CITY OF BLOOMINGTON
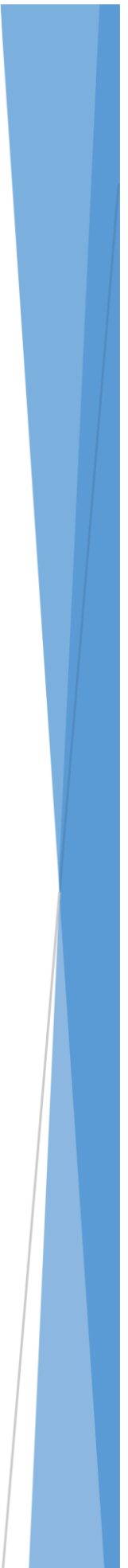## commission on aging

Annual Report for 2016

January 2017

COMMISSION ON AGING ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2016

INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

This commission seeks to raise public awareness of aging-related issues in our community. We work in collaboration with a wide range of community organizations to build bridges, open dialogue, explore issues and concerns, encourage programming, and celebrate the accomplishments of older adults. Our intent is to promote solutions to the problems and challenges of our community's aging population.

Our report is presented in three sections, as follows:

WHO WE ARE provides a short collective resume of our current membership.

WHAT WE DID IN 2016 includes brief summaries of these activities:

- Creative Aging Festival
- Best Cities for Successful Aging Task Force Report
- White House Conference on Aging Policy Briefs Project
- Response to the 2016 Draft Comprehensive Plan
- Resource documents for incoming Commissioners and interested citizens
- Networking

OUR PLANS FOR 2017 describes our two priorities for next year—Creative Aging, and Seniors in Poverty.

We would welcome the opportunity to address any questions that readers of this report might have about our work.

Respectfully submitted by:

Lauren Cowan, Chair

Jack Kahn, Vice Chair

Alice Oestreich, Secretary

Mary Boutain

Lei Gong

Julie Hill

Gail Londergan

Jim Shelton

Courtney Stewart

WHO WE ARE:

Presumably you've already skimmed the list of our names, as provided on the previous page. Perhaps you recognized two or three of our names because we are your neighbors, or your professional colleagues? But even if you recognized *all* of our names, we hope you will find something to surprise you in this brief overview of our collective experience and expertise.

We range in age from 46 to 85. One of us had the great good fortune to be born in Bloomington, and she has lived here all of her life! But she is not the one who has lived in Bloomington for the longest amount of time, which is 50 years. And one of us is a relative "newcomer" to our town, having lived here only nine of his 85 years.

We bring a variety of disciplinary viewpoints to our work on the Commission. In college we specialized in fields such as art history, commerce and engineering, educational leadership, electronic engineering, elementary education, genetics, gerontology, information science, interior architectural design, nursing, photography, physics, public health, public management, and recreation administration. Most of us hold masters degrees; two of us hold doctorates.

We also bring a wide range of professional perspectives to the Commission. One of us is co-owner of a local business, Agewise Design, that plans and creates safe and accessible environments for homeowners who want to "age in place." One of us is an ordained shamanic minister. Some have worked at key service providers for Bloomington's aging population—e.g., the Area 10 Agency on Aging, Bell Trace, and Meadowood. Additional professional affiliations have included the Chamber of Commerce, IBM, Indiana University (various schools and administrative units), Monroe County Community School Corporation, NSWC Crane, Purdue Extension Monroe County, and Technology Service Corporation.

Finally, we bring a useful assortment of community service connections to our work. These are included in the list of our "Networking" activities (see following section).

WHAT WE DID IN 2016:

Creative Aging Festival:

The word "aging" usually conjures up images of the emotional, physical, and fiscal challenges that can arise as time passes. But there also are some *positive* aspects to aging. For example, there is the wonderful experience of having creativity blossom in later life. That kind of intellectual and spiritual growth should be acknowledged, and celebrated.

So in 2016, for the sixth year, we coordinated a collaborative marketing effort with a wide range of community partners to present the Creative Aging Festival during May, which is Older Americans Month.

Throughout May, venues across both town and campus hosted events that focused on one or more of the Festival's three objectives: showcasing elder artists; sharing the arts inter-generationally; and educating participants about the impact of the arts on our health and wellbeing as we all age.

