



Homelessness Response & Housing Investment

Progress to date, current challenges, and long-term solutions

Mayor Kerry Thomson

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A Letter From the Mayor

Dear Bloomington residents and businesses,

I write to you today to address **the community challenge that affects us all: homelessness**. Communities across the nation face the same challenge, and the complex realities of housing affordability, untreated mental illness, and addiction complicate finding solutions. This report provides an update on what our City of Bloomington team has done thus far during my administration, and plans for the future.

My commitment to serve Bloomington and its residents with dignity, safety, and pathways to stability extends to all who live, learn, work, or visit here. **We can and will support our most vulnerable neighbors while upholding these shared standards and expectations for community life.**

Street homelessness is more visible and disruptive today than recent years. Our businesses and neighbors are struggling with unexpected costs and struggling to set compassionate boundaries with those who are living in deep crisis. These tensions deepen our resolve to find solutions for not only housing, but for healing.

Our problems are years in the making, with deep root causes. We're working with many community partners toward long-term solutions. **We also have to take action right now to protect our quality of life, our public health, and our economic health.** We cannot solve homelessness without a thriving community base, and our community cannot thrive unless we simultaneously build long-term solutions for homelessness **and** address its short-term impacts.

Since taking office in 2024, my administration has built on past investments and elevated the response to homelessness and community safety with new urgency and resources. We've taken these action steps, which we'll describe in more detail later in this report:

- Funded affordable housing, tenant assistance, and eviction prevention programs to **increase housing supply and prevent homelessness**.
- Evaluated housing policies and initiatives, supportive housing projects, and properties catering to low-income residents to **keep existing housing safe and viable**.

- Supported reunification and rapid rehousing programs to **get newly unhoused people off the streets as quickly as possible.**
- **Worked with local shelters and service providers** to understand needs, coordinate on problem-solving, and fund solutions.
- Partnered to secure grant funding so providers can **hire more case managers** working hands-on to change lives.
- Supported a significant public awareness campaign of alternative response providers, who **offer 24/7 help for mental health and addiction crises.**
- Advocated for coordinated entry, regional service boundaries, and a continuum of care to **ensure seamless, individualized, reliable support.**
- Worked with providers to **establish humane, practical protocols for dealing with encampments** on private and public property.
- Cleaned up public sites and funded small-business safety and public health pilots to **address community impacts of homelessness.**
- Began rebuilding long-diminished public safety capacity to **provide proactive community policing, tackle predatory drug dealing, and improve public perceptions of safety.**
- Invested in private security to **support safety and reduce vandalism in parks.**
- Streamlined and coordinated city services and response to homelessness with **active interdepartmental teams** and clear accountability.
- Convened leaders and partners, locally and across the state, to **share strategies, solutions, information, and ideas.**
- Advanced economic development work to **build a stronger economy for all.**

The City is spending millions to prevent, respond to, and solve homelessness. Staff from nearly every department have invested countless hours. **The investment we're making is not just financial—it is deeply human.** It takes a real toll on the people doing the work. Our nonprofit and service provider partners face human tragedy every day, armed with a passion for service and a shortage of resources. The people working to solve homelessness are your neighbors, friends, and family members. Like you, we sometimes feel overwhelmed by the scope of a problem that is bigger than a single

person, team, or organization can solve. **We must continue to work together to make progress.**

Our shared work has one aim: making Bloomington a place where all can flourish. And with strategy, accountability, and persistence, we will.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kerry Thomson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kerry Thomson

Mayor of Bloomington

Introduction

Housing and homelessness are a tangled mix of housing, health care, safety, and economics. **Since 2024, the City has invested over \$9 million in affordable housing, eviction prevention, and rapid-rehousing programs.** We're also enforcing standards that keep shelters, housing, and public spaces safe. We're rebuilding our public safety capacity, coordinating cleanups, and improving crisis response through outreach and mental health teams. And we're working on economic development initiatives to strengthen and diversify our economy, raise wages, and attract the talent, jobs, and investments that give more people access to prosperity.

All in all, Bloomington is pairing comprehensive housing solutions with practical, day-to-day stewardship—clear standards, coordinated care, and economic momentum—so everyone can live here and thrive.

Table 1 gives an overview of the City's spending and how it impacts individuals at various income levels, described here as a percentage of Area Median Income (AMI). AMI varies by household size and isn't a single number. "Median income" means that half our population earns less than that amount, and half earns more than that amount. Since AMI is the midpoint, a person earning 80% of AMI is in the bottom half of income for our city, a person at 100% is right at the median, and a person at 120% is earning just above the midpoint. AMI is important to consider because housing is expensive not just for low-income households, but also for middle-income households.

The numbers in Table 1 represent expenses from the primary funding sources for initiatives detailed in this report. They do not include Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding or several smaller grant and investment lines. Totals reflect both invested and committed funding—that is, projects that are active, underway, or in process of disbursement.

Table 1. Housing, Homelessness Prevention, and Supportive Services Investments

INVESTMENT	GOAL	PROJECT
\$800,000	Affordable Ownership Creation	Infrastructure for the creation of 31 affordable lots and homes ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$540,000	Affordable Ownership Creation	Construction material funding contribution for the creation of 9 affordable homes ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$1,000,000	Affordable Ownership Creation	Acquisition of 20 single family lots to create 20 affordable homes ($\leq 100\%$ AMI).
\$200,000	Affordable Ownership Creation	Down payment and closing cost assistance for 10 new land trust homes at or below ($\leq 60\%$ AMI).
\$250,000	Affordable Ownership Creation	Funding contribution to create four land trust townhome units ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$568,000	Affordable Rental Unit Creation	Funding contribution for the creation of 48 affordable units, with 10 apartments set aside for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The remaining 38 affordable apartments will be affordable workforce housing (30–80% AMI).
\$1,368,288	Affordable Rental Unit Creation	Construction funding contribution for the creation of 41 new units, including: 9 permanent supportive housing units designed to support those suffering homelessness (0-30% AMI); an additional 29 units for voucher holders ($\leq 80\%$ AMI); and a childcare center with 3 affordable units above ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$220,000	Affordable Rental Unit Creation	Funding contribution for the creation of 15 new affordable units, 8 units for voucher holders, and 7 in a cooperative living home ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).

INVESTMENT	GOAL	PROJECT
\$432,480	Housing Stability	Down payment and closing cost assistance for 25 first-time home buyers ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$26,804	Housing Stability	Rental deposit assistance to provide stability to 61 households ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$100,000	Housing Stability	Homelessness diversion assistance to support with rent and deposit payments, short-term housing options and utility assistance for those at risk or currently homeless ($\leq 60\%$ AMI).
\$60,000	Housing Stability	Eviction prevention financial aid and case management for households facing imminent eviction (within 14 days of landlord filing) ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$90,000	Housing Stability	Security for a new affordable housing complex that includes 9 permanent supportive housing units designed to support those experiencing homelessness (0-30% AMI) and an additional 29 units for voucher holders ($< 80\%$ AMI).
\$200,000	Housing Stability	Solar installation for affordable new homes built to improve efficiency and reduce housing cost burden ($< 80\%$ AMI).
\$90,000	Housing Stability	Investment in 4 security trailers to support neighborhood stability.
\$400,000	Supportive Housing	Preservation and rehabilitation of a permanent supportive housing project that has housed more than 500 domestic abuse victims ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$439,296	Supportive Housing	Funding for the creation of three case management positions: two that focus on street outreach to help transition unhoused residents into housing and one position that focuses on veterans in need ($\leq 50\%$ AMI).

INVESTMENT	GOAL	PROJECT
\$200,000	Supportive Housing	Rapid rehousing services for unhoused residents to provide a combination of short-term financial assistance for items such as security deposits, utilities, and application fees alongside case management ($\leq 50\%$ AMI).
\$600,000	Supportive Housing	Funding support for land acquisition for development of a 45,000 square foot homeless shelter.
\$566,000	Supportive Housing/ Preservation	Funding for the security, rehabilitation, and preservation of permanent supportive housing units.
\$95,000	Housing Preservation	Funding for the preservation of a 6-unit complex for veterans ($\leq 60\%$ AMI).
\$96,500	Housing Preservation	Preservation of 11 homes through rehabilitation activities for low-income households ($< 80\%$ AMI).
\$980,000	Housing Preservation	Investment in affordable housing creation and preservation ($\leq 80\%$ AMI).
\$9,322,368	TOTAL INVESTMENT	

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding has allowed the City of Bloomington to invest in several high-impact community projects. However, once those federal dollars are spent by the end of 2027, the City will not be able to sustain that level of spending from its own revenues—especially given the fiscal impact of Indiana’s Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA 1). **But we will still be able to leverage partnerships, policies, and practices, as well as accountability, to effect change—and those efforts can have a profound impact.**

This report will address six related avenues the City is using to address both homelessness and housing.

