

BRING IT, BLOOMINGTON!

PLAN IT. SEE IT. LIVE IT.

***A VISION FOR
THE FUTURE***

This report was prepared by the
McLean County Regional Planning Commission
as Phase 2 of the City of Bloomington's
Comprehensive Plan 2015.

Adopted August 24, 2015

CREDITS

Bloomington City Council

Tari Renner, Mayor
Kevin Lower, Ward 1
David Sage, Ward 2
Mboka Mwilambwe, Ward 3
Judith Stearns, Ward 4
Joni Painter, Ward 5
Karen Schmidt, Ward 6
Scott Black, Ward 7
Jim Fruin, Ward 9

Bloomington Planning Commission

Stan Cain, Chair
J. Alan Balmer
Christopher Cornell
Rex Diamond
James Pearson
John Protzman
Ryan Scritchlow
David Stanczak
Kevin Suess
Rob Wills

Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

Georgia Bouda
*Richard Briggs
*Stan Cain
Tracey Covert
*Thomas Dabareiner
*Nora Dukowitz
Austin Grammer
David Hales
Brendan Heffner
Jim Karch
Mike Kimmerling
Frank Koehler
Kevin Kothe
*Alex McElroy
Stephen Rasmussen
Mark Woolard

*Also served on Visions & Values subcommittee

Project Partners

City of Bloomington
Bloomington Car Wraps
Bloomington Housing Authority
Bloomington School District 87
Bloomington-Normal Association of Realtors
Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council
Bloomington-Normal YMCA
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McLean County Chamber of Commerce
McLean County Museum of History
McLean County Wellness Coalition
McLean County YWCA
Sugar Mama Bakery
University of Illinois Extension
West Bloomington Revitalization Project

Promotional Video

Dan Boyd
Krista Gaff
David Hales
Domonica Hilt
Kellie Nolan
Larry Phillips
Tari Renner
Greg Shaw
The Wolfe Family
Connect Transit
Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts

All those who helped with the process, hosted meetings and events, distributed surveys, and provided their input on the Bloomington Comprehensive Plan.

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Merci
Thank You
Spasibo
Gracias

Thank You
Gracias
Xièxiè

Merci
Obrigado

Dziękuję
Shukria
Danke
Xièxiè
Grazie

December 11, 2014

Dear Bloomington Resident,

Bring It on Bloomington, a four-month community visioning process for the City of Bloomington's comprehensive plan, was very successful. Thanks to all of you for sharing your thoughts and ideas for the future of our community, and to the many agencies and organizations that believed in this effort and stood behind it. We are happy to report that over 2,000 community members from many walks of life contributed their voices to this process, making this one of the most productive outreach efforts ever undertaken in this community.

The outreach survey's four questions allowed respondents to express their hopes and dreams for Bloomington's future without limitations on the content or length of their responses. We are very excited to see the breadth and depth of subjects covered reflecting the respondents age, income, race, lifestyle and political perspectives.

This document, "A Vision for the Future" is a compilation of the common themes that emerged from careful analysis of over 8,000 comments. These themes were organized into chapters for use in the next step of the planning process. Those chapters include Arts, Culture and History, Economy, Education, Government, Health and Natural Environment, Infrastructure, Neighborhoods and Public Safety. Expect to find recurring and overlapping topics and themes as respondents expressed their opinions the way they experience the community, in totality and not in isolation.

The Vision statement in each chapter is a reflection of the core values and a desired future envisioned by respondents on that subject. Each Vision statement has several guiding themes based on the context within each chapter. These guiding themes will help the hundreds of volunteers contributing their time and energy on the working groups to take your vision a step closer to reality by framing the goals, objectives and actionable items for the comprehensive plan.

We are very excited to learn the hopes and dreams of many residents. We hope you will be as inspired as we are by the passion your fellow residents have for the future of our community. This unified, multi-layered vision provides a solid foundation for the comprehensive plan.

Thank you,

Stan Cain,
Chair of the Bloomington Planning Commission and
Chair of Steering Committee for City of Bloomington, Comprehensive Plan

Dziękuję
Shukran
Grazie

Danke
Xièxiè
Shukran

Danke
Thank You

Grazie

Shukria
Gracias
Obrigado

INTRODUCTION

In the last 50 years, the City of Bloomington doubled in population and grew more than 2.5 times in the corporate area. This growth brought about many changes in the demographic profile of the City. Given the rapid growth and changes coupled with the fiscal challenges posed by the recent recession, City of Bloomington leadership wanted a deeper understanding of the community's vision for the future and the developmental priorities. McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) was charged with that task as part of the City's comprehensive plan.

Visioning is a process by which the community defines what it wants for the future. An extensive public outreach that allows everyone to collectively shape the vision is a critical first step. Accordingly, MCRPC launched a visioning effort called "Bring It On Bloomington" in June 2014, whereby the community's core values were identified upon which a unified vision was built.