You can find complete descriptions of all these events in the 2016 Creative Aging Festival Guide posted on the City of Bloomington website on the Commission on Aging web page at www.bloomington.in.gov/coa. As you will note, there was something for everyone during our Festival this year!

Best Cities for Successful Aging Task Force Report:

Once every decade, the White House holds a Conference on Aging (WHCOA). The most recent was in July 2015. Matt Hayek, Mayor of Iowa City, was invited to the White House to serve on one of the WHCOA discussion panels. He received this invitation because Iowa City was ranked #1 (out of 252) in the Small Metro category of the Milken Institute's 2014 Best Cities for Successful Aging (BCFSA) report.

Some of the comments Hayek made at WHCOA were intriguing. We found ourselves wondering how Bloomington had fared in comparison to Iowa City. After the Conference, we consulted the BCFSA website and discovered that Bloomington was ranked #80.

This led to formation of our own BCFSA Task Force. Initially, the Task Force did a broad review comparing Bloomington's performance to a small group of other Midwestern college towns on 14 of the 70 indicators used by BCFSA researchers. After seeing those results, we asked the Task Force to take an in-depth look at comparisons on four of those indicators:

- Cost of Living
- Crime Rate
- Geriatric Services
- Percentage of 65+ Population Below Poverty Line

As this project continued to unfold, we learned a great deal. In particular, it gave us a new perspective on data-related problems inherent in the process of ranking cities on how well they support for their aging populations. The Task Force found that it had reservations about some of the methodological choices made in the BCFSA work. As a result, the Task Force chose to strictly limit the conclusions it drew from its own analysis. Nevertheless, the Commission strongly supported the concepts outlined in the BCFSA Mayor's Pledge. Because of that, we sent the final report of our Task Force forward to the Mayor with a request that he affirm Bloomington's commitment to its aging citizens by signing the Pledge—which he did in March of 2016.

You can read more about this project in our BCFSA Task Force Report posted on our web page. A copy of the BCFSA Pledge Signed by Mayor Hamilton also can be found there. For additional background on the work being done by the Milken Institute, consult their main website at http://successfulaging.milkeninstitute.org/.

White House Conference on Aging Policy Briefs Project:

In preparation for the 2015 WHCOA, its organizers identified four key areas of concern related to aging:

- Retirement Security
- Long-Term Services and Supports
- Elder Justice
- Healthy Aging

For each of those four areas, they drafted a concise (9-11 pages) but comprehensive policy brief.   We decided to divide ourselves into four small work teams and use those briefs as background material for a series of presentations to the whole Commission. That project educated all of us about the national landscape of aging-related issues in those four areas, making us more useful as citizens and as Commissioners. The results will

continue to inform our work going forward, providing a context within which to make choices about what new work to undertake and what new partnerships to form.

The full texts of all four policy briefs are appended to the final report of the 2015 White House Conference on Aging, which can be found at https://whitehouseconferenceonaging.gov/2015-WHCOA-Final-Report.pdf . The main WHCOA website can be found at https://whitehouseconferenceonaging.gov/ .

Response to the 2016 Draft Comprehensive Plan:

We were grateful for the opportunity to provide a comprehensive response to the City's July draft of its 2040 Comprehensive Plan. We had a number of concerns with the draft.

In terms of the draft's overall structure, we were concerned that not all of the 16 Resolution 13-01 goals generated by the Imagine Bloomington process may not be fully represented in the planning. The draft Plan offers no evidence of how the 25 new goals it proposes are related to those original 16. This creates confusion, and left us feeling that the planning process was not truly "transparent." We did our own analysis, and we had problems in determining that all aspects of some key Imagine Bloomington goals—such as "meet basic needs and ensure self-sufficiency for all residents"—were being addressed.

At the detail-level, we offered comments on aging-related issues in each chapter. To begin, we solicited input from Phil Stafford of IU, a nationally-recognized specialist in the field of aging and community. We then organized our comments around what he provided, augmenting his observations with our own.

The full text of our Response to the Draft Comprehensive Plan is posted on our web page.

Resource documents for incoming Commissioners and interested citizens:

As new Commissioners joined our number early this year, some expressed concerns about deciphering the shorthand frequently used at Commission meetings, and about clarifying how the Commission's work fit into the broader picture of community support for Bloomington's aging population. Clearly, these are two concerns that any member of the public who attended our meetings might share. In the interest of making both incoming Commissioners and interested citizens feel more welcome, we decided to produce resource documents that addressed those two concerns.

