. Fine arts opportunities also abound, from world-class art exhibits at the IU Eskenazi Museum of Art to distinguished shows at more than ten local galleries.

Arts are indeed an important part of the culture and economy of Bloomington. Fostering an environment conducive to arts participation is an essential part of Bloomington's social, educational, and economic growth and its residents' quality of life. The Bloomington Arts Commission plays an important role in cultivating a thriving arts community and has developed a Public Art Master Plan. It puts forth a blueprint for the ideal public art environment, such that the arts exist within a physical, artistic, sociological, governmental, and economic paradigm. Another aspect to fostering arts and tourism is to consider the "string of pearls" along the

B-Line Trail. The Trades District, in the Certified Technology Park, the Monroe County Convention Center, the IU Health Hospital site on West 2nd, and the Switchyard Park all offer opportunities for creative development, including opportunities within arts and tourism.

Indiana University represents a major tourism draw, though there are many non-university amenities that attract tourists as well. The Bloomington Entertainment and Arts District (BEAD), located in downtown Bloomington, is a focused arts area designed to promote tourism and economic development. BEAD was formally recognized as an official Indiana Cultural District by the Indiana Arts Commission. It promotes a robust grouping of festivals and events that draw thousands to downtown Bloomington each year. These regional events include the Fourth Street Festival of the Arts, the Taste of Bloomington, and the Arts Fair on the Square.

According to VisitBloomington, over 1.8 million visitors travel to Bloomington every year. These visits include vacations, business trips, convention travel, visiting family and friends, and attending various sporting events. The economic impact generated by these visitors during 2015 included \$362

million in total gross sales, which directly supported more than 7,611 jobs in Monroe County and contributed about \$174 million in wages. It also contributed \$78 million in total tax revenue. VisitBloomington awarded ten 2016 Tourism Awards for positive contributions to the area's tourism industry, ranging from the Limestone Comedy Festival to the Lilly Library. Visitors spent \$69 million on lodging, \$123 million on food and beverages, \$75 million on shopping, \$18 million on entertainment and recreation, and \$75 million on transportation. Tourism is a major industry for Bloomington. If tourism continues to grow, it can provide a number of excellent benefits for local residents and businesses. Creative ways to further showcase Bloomington as a prominent Midwestern travel destination should be developed and aggressively pursued.

Equity

Establishing a level playing field or equal access for all residents is essential in a democratic society. This can take on many aspects, from equal access to services and the ability to participate, to equal opportunities for employment. This chapter previously discussed the role of education and the importance it plays to the success of the community. Equity in housing, environment, and transportation are covered in subsequent chapters. Bloomington is a regional health care center for much of South Central Indiana. Providing equal access to health care is one area where the City of Bloomington has worked closely with other non-profit social service organizations to provide all persons access to affordable health care services. These services may include, but are not limited to, substance abuse counseling, mental health evaluations, and general health care services.

However, it is important to not confuse equality with equity. Equity moves beyond equal access to examine how some residents may need additional help to level the playing field. This too is part of Bloomington's identity and culture. For example, while there may be equal access to health care, Volunteers in Medicine of Monroe County provides free and preventive care to the medically under-served for both chronic and acute illnesses. It is operated by volunteers and receives support from the community and from IU Health Bloomington Hospital. The Bloomington community must continue to work together to make sure all have equal and equitable access to the services, events, markets, and many other aspects that define Bloomington's culture and identity.

Goals & Policies

The policies in this chapter respond to the adopted 2013 Vision Statement objectives to:

"Ensure all land development activity makes a positive and lasting community contribution";

"Encourage Healthy Lifestyles by providing high quality public places, greenspaces, and parks and an array of recreational activities and events";

"Celebrate our rich, eclectic blend of arts, culture, and business";

"Provide a safe, efficient, accessible, and connected system of transportation that emphasizes public transit, walking, and biking to enhance options to reduce our overall dependence on the automobile" ;

"Recognize the many virtues of historic preservation, rehabilitation, and reuse of our historic structures";

"Nurture our vibrant and historic downtown as the flourishing center of the community";

"Enhance the community's role as a regional economic hub"; and to

"Nurture a resilient, environmentally responsible community by judiciously using our scarce resources, enhancing our natural assets, protecting our historic resources, and supporting a vital local food system."