1. Preventing Homelessness
2. Supporting Shelters and Front-Line Providers
3. Addressing Short-Term Impacts

4. Bolstering Public Safety
5. Co-Creating Solutions
6. Investing in Economic Development

Preventing Homelessness

Why housing scarcity drives instability and homelessness, how the City supports expanding housing options and preventing eviction, and how permitting reforms and the Hopewell redevelopment can accelerate change in our housing market

As New Hope for Families Executive Director Emily Pike wrote in an editorial column for [***Bloom magazine's August/September 2025 edition***](#), the primary driver of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing. Bloomington's housing story starts with a simple truth: **we are currently the most cost-burdened metro in Indiana**. Six in ten renter households spend more than 30% of income on housing. In addition, analysis from Downtown Bloomington Inc. found that over 14,000 people commute to Bloomington to work. Some prefer to live elsewhere; others can't afford to live here.

The root causes are many, starting with a local economy that lags the state and the nation. Our [***average household income***](#) is significantly lower than the state and national averages, yet average rents here are not. Average Bloomington mortgages, while lower than the national average, aren't low enough to compensate for the wage gap. Attracting good-paying jobs that can close the wage gap presents a chicken-and-egg problem. Employers seek communities with a strong local talent pool, but our housing shortage inhibits our ability to attract young professionals with in-demand skills—and that inhibits our ability to attract potential employers. Economic development and housing go hand in hand.

We also have a shortage of housing of all types. In a healthy housing market, people move up, downsize, form new family households, and so on. Each move frees a home for someone else. When the housing market freezes—because interest rates spike, construction costs rise, or permitting drags—purchase prices and rents climb, empty nesters stay put instead of downsizing, new households double-up to afford rent, and safety nets thin out. More housing at every price point drives movement.

Short-term rentals like Airbnb have removed around 900 homes from the local rental market, according to [AirDNA](#), with approximately 80% being whole homes. COVID-era mortgage rates locked many homeowners into ultra-low rates that disincentivize selling, downsizing, and other typical market shifts. Indiana University’s roughly 48,000 students have access to only 13,000 on-campus beds, spilling thousands of renters into the private market. And finally, construction costs, land constraints, long permitting timelines, and stringent building requirements make it difficult to break even on modestly priced housing, so developments skew toward the upper end of the market.

The City doesn’t have control over all of these factors, but we are not helpless, either—and we are certainly accountable for the impact of municipal policies and investments.

We have the ability to improve how quickly and predictably housing moves from idea to reality by modernizing our permitting system—the internal process that reviews and approves new construction and developments—and by refining our Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which sets the rules for what can be built, where, and how. These tools shape everything from housing density and parking, to design standards and timelines. By making the process faster and clearer, we lower costs for builders, encourage a wider range of housing types, and make it easier for local developers to add homes people can actually afford.

To prevent homelessness, we are focused on four strategies:

1. Increase Housing Stock
2. Preserve Existing Housing
3. Prevent Eviction
4. Implement a Strategic Approach to Housing

1. Increase Housing Stock

We must increase the total housing stock at every price point, with particular attention to housing for those currently struggling to live here: working people and young professionals, low-income individuals and families, and those who need supportive services. Here’s what we’ve done so far and are working on. (These numbers were included in Table 1.)

- **New homes.** We provided infrastructure for 31 affordable lots ([\\$800,000](#) in 2024, which continues to be drawn through 2025), as well as home and construction

support for 9 new Habitat for Humanity homes at Osage Place ([\\$300,000](#) in 2024, [\\$240,000](#) in 2025); land acquisition that will make way for 20 more affordable homes at Shasta Meadow ([\\$1,000,000](#) in 2024–2025); downpayment assistance to 10 land trust homes ([\\$200,000](#)); and funding for the creation of 4 units in a townhome land trust pilot ([\\$250,000](#) in 2024–2025).

- **Affordable apartments.** We funded the creation of 117 new rental units, including 48 affordable apartments, at Retreat at Switchyard ([\\$568,000](#) in 2024–2025); 38 units at Kohr Community Flats ([\\$1,248,288](#) in 2024–2025), with 9 of those reserved for residents who need permanent supportive housing and 29 units for voucher holders; 3 affordable units above a new daycare center at the Summit Hill Early Childhood Center ([\\$120,000](#) in 2024–2025), 7 units in the Avalon Land Trust cooperative living ([\\$140,000](#) in 2024); and 8 newly constructed units for voucher holders ([\\$80,000](#) in 2025).
- **Neighborhood stability.** Through a variety of supportive mechanisms, we are stabilizing neighborhoods through down-payment assistance for 25 first-time homebuyers ([\\$292,480](#) in 2024, [\\$140,000](#) in 2025); rental deposit assistance ([\\$26,804](#) in 2024–2025); diversion ([\\$100,000](#) in 2025) and eviction prevention investments ([\\$60,000](#) in 2025); security support for permanent supportive housing units ([\\$90,000](#) in 2024); 4 security trailers for neighborhoods to deter and prevent crime and increase stability ([\\$50,000](#) in 2024, [\\$40,000](#) in 2025); security and rehabilitation of permanent supportive housing units to keep units in service ([\\$566,000](#) in 2025) and solar installation for new affordable homes to improve efficiency and reduce cost burden ([\\$200,000](#) in 2024).
- **Supportive housing.** We've expanded options for people with the highest needs, including survivors of domestic violence ([\\$400,000](#) in 2024) and residents needing wraparound services like case management.
- **Hopewell neighborhood.** In 2025 we engaged experts in innovative housing to pilot a new vision for the Hopewell neighborhood, using it as a test case for building smarter, faster, and more inclusively. Innovations include pre-approved housing designs to cut time and costs, and legal frameworks that preserve attainable ownership alongside workforce and market-rate units providing 500–1000 homes throughout Hopewell. We'll discuss Hopewell in more detail later.

- **Summit neighborhood.** We are securing funding and infrastructure solutions to help move this southside development of over 4,000 housing units toward being shovel-ready.
- **Development processes.** We began an external audit in 2025 to examine how to make it easier for builders to create the housing we need, especially local developers and builders who care about our community and want to be part of the solution.

Let's dig deeper into this last point regarding development processes.

Development That Works for Bloomington Residents

As noted in the introduction, once ARPA money runs out, we won't be able to continue one-time investments in innovative housing projects at the same pace. Particular neighborhood developments like Hopewell and Summit hold great potential, but they too are one-time projects.

But **development processes impact housing over the long term, regardless of federal funding.** They impact every neighborhood and every housing project. We have to make them work better for Bloomington.

Our administration believes in demystifying government. What we do, how we do it, and why we do it are out in the open. **We have to be candid: we're part of the problem.** Much of the housing bottleneck is inside City Hall, in our rules and workflows.

When the rules are complicated and the process for permitting is unpredictable, development projects stall, deadlines pass, and costs grow exponentially. Those costs are then passed on to residents. While big national developers with deep pockets may survive that process, local developers of smaller, more modest projects often can't.

We're working to reposition local developers and builders as partners, not opponents. We are asking our teams to make a deep cultural change: to shift from detailing why a housing project *can't* work, to describing how it *can* work. We also need to better understand and account for the external factors that drive development decisions, timelines, and end-user prices. That cultural change will be backed with systems and tools that eliminate red tape by design.

We're working on two permitting audits. These are proactive performance reviews designed to make housing development faster and more predictable. The first puts the City in the role of zoning petitioner to experience and fix real friction points in zoning,

platting, and permitting. The second audit is a comprehensive evaluation. This deeper review will examine every step of the development process, identifying conflicting requirements and inefficiencies across different departments, phases, and types of project. The final deliverable—due spring 2026—will include explicit, actionable recommendations, followed by a three-month support period to help implement the changes.

However, processes are only effective when they are aligned with rules and how things actually get done. The Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) is Bloomington's consolidated zoning and land-use rulebook. The UDO sets what can be built, where it can go, how big it can be, and the standards (like parking, height, and setbacks) projects must meet, as well as which reviews are required. Along with redesigning our permitting process, we are simultaneously working on UDO revisions.

As the rules become clearer and more practical, and the process improves, approvals will move faster, carrying costs will fall, and more projects should pencil out at prices residents can afford. Clarity means standardized forms and checklists, training for staff and local developers, consistent timelines, and a single point of contact so that applicants aren't lost in a maze of internal handoffs. These changes reduce soft costs, prevent financing from expiring, and bring smaller projects, led by local developers who care about our community, back into the mix.