With the motto of "we will come to you for your input," this four-month long visioning process reached over 6,000 people at 51 different meetings or community events at times most convenient for the residents. Over 2,000 members of the community completed and returned the four-question survey during the outreach. Particular attention was paid throughout the process to include the voices that are typically not involved in local decision making.

Over 8,000 individual comments

were reviewed and analyzed, discovering what the community members love and hold close to their heart, things they see as challenges, their inspirations for the future and suggested strategies to help overcome those challenges. The respondents covered a wide variety of topics with great depth. While there are variations, a few dominant themes or core community values quickly emerged. This report is a compilation of those voices, values and the themes in all their complexity.

There is a distinct sense of community in Bloomington. Many describe this as a family-friendly community and prize its "small town feel" where people care for each other, and it is generally clean, peaceful and quiet. They see this spirit in the neighborhood schools, parks and public places where the children and neighbors gather. Bloomington's plentiful job opportunities, universities and community colleges, entertainment choices and cultural opportunities, and a range of shopping and dining options were the "big city amenities" frequently cited by the respondents.

It was clear that the rich history is greatly valued and celebrated. Overwhelmingly, respondents wanted to see a vibrant core where the Downtown is thriving and the older neighborhoods are in vogue again.

People recognize solid infrastructure as the backbone for growth and prosperity of the City. Many urged continued investment in the City's current infrastructure and careful and thoughtful expansion of critical assets

in the future. The community values opportunities for healthy and active lifestyles, such as the City's many parks and Constitution Trail, and access to fresh, local food.

Residents favor an efficient city government that operates with transparency and respect for the public. Many value the good work of City staff in protecting and providing services for residents.

Respondents covered a breadth and depth of issues from built to social and civic to political. These issues are carefully organized into eight different chapters. Each chapter represents the community's collective thoughts within an interconnected network in which no one person, organization or institution is fully in charge.

While the comprehensive plan will incorporate most of the community's input, there are some limitations. A small minority of comments called for the reorganizing of Bloomington's governmental structure, an aspiration well beyond the scope of the comprehensive plan. The common themes from these comments are included in the chapter titled "Alternative Perspective" as an acknowledgment of that voice.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the core values and the unified vision can become the foundation for future planning initiatives by the City, other public and not for profits as well as grant applications.

