January 2024

Bloomington Open Government Roadmap
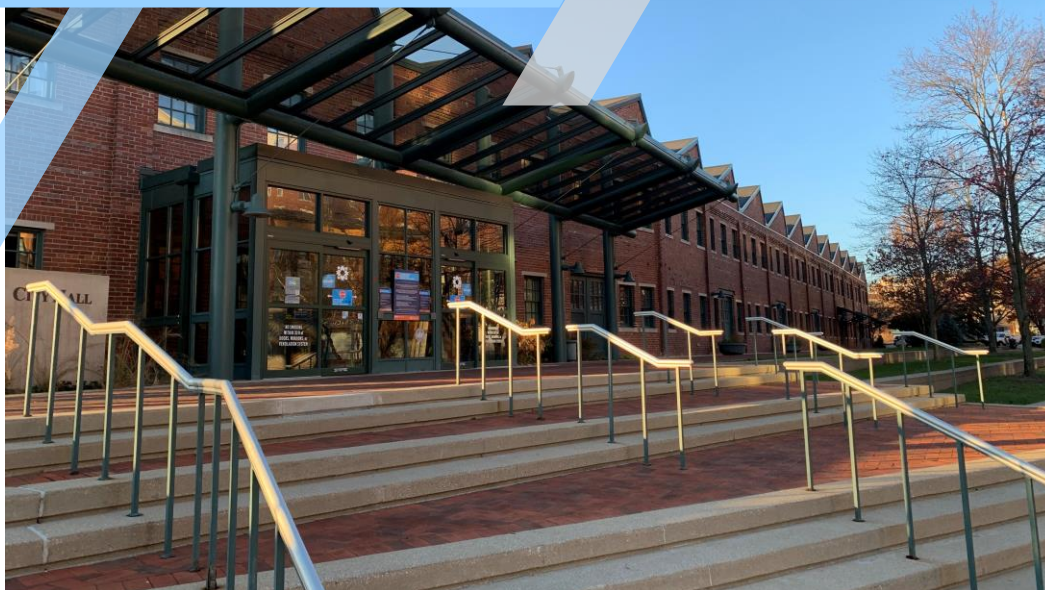
Afreen Ahmed
Grace Martin
Aashna Shaparia

CITY OF **BLOOMINGTON** | MAYOR KERRY THOMSON

INTRODUCTION

From the farmer's market to the many locally owned restaurants to the cultural events, Bloomington has a strong identity fostered by its diverse and loyal residents. In the 2021 Bloomington Community survey, 90% of respondents viewed Bloomington favorably and 80% of respondents would recommend the city to others.

While there's no shortage of local pride, Bloomington continues to face low voter turnout, low engagement in public meetings, and limited civic engagement through digital and other channels. Several interviewees reported that they have witnessed a decline in city outreach to its residents and resident engagement in city affairs in the past decade. Rebuilding a culture of open and inclusive government is a top priority for the new mayoral administration. This report outlines findings from desk research, interviews, and listening sessions and focuses on building formal and informal channels for meaningful community input into Bloomington's decision-making processes.

BACKGROUND

As of the 2020 census, Bloomington had 79,968 residents – a number that does not include many of the 48,000 students at Indiana University (IU). The city is 77% white, 10% Asian, 4.3% Black, and 4.5% Hispanic with 32% of residents at or below the poverty rate. Bloomington welcomes approximately 150 refugees each year and has an unhoused community of approximately 300-350 individuals.

In terms of voter engagement, Bloomington is below the Indiana average turnout of 23 percent. In the most recent elections, 6,578 voters cast ballots for Mayor, City Clerk, and Common At-Large City Council members out of 45,543 registered voters – just 14 percent of eligible voters. Public meetings are regularly held, and there are 51 Boards, commissions, and committees with member of the public positions, of which 21 have current vacancies.

Bloomington also runs active social media accounts, which last year reached an audience of 48,000 across all platforms. The city currently shares information with residents on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram with Facebook being the primary channel of digital engagement. Overall while the size of the audience consuming this digital information has grown by ~8% between January 2023- 2024, the base remains low. As of January 2024, The City of Bloomington account has approximately 14,000 followers on X, 13,000 followers on Facebook and 2,900 followers on Instagram. Given that Bloomington has minimal local news outlets, there is potential to further exploit existing social media channels to strengthen meaningful engagement with residents.

Lastly, Bloomington offers an online 311 portal called uReport which allows residents to report issues directly to the relevant city staff. Between 2022-23, there were 7,686 uReports submitted by 2,545 users. While several interviewees mentioned a perception that uReport is dominated by a handful of concerned citizens from a specific part of the city, and analysis of uReport usage revealed that complaint levels were consistent with population across Bloomington's four non-IU zip codes.
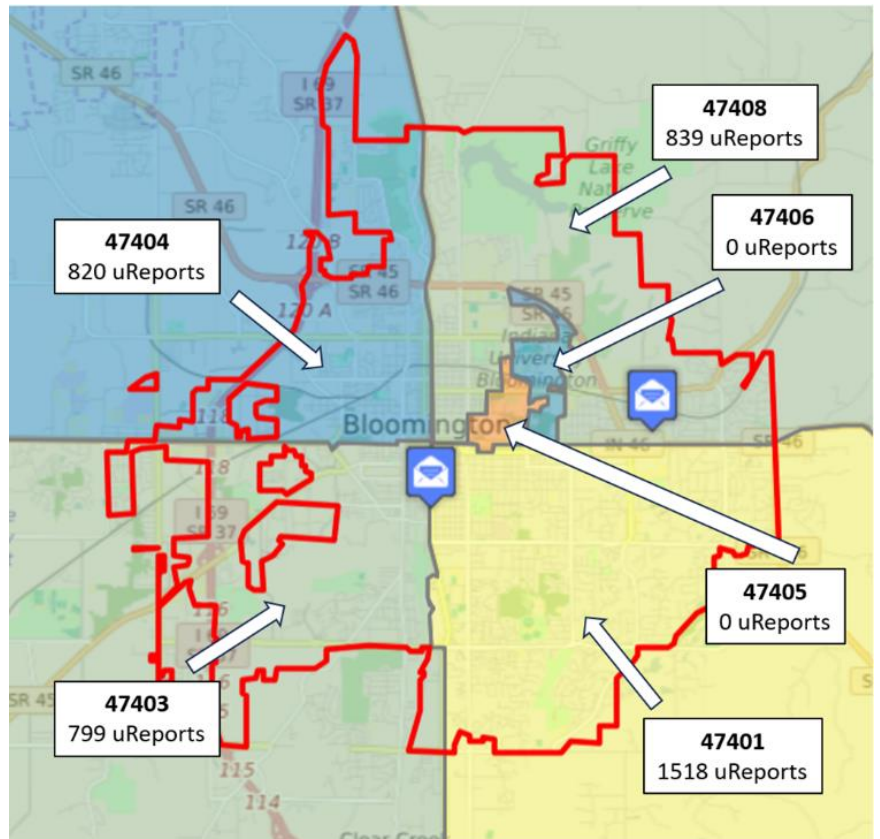
Zip	uReports	Population	% of uReports	% of Total Population
47401	1,518	41,225	38.2%	34.1%
47403	799	33,066	20.1%	27.3%
47404	820	23,799	20.6%	19.7%
47408	839	22,917	21.1%	18.9%
No Zip Listed	3,710			
Total (With Zip)	3,976			0
Total (All)	7,686	121,007		1

Additionally, the majority of uReport users submitted just one report in the past two years, with a small handful submitting more than 30. Some frequent users consistently report on a single issue – for example, blocked sidewalks – but their reports are valid and timely.

Number of Complaints per User	Number of Users
1	1,907
2 to 5	547
6 to 10	58
10+	33
30+	10
Total users	2,545

Another perception is that uReports are not handled by city staff in a reasonable amount of time. An analysis of time-to-close for reports showed that the majority of reports are closed within 5 days and nearly three-quarters are resolved within one week. Time to resolution varies by department and by complexity of report and further analysis of departmental pain points is needed.

Time to Close	% Closed
<3 days	55%
<7 days	72%
<14 days	81%
<30 days	89%
<90 days	95%

METHODOLOGY

We conducted four primary forms of research to identify the issues of Bloomington city constituents regarding government participation.

1. **Non-profit listening session:** As an extension of Mayor Thomson's monthly listening sessions with community members, we hosted an additional session with ~35 non-profit leaders. This enabled us to gather information from groups whose voices are underrepresented in city government (e.g., faith groups, refugees). A detailed list of interviewees can be found be found in the Appendix.

2. **Individual interviews:** We conducted individual interviews to gather a variety of perspectives from Bloomington residents, local journalists, faith leaders, community organizations, and city council members. This included 18 individual interviews, a detailed list of which can be found in the Appendix.

3. **Testing user experience:** We tested platforms such as uReport and the city website to understand the user experience of residents when reporting grievances. The aim was to identify pain points of the reporting process and the responsiveness of local government to resident concerns.

4. **Joining existing community meetings and programming:** We attended existing community meetings to gain a better understanding of local leadership on social issues. This included attending meetings of the NAACP, homelessness coalition, City Council organizational meeting, and the neighborhood association meeting as well as programming with underrepresented groups such as the US101 session with refugee groups.