2. Preserve Existing Housing

In a tight housing market, it's essential to keep the housing we have and to return underused housing stock to the market. Low rent is no excuse for unsafe or substandard housing conditions. When housing isn't safe, lives are at risk, and units deteriorate over time and eventually go empty—thus further reducing our housing stock.

Bringing homes back is often faster and greener than building from scratch. Many affordable rentals are at risk of slipping out of service because of deferred maintenance, safety issues, or ownership changes, while others sit empty because they no longer meet modern code standards. To counter this, the City uses a combination of targeted rehab incentives and firm, fair code enforcement ([Title 16](#), [Title 17](#), and [Title 6](#) of the Bloomington Municipal Code). These tools help landlords address life and safety issues, return underused or offline units to the market, and maintain affordable homes that would otherwise deteriorate.

- **Preservation.** We provided funding to secure veterans' apartments and supportive housing for voucher holders ([\\$95,000](#) in 2024). We are making nearly a million dollars ([\\$980,000](#) in 2025) of additional affordable housing investments to keep Bloomington's housing stock strong.
- **Housing safety enforcement.** We've strengthened enforcement through [Title 16](#) (Rental Housing), [Title 17](#) (Land Use), and [Title 6](#) (Health and Sanitation). This protects tenants, preserves properties, and safeguards the limited housing stock available to those in need. Through the City's Housing and Neighborhood Development (HAND) department, we secured more than [\\$600,000](#) in legal judgments against property owners who repeatedly neglected housing standards. That figure does not include additional cases involving a long-time property owner whose chronic life-and-safety code violations led to a 20-year prohibition of operating rental units in the City. These actions set a precedent that unsafe, unmaintained housing will not be tolerated in Bloomington.
- **City investment accountability.** We examined affordable and supportive housing that have received City funding to ensure compliance with commitments. Our goals must be achieved in reality, not just on paper. If City-backed affordable units sit empty because they are not being marketed or rented to those who need them, the plan isn't working. If those who need supportive housing are afraid to rent those units out of safety concerns, the plan isn't working.

We have to hold ourselves and our partners accountable for outcomes.

After exhausting all other avenues, we have at times pursued legal action to reinforce that public resources come with responsibility. This has included an investigation into conditions at Union at Crescent, which received a tax abatement in exchange for low-income housing units, and high-profile litigation such as with Crawford Apartments. Our goal is not litigation itself, or punishment. It's simply to motivate partners to fulfill their commitments.

3. Prevent Eviction

Eviction is often the first step in a downward spiral that leads to homelessness. The City makes strategic investments in programs that help residents stay housed during periods of instability.

- **System-level prevention.** The City has invested in eviction prevention through Summit Hill Community Development Corporation ([\\$60,000](#)), rapid rehousing

with New Hope for Families ([\\$200,000](#)), and in homeless diversion funds through South Central Community Action Program ([\\$100,000](#)).

- **Security deposit assistance.** Through housing counseling services, income-eligible renters can get up to [\\$500](#) to help with rental deposits—lowering the upfront barrier to securing housing quickly.
- **Emergency home repair grants.** These grants of up to [\\$7,500](#) provide support for repairs associated with urgent health and safety problems before a home becomes uninhabitable or condemned, preventing displacement and costly emergency stays. The City manages repairs from start to finish.
- **Owner-occupied rehabilitation loans.** These loans (at [0% interest, for up to \\$50,000](#)) finance larger health and safety rehabilitations, with labor, materials, and project management all covered by the City, to stabilize low-and-moderate income homeowners in place and prevent involuntary moves that can cascade into homelessness.
- **Education.** The City also provides education to help residents make informed, sustainable housing choices. Services include financial management and budgeting to build long-term stability, delinquency and default resolution to prevent foreclosure or eviction, rental counseling and [R101: Renting in Bloomington](#) courses to help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities, and pre-purchase and home-buyer counseling—including [Homebuyer's Club](#)—to prepare first-time buyers for successful homeownership.

4. Implement a Strategic Approach to Housing

Housing is the foundation on which a life is built. When we remove development friction, align building requirements with the development process, and invest where the market can't afford to go on its own, homes get built.

Since we've taken office, the committed HAND team has worked quickly to close four federal audits, strengthen compliance tools, and update our [Consolidated Plan](#) to ensure the City of Bloomington remains in good standing with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and continues to receive crucial federal funding. Today, Bloomington's housing strategy is grounded in these principles:

- **Modernize systems and processes.** Cut red tape, audit our Planning and Transportation permitting process, and create a culture of partnership with builders to speed development while protecting neighborhood character.
- **Unlock existing housing supply.** Incentivize the rehabilitation and return of unused units to the market.
- **Leverage City-led development.** Use projects like Hopewell to test, model, and accelerate new housing pathways.

We've already discussed the first two bullets in the previous sections, Increase Housing Stock and Preserve Existing Housing. Now let's talk about the last bullet.

City-led Innovation

The City doesn't typically build homes, but we make housing possible by shaping the field of play. Zoning, permitting, compliance, infrastructure, incentives, and partnerships make more homes feasible—more types of homes, in more places, for more people at more price points.

At Hopewell, for example, the City is preparing lots and infrastructure that developers and nonprofits will use to build a mix of housing types. In other areas, we are working to create transparency around available incentives and communicate more quickly on project eligibility, so that developers know which tools are actually available.

And we must do that work inside the perimeter of federal and state Fair Housing laws. **We cannot build housing that discriminates against any particular demographic, whether that is students, retirees, low-income families, or any other segment of our community.** Instead, our role is to expand choices so that people at different life stages—young workers, families, and seniors—can all find a home that fits. Equity and compliance create an operating system that protects residents and preserves access to federal funding.

Hopewell, located on the site of the former Bloomington Hospital, is one of the few housing developments in which the City is directly involved. Hopewell will directly relieve housing pressure by adding homes where demand is highest: in Bloomington's core, near jobs, transit, and amenities. Whenever new, well-located homes come online, competition for existing housing should ease across the city, helping to stabilize rents and reduce displacement in nearby neighborhoods.

Our vision of Hopewell includes a mix of permanently affordable homes alongside workforce and market-rate options. **When complete, Hopewell will deliver 500–1,000 market-rate homes alongside permanently affordable units.** This activation of homes, green space, and community life will nurture a place of belonging.

The redevelopment of Hopewell is a significant initiative in Bloomington’s history. The City is taking a leadership role in planning, coordination, and oversight to ensure the project results in more types of housing for more people—without compromising neighborhood character.

We intend to use Hopewell as the City’s proof of concept that shows how we can enable housing production at a pace and price point that match local needs.

Here’s how we’re building a different framework and why it works.

- **Pre-approved design catalog.** We’re creating a catalog of more than 10 design plans vetted up-front (duplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, small condo buildings). This “pattern book” of pre-approved designs will shave weeks off permitting, resulting in lower architectural costs for smaller builders and more predictable timelines for lenders.
- **Process reform baked in.** Hopewell is the test bed for our permitting fixes: fewer re-submittals, lower carrying costs, and less risk of financing expiring.
- **Permanent affordability tools.** Affordability covenants will secure a meaningful share of below-market homes for the long term, resulting in public dollars that buy durable affordability, not just short-term discounts for the first homebuyers.
- **Mixed income by design.** Blocks that intentionally blend income levels help sustain neighborhood safety, support school stability, and create healthier market conditions—resulting in inclusive streets where families, small businesses, and community services can all take root and thrive.
- **Local participation pathways.** Right-sized bid packages, technical assistance, and predictable schedules for local contractors and vendors leads to more competition, lower costs, and stronger local capacity for future projects.

In short, Hopewell is where we can show how Bloomington can add more homes, more affordably, and more quickly.

Supporting Shelters and Front-Line Providers

Why increasing shelter options and case management, strengthening Coordinated Entry, and funding reunification and treatment options are critical to long-term success—and what role the City plays in the process

In an ideal future, we prevent homelessness from ever occurring. The last section describes our investments in those measures. But in the meantime, we must be ready with clear roles, resources, and partnerships to help those in crisis find short- and long-term solutions.

The City does not run any shelters. We rely on and partner with local nonprofits with the expertise, passion, and staff to serve our unhoused neighbors. To ensure their success, our entire community—City, County, State, and nonprofit partners—must work together. The City is committed to the following action steps:

1. Address System and Service Gaps
2. Increase Case Management
3. Support Coordinated Entry and Consistent Standards
4. Set and Follow Humane Protocols

1. Address System and Service Gaps

The City continues to advocate for and invest in a sheltering system that serves the needs of the people in need in our region, ensuring that they can be moved into beds as the first step to becoming permanently housed. **Shelters provide essential short-term help for those in crisis, but our system is currently not adequate.** Our partners are working at full tilt, but critical gaps remain in our community resources.

