

City of Bloomington
Safety, Civility and Justice Task Force

Final Report

On August 10, 2016, Mayor John Hamilton introduced a new City initiative to address downtown safety and civility issues, noting that “our downtown is sometimes not as safe and civil a place as we would like it to be.” Business owners and employees, their patrons and other members of the public visiting Bloomington’s downtown expressed concerns regarding unwelcome behaviors making them feel unsafe. There were growing concerns from many of Bloomington’s residents who are experiencing homelessness or living in poverty for their personal safety because of unwelcome behaviors from others, especially inebriated students who patronize downtown bars or others people living on the streets. Last but not least, the health and safety of City staff who maintain our parks and public areas and retail managers responsible for keeping their property maintained are at risk because of the frequency at which human waste and syringes (used and unused) are being found on the various properties. These matters exist in the larger contexts of poverty, homelessness, drug dependency and mental illness.

As a first step in this initiative, cameras were installed in Seminary and Peoples Parks and a public information campaign was created to encourage residents who wanted to help those in need to contribute to social service agencies rather than giving directly on the street. The cameras gave law enforcement another tool to help deter negative behaviors in the parks. The public information campaign involved street signs which include a web address linking potential donors to a page providing information and a direct donation link to 12 local agencies providing direct services to some of our community’s most vulnerable residents.

Next, Mayor Hamilton enlisted the Community Justice and Mediation Center (CJAM) to ensure that members of the community were able to voice their perceptions, realities, fears and hopes for safety in the downtown. CJAM developed and implemented a Deliberative Dialogue process which engaged approximately 217 Bloomington residents in conversations through focus groups, stakeholder dialogue and public deliberation. Included among the 217 participants were individuals who had or were experiencing homelessness or participating in panhandling; representatives from advocacy and community organizations; business owners/managers; local government officials; representatives from the justice system; service organizations and downtown patrons.

The Safety, Civility and Justice Task Force was formed prior to the conclusion of the CJAM process, with most members participating in one or more of the dialogue groups. The purpose of the Task Force was to make recommendations to the Mayor for steps to improve safety and civility in Downtown Bloomington based upon receiving and studying

the results of the CJAM process, other best practices and relevant research, and to take additional public input. This was done against the backdrop of concern for assuring justice for all those affected. The Safety, Civility and Justice Task Force, chaired by William J. Beggs, held its first meeting on February 16, 2017. Utilizing the findings from the CJAM Downtown, Safety, Civility and Justice Project, information gathered by a SPEA V600 Capstone class, the examination of best practices from cities like Boulder, CO, Ann Arbor, MI, Louisville, KY, Portland, OR, Eugene, OR, San Francisco, CA, Austin, TX and Albuquerque, NM and additional research, the Task Force examined the benefits and liabilities of several options before coming to its final recommendations.

The Task Force was not charged with making recommendations for the elimination of homelessness, mental illness, poverty, drug addiction or other community and societal problems and challenges, although the Task Force acknowledges the oftentimes close relationship between those issues and safety, civility and justice in Downtown Bloomington.

The Task Force focused on appropriate vs. inappropriate behaviors regardless of an individual's housing or employment status, level of income or education.

The system of service provision in Bloomington has been functional until an inexplicable population growth of persons experiencing homelessness over the past few years, and increasing cases of opioid dependency and mental illness. This indicates the system is not necessarily broken but that it is overwhelmed by sheer numbers. Adding to this, resources have not increased at a rate to keep pace with the increased challenges faced by the community. As these problems have increased, behaviors of downtown users have also evolved so as to cause feelings of being unsafe and uncivil downtown.

In April, 2017, as the weather began to turn warmer and traffic along the Kirkwood corridor increased, the Task Force offered initial recommendations to the administration involving four priority areas, anticipating that implementation of these recommendations as a proactive measure to address the challenges that come with warmer weather.

Initial Recommendations

A. Increase “official” presence along Kirkwood and in the downtown area

1. Increasing Bloomington Police Department (BPD), Downtown Resource Officer (DRO) and parking enforcement presence during the day.
2. Hiring IU part-time officers by BPD for added presence at times designated by BPD.
3. Continue to obtain process and cost information on “Block by Block” safety, cleaning, hospitality and outreach services and similar programs. Consider development of a local homegrown Ambassador program in the future.