FINDINGS

"People have their thing – 'I plant trees,' 'I work at the homeless shelter.' There's a disconnect between the large amount of people who do those things and the small amount of people who vote… people do not understand how their piece fits in to the larger picture"

Through interviews and desk research, we identified the legacy issues that will continue to affect the new administration. Key challenges to building an open and inclusive government model in Bloomington are:

I. Lack of easily accessible, relevant public information:

While Bloomington makes available data sets, upcoming legislation, a calendar of events, and other public-facing information, the average resident has difficulty quickly finding information on their interests or needs. City communications and the public calendar of events are "one-size-fits-all" with minimal curation for different audiences

- Existing channels are underutilized and hard to navigate (website and social media); data that *is* published on them is outdated or irrelevant.
- Hard to find live information on city happenings in absence of a strong local media outlet (Herald Times only has 8K subscribers, Bloomingtonian focuses mainly on police news, limited viewership of B-Square Bulletin), particularly for the elderly and minority groups who may not be digitally savvy or are mobility restricted.
- Underutilization of creative channels or existing non-governmental channels (e.g. no distribution list with partner NGOs to reach community list servs).
- No consolidated information on city processes or institutions; very difficult for businesses and organizations to identify other players that exist, process for setting up an organization.

II. Limited methods of collecting resident input:

Resident input is collected mostly through formal channels, such as the public comment portion of City Council and uReport. These methods structurally favor repeat players as they require residents to understand the lawmaking process, have extra available time on weekdays, and be empowered to collect relevant information to form an opinion.

- Existing public comment method in City Council is inefficient and lengthy, limiting participation to residents who have extra time while excluding working families.
- UReport adoption is low with frequent repeat users (~3% of Bloomington population has used uReport in the last two years).
- No avenues for residents to ask questions or provide feedback on issues in advance of decision-making; public comment takes place immediately prior to voting.
- Informal and 'quick' feedback channels in communities are non-existent, which means voices of marginalized communities and working families are absent from decision making processes.

III. Absent culture of co-creation:

The new administration is inheriting a city culture of top-down decision making, where city residents are informed about policy but not consulted during policy creation. While other cities are piloting hands-on, interactive policymaking, Bloomington has very few tools to engage its constituents in the decision-making process. Over the past decade, many residents have come to feel that the city does not wish to hear from them or value their input, and that city decisions are a "black box" that residents cannot participate in.

- <u>Disillusionment with residents' role in city decision-making</u>; there's a perception that existing avenues for city and community to collaborate, such as Jack Hopkins grants, are reserved for the same recipients every year and new organizations stand no chance.
- <u>Friction between internal government branches affects residents</u>, with constituents asking for more cohesion between City Hall and City Council so that they feel comfortable working with government.
- <u>No avenues exist for everyday constituents to make decisions</u> on city budget or projects tied to their areas of interest, in an interactive and meaningful way.

IV. Lack of intentional effort to engage underrepresented groups:

Bloomington has an incredibly vibrant social sector, with community organizations leading work on the ground for many underserved communities. But there is little systemic collaboration between the city and these organizations, and many organizations feel left behind due to a lack of engagement from the city's side.

- <u>Selective and limited engagement with community organizations;</u> some organizations like business associations have monthly meetings with the city while community organizations, faith leaders, and service providers have none.
- <u>Unwelcoming environment in City Hall</u> is preventative for underrepresented residents due to physical set-up (e.g. locked doors, check in requirements) and non-physical barriers (e.g. lack of language interpreters, perception that expertise is required to attend chamber meetings).
- <u>City doesn't showcase its community assets,</u> leading to a perception that there is limited city pride for local universities, community organizations, or projects.
- <u>Structure of current engagement opportunities</u> is not set-up for historically marginalized groups to participate in; student internship openings with city government are few and far between, Boards and Commissions volunteer tenure

is 2 years long with no short-term rotation opportunities, and there are no multi-lingual volunteer opportunities in City Hall.

- <u>No centralized response strategy</u> for crises in underrepresented communities. Faith communities reported that they feel unprotected by government, e.g. when the Islamic Center of Bloomington faced vandalism and hate crimes, the city was slow and unresponsive. This has undermined trust that such communities have in local institutions.

V. Limited institutionalized processes for implementation

The new administration is not inheriting a set of documented and standardized processes for implementing change. It will therefore need to develop its own set of guidelines, develop a system to delegate tasks, and clearly outline roles and responsibilities for public engagement roles.

- <u>Lack of documented processes and guidelines</u> for City Hall staff to follow, such as standardized follow-up procedures after listening sessions with the public, response to convenings by the mayor in response to community developments (e.g., closing of a homeless encampment) or a well-defined process to systematically delegate tasks to departments and prioritize items for immediate action
- <u>Limited staff capacity and unclear roles / responsibilities</u> when it comes to public engagement. Existing responsibilities of Public Engagement Director are partially administrative, leaving little capacity for engaging with community and the split of roles and responsibilities for public engagement between departments and the mayor's office needs to be clearly defined.
- <u>No structured partnerships between the mayor's office and community organizations</u> through digital channels, ongoing meetings, task forces, or working groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to our findings, we developed 10 recommendations for consideration:

I. **The Bloomington website is the "digital front door" to the city for residents** and by providing clear information and an intuitive interface for a variety of user types, the city can free up city staff time for other pressing issues.

II. **Revamp social media channels** with the view to expand access to local news and happenings and tap into local pride and culture to engage city residents**.**

III. **uReport can serve as a communication platform** and an on-ramp for future civic engagement.

IV. **Use creative outreach mechanisms** that address barriers to accessing information and tap into the existing ways channels.

V. **Proactive and timely city response** to high-visibility community developments, including active crises, will build community trust.

VI. **Redesign the public comment process** to facilitate a two-way, constructive dialogue between residents and city government with view to problem solve.

VII. **Improve collaboration between executive and legislative branches** of government through informal committees convened to address issues of importance in the community.

VIII. **Create hands-on, interactive avenues for engagement** that will draw in new community members to engage with issues they care about.

IX. **Build long-term and action-driven partnerships** with community organizations.

X. **An ongoing feedback loop to outline actions taken** (or not) with the community input will serve both as a tool to maintain the administration's accountability and increase transparency on decision making.

The recommendations are described in more detail in the next section.

Recommendation #1: The Bloomington website is the "digital front door" to the city for residents and is an opportunity to share information and answer questions. By providing clear information and an intuitive interface for a variety of user types, the city can free up city staff time to focus on other pressing issues.

Bloomington should consider its most common "user profiles" and organize the site accordingly. While the Bloomington website has a lot of information on city happenings, services, and news, the website does not use categorical headers like "business," "resident services," or "visiting Bloomington" to redirect types of users towards relevant information.
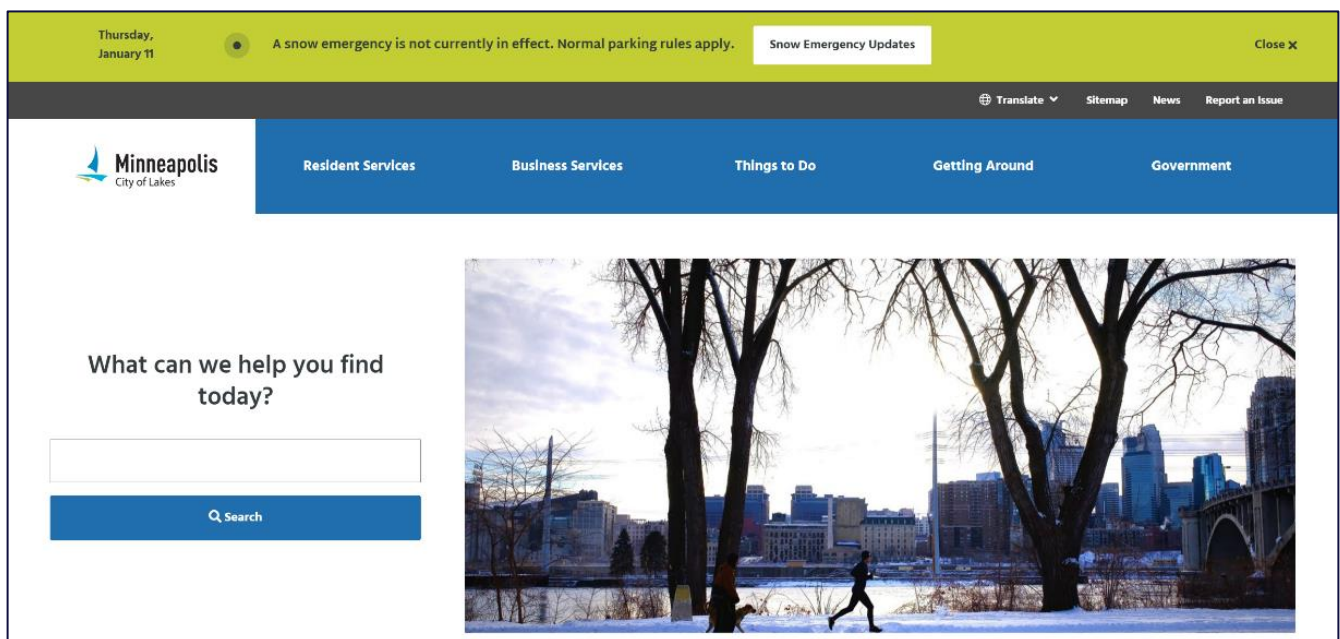