Bloomington's shelter network includes Friends Place (serving all adults 18+), New Hope for Families (serving families with children), and Wheeler Mission (serving single men). While Friends Place and New Hope often operate at full capacity, Wheeler typically maintains open beds, especially in warmer months, despite operating as a

low-barrier emergency shelter (sobriety is not required to enter, though guests may not use drugs or alcohol onsite).

Beds may appear open on paper, but access is often constrained by real-life barriers, leaving people with few viable options. Families and couples want to find shelter together, and that's difficult today. In some rule-intensive models, compliance becomes a barrier even when space exists. Even something as simple as lacking a photo ID can block entry into shelters, and replacing identification is very difficult if you don't have a mailing address, access to technology, or transportation.

To help close these gaps, the City has committed [\\$600,000](#) toward the development of an expanded emergency shelter facility that will consolidate day services, overnight beds, and supportive housing in a single location

For those who need treatment for addiction or behavioral-health crises, detox beds and step-down treatment options are scarce. Withdrawal management and short-term stabilization capacity remain especially thin, pushing crises into emergency rooms and public spaces. The Mayor and our lobbyists advocate with state and federal leaders to preserve and expand essential funding for treatment, Medicaid, and transitional services.

The new Beacon Center is advancing and will combine emergency shelter beds with permanent housing and rapid-rehousing programs all in one facility. This will not only streamline services, but also increase the number of available emergency shelter beds. The City has committed funding and staff coordination to help bring this facility and its related services online as quickly as possible. The project broke ground in September 2025 and is currently estimated to open in mid- to late-2027.

2. Increase Case Management

Case management is a one-on-one, ongoing professional relationship where a trained specialist helps an individual identify needs, set goals, and coordinate the housing, healthcare, benefits, and services required to stabilize their life. **Frontline case management is essential to long-term solutions to homelessness.**

Our local providers are stretched thin. That's why the Mayor partnered with the Community Foundation on a [\\$7.39](#) million Lilly Endowment grant to fund 10 new case managers. The City has also provided [\\$439,296](#) to HealthNet for two outreach case managers and one veteran case manager.

This work has created more than a dozen new frontline roles across our partner organizations. These street outreach workers, veteran specialists, and case managers provide one-on-one help navigating housing, healthcare, and benefits, getting an ID, dealing with family and legal issues, finding transportation and employment, and so much more.

It takes time to fill these roles. Outreach and case management require not only special skills, but also a certain personal passion for helping those in need.

And once the roles are filled, it takes time for that outreach to impact individual lives and even longer to ensure lasting success. New Hope for Families provides three years of follow-up support once someone has moved out. That's what it takes to truly solve homelessness. But that is the way lives get changed: by steady, committed, one-to-one, personalized help.

3. Coordinate Services Around Consistent Standards

As noted, the City does not run shelters or provide case management directly, though we do fund or help find funding for some programs. And as shown earlier, we invest considerably in prevention and housing. Another way in which the City can play an important role is to advocate for coordinated, consistent standards and practices in providing services. The City supports:

- Coordinated Entry
- Reunification
- Regional service boundaries

Coordinated Entry

Coordinated Entry offers a single, shared “front door” to our community’s homelessness response system. Rather than asking people in crisis to navigate a maze of programs, Coordinated Entry creates one consistent path to assistance. No matter which organization an individual approaches first, they receive one assessment and a coordinated plan to match them to the right resources, including permanent supportive housing, treatment, diversion, or whatever else they need.

Coordinated entry is the first step to case management and long-term success.

Outreach teams, day shelters, healthcare partners, and crisis responders can look up a person by name, use the shared assessment, and case-conference regularly with other providers. The result is an equitable, efficient, and accountable system that prioritizes

the most vulnerable, reduces duplication, sets shared expectations, and tracks progress through unified performance metrics.

Coordinated Entry does not create more beds or housing, however. When detox, step-down treatment, or permanent units are at capacity, Coordinated Entry organizes the line—but the line is still long. Coordinated Entry works best when it reflects our Continuum of Care’s intended scope. We’ll expand on Continuum of Care shortly.

Reunification

Those who are unhoused are best able to achieve stability where they have roots, family, and resources. When someone has no local connections, the humane choice is often reunification with their support system: a bus ticket, ride, or plane ticket home.

To understand why this is important, consider this example: a resident discharged from a neighboring county’s treatment facility was dropped off at Bloomington’s transit center with no money, no phone, and no connection to our community. Within hours, they had relapsed. When our Downtown Resource Officers intervened, they helped reunify that person with someone who knew them, cared about them, and wanted to take them in.

The City of Bloomington has committed to pursuing reunification when possible, covering transportation costs and working with providers to make sure those transitions are safe and supported. However, the absence of a coordinated local, regional, and even statewide framework makes this work more difficult than it should be.

Reunification often requires ad hoc arrangements between the City, nonprofits, and family members. Without consistent policies and shared accountability, people in crisis are left stranded and suffering, neighborhoods are overburdened, and nonprofits and caregivers are exhausted.

Because services work best in a person’s home community, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) organizes regional networks of services into Continuums of Care. This system is designed to connect individuals to housing and services where they already live. Bloomington is part of the Indiana Balance of State Continuum of Care Region 10, which covers Monroe County and nearby counties including Morgan, Lawrence, Owen, Greene, and Martin counties.

We acknowledge that Bloomington is one of the largest cities in rural southern Indiana, and we want to be a leader and a good neighbor. **But the reality is that lasting stability requires years of continuing care, follow up, and support.** That’s what it

takes to truly solve homelessness, and that's why staying close to home is so important for those in crisis.

Regional Service Boundaries

Our HUD region is much bigger than just Bloomington (see Figure 1) **and there are many here who need and want our help.**

Bloomington's reputation as a compassionate city, with robust services and a community that cares, is one reason displaced individuals are drawn or brought here. But that very strength creates strain and a false promise of hope. Individuals from outside our HUD region often arrive disconnected from family, hometown resources, and case management. They arrive seeking help, only to find that our system is already beyond capacity. Instead of finding safety, they end up on the streets because there are no open beds, case managers, or permanent housing slots available.

City outreach teams have documented a growing trend of high-need individuals being discharged to Bloomington from hospitals, treatment facilities, or correctional facilities outside our HUD region—and sometimes outside Indiana altogether.

Caring for our community means acknowledging our limits. We are already short on resources, already leaving too many on the streets. If we truly want to make a meaningful impact on individual lives and on our community as a whole, we must set clear boundaries that protect

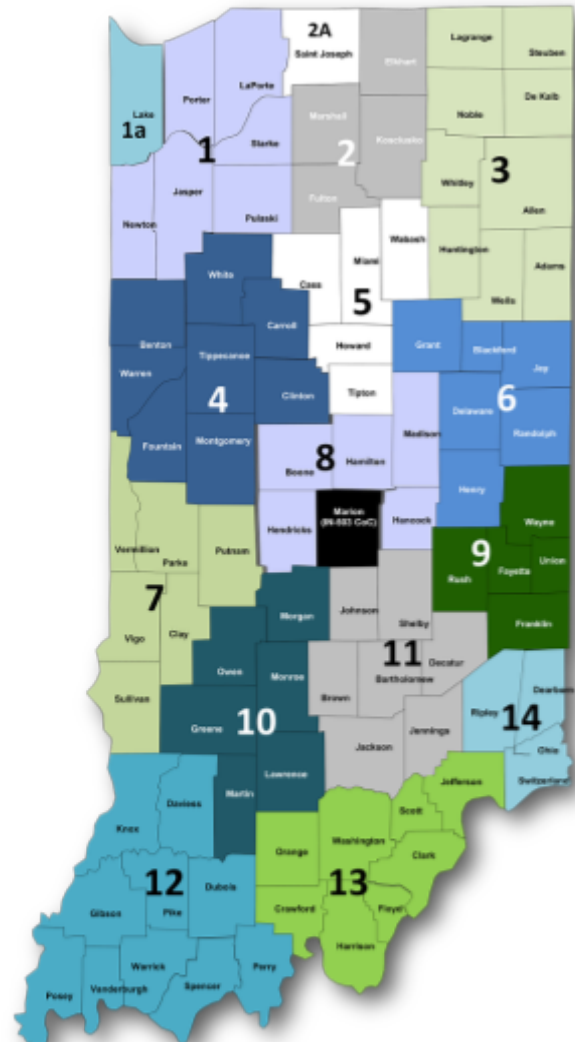


Figure 1. Bloomington is part of HUD Continuum of Care Region 10, a six-county service area. Many individuals arriving in Bloomington come from outside this region, often without local supports or case management.

continuity of care and ensure people receive help from providers best equipped to sustain it. Without limits, we are failing the very people we are working to support.