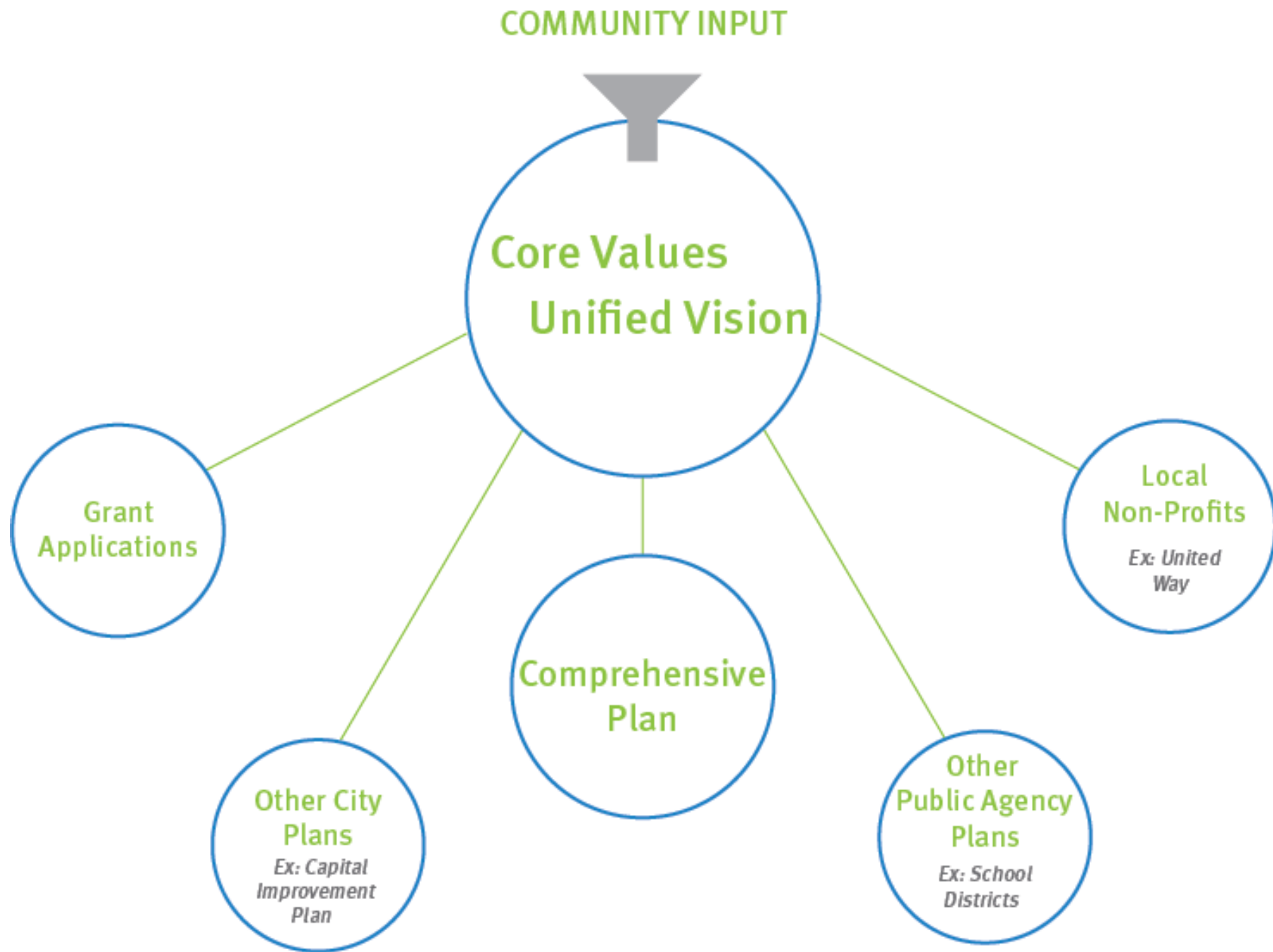


FIGURE 1

CORE VALUES...

Small Town Feel With Big City Amenities

Residents prize Bloomington's **small town feel** where neighbors are welcoming and care about each other and those that are less fortunate.

The **family-friendliness** of the community makes it a great place to raise kids and grandkids.

Safe neighborhoods ensure general peace and quiet and a feeling of security in homes.

Residents appreciate the aura of **history**, with each new generation finding its place in Bloomington's journey.

Bloomington has **big city amenities such as job and education choices** to build lives, a **variety of entertainment options** that enhance the quality of life, and a rich palette of **arts and cultural opportunities**.

Keeping and enhancing our **sense of community**, community pride, diversity of people, jobs, activities, public spaces and amenities is vital for the long-term health and vibrancy of this community.

Stable Economy

The community's **recession-resistant economy** is highly valued by the residents and includes...

...a range of **good-paying jobs** provided by many large corporations and small companies.

...a highly educated **"white collar" workforce**.

...a **lively marketplace** of goods and services, with world products and local crafts.

People would like to see...

...a **diversified local economic base** with a range of stable businesses.

...an emphasis on **local services and small businesses** in the interest of long-term economic sustainability.

...a **culture of entrepreneurship** in the community.

...the City positioned to be competitive in the **21st century economy**.

Good Education System

Quality schools, public and private contribute to Bloomington's reputation as a family-friendly community.

Colleges and universities offering intellectual enrichment and life-long learning opportunities are among the City's great assets.

Residents..

...recognize that the **health of the public school system** is crucial for the City's long-term success.

...support additional **afterschool programs** to nurture the **youth**, particularly lower income.

Dynamic Neighborhoods

Bloomington's people **value its wide selection of neighborhoods and strongly support neighborhood revitalization and preservation.**

The **Downtown** district is the center of **history, government and law.** Residents seek to redefine the Downtown as the epicenter of all activity, a vibrant, unique, mixed-use neighborhood.

Residents value **historic neighborhoods surrounding Downtown** and support **their preservation and redevelopment** to enhance the City's character.

West Side neighborhoods have experienced severe disinvestment but hold great potential.

Newer neighborhoods bring their own character and attractions.

Residents support...

...**dissolving** the physical, economic and social **divide between the East and West Sides**

...development of **vibrant, connected, affordable, mixed-use neighborhoods in the future.**

...providing a **range of housing choices** for people of all ages and income levels.

Solid Infrastructure

Bloomington boasts civic infrastructure developed over 150 years. Residents recognize that a solid infrastructure is the backbone to support growth and quality of life in the community.

Residents value the parks, trails, streets, community facilities and other municipal service systems that earlier generations had the foresight to conceive and build.

Bloomington confronts the dilemmas of...

...aging infrastructure above and below ground.

...constrained resources for repair, renovation and preservation.

Residents advocate...

...immediate investment in the upkeep of current assets.

... careful and thoughtful consideration of expansion.

...evaluation of the ongoing costs and benefits.

Healthy Community

Residents of Bloomington embraced healthy and active lives with...

...frequent use of **trails, parks and other recreational opportunities** across the city.

...**support for local food producers and farmers' markets.**

...local restaurants that focus on **local products.**

...**clean resources** such as water and air.