Minneapolis, Minnesota uses headers geared towards residents, business owners, and tourists.
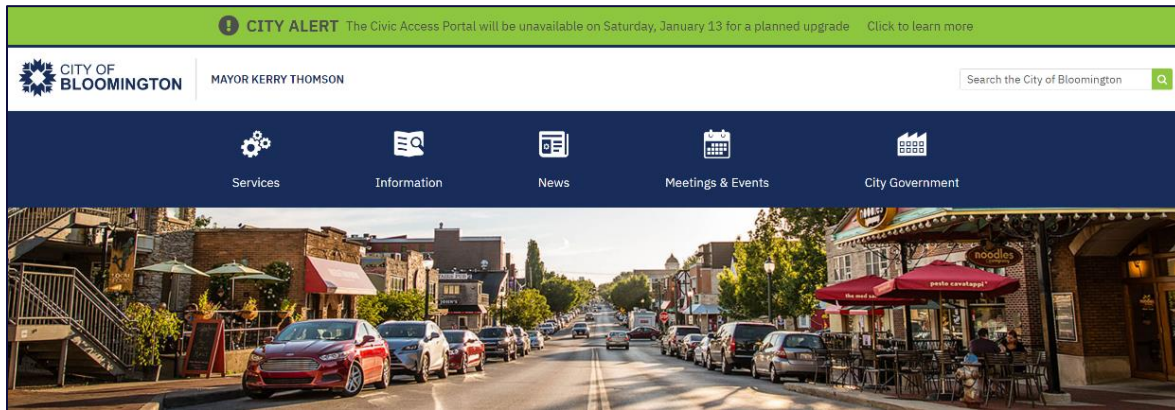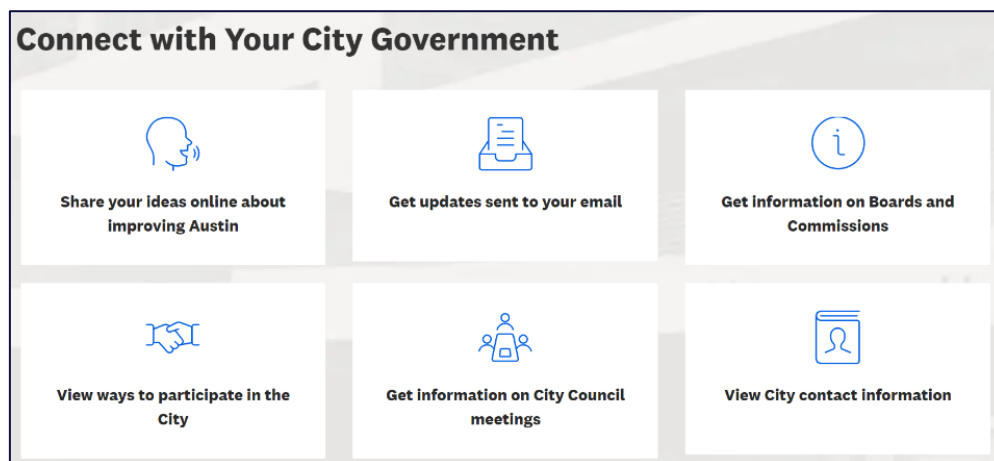
Bloomington uses headers on its website to broadly direct users, but they lack clarity for the average user. For example, if a resident has a question about what is recyclable, should they select the "services" or "information" header? If a business wants to know how to submit an RFP, should they select "services" or "information" header? While a large portion of information for business is on a page on the "information" section called "Businesses," businesses that would like to submit a response to an RFP will not find that information on that page – it is under the "services" heading on a page called "City Solicitation Information." There are many pages concerning business, but they are not fully aggregated into one spot making them difficult to find.
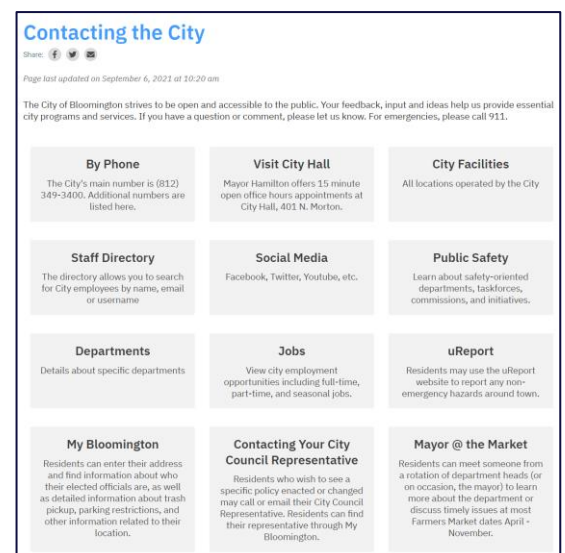
User focus groups consisting of a range of users from newcomers to the city, to small business owners, to homeowners, to renters could help clarify what information each demographic needs and how best to deliver information clearly to them. Further analysis of website usage could help push frequented pages to the top of the website, as the City of Denver does.
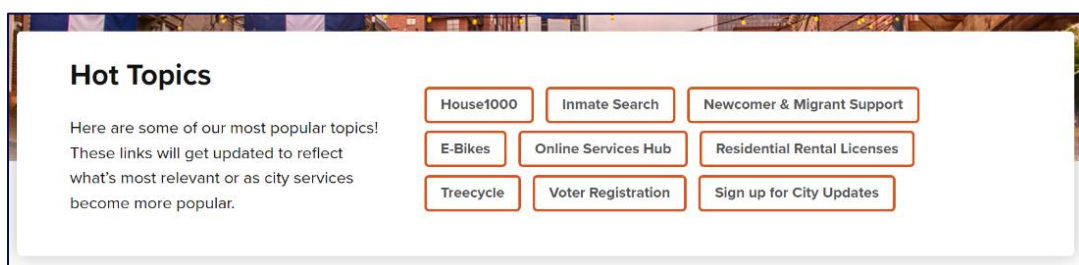
Put information on current happenings and digital avenues for feedback front and center. The Bloomington website can be used as a mechanism for collecting resident feedback, as done by other cities in the US. For example, the city of Austin, Texas has a Connect with Your City Government section, picture below, that shows users the variety of ways they can share their thoughts. These options highlight both ways to get information and ways to share an opinion or engage in two-way dialogue. The Speak Up Austin page (top left in image) includes a social media feed of recent city proposals and developments where residents can add their opinion or learn more about current issues.

Connect with Your City Government

Share your ideas online about improving Austin

Get updates sent to your email

Get information on Boards and Commissions

View ways to participate in the City

Get information on City Council meetings

View City contact information

In comparison, Bloomington's website focuses on channels to contact the city with feedback, relying on residents to have form opinions by gathering information for themselves. Bloomington could consider implementing a social page for city issues, but even a page showing ways to participate in the city or a page (updated regularly) with information on the mayor's office's progress towards campaign promises or mayoral priorities with an option to send a message to the Mayor's Office could solicit more input.

Contacting the City

Share: f y ✉

Page last updated on September 6, 2021 at 10:20 am

The City of Bloomington strives to be open and accessible to the public. Your feedback, input and ideas help us provide essential city programs and services. If you have a question or comment, please let us know. For emergencies, please call 911.

By Phone
The City's main number is (812) 349-3400. Additional numbers are listed here.

Visit City Hall
Mayor Hamilton offers 15 minute open office hours appointments at City Hall, 401 N. Morton.

City Facilities
All locations operated by the City

Staff Directory
The directory allows you to search for City employees by name, email or username

Social Media
Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc.

Public Safety
Learn about safety-oriented departments, taskforces, commissions, and initiatives.

Departments
Details about specific departments

Jobs
View city employment opportunities including full-time, part-time, and seasonal jobs.

uReport
Residents may use the uReport website to report any non-emergency hazards around town.

My Bloomington
Residents can enter their address and find information about who their elected officials are, as well as detailed information about trash pickup, parking restrictions, and other information related to their location.

Contacting Your City Council Representative
Residents who wish to see a specific policy enacted or changed may call or email their City Council Representative. Residents can find their representative through My Bloomington.

Mayor @ the Market
Residents can meet someone from a rotation of department heads (or on occasion, the mayor) to learn more about the department or discuss timely issues at most Farmers Market dates April - November.

Keep city website current by archiving outdated pages. A review of the city website found many pages with outdated information that was no longer relevant to users.

There are many helpful pages on the website, but without regular site maintenance and archiving of old pages, the most relevant information is lost in a sea of information. For example, a search for information on biking in Bloomington will lead to pages about a proposed ordinance from 2020, a Bikes' Month page from 2019, and a square touting the planned introduction of a bike share program "slated to launch in early 2018."