For this reason, **the City is calling for a temporary framework of regional service boundaries within our six-county HUD region.** When we offer help, it must be reliable, consistent, and actually available.

We value our partnership with Heading Home of South Central Indiana, the coalition charged with leading the regional homelessness response. Heading Home’s mission is to make homelessness in our region rare, brief, and non-repeating, by aligning the work of local governments, service providers, and housing partners around a shared strategy.

In 2024, Mayor Thomson convened a team to address unsheltered homelessness. As a result, Heading Home and its partners developed the Housing Action Plan: a coordinated roadmap identifying eight immediate priorities and two longer-term needs to strengthen the regional housing and homelessness system. Those priorities included:

- increasing permanent supportive housing,
- expanding shelter capacity,
- improving coordinated entry,
- implementing a temporary residency framework tied to our HUD service area,
- enacting a temporary moratorium on serving those from outside our region, and
- building stronger prevention tools across agencies.

The plan was designed to serve as a shared framework for accountability and to ensure that every partner—from City and County governments to nonprofits and health systems—would operate toward the same measurable goals.

In 2025, the regional service boundary was removed from the plan, and an annual survey of those experiencing homelessness was edited to remove a question asking where they came from. We respectfully disagree with those decisions. We understand that implementation would require tackling both pragmatic and emotional issues. It’s not easy to determine where someone is from if they lack an ID, have been moving between communities, or don’t want to share that information. It’s also not easy to communicate that someone is not eligible for extended services. But we already know we don’t have enough resources for every Hoosier, much less those from other states.

Regional service boundaries are not:

- A test of whether someone “belongs” in Bloomington or was born and raised here

- A barrier to immediate food, shelter, or reunification help
- A refusal of care based on identity, background, or circumstance

Regional service boundaries are:

- A temporary framework that keeps scarce beds, case-management slots, and housing resources available for people whose providers are in HUD Region 10
- A way to guarantee that long-term case management and housing support are prioritized for people from our HUD region, where continuity of care can be maintained
- A safeguard to ensure that help offered is real, consistent, and actually available

In the original plan, those from outside our region would have 10 days to get access to emergency food and shelter while case managers work to reunify. We still believe in that plan. We continue to work with our partners to find philosophical and practical common ground and solutions.

We are also continuing to tell other communities, municipalities, jurisdictions, and criminal justice organizations: **stop transferring individuals to Bloomington** without a local connection or follow-up plan. It is not helpful to take someone out of their community and drop them off where they have no meaningful personal support systems. **Each agency and municipality must take responsibility for their community members in crisis.** While these transfers may be made with good intentions, the result is that our city shoulders the costs and consequences, and the human beings we want to help are left isolated and without hope.

4. Set and Follow Humane Protocols

The sad reality is that given our limited resources and options, too many people are still living outdoors in encampments, and that creates risks for them and for our community. We hear regularly from residents and businesses who have so much compassion for their unhoused neighbors and feel conflicted about reaching out for help when a small, quiet camp suddenly grows larger and more unpredictable. **A situation that feels safe one day can become unsafe overnight.**

When all other options are exhausted, the City follows clear and humane protocols for managing encampments. In 2024, the Thomson administration formalized a best

practices encampment-response policy to bring care to such difficult processes. We close encampments only when there are immediate risks, such as fire hazards, violent activity, or severe public health concerns.

Every closure is coordinated with outreach partners so that people receive notice, access to help, and clear information about available shelters and resources. Encampments on public property receive a 30-day notice before closure, except in cases of immediate danger. During that period, City staff and service providers make repeated contact with residents and create individualized plans to offer solutions such as shelter, reunification, and transportation assistance. On private property, the City coordinates with landowners to follow a similar, humane process whenever possible.

Personal belongings are handled with care and respect. The possessions of individuals in an encampment are collected and stored securely for 30 days, with service providers present to help residents identify, pack, and retrieve their items. Wet, contaminated, perishable, or unsafe items can not be stored, and no more than one 96-gallon container is kept per person.

These policies protect both individuals and the broader community. They ensure that people experiencing homelessness are treated with dignity and that public spaces remain safe, sanitary, and usable. This work is never easy, but the City's guiding philosophy remains constant: leading with compassion does not mean ignoring danger.

Addressing Short-Term Impacts

What the City does to help businesses, neighborhoods, and the community, including coordinating cleanups, providing business assistance, deploying ambassador teams, and maintaining predictable, well-managed corridors

Enduring change doesn't happen overnight. As we work toward our long-term goals, **the City also continues to tackle visible symptoms and short-term impacts**. Disruptive behaviors, vandalism, aggressive panhandling, open drug selling, public intoxication, and human waste have a real impact on how downtown, parks, and neighborhoods look and feel. Families decide whether to picnic at the park or shop downtown based on those experiences. Business owners weigh whether to expand, relocate, or invest. Visitors evaluate whether to return.

These are not just cosmetic problems. We must protect Bloomington's quality of life, our public health, and our economic health. Keeping pace with the daily impacts takes considerable investment of City funds and staff time. Behind the scenes, City departments huddle constantly to trade notes, assign follow-up, and track requests, response times, and repeat locations so that we can shift resources quickly to where they're needed most.

1. Protect Public Health

Protecting public health is one of the City's most important responsibilities.

Needles, human waste, and trash that attracts insects and vermin are not just unsightly. These conditions create real risks for the community and place a daily burden on the teams who respond. This section outlines our on-the-ground efforts to maintain public spaces and the people-centered practices that guide that work.

Parks, trails, and public spaces

Every morning, and late into many evenings, City crews are out working to address immediate health and safety risks. Last year, City staff trained in OSHA-compliant sharps handling collected over 7,000+ discarded needles, alongside regular biohazard clean-ups.

Parks and Recreation and Public Works run hot-spot routes and same-day callouts to remove litter, abate graffiti, and make sure right-of-ways, bus stops, and trails are maintained. Additionally, the City's Downtown Clean-up Specialist, a dedicated role that delivers quick turnaround help to businesses, ensures sidewalks stay passable.

The City also is tasked with cleaning up abandoned encampments in public spaces. Sometimes encampments are in inaccessible areas, making removing dumpster loads of trash very difficult. Cleaning any former encampment is very expensive, costing the City tens of thousands of dollars or even a hundred thousand dollars for public spaces. For private property owners, who must pay out of pocket to clean encampments (or risk a return), these are extraordinary costs. At times, an owner has let a few people camp for a while, only to have the camp grow beyond expectations—and then faces a very costly clean up.

This is hands-on work. City staff regularly encounter human crises and hazardous conditions. It is physically strenuous and deeply emotionally taxing, and they keep showing up with professionalism and care because safe, usable public space is part of how we look after one another.

Restrooms

Access to restrooms is a basic public-health need, but providing them in busy public spaces is far more complex than installing a door and keeping lights on.

High-use areas require constant cleaning and repair. Because restroom access shapes how people experience downtown, the City has had to adapt practical, sustainable approaches.

We're often asked why the City doesn't have more public bathrooms downtown. It has been our experience that stand-alone facilities face constant vandalism and maintenance challenges. The 4th Street Parking Garage restrooms, for example, were repeatedly damaged and required repairs costing over \$150,000. Options such as a Portland Loo, which many residents have learned about and suggest we try, cost over \$250,000 to install just one—and it's recommended to have five staff rotating to clean it multiple times a day.

In an effort to meet the ongoing need for restroom options for human dignity, public health, and economic vitality, the City introduced a practical short-term solution. The port-a-let at Seminary Park may not win design awards, but it has helped these problems. The port-a-let requires daily cleaning, and in the few months of the pilot period, City staff regularly encountered used needles from external harm-reduction

programs, personal belongings obstructing drains and causing overflow, and hateful messages. The cumulative impact on staff morale was significant, and the City has determined that we must pay to outsource that work in order to maintain public health as well as staff. **Daily cleaning of a single port-a-let will cost \$44,000 in 2025.** There are no easy solutions.