...easy access to **quality health care services.**

Residents desire...

...a safe and attractive **walking and biking network** throughout the community.

...a **small footprint** that will foster **multi-modal transportation** while preserving the surrounding **natural environment.**

Effective Government

Residents of Bloomington favor...

...government that is a **careful and thrifty** steward of **City resources.**

...government that considers issues raised by residents in its actions.

...cooperation, communication and **vision from its elected leadership.**

...municipal government that operates with **transparency and respect** for the public.

Residents value the **good work of city staff** protecting and providing for residents in everyday and extraordinary circumstances.

UNIFIED COMMUNITY VISION

Bloomington, in 2035, unites the vibrant urban core to its diverse neighborhoods. Supported by our quality of life and enduring economic stability, it is the destination community for people and businesses that seek a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Residents thrive, surrounded by rich history, arts and culture, lifelong learning opportunities, a healthy environment and an active lifestyle.

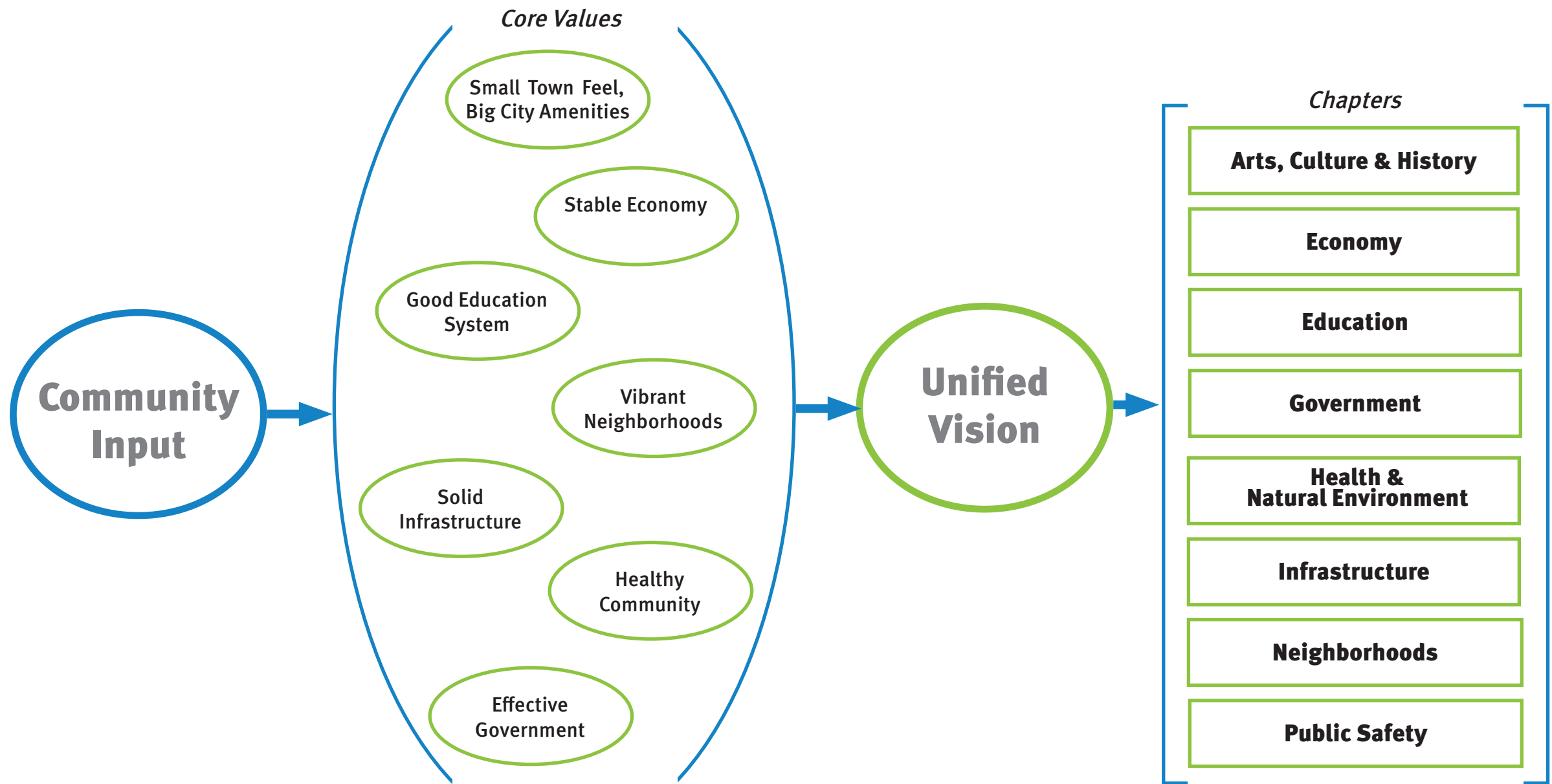


FIGURE 2

DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

The unified vision and the core values described in this document reflect feedback received directly from citizens who live, work, and play in Bloomington, through the Bring It On Bloomington survey. This document summarizes that feedback with supporting sample comments and graphics. For those who have not been following this process from the beginning, it may be difficult to absorb all of the information contained in the document. This chapter attempts to make that process easier by briefly explaining the survey questions used, how the survey data was organized, analyzed and presented here.