Goal 2.1 Support cultural spaces in all areas of Bloomington, especially Urban Centers, Neighborhood Villages, and around the Indiana University campus, where they are publicly accessible to a broad and diverse range of people (ages, incomes, backgrounds, and races) and can help activate the public realm. These cultural spaces should be collaborative, whenever possible, and incorporate or represent a broad range of art types, art forms, and artists.

Policy 2.1.1: Place an emphasis on public space design within the private development realm – including, but not limited to, the pedestrian and active transportation environments surrounding the sites, any opportunities for public art or engagement within the development, and how the development aesthetically blends in with its surroundings – through Unified Development Ordinance amendments and incentives.

Policy 2.1.2: Ensure culturally significant places and spaces are preserved and celebrated.

Policy 2.1.3: Encourage partnerships with Indiana University and Ivy Tech, and the public, private, and non-profit sectors, to engage in creative placemaking projects.

Policy 2.1.4: Encourage the use of public art to create a neighborhood identity.

Policy 2.1.5: Support the temporary re-use of vacant and/or underutilized spaces or building facades for art production, exhibitions, and murals.

Policy 2.1.6: Create infrastructure and signage for better transportation connections to and among cultural venues.

Policy 2.1.7: Explore opportunities to enhance and expand the Monroe County Convention Center to create additional venue and activity space.

Goal 2.2 Preserve assets of historical, architectural, archaeological, or social significance.

Policy 2.2.1: Work with the department of Housing and Neighborhood Development (HAND) and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to aid in the advocacy and monitoring of historic structures and places, placemaking, and opportunities for art installations that explore our history.

Goal 2.3 Ensure public spaces are of high quality, engaging, and active.

Policy 2.3.1: Incorporate an arts component that engages sight, sound, and/or texture into the planning, construction, or renovation of all city facilities as deemed feasible.

Policy 2.3.2: Consider the use of natural art and beauty through the preservation of trees, waterways, and other environmental features.

Policy 2.3.3: Ensure public spaces are accessible to all ages and abilities and serve to connect all generations.



Programs

- Explore the possibility of a joint partnership/endeavor with Visit Bloomington and Monroe County Convention Center by analyzing the market and conducting a feasibility study for convention center expansion.
- Hold festivals, celebrations, or other events that help to highlight the community's heritage and important cultural assets.
- Create and maintain a cultural and archaeological asset map as an inventory resource for decision making.
- Study the benefits/costs of designating existing clusters of cultural spaces as additional cultural districts.
- Incorporate works of public art and performances in high-traffic transportation corridors and pedestrian areas.
- Include Percentage for the Arts requirements or incentives for private-sector developments.
- Partner with the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology and other stakeholders to coordinate efforts in value-added assessments of historic and archaeological assets.
- Encourage the integration of green building practices into historic district guidelines and assist districts in adopting sustainability guidelines.
- Encourage new neighborhood preservation plans.
- Public places and events held in public places should be as affordable as is feasible, particularly for full access to people of all walks of life.

Outcomes & Indicators

Outcome: Historic and culturally significant places are preserved and celebrated.

- Number of historic/archaeological/cultural preservation projects completed and/or programs operated annually
- Number of public spaces available for cultural events
- Reference the numbers of requests for historic designation of properties, and number of neighborhoods seeking Conservation or Historic District status
- Number of demolition requests

Outcome: Attendance at cultural events is high.

- Number of residents to number of attendees and cultural events within the City
- Number of public art and/or activities annually

Outcome: Public spaces are high quality, engaging, and active.

- Number of activities programmed annually for public spaces, including streets downtown and in neighborhoods and parks
- Number of people using public places daily, at peak and off-peak periods

Outcome: Measure the benefits of the arts and culture industry for Bloomington.

- Investments in local creative industries
- Number of creative jobs in the arts and culture sector
- Community social engagement opportunities through the arts and culture lens
- Economic assessment of tourism
- Assess the competitive edge for arts and business retention and recruitment
- Survey community attitudes toward art and cultural opportunities