Bloomington Bike Share Project

Still in its early planning stages, the new bike share is slated to launch in early 2018.

Bloomington should review its website content for usability – while the website has most information a resident could want, the presence of large quantities of old information affects navigability and user experience.

As the city pivots to a centralized communication strategy, consider off-the-shelf platforms for an improved user experience. Bloomington's current website is created and maintained in-house. While this has its benefits, its main drawbacks are that it is time- and resource-consuming to continually ensure the website is up to date with current standards. Other city governments, such as Denver, Orlando, Syracuse, and San Antonio use an off-the-shelf platform called Open Cities. The pitch deck here outlines the services that come with a third-party platform, including innovative user-centered design, regular maintenance and updates, back-end data collection, and security compliance. Austin's city page, which is highly user-friendly and interactive, is also an open-source platform which Bloomington can consider collaborating with to remodel the website communications.

Recommendation #2: Revamp social media channels with the view to expand access to local news and happenings and tap into local pride and culture to engage city residents.

Use Instagram stories and X to share local news highlights, make public safety announcements and distribute information about key events. To plug the information gap that exists due to absence of a strong local news outlet, the city can share relevant real-time/ timely information about the happenings in the city and City Hall with residents using channels that allow for dynamic information sharing. Such efforts will promote meaningful interaction between the city and residents on a routine basis, without overwhelming them.

- City news: Sharing information about city services, public works or policy related matters that affect the lives of residents (e.g., road closures during Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Spanish).

- Public safety-related announcements: Putting out information to ensure that city residents stay safe in times of crisis, emergencies or difficult weather conditions.
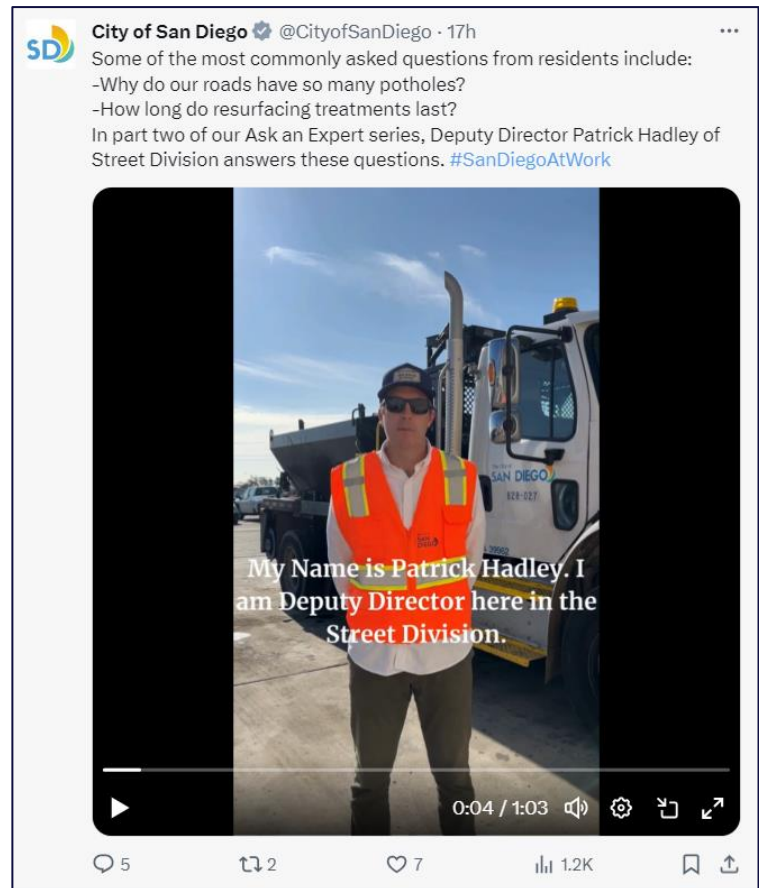
- Key events/ programming to encourage community participation: Advertizing initiatives centered on specific topics (e.g., art, music) or festive celebrations (e.g., MLK Day celebrations at Buskirk-Chumley theatre, Black Market event in City Hall as part of Black History month)

Leverage Facebook and Instagram posts to interact with residents through Q&A series, polls, live sessions and tap into the local pride by profiling stories of Bloomington residents and supporting local businesses: Use fun and creative ways to keep the door of city government open to residents who are looking for low lift channels for engagement. Social media usage can expand information shared on formal communication channels (such as press releases from the mayor's office) to include an array of relevant content, for example:

- <u>Q&A with residents</u>: 'Ask an Expert' interview series with city officials that address commonly raised questions from residents before policy changes are announced.

- <u>'Bloomingtonian of the Week'</u>: Celebrating the lives of residents and community who have made meaningful contributions to their communities in a multitude of ways (e.g., public services, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship).

City of San Diego ✔ @CityofSanDiego · 17h

Some of the most commonly asked questions from residents include:
-Why do our roads have so many potholes?
-How long do resurfacing treatments last?
In part two of our Ask an Expert series, Deputy Director Patrick Hadley of Street Division answers these questions. #SanDiegoAtWork

My Name is Patrick Hadley. I am Deputy Director here in the Street Division.

0:04 / 1:03

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City of San Francisco ✔ @sfgov · Jan 9

This is a great opportunity to enter #publicservice in @sfgov with @SF_emergency 🖥️

San Francisco Department of Emergency Ma ✔ @SF_emerg· Jan 9

Are you interested in public service? The City of San Francisco is hiring 911 Dispatchers to work with police, fire, and emergency medical services to keep San Francisco's residents safe. Details and information on how to apply: careers.sf.gov/role/?id=37439...

was so unstable during something like a

0:16

♡ 4   ⟲ 1   ♡ 4   ᴵᐧ 3.5K

- <u>Recruitment channels for public agencies:</u> Promoting hiring efforts of local agencies through engaging videos that highlight benefits of the job through the stories of existing employees.

Have departments generate topic-specific content, to be elevated by the mayor's office for emphasis. The incoming Communications Director can work with departmental heads to make specific content strategies (for example, which regularly occurring events should they post about? What are commonly asked questions? Where do they see the most engagement?). The mayor's office can repost departmental content when a post needs to reach a broader audience.
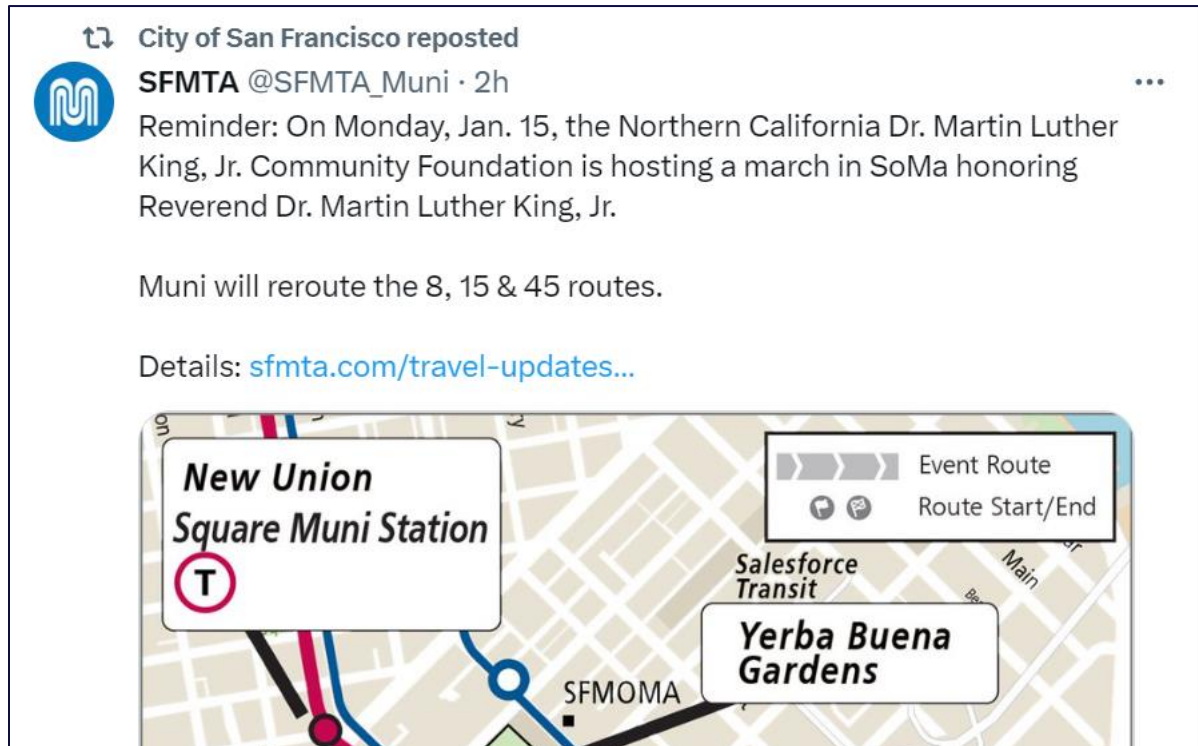
Recommendation #3: uReport is currently used to respond to community requests for services. With modifications, it could also serve as a communication platform and an on-ramp for future civic engagement.