CORE SURVEY QUESTIONS

The Bring It On Bloomington survey was available to the public through a variety of channels in both paper and electronic forms. From the beginning of the outreach process on July 1st through its close on October 31st, over 2,000 residents filled out the survey [*also see the Public Outreach chapter*].

The core survey was composed of four open-ended questions. These questions were (1) What do you value the most in Bloomington and why? (2) What is the one thing you would change in Bloomington today to make it a better community? (3) Imagine in 20 years all your hopes and dreams for your ideal city have been realized, what does Bloomington look like then? (a timeframe that matches the horizon period of the Comprehensive Plan); and (4) As you imagine Bloomington the way you just described, what should we

do to get there? To provide context for these answers, respondents were asked to provide basic demographic information—how long they have lived in Bloomington, age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, languages spoken other than English, household income, whether they rent or own their house or apartment, number of people living in the household, and city ward.

Traditionally, surveys aimed at large audiences use a multiple-choice rather than an open-response format. The decision was made to use open-ended questions in order to hear from the public with no limitations. Each response in an open-ended survey captures the views and opinions of the respondents in all their complexity, that a multiple-choice option cannot.

There are certainly strong common themes that run throughout the comments, but open-ended questions reveal some of the endless potential variations on those themes, which gives planners a better idea of how to move forward. Because the responses to all four questions were posted on the the project website, www.bringitonbloomington.com, they also provide engaged citizens a unique opportunity to find out what others in the community think, in their own words.

Open responses are not without their drawbacks, primarily in interpreting the results. Because each one is unique, open responses cannot easily be organized into categories or quantified. In order to organize the more than 8,000 unique responses in a mean-

ingful way, each response was tagged with one or more of a set list of words or short phrases representing common ideas that appeared in the comments. A subsection of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee formed the Vision and the Values subcommittee to assist with this process.

Using responses to Question 1 (the “value question”) as an example, a comment stating that the respondent valued the Constitution Trail would be tagged “Parks & Trails,” as would a comment that valued Miller Park. A response to Question 2 (the “improvement question”) suggesting that the city repave its roads would be coded “Infrastructure Investment,” as would a comment calling for improvements to sewers, the water supply, or other utilities. These tags were used to create word clouds throughout the process to keep the public up to date on what sorts of responses were being received, and how frequently.

In preparing this document, they were used as a quick and convenient way to aggregate comments that might be relevant to each of the document’s nine chapters and establish relationships between particular kinds of responses and demographics. It is important to note that staff read and reread every comment that might be relevant to each section in any given chapter before generating the contents in the chapters. The tags were useful as a device for organizing large amounts of otherwise unstructured data.

READING TIPS

VISION AND GUIDING THEMES

Below the title of each chapter is a sentence or a short paragraph which describes an overall vision based on the comments related to that subject area.

Each chapter identifies a few guiding themes that relate to the discussion within various sections of that chapter. These guiding themes provide guidance for development of the goals and objectives for the comprehensive plan. These themes appear both at the beginning of the chapter and at the end of each corresponding section to help provide context to the reader.

SAMPLE COMMENTS

It is one thing to read a summary of a group of comments; it is another to see a concrete example. A well-chosen sample comment can replace hundreds of words of explanation and elaboration. Sample comments are placed in the margins alongside relevant text. For the most part, comments within the quotations are verbatim except for the clarification provided using the square brackets.

Comments in green are values expressed by the respondents while suggested improvements are in blue. Responses to question 3 (the “vision question”) are in black and preceded by the phrase “I Envision”. Responses provided for question 4, strategies to achieve the vision, are not included in this document. Quotes from those responses may be used in the final comprehensive plan

report alongside the goals, objectives and actionable items.

QUALITATIVE LANGUAGE

The language in this document is primarily qualitative rather than quantitative, reflecting a desire to present common themes without overemphasizing numbers that cannot perfectly represent open responses.

Simple descriptive statistics are provided for each chapter to give the reader a sense of which themes came up most often and, in some instances, how frequently they came up within particular demographic groups. Given the subjective nature of coding open responses, and given that the survey could not reach every Bloomington resident, these statistics should not be taken as authoritative statements about how Bloomington should be, but as tools for identifying key issues and formulating plans for the future.