Win-win solutions

Brighten Bloomington is a great success story for our city. Formerly known as Brighten B-Town, this program is a City partnership with Centerstone Job Placement that provides supportive employment for residents engaged in recovery or mental-health treatment. Participants work side-by-side with City crews year-round, earning income and job references while caring for shared public spaces. Teams move in zone-based waves through downtown and core neighborhoods, power-washing sidewalks, clearing debris, refreshing tree plots, and tackling general maintenance. The result is block-by-block improvements and a dignified pathway back into the workforce.

Since its launch, **Brighten Bloomington has employed 71 participants who were experiencing homelessness or living in transitional housing or treatment programs when they joined. Every one of those individuals has since been successfully housed.** In 2025 alone, two participants transitioned to full-time factory jobs, one accepted a full-time position with the City, and another earned professional certification through Centerstone.

2. Support Economic Health

A stable local economy depends on an environment that feels predictable and welcoming. Homelessness intersects with economic life in complex ways. This section details the City's direct investments and collaborative efforts to preserve the vitality of our core commercial areas while long-term housing and treatment solutions take shape.

Business grants

Through the Economic and Sustainable Development department (ESD), the City has directed over \$155,000 toward safety, cleanliness, and improvement grants, helping local businesses strengthen security, upgrade facilities, and sustain a clean, welcoming environment amid the impacts of homelessness.

Collaborative corridor management

Kirkwood Avenue is one of Bloomington's most active community corridors, drawing residents, students, and visitors. From April through November of 2025, most of Kirkwood was closed to vehicle traffic—a seasonal program launched during the pandemic to allow expanded outdoor seating in an era of social distancing.

The continued summer closure has had mixed responses and mixed results. According to national experts at Retail Strategies—an agency currently working with Downtown Bloomington Inc. and ESD—street closures without strong, coordinated programming, storefront-access management, and daily stewardship can dampen retail performance, reduce purposeful foot traffic, and invite off-purpose activity.

To keep Kirkwood safe and welcoming, the City has adopted a straightforward approach: **begin with education, then enforce everything enforceable**. In summer and fall of 2025, this has meant a noticeable increase in presence and hourly foot patrol from Bloomington Police, with assistance from Indiana University Police near campus. Looking ahead, we are evaluating seasonal closure practices to ensure any street use advances both public life and a healthy main-street economy. A running log of concerns from officers and businesses helps identify patterns and target resources where they are most needed.

Expanded outreach and security

Using ARPA funds, the City contracted additional professional security to have a presence targeted in parks, parking garages, and other civic facilities. These security officers patrol on foot and bike during peak evening and weekend hours, deter vandalism and property damage, and operate on an observe-and-report model—coordinating with the Bloomington Police Department when appropriate. This adds steady eyes on the street without pulling sworn officers from priority calls.

We also employ After-Hour Ambassadors. Ambassadors are trained City staff who work evenings and weekends downtown. They provide after-hours on-site points of contact, help de-escalate issues, and connect residents, businesses, and unhoused individuals to resources, coordinating with police as needed.

These steps do not “solve” homelessness, but they reduce immediate risks, increase perceived safety, and buy time for housing, treatment, and economic strategies to impact root causes.

Bolstering Public Safety

Why we can't arrest our way out of homelessness, and how the City is working to create a layered approach to public safety with alternative crisis response partnerships and a well-trained, fully staffed, modern police force

Public safety and community well-being are interdependent. A healthy public safety system recognizes that not every problem is a crime, and not every solution is enforcement, prioritizing sworn officers to respond to dangerous, urgent situations and crime. The Thomson administration is committed to building safety from both directions: restoring police capacity while expanding care networks. The City is working on multiple fronts to:

1. Support Alternative Response
2. Restore Police Capacity

1. Support Alternative Response

Constituents sometimes express frustration and ask, “Why don’t you just arrest people for ‘vagrancy’?” **We can’t arrest our way out of homelessness.**

First, it’s important to understand that **many behaviors the community finds upsetting are not crimes**, and those behaviors are better handled by outreach or crisis professionals than by police. Non-criminal behaviors include someone talking to themselves loudly, pushing a cart of belongings, sleeping on a bench, panhandling, or appearing intoxicated or in withdrawal.

Some acts are technically illegal but difficult to enforce in practice. For example, an officer must witness public urination to issue a citation—something that rarely occurs in real time. Even when enforcement is possible, our County’s prisoner release program and limited jail space mean that arrests for minor crimes create a revolving door. The person is often back on the street the same day—but now with a criminal record. An arrest record creates obstacles to getting out of homelessness and into housing and employment. It defeats our long-term goals.

That is why we reserve arrests for serious crimes and focus on tools that lead to real solutions—housing, treatment, and case management, not citations or jail time.

Criminalizing poverty only deepens it. In Monroe County, 75–80% of jail bookings on any given day involve individuals with mental illness or substance use disorders, according to Monroe County's Criminal Justice and Incarceration Study.

We remain committed to making arrests for serious crimes. Whenever anyone experiences assault, intimidation, theft, drug dealing, vandalism, or trespassing, they should immediately call 911. Police continue to respond to both crimes and crises. But when behavior is disruptive rather than dangerous—or when the primary driver is mental health or substance use—Stride is the right first call.

Stride Crisis Response

Stride is Bloomington's 24/7 mobile crisis response team. The team includes trained mental health professionals who work with medical professionals. They respond to mental health, substance use, and behavioral crises in real time. Stride can meet people where they are—whether that's on a sidewalk, in a park, or at a business—and connect them to the support they need.

Stride's role is simple but transformative: it offers a compassionate, professional, trained, non-police response to distress. In many cases, Stride prevents situations from escalating into emergencies, reduces unnecessary ER visits and arrests, and builds trust with residents who may fear or avoid traditional systems of authority. It also frees sworn officers to focus on crime.

Mayor Thomson has taken a leading role in ensuring Stride's continued visibility, securing Cook Medical's partnership to expand public awareness through a coordinated marketing campaign. We deeply appreciate Cook's commitment to our community and their team's expert support in elevating this life-saving resource. While the City does not operate Stride directly, our role is one of leadership—convening partners, setting shared expectations, and helping direct community resources where they make the greatest impact.

The City also partners closely with nonprofits and service providers outside of law enforcement to address non-criminal situations safely and compassionately.

Community-based policing deters crime, while Stride and our outreach partners address the root causes—crisis, trauma, and unmet needs. Together, they form a more complete public safety system.

Bottom line: **Call Stride (1-866-StrideTeam) when it's distress, and call 911 when it's danger.**

Internal Alternative Response

The City has also built a layered response system within our employees that balances enforcement with care and expands the tools available to respond to homelessness and public disorder:

- **Downtown Resource Officers (DROs)** are sworn police officers who balance safety with service connections. They know many unhoused individuals by name and serve as a trusted bridge between enforcement and care. DROs are often the first point of contact when issues arise in our community. They balance accountability (addressing unsafe behavior) with compassion (offering pathways to help).
- **BPD social workers and street outreach** are civilians who collaborate with non-City outreach teams to build relationships, follow up after incidents, and connect individuals to long-term supports like housing and treatment centers.
- **Coordinated coverage after hours** extends safety in the evenings and on weekends. Trained City staff—including the After Hours Ambassadors mentioned earlier—help de-escalate issues, share real-time information with police and outreach partners, and ensure continuity of care outside traditional service hours.
- **Mobile Integrated Health (MIH)** is a team working under the Bloomington Fire Department composed of Community EMTs. They strive to improve quality of life for the residents by visiting them at their homes to connect them with care and resources. The MIH team works to bridge gaps in healthcare and services to help Bloomingtonians recover, age in place, and/or improve quality of life.

Together, these roles expand the City's capacity to respond to the full spectrum of public safety and social need—ensuring that each situation receives the right response, at the right time, from the right team.

2. Restore Police Capacity

While we can't enforce our way out of homelessness, a well-trained, fully staffed police department creates the capacity to patrol proactively, build relationships, and be part of the solution. When people see and know their local officers, trust and safety increase.

We inherited a police force in January 2024 with 85 sworn police officers—fewer than the 92 officers the City had in 2011. For the last five years, the Bloomington Police Department (BPD) has operated at a 15–20% officer shortage. This shortage has real consequences for our city and for the officers working double shifts to ensure safety. That is why **one of our most critical commitments is restoring BPD staffing to its authorized strength of 105 officers.**

The erosion of capacity did not happen overnight. **Prior to our administration, officer departures outpaced recruitment, leaving the department struggling to maintain consistent coverage.** The effects have been threefold:

- **Reduced preventative response.** A reduced police force has to focus its energies on emergencies, resulting in fewer opportunities and lower capacity to build relationships and intervene early.
- **Higher operating and human costs.** An understaffed force results in mandatory overtime to ensure every shift has enough officers. This creates financial burdens for the City—and unacceptable mental health and safety burdens for officers.
- **Delayed community safety goals.** Without enough officers, community policing, problem-solving patrols, and engagement activities all take a back seat to emergency response. Prevention is an essential piece of a progressive policing strategy. We recognize that not every community member feels safe around police, but a reduced force has not increased perceptions of safety.