City staff is responsive to resident-generated uReports, but small tweaks to user interface could improve customer satisfaction and usage. uReport is well-monitored by staff: most complaints are closed within three days, and nearly three-quarters of complaints are closed within one week. Beyond staff response time, however, several pain points on the user experience side were identified through interviews and a review of the system:

- Several users mentioned that the categories were challenging to navigate or that the categorization of issue areas was confusing to people outside of city hall. Non-technical language and pictures could help residents navigate the interface.

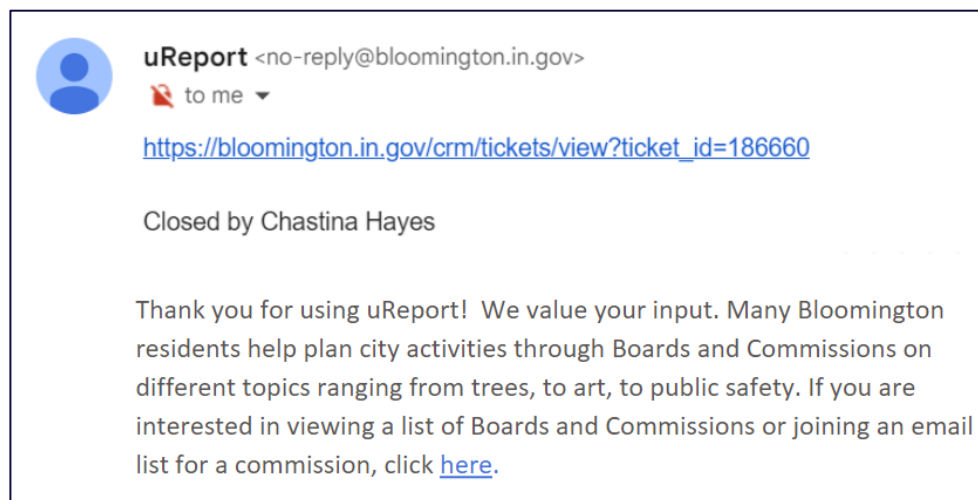*Current design (left) and proposed alternative (right)*

- The review also highlighted the <u>lack of standardization in automated, departmental responses to uReports.</u> While some departments send an automated message that outlines the expected response time and next steps, there is no standardized system. A standard message (HAND's example below) will set expectations for the user and dissuade the perception that uReports go "into the void."
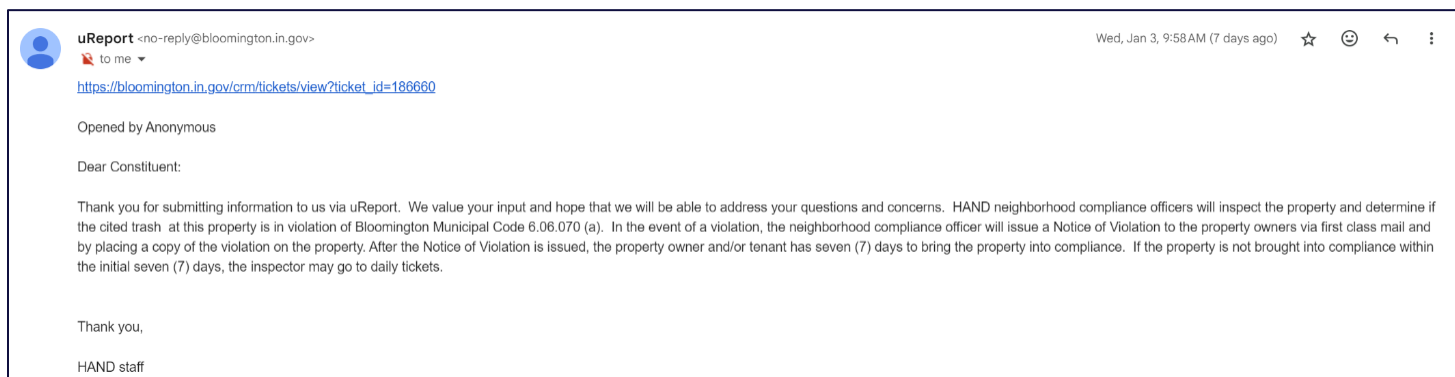
Because uReport reaches many residents, add a message to request responses to serve as a conduit for further engagement. uReport was used by approximately 1,900 distinct, non-anonymous users in the past year – far more than residents that regularly attend public meetings or serve on Boards and Commissions. uReport is an opportunity to connect users to more city activities,

specifically through its "ticket closed" message. Currently, when an issue is resolved, a message is sent (see picture).

As it stands, this closing message is a simple status update, but it could be an opportunity to further engage residents. The message could, for example, link to the Boards and Commissions page (see below), or even direct residents towards topic-specific email lists from the city.

uReport <no-reply@bloomington.in.gov>
to me

https://bloomington.in.gov/crm/tickets/view?ticket_id=186660

Closed by Chastina Hayes

Thank you for using uReport! We value your input. Many Bloomington residents help plan city activities through Boards and Commissions on different topics ranging from trees, to art, to public safety. If you are interested in viewing a list of Boards and Commissions or joining an email list for a commission, click here.

Usage of uReport can be improved through further publicization via creative channels. The city should consider placing QR codes leading to the uReport page in parks, public spaces, and trash collection vehicles. By making uReport easily accessible for on-the-go users on their mobile phone, the city will generate a wider array of reports on pressing issues. The existing one-pager in city hall could be printed and posted in frequented public locations.

Off-the-shelf platforms equivalent to uReport or hiring an intern to lead efforts to redesign the uReport system could redirect city capacity towards other projects.
Bloomington is unique among municipalities in that it has 30 software platforms made in-house. The city's capacity to maintain its internal software, however, is insufficient to allow for updates and redesigns. Some of these internally created platforms, like onBoard, do not have an equivalent third-party version. There are, however, a range of high-quality, standardized digital 311 platforms for purchase. These platforms have the equivalent functionality as uReport, but with additional vendor support for bug fixes, regular updates, and a more modern interface. The ITS department has explored some options already. Alternatively, an intern could be tasked with a user-friendly redesign of uReport. Most pain points identified by our review are non-technical in nature (e.g. rephrasing uncommon language, recategorizing report topics) and could be outlined as

To implement recommendations 1-3, consider adding a Communications Director role. Currently, digital communications are individually managed by departments. This role would support the creation of a central strategy for public-facing digital communications, as well as audit all current in-house platforms.

a time-bound project for a design or communications student.

Recommendation #4: Use creative outreach mechanisms that address barriers to accessing information and tap into the existing ways in which residents consume information and engage in the community.

Reach people where they are by sharing information through community channels: Community service organizations have longstanding relationships with members of underrepresented groups and established avenues for two-way information sharing. The city should tap into these existing networks of underserved communities by:

- <u>Plugging into existing non-profit programming and events</u> that are already embedded in the routines of or tailored to the interests of constituents. Below, we playback a shortlist of ideas to get the ball rolling:
    - *Mayoral participation in community events and programming*: Plugging into the financial literacy program run by Purdue Extension provides inputs on stretching food stamp dollars with budget friendly cooking ideas for low-income families or by providing families the opportunity to have a say in designing community resources for their children (e.g., a new park in their neighborhood), attending annual events that witness participation from a large, diverse audience such as the summer picnic organized by Amethyst House for Recovery.
    - *Leveraging monthly newsletters and contact lists managed by non-profits to share city news and happenings at city hall:* For example, the newsletter created by Bloomington Multi-Faith Alliance has a wide viewership, list servs on topics such a systems of care (Centerstone), non-profit (United Way), business (Chamber of Commerce). The library, local coffee shops, and faith centers all have bulletin boards that residents report using.

Identify a point person to participate in existing forums/ roundtables that are working collaboratively to find solutions to systemic challenges in the
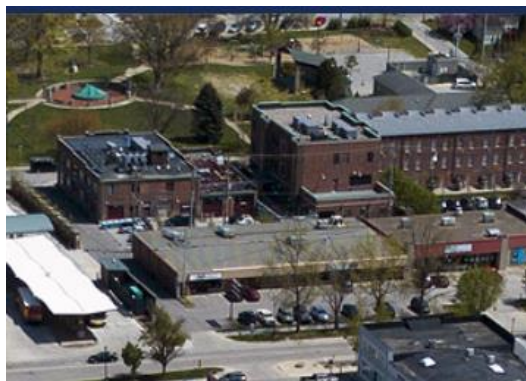
community: The Mayor's Office can serve as catalyst for implementation of solutions to longstanding issues such as homelessness and health equity by participating actively in working group discussions that are led by stakeholders in the community (particularly when it comes to topics such as policy, public safety). For example, Monroe County Health Equity Council that creates bridges to engage underrepresented groups, PCC Committee created by the Bloomington Housing Authority, Food Security networking group, Senior Advocates Group are all tackling different and important problems in the community.