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

As the survey results came in, it became clear that a particular group of responses were substantially different in kind from the others. These responses, which make up 6% of the overall total, present a vision of extremely limited government and much lower taxes. Because responses of this type are so similar to each other, but so different in character from the other comments, they are discussed in their own chapter. Moreover, none of the statistics presented in the other nine chapters include these responses [Also

see the *Alternative Perspectives* chapter].

Note: Terms such as “citizens,” “respondents,” “residents,” “Bloomingtonians,” and “people” are used interchangeably throughout this document. All refer to the respondents of this survey.

ARTS, CULTURE AND HISTORY

Our future should be inspired by the rich and important history with abundant art and cultural opportunities.

GUIDING THEMES

- *The Bloomington area will value, support and fully integrate the arts, in all their diversity, into the fabric of civic life.*
- *The community will honor its past and provide a perspective for the future by preserving historic buildings, neighborhoods and other links to the City's early years.*
- *Bloomington will foster community interaction and reinforce a sense of place through positive, welcoming and unique public spaces.*

“Bloomington’s heritage, Most particularly the Old Courthouse, the Square around the Courthouse, the Consistory (BCPC), and all of the great buildings that have not succumbed to fire and have been rehabilitated and/or well maintained. The Farmer’s Market has become a real plus as well. It is a family-friendly event. We have some great artists in the community who showcase their talent in their galleries in the DT area. First Friday is a wonderful way for citizens to be exposed to the rich culture that our community has to offer.”

“Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts. It adds much needed culture to the City and brings people to the downtown area. The economic impact is far greater than City Council realizes and the Council really needs to get behind it. They have a gem, and they don’t even realize it.”

Arts, culture and history are an integral part of our City’s enduring spirit and vitality. A fourth of all respondents enjoy the abundant art and cultural opportunities available in our community. They value the City’s history, its art galleries, entertainment venues, festivals and other cultural events. They also recognize that preserving and maintaining these unique assets is important to our community’s future.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Respondents make it very clear that art and cultural offerings in Bloomington and its twin city Normal enhance the quality of life in our metro area. A majority of respondents express appreciation for cultural venues such as the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts (BCPA), McLean County Museum of History, McLean County Arts Center, Castle Theatre, Bloomington Public Library, David Davis Mansion State Historic Site, Ewing Cultural Center, U.S. Cellular Coliseum, Heartland Theatre and the Corn Crib. Particularly cherished cultural activities include various performances at the BCPA, concerts, the First Fridays in Downtown Bloomington, the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Sugar Creek Arts Festival and the WGLT Blues Fest.

Bloomingtonians closely associate the arts and culture of this community to its historic Downtown. It is no surprise given most of these venues are clustered in Downtown (as illustrated in Figure 3). In addition

to these, Downtown Bloomington boasts the highest concentration of historic buildings, art studios and galleries, all of which were identified as valuable assets to the community. The weekly farmers’ market in Downtown and the unique local shops and restaurants located there make it the cultural hub of the City [also see the Downtown section in the Economy chapter].

Respondents who identify Bloomington as a “small town with big city amenities,” or a community with a “variety of things to do” frequently refer to the art and cultural entertainment in the City. They appreciate the abundance of “low cost/no cost” entertainment that people can enjoy at their own pace [also see the Family Friendly Activities and Entertainment Options in the Economy chapter].

Some respondents called for adding more public art, increasing the number and variety of visual and performance arts in the existing venues, and providing more opportunities for learning art at all ages. Many respondents believe that cultivating local businesses and restaurants would also bring a unique culture to Bloomington [also see the Local Businesses section in the Economy chapter].

Guiding theme: The Bloomington area will value, support and fully integrate the arts, in all their diversity, into the fabric of civic life.

HISTORY

Bloomington’s people value and celebrate their city’s history. Many respondents valued the historic buildings and monuments

“Small town atmosphere with the great universities + arts + cultural opportunities.”

“More arts, more restaurants, more festivals and things to do.”

I Envision “clean, friendly, fun, creative environment that values diversity of thought, appreciates arts and culture and offers great hope for our children. A place the people want to visit, live, work, and raise their family.”

“History, culture, farmer’s market, DTB (Downtown Bloomington) shops and restaurants, public library, museum, arts. Love it’s diversity, it’s entertainment. The downtown Bloomington area inspires me to go back to my painting and crafts roots...”

***I Envision
“I feel that the city will have successfully embraced the technological and ecological advances yet to be imagined while maintaining its reverence for its rich history. The key is in keeping our stories ever present.”***

not only for their architecture but also for the character they add and the stories they tell about our community. Bloomington’s many historical neighborhoods and the unique old homes were cited with pride, contrasting them to the newer housing styles. However, many respondents noted the east vs. west divide in the community and cautioned that the growing cultural difference may not be healthy to our community’s future [also see the East/West Divide section in the Neighborhoods chapter].