B. Enforcement

1. Bloomington Police Department and the Indiana Excise Police work together to monitor bars and other establishments serving and selling alcohol for over pouring, sales to minors, sales to those already intoxicated.

2. The Mayor and/or his representatives continue direct communication between the City and owners of establishments serving and selling alcohol to communicate expectations.

C. Increase programming in People's Park

1. Waive fees for park usage by non-profits and student groups who desire to hold events in the park and for food cart vendors during events.

D. Sanitation

1. Develop a jobs program with City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department to hire local non-profit agency clients to help clean parks/weed planters, etc. Consider supplementing costs incurred by the agency for this program on an as needed basis.

E. Other

1. Mayor Hamilton convene meetings with representatives from the Department of Corrections, mayors from surrounding counties, and perhaps others to discuss the impact their practices are having on Bloomington. Additionally, it is recommended that the Mayor meet with Indiana Excise Police leadership to discuss having them spend some targeted time in Bloomington

The **remaining recommendations** from the Task Force are being proposed with the goal of assisting with the enhancement of the economic vitality of the City and to encourage the safe and orderly use of public property within the city. Because the Task Force was mandated to keep "justice" as an overriding value of what they considered, there was great concern about not targeting or hurting specific populations or groups. It was important to realize the issues involved are downtown issues, not "homelessness" issues. At the same time, some behaviors being observed, experienced, and reported in the downtown area are occurring with increasing frequency and are simply unacceptable, regardless of the actor.

The Task Force makes the following final recommendations:

1. Sanitation

One of the worst indignities for people living on the street is having to deal with a simple natural bodily function: going to the bathroom. Those who are sheltered and/or employed do not have to give a second thought to how they will relieve themselves. A bathroom is always just a few feet away. However, individuals experiencing homelessness often find it challenging and embarrassing to locate a clean, safe bathroom, as most street people are turned away from using toilets at stores, offices and restaurants. Conversely, it is also unacceptable for parks, alleys and other inappropriate public and private space in the downtown to be used as bathrooms -

causing public health concerns and increased costs for those charged with maintaining these facilities. The lack of bathroom facilities in downtown Bloomington has meant a large amount of human waste in parks, alleys and on the streets. Unfortunately human feces and used syringes have become routine, causing a public health hazard for park staff, employees of downtown businesses, people on the street and the general public.

The Task Force recommends the implementation of a pilot Pit Stop public restroom program similar to ones in San Francisco and Sacramento, CA, to operate during hours when most other public facilities are closed. Pit Stop programs are staffed portable public restrooms that are brought in and out during specific periods. They also function as collection sites for needles and dog waste. Because the staffing is what makes the Pit Stop unique, there may be an opportunity to staff restrooms in retail facilities and make them available for use as well. [<http://sfpublicworks.org/pitstop>] [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sacramento-pit-stop-public-mobile-attended-bathrooms-homeless_us_5773ea79e4b0d1f85d47f59a]

2. Security

Retailers want customers and visitors to feel welcome and safe downtown, but security must strike a balance between concerns about serving the customer and the rights of those lawfully using public spaces. The following recommendations take this balance into consideration.

- A. Increase lighting in key areas to be identified by City staff with input from downtown businesses and service providers.
- B. Make alleys more pedestrian/bike friendly.
- C. Assess key areas and redesign to make them more community friendly.

3. Education/Training

A. Implement a Mental Health First Aid or Mental Health 101 training – this course teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives the skills needed to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis. The target audience for this training: restaurant and retail managers; City/IU staff working downtown, Chamber of Commerce members and other businesses. Centerstone has agreed to coordinate and provide this training. [<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>]

4. Funding

The challenges facing the downtown are not unique to Bloomington and are likely to be with us well into the future. However, as the population or issues change, adjustments will need to be made to keep ahead of those challenges which have a negative impact on our public spaces and residents' well-being.

A. In order to continue working toward a safe, civil and just community, the Task Force recommends the establishment of a stable, long term source of funding for downtown safety, civility and justice initiatives.