Pulse checks through unstructured visits to locations frequented by community members to understand top-of-mind issues and concerns: To address barriers to civic engagement (e.g., limited availability of time for working families, mobility-restricted elderly populations, limited access to technology), city leadership (department heads, City Council members and the mayor's office) should consider engaging with community members in locations frequented by them on an ongoing basis. It is important to note that different tactics may be required to reach under-engaged populations (e.g., working families) as compared to underrepresented populations (e.g., faith communities, refugees). Below, we outline locations/ programming that emerged as strong candidates for engagement for both groups:

- Under-engaged communities: Banneker Community Center or Lincoln Street Boys and Girls Club which remains one of the most diverse buildings in the community and is frequented by ~200 families daily who are often sitting in waiting rooms to pick-up their children from after school programming, commonly used co-working spaces such as The Mill for working professionals

- <u>Underrepresented communities:</u> Heatherwood Food Bank and Sherwood Oaks for the Latino community, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard for low-income families, door-to-door visits at Redbud Hills for elderly populations who maybe mobility-restricted, attending faith services or going to resident council meetings at Bloomington Housing Authority.

Make listening sessions organized by the mayor's office more accessible and inviting:
- Since City Hall can be intimidating and difficult to access, the mayor can consider <u>conducting listening sessions with community members in accessible locations</u> such as the South West Library which have easy access to parking or the Banneker Center.
- In addition to diversifying locations of listening sessions, concrete steps can be taken to <u>make City Hall a more physically inviting space</u>. This includes hiring interpreters to translate at listening sessions so the growing Latino community and refugee groups can attend. It can include reducing the number of physical barriers like locked doors and check-in counters, while ensuring adequate security staff trained in de-escalation to protect attendees. And it can also take the form of reducing intimidation barriers: we heard in listening sessions that people feel they lack adequate knowledge to attend meetings in City Hall. This can be countered by sharing informational packets with community NGOs before meetings and creating a digital Q&A so that people feel equipped to participate.
- <u>Tap on community leaders to lead the discussions with members of historically underserved groups</u> to leverage familiarity and reduce apprehensiveness associated with participation. For example, work with faith leaders when engaging with their constituents or individuals who have experienced homelessness in the past when engaging with the unhoused community.
- <u>Offer incentives for participation based on interests and needs of the target group</u> such as gift cards/ vouchers from Kroger or Walmart, free food or chance to win a free summer camp (given the onerous costs of childcare over the

summer) to low-income families. Parents mentioned activities for kids (e.g. coloring books) as something that would help them participate.

Recommendation #5: Proactive and timely city response to high-visibility community developments, including active crises, builds community trust.

Several of our interviewees highlighted Mayor Thomson's decision to show up at the encampment clean-up (and embrace a homeless person) as an indication of her willingness to take ownership and personal responsibility for a difficult situation. High-visibility informal engagement with the community will go a long way in building trust with the community. Mayor Thomson should consider the following:

> *"This (the act of showing up) was beautiful and deserves praise. It showed that the mayor was going to be accountable. The more of it we see, the better."*

Ongoing informal, two-way dialogue between the city and community touchpoints: Identifying individuals within the mayor's team (such as the public engagement director or department heads) tasked with building relationships with other key stakeholders in a way that facilitates information sharing on an ongoing basis (instead of limiting updates to formal meetings or updates provided per a schedule). Key planned events/ happenings for the week can be collated in a single shared location by team members.
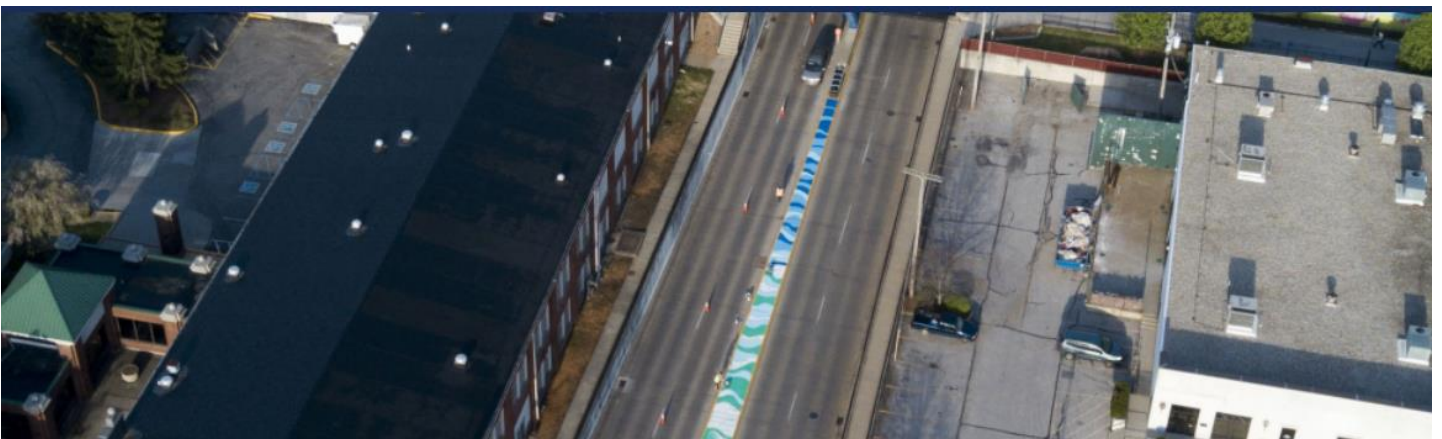
Triaging ongoing community actions to determine the right level of response: Reviewing the master list collated by team members on a weekly basis to determine whether participation/ engagement is necessary/ meaningful and if so, identifying the appropriate response (representation from team members in the Mayor's Office, inviting participation from Council Members, for example when topics that fall within commissions under their purview - Isak Asare for economic development - or in-person engagement from the mayor). Monitoring active crises in real-time through dedicated community lead: Several community groups, including the homelessness coalition and the Islamic Center of Bloomington, have referenced previous safety incidents where they needed more city support. To action this, the Office of the Mayor can assign a clear community point person so that people know who to reach out to when a crisis or emerging development unfolds. The Mayor's Office can then keep in close contact with the situation through the point person and work with the communications director to address the situation in-person and through published communications.

Proactively showing that "the mayor's door is open to city events": Showing up to unscheduled community events (e.g. vigil for a homicide, showing up to support an advocacy NGOs responding to a hate crime), as well as verbalizing through published communications that the mayor wants to be involved in the city, can go a long way in creating an open-door culture.

Recommendation #6: Redesign the public comment process to facilitate a two-way, constructive dialogue between residents and city government with view to problem solve (vs. air complaints and share opinions) based on the ResiStat model adopted by Somerville.

To inform our efforts to redesign Bloomington's public comment process, we referred to Somerville's success in leverage community activism as a tool for transparency and accountability**.**

Case Study: ResiStat in Somerville, MA

Under Joe Curtatone's leadership in 2007, Somerville introduced Resident Statistics ("ResiStat"), a platform "for every resident to get involved in government and stay apprised of everything that the city was doing (or not doing) in their neighborhoods." Biannual meetings were held in each ward across the seven hills that that make up Somerville. ResiStat creates a shared sense of ownership for residents (through a community-led agenda for each session) and enables city government officials to focus their attention on issues that were top of mind, ranging from traffic data to impact of public health on academic performance of children.

While each session was different, the core aspects remained unchanged:

- Community-first: Different from other meetings, ResiStat put the perspectives, grievances, ideas and concerns of the community at the heart of the conversation. In mayor Curtatone's words "I wanted citizens to push back, challenge, get mad, ask why, and ultimately believe that we were doing the best that we could to represent them and their shared values." While this created constructive tension between city officials and the community, the open dialogue ultimately helped to build accountability and trust in the local government.

- <u>Endorsement and buy-in from senior leadership:</u> All meetings were attended by the mayor, senior agencies and their executive directors and top city officials including the police chief. This was critical in following up on priority issues that were aired rather than waiting six months for the next meeting.

As community participation more than doubled in two years, ResiStat went from a grant-funded pilot program to a permanent fixture of mayor Curtatone's administration (housed in the communications department) for the 15 years that he was in office. Ultimately it paved the way for SomerVision, a three-year process to establish a community-led comprehensive plan for Somerville that was led by 60 residents representing the interests of diverse community groups, nonprofits and business associations. Going a step further, the goals from the report were showcased around the city with multilingual translation services that allowed residents of all backgrounds to provide input; feedback was also sought via print and online surveys. The outcome formed the foundation for tangible targets (SomerVision Numbers) that the city relentlessly pursued. Examples include the creation of 30,000 new jobs and 6,000 new housing units with 1,200 permanently affordable. Very quickly they became the "drumbeat" of the mayor. These goals were used to prioritize and allocate resources and drive critical decisions (e.g., massive zoning overhaul) that have allowed Somerville to address crippling concerns (e.g., affordable housing) and transform from the infamously known "Slumerville" into a thriving city.

Tactical changes to Bloomington's public comment process: Incorporating the local context through inputs from interviewees across city council, Indiana University, community service organizations and residents, we have outlined below the suggested changes to Bloomington's public comment process, drawing on the ResiStat model outlined above.