The first we called *Alphabet Soup*. It is a summary of definitions for (and history about) the many aging-related acronyms and abbreviations used at Commission meetings. It can be found on our web page here. The second is a matrix called *Guide to Support for Our Aging Community: A10AA, AAC, and COA.* We collaborated on developing this matrix with the Area 10 Agency on Aging and the Active Aging Coalition; these two represent very different types of key players in Bloomington's support structure. The matrix we developed together shows at a glance where the interests and activities of these two overlap with those of the Commission, and where they are distinct.

Copies of both Alphabet Soup—Acronyms & Abbreviations and our Guide to Community Support are posted on our web page.

Networking:

We are committed to helping Bloomington build its capacity for support of its aging population. This is work that never is really "done," nor can it be advanced by any one group on its own. Thus, we rely heavily on forming, nurturing, and maximizing effective collaborative relationships with others across the community.

Some of our networking is the direct result of our community service as individuals, while other networking efforts have required additional, targeted outreach. During the past year our networking has included:

- AARP Tax Assistance
- ACHIEVE (Community Health Think Tank; Basic Needs Task Force)
- Active Aging Coalition
- Active Living Coalition
- Adult Guardianship Volunteer Committee
- Affordable Living Study Group
- American Society on Aging
- Area 10 Agency on Aging
- Arts Alliance of Greater Bloomington
- City of Bloomington Environmental Commission
- City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation
- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Board
- Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce Board
- IU Center on Aging and Community
- IU Emeriti House
- IU Health Bloomington Hospital
- IU Mathers Museum of World Cultures
- IU Retirees Association
- Monroe County History Center
- Monroe County Public Library
- Monroe County YMCA
- National Center for Creative Aging
- Sally's Place
- Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
- WFHB (co-hosting "Everyday People," a weekly radio spot)

OUR PLANS FOR 2017:

We will continue to engage in activities that involve advocacy, education, and collaboration.

For 2017, we have selected two priorities: ***Creative Aging***, and ***Seniors in Poverty.*** Please note that our work will not be limited exclusively to these two areas. However, we expect them to be our primary concerns.

Obviously, ***Creative Aging*** is not a new focus for us. But we tentatively are planning to replace the current "festival" concept with a "series" approach that is both more flexible and more expansive. We still hope to work with some of our partners on coordinating a smaller creative aging event in May (Older Americans Month).

However, we no longer will develop and coordinate a month-long calendar of activities, nor will we produce our traditional full-color program guide.

This new approach is responsive to the needs expressed by several Festival participants and partners in the past. It will allow us to provide promotion for selected creative aging events no matter when they are mounted, rather than focusing exclusively on events held in May. We are working now on a protocol for how to implement this new approach. Once that has been finalized, we will roll out an announcement of the change in how we address our Creative Aging focus.

Seniors in Poverty is not really a new focus for us either. But we have not specifically highlighted it in the past, and the relevant work we've done has all been at the "big picture" level—i.e., looking at data and policy or planning issues.

For example, in our 2016 BCFSA report (see description of this in an earlier section) one of the four areas we targeted for in-depth analysis was the indicator "percentage of 65+ population below the poverty line." We found Bloomington's performance on this indicator disturbing, even though we questioned some aspects of the BCFSA ranking process.

Also, during our review of the White House Conference policy brief on "retirement security," we realized anew just how few people plan effectively for their post-employment years, and how vulnerable our country's aging population could be if drastic changes in Social Security were implemented.

Additionally, as noted above in the section on the Draft Comprehensive Plan, we remain concerned that City planners are not clearly demonstrating that addressing all aspects of the Imagine Bloomington goal to "meet basic needs and ensure self-sufficiency for all residents" will be a priority as the City moves forward.

But our focus on Seniors in Poverty was sharpened dramatically in November when one of our members circulated an IDS article featuring profiles of local seniors who live in poverty. Their personal stories were so moving. And as this Commissioner noted, "data can be powerful but also leave people feeling cold."

Thus, we move into 2017 hoping to raise awareness and make contributions in this area, using both data and individual narratives in that work.