Progress is already visible. In June 2025, BPD welcomed 11 new sworn officers—the largest single group in at least 35 years. Of those, six were already certified to serve in Indiana, accelerating their deployment, and one veteran officer with over 20 years of prior service came out of retirement to rejoin the force. We still have a ways to go. Not every hiree will make it through training. Older officers will retire, and injured officers reduce the on-street numbers—but we are making progress.

We understand that experiences with law enforcement can feel different for everyone. **Restoring staffing gives us the bandwidth to do policing differently—with more time to listen, connect, and problem-solve—not just respond or enforce.**

Even while operating under a staffing shortage, BPD has carried out targeted operations to preserve public safety. In July 2025, officers conducted a planned operation to disrupt predatory drug dealing in Seminary Park. Since then, detectives have made additional significant arrests, including a case in late September 2025, in

which the Special Investigations Unit seized nearly eight pounds of crystal meth along with cocaine, ecstasy, marijuana, firearms, and approximately \$16,000 in cash.

These arrests do not “solve” homelessness—but they do protect vulnerable individuals from being exploited and send a clear message that criminal behavior, especially behavior that targets our most vulnerable residents, will not be tolerated. Strategic, coordinated enforcement, creates space for outreach workers, case managers, and service providers to succeed.

Adequate police headquarters

Another step in rebuilding our police department to its intended levels is ensuring they have adequate facilities. The current headquarters was built in the 1960s and does not serve officers or the community effectively. Just steps from Hopewell, the City is preparing to repurpose the former Bloomington Convalescent Center at 714 South Rogers into the new Bloomington Police Department headquarters. This long-term investment would situate community safety in the same corridor where Bloomington is concentrating its most ambitious housing and economic development efforts. This space offers:

- Central location with access to major roadways for rapid dispatch
- Strong steel-and-concrete structure adaptable to modern policing needs
- Proximity to public transit and service agencies already active in the area
- Adequate space for the next 50 years
- Additional space for possible co-location of supportive services
- Broad support from police leadership and labor unions

Collectively, these efforts strengthen Bloomington’s capacity to respond with care, act with integrity, and serve with openness—creating the conditions for a stronger, more connected city.

Co-Creating Solutions

Faith, nonprofit, business, and resident partnerships working with the City toward shared accountability and better outcomes.

“Co-Creators with Our Community” is one of the Thomson Administration’s core values. It means that the City listens, convenes, and builds alongside residents, nonprofits, businesses, faith partners, and other jurisdictions to find solutions that fit Bloomington.

In practice, co-creation means bringing people into the process early—before decisions are made—and staying engaged after implementation. Our approach is iterative, practical and grounded in lived experience.

1. Community Engagement

The City continues to bring together voices that see challenges from different vantage points and turn those insights into coordinated action. These conversations aren’t always easy. People express frustration. Partners sometimes disagree on root causes or solutions. We can’t always provide the support that’s requested, but we *can* always listen, learn, and act where we can.

- **Nonprofit listening sessions.** Conversations with frontline agencies give practitioners space to voice challenges and identify emerging gaps. **These sessions have directly informed City policy, from developing humane encampment protocols and identifying the need for expanded case management, to convening partners to shape Heading Home’s Housing Action Plan.** This ongoing feedback loop has helped align City investments with real-time community needs so that local expertise continues to shape system-wide improvements.
- **Business and resident input.** Ongoing engagement with business owners and residents has shaped daily operations—from community safety presence to the timing and location of cleanups. The Mayor’s Office has also prioritized meeting directly with residents experiencing homelessness, including leaders within

encampments and residents of permanent supportive housing, to better understand lived experiences and barriers. This work is supported by the Bloomington Police Department's Downtown Resource Officers (DROs), whose role includes building those relationships with care and consistency. **A clear example of input driving decisions came from business owners near Seminary Park, who expressed concerns about sanitation and public health impacts in the area.** That is the origin story of the port-a-let, which was an immediate, practical fix for nearby storefronts and passerbys.

- **Faith community partnerships.** Quarterly meetings with faith leaders have created a consistent forum for sharing what congregations are witnessing on the ground. These gatherings have aligned volunteer efforts, directed donations toward the highest-need areas, and built direct connections between spiritual leaders, City staff, and service providers.
- **Visible community care.** Bloomington's Downtown Community Cleanups, held each spring and fall, have each drawn more than 90 volunteers in 2025. These events demonstrate the civic pride and collective stewardship that define our city: neighbors coming together to care for shared spaces and one another.
- **Peer-city and state collaboration.** Convened by the Thomson administration, roundtables with mayors across Indiana have elevated best practices, shared lessons, and built momentum for policy changes that require state and federal partnership. The City also works closely with our legislative representatives to communicate local needs and advocate for statehouse action. **Housing, mental health, and public safety aren't partisan issues; they're community imperatives.**

2. Internal Coordination and Shared Accountability

This year, the City appointed its first-ever Homelessness Response Coordinator—a dedicated role focused exclusively on homelessness response. This position provides daily accountability across departments, improves communication with service providers, and gives residents a clear point of contact for concerns.

But homelessness is not confined to one department—it's a Citywide issue that intersects with nearly every function of local government. The City employs hundreds of people whose work connects to homelessness in some way.

- **The Office of the Mayor** coordinates citywide strategy and partnerships and translates daily realities from the field into long-term policy. The Office also operates under high public expectation—balancing fiscal limits and the boundaries of municipal authority. Residents expect visible results, often within systems that move slowly or depend on partners outside the City’s control.
- **Legal** advises on enforcement, liability, and compliance to help the City uphold empathy and legal responsibility.
- **Public Works and Parks and Recreation** carry out some of the City’s most demanding, misunderstood work. Their responsibilities bring them into daily contact with the most visible impacts of homelessness. Public Works leads the physical response—crews remove debris and biohazards from encampments, repair damaged infrastructure, and restore public rights-of-way affected by prolonged human activity. Parks and Recreation manages the parks, greenway, and facilities that serve both recreational and essential purposes for residents, visitors, and individuals without housing. Both departments operate at the intersection of public space, public health, and social needs.
- **Engineering and Planning & Transportation** encounter the physical impacts of homelessness daily—maintaining infrastructure and responding to how public spaces are designed and used.
- **Economic and Sustainable Development** stabilizes the conditions that allow neighborhoods, small businesses, and local workers to stay resilient amid the impacts of homelessness. The department aligns redevelopment efforts, business needs, and long-term housing goals so Bloomington’s economy can grow in step with public safety and social-service strategies. More on this work shortly.
- **Community and Family Resources** leads partnerships to prevent homelessness and strengthen the social safety net. This department also supports public access to naran and de-escalation training for residents, businesses, and frontline workers to increase community safety and awareness.
- **ITS and the Controller’s Office** manage the data, funding, and accountability that make coordinated response possible.

- **Human Resources** supports City employees who are directly impacted by the emotional and physical demands of homelessness response by offering confidential mental health and support resources.

The City of Bloomington plays a critical role in responding to homelessness, but our capacity and authority are finite. Accountability must be reciprocal. The City cannot and should not carry the full weight of responsibilities that belong to county, state, federal, or nonprofit partners—especially when those partners accept public funds or have statutory mandates to deliver essential services. **We rely on the infrastructure and expertise of service providers, the accountability of the justice system, and the engagement of county, state, federal, and nonprofit partners to build a system that works as intended.** The broader work that supports the core responsibilities for addressing homelessness—behavioral health care, long-term housing, and case management—do not fall within local government. Those functions belong to our partners. But together, we each carry part of the solution.

Investing in Economic Development

How housing supply, workforce growth, and investment in key projects create economic conditions where all can prosper

Economic development is the engine that powers every goal in this report, which, in short, is better quality of life for everyone. In practical terms, that means more Bloomington residents are in good-paying, stable jobs; stronger local businesses; and a tax base healthy enough to fund housing, public safety, and services over the longterm. The City's strategy focuses on strengthening the foundations that sustain community vitality: innovation, life sciences, hospitality, major capital projects, and a cohesive city identity. We will do this by:

- Supporting the City's efforts in creating housing units
- Doubling down on investments in the economy of the future
- Reinvesting in the City's creative economy
- Expanding the convention center
- Developing Hopewell
- Building a shared sense of place

Housing is the foundation of economic development. It anchors families, attracts workers, and supports businesses.