- <u>Change the top-down culture at city hall by reducing decision-making at 'privileged' meetings:</u> Instead of future agendas and decisions being discussed in privileged meetings with city leadership, make them open meetings with city participation. For

Photo via B Square Bulletin

example, input from HAND, Beacon and Heading Home should be sought when designing an agenda focused on housing and opportunity to provide feedback on the agenda should then be provided to the public.

- <u>Advance registration for public comment:</u> In line with practices used by [Cambridge], [Cleveland] and [Long Beach], Bloomington should ensure that members of the public interested in making public comment sign-up ahead of the meeting via a registration form, filled online or downloaded and mailed to Council offices.

- <u>Limit time allotted per resident for public comment</u>: City of Des Moines and Long Beach limit speaking time to 2 minutes or less per resident per agenda item for which the public is allowed to provide comment.
- <u>Limit duration of city council meetings to 90 mins</u>: Evaluate the feasibility of introducing standing committees and reducing time spent in community-as-a whole so that meetings can be timeboxed and conducted more efficiently. On hot button issues that require longer deliberation, consider exchanging clock time on a given night for calendar time so that issues can be evaluated from all vantage points without the time pressure to come to a decision.
- <u>Clearly defined and time-bound agenda items</u>: Pre-determine the starting time and ending time for agenda items so that members of the public can participate in-person or virtually on matters of their choosing rather than having to sit through entire Council meetings.
- <u>"Bring city hall to the people"</u>: Find public venue in each of the 7 council districts to serve as a satellite for City Hall (which can serve as District 2 satellite). Encourage council members to be in the room with the communities they represent and dial in to City Council meetings via Zoom. Having dedicated spaces inside the community will expand accessibility, allowing a broader group of individuals to participate in City Council meetings.

Recommendation #7: Improve collaboration between executive and legislative branches of government through informal committees convened to address issues of importance in the community.

Ensure that Council meetings addressing legislative matters are not the only avenue to seek public input and investigate important topics e.g., homelessness: Consider using informal committees (called by 3 or more Council members) or similar structures to investigate large topics or problems by breaking them down into constituent parts. For example, when addressing challenges of homelessness, collaborate with key stakeholders to frame the issue more narrowly as ways to reduce encampments or make shelters safer to allow for targeted input. Committee findings can then be presented to the council-as-a-whole to inform decision making and voting.

Establish buy-in and active participation from city leadership and key stakeholders: Committee Chairs can invite participation from key stakeholders that lead on-the-ground implementation (e.g., public interest groups, community service organizations) as well as law and enforcement, alongside the voices of affected residents to ensure necessary resources, collaboration and policy implications are identified to work towards a concrete solution. Mayoral participation will be key to ensure buy-in and follow-through on actions agreed.

Allow for back-and-forth with residents to ensure that their concerns remain at the heart of solution design: To supplement existing channels of public comment during City Council meetings, informal committees that convened to solve specific issues can serve as constructive channels for the public to ask questions, understand the tradeoffs and constraints to different policy options, and contribute to the co-creation of tactical plans to

> *"Making public input just about hearing people's opinions is a wasted resource."*

address concerns are agreed upon, where possible. This format will also improve efficiency in the legislative process and follow-through since key stakeholders responsible for implementation are a core component of the solutioning process.

Recommendation #8: Create hands-on, interactive avenues for engagement that will draw in new community members to engage with issues they care about.

Participatory budgeting can serve as a fun, tangible avenue for resident input that increases civic engagement in the long run. Participatory budgeting (PB) is a novel approach to funding allocation that has spread across the United States and world. In PB, the members of the community vote on how to spend a set-aside amount of money. It is a direct democracy, where residents themselves propose ideas, work with city staff to develop full-fledged proposals, then vote on which proposal(s) to fund. Throughout the process, residents learn more about the municipal budgeting, capital projects, and city service delivery. The exciting prospect of spending real money (Cambridge, MA's eye-catching PB flyer says, "How would you spend a million dollars?") draws in a wide breadth of participants and is an excellent on-ramp to future civic

Photo via LIC Post

engagement. Bloomington has done youth participatory budgeting for the past two years on a small scale run by CFRD – the new administration could expand or modify that program to strengthen participation from across the city.

Public art provides an opportunity for residents to co-create the spaces they use:
Bloomington's Art Commission, microgrant program for public art, and Percent for the
Arts program allow for continued public art projects. Like PB, public art is a fun and
meaningful way for residents to engage, including those who may otherwise not
participate in local government, and BAC will give out over $140,000 in art grants this
year. Multiple arts programs already exist in Bloomington, but their structure poses a
barrier to participation. For example, the citizen art microgrant outlined in the Master
Plan tells residents with an idea to contact BAC, then present to the commission, then
implement – putting the onus of action onto residents. To increase engagement, the
BAC could instead:

- Host events in community spaces like Banneker Community Center, the Farmer's
  Market, or Mother Hubbard's Cupboard to gather ideas and spread awareness
  of programming.
- Use "hack-a-thon"-style events with prizes that pair local artists with residents to
  generate public art proposals over a short amount of time, encouraging
  students, families, and others to participate in making and selecting public art.
- For the upcoming Hopewell development, members of the public could vote on
  a curated list of 5 proposals in an online survey distributed through BAC's
  extensive email list, social media, and QR codes near the development site.
- Lastly, the BAC is working on a "one-stop-shop" for artists website in
  collaboration with IU. This website design could be used as a model for other
  departments working on aggregating their resources in a user-friendly format.

**Attract more student engagement by supplementing traditional internships with
hands-on problem-solving rotations:** IU students are a valuable city resource, and as
of now there are few avenues for the city to engage with them. Internships are very
limited in number and Boards and Commissions appointments last for a lengthy two-
year tenure. Instead, the city can pilot programs that allow students to work with
different departments and agencies to tackle a specific problem over several months.
This can follow the model of CampusCatalyst at the University of Chicago, where

students partner with a non-profit organization and tackle a problem over the course of a semester; or the model of [Hacking For Defense](#), which is a credit-granting course that pairs student interns with a federal government agency to tackle a cyber problem. To effectively work with students, the city would need to partner with IU to create a course or extracurricular program training students in consulting practices. For additional incentive, it could be a credit-bearing course or an extracurricular program that has a stipend attached. The city would also need to create capacity for it internally by onboarding city departments and agencies and helping them define a problem statement for students to tackle. An additional idea to attract students is to increase the number of flexible volunteer opportunities available to them in city government, such as offering 6-month rotations on Boards and Commissions instead of 2 years.

Consider providing structured pathways to jobs for volunteers or incentivizing participation through stipends to address financial barriers: While there are some volunteer opportunities with city government (e.g., Parks and Recreation, Community and Family Resources), majority of Bloomington Volunteer Network's (BVN) efforts are focused mainly on plugging gaps in capacity for non-profits and community service organizations. To attract young professionals with limited experience or individuals looking to make a switch in careers, the city can use BVN as a pipeline to evaluate candidates for full-time recruitment opportunities. For example, a graphic designer volunteer opportunity after a six-month period could allow individuals to get to the top of the new hiring list for Parks and Recreation. Such a program could serve as a win-win opportunity - for the city by expanding access to high-quality talent while providing opportunities to 'try before you buy' (testing the skills and fit of individuals before extending jobs) and for individuals by providing accessible avenues to hone new skills/ knowledge with a clear pathway to a full-time job. It will be important to provide stipends that cover expenses so that a wider audience can participate in such programs.

Recommendation #9: Build long-term and action-driven partnerships with community organizations.

Understand *who* is in the space and help other NGOs access that information: Build a comprehensive understanding of key non-profit actors in the community. One finding from the non-profit listening session is that NGOs lack access to a directory of organizations in Bloomington and are often working in silos. The city can be a convening and aggregating power here to create the list, then maintain it so that the list is up to date on an ongoing basis.

- To implement this, city government can <u>request the existing contact lists that are held by non-profit organizations</u> (e.g., GuideStar has a list of non-profits in Monroe County and United Way manages the Agency Directors List, Financial Stability Alliance contact lists). At the listening session with non-profit leaders, United Way and Non-Profit Alliance offered to put out open calls to their partners to kick off the information collection process on behalf of the city government.
- <u>Critical stakeholders in the community</u> identified by non-profit leaders include churches that represent interest of different cultural groups, Multi Faith Alliance, Bloomington After School Network to engage working families, Services Bureau of Monroe County that provides scholarships in the community, Community Kitchen in Monroe County, Hooser Hills Foodbank, Middleway House.

Establish regular cadence for communication with non-profits, organized around an action-driven agenda:

- <u>Set up quarterly meetings with NGO leads</u> that are organized around a shared ongoing civic engagement agenda. Listening session participants voiced that it is key for them to have efficient meetings focused around key action items and progress updates from city hall that are focused on meeting the needs of their constituents. An important element of this recommendation is to avoid repetitive listening sessions but to instead use the next session to decide a

comprehensive agenda for civic engagement in the city, assign city and NGO leads on each task, and then use following meetings to track progress through KPIs. Due to the large number of non-profits in Bloomington, the Mayor can invite representatives of NGOs that aggregate voices on the ground (one level above direct service providers): coalitions like the homelessness coalition, Heading Home, and the Multi-Faith Alliance would be good candidates for this.