In responding to the opportunities for improvement, Bloomingtonians overwhelmingly suggested preserving and enhancing our historic buildings and architecture. They urged rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the underutilized buildings and preservation of older historic neighborhoods for the cultural and economic health of the community.

Guiding theme: The community will honor its past and provide a perspective for the future by preserving historic buildings, neighborhoods and other links to the City’s early years.

THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Bloomingtonians envision a future where the “small town feel” is preserved and enhanced with a vibrant Downtown that is full of unique local businesses and is the epicenter of the entertainment and cultural opportunities for all ages. They envision a culturally thriving city filled with vibrant public spaces, such as plazas, squares, streets, and

parks that host the unique cultural events that help promote social interaction and create a sense of community. They visualize historic buildings that are preserved, restored and retrofitted for newer uses [also see the Downtown section in the Economy chapter].

Guiding theme: Bloomington will foster community interaction and reinforce a sense of place through positive, welcoming and unique public spaces.

Another aspect that was identified as adding value to the culture of this City was the diversity in people and places. Race, ethnicity, socio-economics and age were all identified as contributors to the uniqueness of the City. Universities were also identified as big cultural contributors to the community [also see the Higher Education section in the Education chapter].

“More active and alive downtown. More outdoor art and outdoor cafes...”

“The diversity. When I can sit at a park watching my kids play with multiple children of many different ethnicities, I feel we are all very lucky.”

I Envision

“A mix of residential and business available in the downtown area. When I go downtown now and sit outside with a cup of coffee, I look up and wonder what it would be like, how much more life there would be, with the upper floors of the downtown buildings renovated and offering unique places for people to live. The downtown area is so rich with history, capitalize by offering incentives for those building owners to renovate and improve their real estate. Those buildings shouldn’t be empty above the first floor.”



FIGURE 3: CULTURAL VENUES FREQUENTLY CITED BY THE RESPONDENTS

ECONOMY

Bloomington will be vibrant and thriving, with a diversified local economy and a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. As a regional economic leader, it will attract and nurture highly skilled workforce. The community's high quality of life will bolster its economic competitiveness.

GUIDING THEMES

- *Bloomington will continue to leverage its strategic location and infrastructure capital as tools for economic development.*
- *The Bloomington area will continue to have a strong local economy with diverse employers and job opportunities for people of all ages and skill levels. It will lead the efforts in the region for attracting, retaining and nurturing a highly skilled workforce.*
- *Downtown will be vibrant and thriving as a unique local attraction and regional destination. It will be the City's cultural hub and entertainment center, with positive and welcoming public spaces appealing to people of all ages for living, working and playing.*
- *Bloomington will continue to be a regional destination for shopping and dining, with a wide variety of establishments for everyone to enjoy.*
- *Bloomington will be an active community year round with plenty of entertainment options for people of all ages and income levels.*
- *Bloomington strives to be an inclusive City that provides a basic quality of life and opportunity for all.*
- *The City will seek to remain an affordable community.*
- *Bloomington will enhance its standing as an attractive regional destination.*

“Its a nice mid sized community with things to do, it’s clean, and my job is here.”

“...Economic Development: City governance needs to encourage businesses and industry related to freight transportation industry and warehouse, tourists, and recreation. My reasoning is Bloomington area has 3 Interstate highways, a state highway, and “Route 66.” There are also rail and air services. I don’t believe these assets are marketed correctly. Bloomington has potential for a major inland port sending goods to Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Madison, WI., Memphis...”

The City of Bloomington and the metro area generally enjoy a stable economy with relatively low unemployment rates compared to the surrounding communities and the State. The local economy is a subject that is close to many peoples’ hearts. Nearly 80% of all respondents commented on topics addressed in this chapter. A majority of those respondents cite the stability of the local economy and number of things to do for all ages as qualities they value the most about the city. Many Bloomingtonians also see the need to diversify the economy with a healthy mix of smaller businesses and larger companies to enjoy the same level of economic stability in the future.

LOCATION AND CONNECTEDNESS

Bloomington’s strategic location in the state and its transportation connections by road, rail and air contribute to the City’s economic advantage.

Respondents value easy access by car to major metropolitan areas such as Chicago, St. Louis and Indianapolis. The Central Illinois Regional Airport (CIRA) greatly expands the ease of access of people and goods to and from the community to many cities across the nation and beyond. CIRA connects people and goods from the community to cities across the nation and beyond. Bloomingtonians are eagerly awaiting the high speed rail connection currently underway between Chicago and St. Louis. A few suggested commuter rail connections to improve access to the

surrounding communities like Champaign and Peoria [also see the Transportation section in the Infrastructure chapter].