B. Establish funding to support safety and civility initiatives – primarily:

1. A downtown ambassador program; and

2. A grant program to assist downtown businesses in making safety and/or lighting improvements to their buildings.

C. Establish public-private partnership to fund security enhancements.

D. Parking Meters – Set meters so patrons are able to round up in order to donate to accounts intended for support of downtown safety, civility and justice initiatives. Grant funds, resulting from rounding up to safety, civility and justice initiatives that are actively working to solve issues. One option for granting these funds is to set up a specified pool in the Jack Hopkins Grant process. Several communities have designated parking meters for charitable giving however the task force felt it might be more effective to allow donors to round up rather than have them seek out a meter in a spot other than where they are already parking.

E. Encourage sponsorship to help increase programming in People’s Park.

5. Resources

Providing resources for persons experiencing homelessness, substance misuse, mental health issues and those who want to assist them is essential for moving people from the streets to self-sufficiency. It is also important to educate community members about services that currently exist, how they are helping and what they can do to be a part of the solution.

A. Create a “Homelessness Services” webpage on the City website. This, in addition to 211, would provide accurate, timely information to people who are experiencing homelessness or in jeopardy of becoming homeless, about prevention resources, shelter information, childcare, healthcare, meals and other relevant information and links. This can also provide information for students, civic clubs, faith communities and other community members who want to volunteer and make donations. [<https://www.cabq.gov/family/income-eligible-services/homeless-services>]

B. Continue and/or expand the Downtown Specialists to help maintain the cleanliness and character of downtown and address concerns of downtown patrons. Downtown Specialists focus on cleanliness, maintenance and upkeep in the downtown and serve as first-line customer contact for merchants, patrons and visitors in Bloomington’s downtown.

C. Develop metrics to measure performance of safety, civility and justice initiatives. Determine what needs to be accomplished and how to measure it.

D. Establish a temporary, long term (2-year) committee to monitor progress of recommendations, coordinate communication between the various related committees and oversee this process with accountability to Mayor.

E. Encourage Indiana University to address its students, possibly during Orientation or at other appropriate time(s), on the topics of promoting their own safe and civil behavior in the downtown and avoiding illegal acts, making donations to charitable

organizations of their choice rather than to panhandlers and interacting with members of the community in respectful and positive ways.

6. Enforcement:

A. Consistently and fairly enforce aggressive panhandling statutes for all parties including students, non-profits, etc. [<https://bloomington.in.gov/public-safety/safe-civil/panhandling>]

B. Increase foot patrols downtown.

C. Many factors go into determining the number of police officers needed in a city – analysis of an agency's current and projected future workloads, population size, examination of 911 calls, comparison to agencies in comparable size cities, to name a few. At 100 sworn officers when fully staffed, BPD staffing has not seemed to keep pace with the growing need in the community. The department consistently ranks lower per capita in officers than similar Big Ten cities and similar size cities in Indiana. The Task Force recognizes that many of our recommendations require additional community resources that currently may or may not be available. To that end, we strongly recommend that the City of Bloomington adopt a plan to adequately staff and support public safety initiatives, specifically including police officers, at a level found in similar communities.

7. Services to low-income persons or those experiencing poverty

A. From anecdotal information, many of the downtown challenges from the behavior of people in the park and on the street comes in the late afternoon/evenings and weekends, which is when day shelter is limited or non-existent. The Task Force recommends expanding Day Sheltering until 9pm on weeknights and include weekend hours. Having an alternative place for people, other than the streets, would likely resolve many of the issues and has the benefit of being a humane response for all involved.

B. Work with local shelters to encourage more on-site programming as well as support efforts to coordinate overnight shelter and services.

C. Advocate for collaboration between social services and the criminal justice system to provide comprehensive care coordination plans for high frequency users.

D. Identify an organization/agency to create a program that allows donors to purchase alternatives to cash (tokens/certificates) to be used at participating services. This can be given to those in need of a meal by persons who prefer to give directly to an individual but takes away the danger associated with handling cash for the donor and the risk of the recipient being robbed for the money.

8. Legislation:

Based on results realized after implementing and evaluating Task Force recommendations, ask the Bloomington Common Council to explore local legislation addressing aggressive behavior in the downtown area.

Respectfully submitted by members of the Safety, Civility and Justice Task Force on
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A copy of this report can be found online at <https://bloomington.in.gov/SCJinitiative>