- <u>Create a single-source point of contact</u>. There should be a designated community engagement lead at the Office of the Mayor whose key responsibility is to stay up to date with all real-time community events as well as build long-term relationships with NGOs to advance a mutual civic engagement agenda. This point of contact should be universally socialized so that everyone knows who they are, and 100% of their role should be public-focused. The current role job description has a lot of administrative tasks that can be removed so there is increased capacity for public engagement.

Run capacity-building trainings to empower community leaders to make change on the ground: Host third party led trainings to equip community leaders with necessary skills to serve their constituents. In speaking to faith institutions like the Islamic Center and the United Methodist Church, faith leaders stated that they are often the first respondents to mental health crises on the ground and could use city-organized trainings to support their staff in responding appropriately. Members of the non-profit

listening session also stated that the people they serve don't come to City Hall because they do not feel equipped or knowledgeable enough to participate in public policy discussions. Suggested trainings the city can organize are (1) mental health first aid trainings, (2) safety response trainings (de-escalation and active shooter response), and (3) civic engagement trainings. On the mental health trainings, faith groups mentioned that the city had previously organized one with very limited spots. We recommend *continuing this series of mental health trainings with expanded capacity to ensure all service providers can attend*. On safety trainings, the priority is to ensure organizations feel prepared to deal with a crisis in a competent way (and with compassion where needed) before resorting to law enforcement. This could include elements of the kindness and de-escalation training delivered by Beacon, as well as elements of the active shooter response training that is delivered at Monroe County Schools. Lastly, on civic engagement trainings, the city can consider partnering with CJAM to deliver training on constructive dialogue and public policy skills.

Uplift community partners by showing up to significant occasions and highlighting their work through the city's digital channels:

- Show support at events that are close to the community's hearts: While check-in meetings with community organizations should be action-focused, it is just as important to show up at important occasions in the community without an agenda. This is especially important for events that hold cultural, religious, or emotional significance for Bloomington's communities, such as attending an annual Iftar event at the Islamic Center during Ramadan or attending a Black History Month commemoration event. This action can be shared between the mayor, mayor's office team, and department heads so that there is broad representation from the city.
- Use digital storytelling to celebrate local leaders: Use social media to highlight the work that everyday residents are doing for the community. As mentioned in the social media section, this can look like Instagram profiles of

'Bloomingtonians of the Week' where residents can nominate 'unsung heroes' of their community.

Empower city departments to act as extensions of the Mayor's Office in community interactions: Set the tone with departments that they are encouraged to be city representatives with the Bloomington community.

- Encourage department heads to go out into communities, interface with residents (such as HAND with the unhoused community and CFRD with communities of color), and take the lead in attending events around Bloomington. If they are seen as an extension of the mayor's office, then there is wider reach and connection built between the city and community.
- Add a public engagement focus in Cabinet meeting agendas to ensure alignment between Mayor's office and departments on which communities each department is engaging with, which events they are planning to attend, and any relevant information shared by those communities to the city.

Recommendation #10: An ongoing feedback loop to outline actions taken (or not) with the community input will serve both as a tool to maintain the administration's accountability and increase transparency on decision making.

Transform listening into action: the administration should develop a follow-through system to ensure that community sees that their input is valued. Several interviewees highlighted concerns about not knowing what comes of the concerns aired through the public comment channel in City Council meetings or in response to feedback collected by local government leaders through informal channels such as listening sessions.

> *"People will say that they were listened to, but nothing ever came of it."*

Ensure Public Engagement Director's responsibilities focus as much on collecting community input as providing periodic updates/ feedback on concerns raised: Based on information collected from the community, the Public Engagement Director should find appropriate and creative ways to actively address key concerns raised by community service organizations on behalf of their members or by the members themselves. The channel/ medium should be determined based on (1) the nature of questions and concerns raised and (2) the existing ways in which the target group consumes information.

- *[Addressing widely held resident concerns/ questions]* Interview with department head/ council members on Facebook or radio to address frequently asked questions in response to a hot-button topic (e.g., annexation, bringing new jobs to Bloomington).
- *[Targeted response to individual groups with specific needs]* Feeding next steps/ actions from quarterly meetings between the non-profits (e.g., NAACP) and city back to constituents through a 'We hear you' section in non-profit newsletters

- *[Keeping non-profits and businesses in the loop]* We heard from interviewees that the periodic email sent by the mayor's office has been helpful to learn more about what City Hall is working on.
- *[Tracking progress on specific areas of interest for non-profits and businesses]* Outlining progress made since the last meeting and next steps that will be taken in writing as a follow-up to meetings will serve as a tool to maintain accountability and provide visibility on progress being made

Create a smooth system to action feedback cross-departmentally: Develop a tracking system to assign tasks to departments / other branches of government after collecting information from listening sessions. This system should have a method to assign tasks, track and monitor progress, then share the progress updates with community periodically. This can either be a manual system (i.e. the public engagement team holds the master excel tracker and assigns / follows up on tasks regularly), or a digital task system developed in collaboration with ITS.

Implementation Plan

A detailed implementation tracker has been created to delegate tasks and monitor progress. The tracker can be used as a work-in-progress, with new actions added and updated as needed. Below is a screenshot for reference (full model in Excel link here):

Transition Term Implementation Tracker
Open Government Roadmap - Implementation Plan

	Action item	Description	Priority (Short / Medium / Long Term)	Lead	Support stakeholder
Recommendation 1: Website	1a	Re-organize website for user friendliness	MEDIUM		
	1b	Put relevant + current info front and center on website	SHORT		
	1c	Archive outdated site pages	MEDIUM		
	1d	Consider OTS platforms for website	LONG		
Recommendation 2: Social media	2a	Use IG and X for current news and announcements	SHORT		
	2b	Use FB and IG to interact with local residents, nonprofits, and businesses	MEDIUM		
	2c	Have departments generate topic-specific content and elevate through Mayor's account	MEDIUM		
Recommendation 3: uReport	3a	Tweak uReport user interface	MEDIUM		
	3b	Add message to request responses as conduit for further engagement	SHORT		
	3c	Publicize uReport through creative channels	LONG		
	3d	Consider OTS platforms for 311 reports	LONG		
	3e	Consider hiring a communications director role	MEDIUM		
Recommendation 4: Creative community outreach	4a	Reach people where they are through community channels	SHORT		
	4b	Participate in existing roundtables for problem-solving	SHORT		
	4c	Unstructured pulse checks in community locations	LONG		
	4d	Make listening sessions inviting and accessible	MEDIUM		
Recommendation 5: Proactive response to high-visibility events	5a	Ongoing informal dialogue with community touchpoints	LONG		
	5b	Triage community actions to determine right level of response	MEDIUM		
	5c	Monitor active crises through a staff lead	SHORT		
	5d	Show that mayor's door is open to city events	MEDIUM		
Recommendation 6: Public comment process	6a	Redesign public comment based on best practices	MEDIUM		
	6b	Tweak public comment process based on local input	SHORT		
	7a	Pilot participatory budgeting	LONG		

Resources and Organizational Model:

Implementing the recommendations above requires some adjustments to the organizational model, partly by increasing resources and partly by adjusting the current working model with existing resources. The recommended actions are:

Action	Role	Objectives of new role
Re-examine existing position	Public engagement director	Maintain active touchpoints with community organizations, convey priorities and unfolding current events to Mayor. Re-examine current role's JD and expand public engagement team if extra capacity is needed.
Add new position	Communications director	Audit key in-house platforms, develop centralized comms strategy across departments
Change working model	City Council	Improve collaboration between Mayor's office and City Council, co-lead events to gather community input, collaborate on improving City Council public comment and decision-making process
	City Cabinet	Set the tone that Dept Heads are encouraged to interface with community as "extension of Mayor's office", delegate and collaborate on public engagement
Increase opportunities	Volunteers	Leverage volunteers, as needed, to supplement capacity by advertising time-bound projects on BVN and create structured pathways to full-time jobs
	Students	Create new hands-on rotations for increased student involvement

APPENDIX

Stakeholder Interviews:

Name	Title	Organization
Crystal Ritter	**Director of Public Engagement**	**Office of the Mayor**
Adam Wason	**Director of Public Works**	**City Hall**
Rick Dietz	**ITS Director**	**City Hall**
Cliff Ingham	**ITS**	**City Hall**
Holly Warren	**Assistant Director of the Arts**	**City Hall**
Beverly Calendar-Anderson	**Director of CFRD**	**City Hall**
Michelle Moss	**Bloomington Volunteer Network**	**City Hall**
Jeff Richardson	**Former City Council Member**	**City Council**
Stephen Volan	**Former City Council Member (President)**	**City Council**
Isabel Piedmont-Smith	**Council Member**	**City Council**
Isak Asare	**Council Member**	**City Council**
Sydney Zulich	**Council Member**	**City Council**
Erin Aquino	**Director**	**Exodus**
Mary Morgan	**Director**	**Heading Home Indiana**
Mohamed Sayed	**Imam**	**Islamic Center of Bloomington**
Lisa Schubert-Knowling	**Lead Pastor**	**United First Methodist**
Peter Dorfman	**Resident**	
Chris Geary	**Resident**	