If the economy expands, then household incomes rise and eviction risk falls. If storefronts are active and corridors are well-used, then public spaces are safer and outreach is easier. And local revenues grow—through the Local Income Tax (LIT), property taxes, and food and beverage taxes—the City can reinvest those dollars directly back into the community to fund housing, infrastructure, parks, police, fire, and public health.

The City does not directly set most tax rates—state law and county formulas determine those—but we can influence the size and strength of the local economy. By broadening the tax base through housing supply, wage growth, and job creation, Bloomington can sustain services and investments without increasing the burden on individual taxpayers.

The inverse is also true: when the economy stalls, services strain; when services strain, housing instability grows; and when instability grows, neighborhoods and small businesses feel it first. That feedback loop works in both directions. Our charge is to keep the flywheel turning in the right direction. **Build an economy that funds housing, and then build housing that sustains the economy.**

Bloomington’s economic future rises or falls on two everyday experiences residents care about most:

- Can I afford to live here?
- Do I feel safe?

Our economic development strategy is built to answer yes to both.

The City does not directly build homes or run shelter programs, addiction treatment, or outreach services. As outlined in this report, our role is to generate the policy, infrastructure, and investment conditions where those systems can function while keeping our partners true to their commitments. **Put simply: we grow and steward the resources that our partners use to deliver housing, healthcare, and human services.** Our economic development playbook is built to produce three outcomes you’ll be able to see and measure:

- A stronger, growing workforce
- Higher wages and household earnings
- A more resilient and diversified economic core

We pursue those outcomes by growing key industries and places—expanding tech and life sciences in the Trades District, investing in arts and culture, and adding housing in the locations where it supports jobs and daily life.

1. Invest in People and Place

Bloomington's most visible challenges—and greatest opportunities—are concentrated in the corridor that stretches across South Rogers and South Walnut, just south of 3rd Street and across the Hopewell redevelopment area. This is where housing, infrastructure, and business investment converge to shape the city's future.

The Convention Center expansion, Hopewell Neighborhood, and the proposed relocation of Police Headquarters all sit within this same district. **Locating these projects together is intentional: it shortens the distance between where people live, where they work, and where they access safety and support.** Each investment strengthens the city's economic base, supports workforce housing near employment centers, and reinforces Bloomington's appeal as a destination for residents, visitors, and businesses alike.

2. Expand the Convention Center

The Convention Center expansion is projected to bring \$9 million in new external spending into Bloomington's economy each year. It is also expected to create roughly 500 new jobs in hospitality and related industries, growing the local tax base and supporting essential City services. **Those revenues help fund the very services this report describes—from street maintenance and cleanups to parks, transit, and public safety.**

The Convention Center also helps Bloomington weather the seasonal ebb and flow of our economy. When Indiana University is out of session in the summer, many local businesses face a slowdown as the student population thins and visitor traffic drops. Expanded convention capacity fills that gap, bringing in steady streams of visitors, conferences, and events during the months when Bloomington most needs them, reducing the summer slump.

However, the Convention Center's impact cannot only be measured in dollars. Activity is one of the most powerful tools for revitalizing public spaces. The steady presence of residents, visitors, and workers provides predictable, positive activity. It also strengthens the case for nearby investment—neighborhood-serving retail, transit, and dining—creating a contiguous district of well-used, well-managed, safe public life.

3. Develop Hopewell

Earlier in this report, we introduced the Hopewell Neighborhood as a central part of solving the housing crunch. After the former Bloomington Hospital relocated, the site left a major gap in the city's core—one that the City is now turning into an opportunity for renewal. By transforming a currently underused district into a mixed-income neighborhood that will remain accessible in the long term, Hopewell will bring people, jobs, and services back into the city's core.

The steady presence of people living, working, and gathering sets a baseline for safety, commerce, and care. In economic terms, Hopewell adds hundreds of households within walking distance of jobs, retail, and transit—supporting small businesses, reducing transportation costs for residents, and lowering barriers to employment. Hopewell is housing *and* it's a blueprint for how redevelopment serves economic, social, and environmental goals simultaneously.

4. Build a Shared Sense of Place

In 2016, the [City of Bloomington's Wage Growth Task Force](#) formally recommended that Bloomington develop a unified brand: a clear, coordinated way to communicate who we are as a city and why people choose to live, work, and invest here. That recommendation sat dormant for nearly a decade. Without a shared identity, Bloomington has missed opportunities to distinguish itself in a crowded landscape of cities competing for talent, visitors, and job creation.

Branding work is not about a logo or slogan. It's about how a community understands itself and expresses that identity—through design, signage, digital presence, and the everyday experience of moving through our city. A city brand functions as connective tissue: it helps residents feel rooted, visitors orient, and employers and institutions speak with one voice about what makes Bloomington special. When the whole city tells one clear story and is easy to navigate, economic development performs better.

Earlier this year, the City launched a citywide branding and wayfinding initiative to clarify what makes Bloomington **distinct, cohesive, and easy to navigate. When a city presents one clear, visible, and authentic story, that clarity builds confidence—visitors stay longer, and businesses reinvest because they see stability and shared direction.**

Bloomington is already a city of ideas and heart. With a clear identity and aligned action, we can translate those values into tangible outcomes—stronger corridors, more accessible housing, and public spaces that work for everyone. This shared language of place helps ensure that every investment adds to a connected, welcoming, and thriving Bloomington.

Looking Ahead

Progress is, by nature, long-term. It shows up incrementally, through patterns of investments, new partnerships, and confidence that keeps people here: living, hiring, and building. Here's what success looks like near and longer term.

Foundation & Follow-Through

- **More case managers and outreach workers in the seat**, including the new positions funded through City and other philanthropic partnerships and **expanded reunification efforts**.
- **Shared standards and better handoffs across the care spectrum**—so no one falls through the cracks.
- **Faster turnaround for housing placement** through tighter coordination between Stride, Downtown Resource Officers (DROs), and service providers.
- **Early permitting fixes**—standardized checklists, one point-of-contact, and fast-track review for code-compliant small infill.
- **Police staffing pipeline restored**, with open postings to backfill towards the full 105 authorized officers.

Operational Outcomes

- **More people moving from shelter to permanent housing**.
- **Visible construction at Hopewell and a simplified development process** with clearer rules, faster approvals, and more locally built modestly priced homes.
- **Increased business confidence downtown and in key corridors** as cleanup, safety, and outreach stabilize shared spaces.

Structural Change and Sustainability

- **Decrease in unsheltered homelessness** verified through the annual Point-in-Time Count.
- **Cleaner, safer public corridors** with fewer vacant or blighted properties.

- **Reduced dependence on temporary or ARPA funding** as long-term operating models take effect.
- **Coordinated Continuum of Care** using shared data, aligned goals, and joint accountability among service providers, first responders, and regional partners.
- **Improved housing affordability, built faster** through pre-approved designs, new affordable units, and more small- and mid-scale projects built by local developers.

What You Can Do Right Now

Respond

- **Use the right responder.** Stride for distress (1-866-StrideTeam), call 911 for danger or criminal activity.
- **Report health or safety concerns.** Submit issues like encampments, debris, or graffiti through UReport at bloomington.in.gov/ureport or contact the City's Homelessness Response Coordinator, Brian Giffen, at brian.giffen@bloomington.in.gov or 812-349-3406.
- **Alert the Monroe County Health Department of improperly discarded needles.** If you see a syringe in a public space, contact the Health Department at 812-349-2543. Leave your name, phone number, and the exact location.
- **Share patterns.** If you notice recurring issues in the same area, contact the Office of the Mayor at mayor@bloomington.in.gov or 812-349-3406.

Learn

- **Schedule a free de-escalation or Narcan training.** The City offers training for individuals, businesses, and organizations. Email cfrd@bloomington.in.gov to request a session, or call 812-349-3430.
- **Stay informed and weigh in.** Follow City updates on homelessness response, housing, and public safety initiatives through bloomington.in.gov or the City's official social media channels and participate in public engagement sessions.

Support

- **Get help early.** If you're struggling with housing costs, reach out to local prevention resources (eviction prevention, deposit assistance, emergency home repair), visit [HelpingBloomingtonMonroe](https://helpingbloomingtonmonroe.org), or dial 211 to get connected.
- **Support the frontline.** Give, volunteer, or partner with nonprofits doing the daily work by checking out the [City of Bloomington's Volunteer Network](https://cityofbloomington.org/volunteer).
- **If you are a landlord, consider accepting housing vouchers or setting aside a unit for rapid rehousing** to help individuals exit homelessness faster.



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