Guiding theme: Bloomington will continue to leverage its strategic location and infrastructure capital as tools for economic development.

EMPLOYMENT (JOBS, BUSINESSES AND WORKFORCE)

Respondents voice a great appreciation for their jobs and the availability of job opportunities through large employers in this community, such as State Farm, the local hospitals, universities and the school districts. In many instances, respondents who call Bloomington a “small town with big city amenities” classify the job opportunities along with plentiful options for shopping, dining and entertainment as those “big city amenities” that add to the quality of life in this community.

While suggesting improvements, respondents called for a diversified economy with a mix of small local businesses and large corporations. Many Bloomingtonians believe the locally owned stores, shops and other businesses add to the sense of community and bring a unique culture to the City. Respondents suggested creating a favorable climate for entrepreneurs and small business growth [also see the Government chapter]. Many respondents note with pride that Bloomington is a highly educated “white collar” economy. Local universities are often credited as the incubators of such a work-

“Strong Employment The jobs that are available in Bloomington make this area valuable. Employers big and small provide the lifeblood of our community. Without jobs our city would not: • Attract new residents • Bring in tax revenue to fund local government • Score state and federal grants”

“...encouraging (and soliciting) unique local businesses within the community. A diverse offering of small-businesses (shops, restaurants, etc) will help grow the local economy by adding jobs and local spending. We don’t need to solicit more chain businesses – those will come on their own, we need to encourage local start-ups.”

“Seems resilient. Mostly a good place for kids, has a good amount of jobs”

I Envision

“The year is 2034 and Bloomington, aka “Little Silicon Valley”, is the Midwest’s hot bed of tech startups. Entrepreneurs have been placing down headquarters for the last 15 years because of the large skilled labor pool...”

I Envision

“An affordable place to live with great jobs for people of all education levels.”

force. Respondents identify a need to better retain university graduates and Millennials in the community. Along with well-paying jobs, this generation desires an “urban” lifestyle over a “suburban” lifestyle. Respondents suggest expanding jobs in industries expected to be thriving in the future, such as the technology industry. Given the universities and other resources available in Bloomington, many feel confident that this is possible.

Some respondents express concerns over income inequality in the community, particularly on the west side of town, and which has largely gone unnoticed. The difficulty for low skilled workers to find well-paying jobs in a “white collar” community is identified as a challenge. Respondents call for a need to create well-paying jobs and job training programs for low skilled workers [also see the *Education and Neighborhoods* chapters].

Guiding theme: The Bloomington area will continue to have a strong local economy with diverse employers and job opportunities for people of all ages and skill levels. It will lead the efforts in the region for attracting, retaining and nurturing a highly skilled workforce.

DOWNTOWN

A third of all respondents from across the City commented on Downtown. Some value it as is, while most would like to see a much more inviting, vibrant and thriving Downtown.

Respondents appreciated the architec-

tural history associated with its buildings, the local shops, the concentration of studios and art galleries, antique stores, and the culture they collectively bring to Downtown.

While seeing the Downtown as a discrete neighborhood in need of additional support from the city and the private sector, respondents noted the Downtown occupies a unique position as the historic center and origin of Bloomington. This central status is reinforced by the attraction of community facilities including the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts, the U. S. Cellular Coliseum and Pepsi Ice Center, the McLean County Museum of History and its forthcoming Route 66 tourism center, and the Downtown arts community.

Residents also very much value the Farmers’ Market, the Castle Theatre, and the Bloomington Public Library. Initiatives to create and support new local businesses in Downtown are applauded, and future Downtown business development and diversity is strongly supported. Facilities located in Downtown link residents to Bloomington history, provide cultural and entertainment choices, and demonstrate that adaptive reuse of older buildings is both possible and desirable.

Many suggest increasing the number of shows and events in the Coliseum and the BCPA as a way to make those facilities profitable and bring more people Downtown [also see the *Community Facilities* section in the *Infrastructure* chapter, and the *Health and Natu-*

“Downtown. It is the spiritual heart of Bloomington. Most of the noteworthy history of Bloomington has its roots in downtown. I also happens to be incredibly beautiful and laid out very well.”

“I would break up that group of bars downtown and spread them out more...”

I Envision

“A more interesting downtown area, including the library park area, fewer bars downtown, a more family friendly downtown, expanded Farmers Market.”

“...I would encourage shop owners to operate when people can visit their establishments. 9:00-5:00 just doesn’t cut it, except on weekends.”

“I would love to see more non-chain restaurants/ outdoor cafes in the downtown area that have people gathering- something like in downtown champaign- there are lots of cafes and restaurants there and people sitting out at tables in the streets. More outside areas to gather and spend time!”

“Stronger focus on public transportation and incentives to revitalize older neighborhoods/downtown.”

ral Environment chapter].

Some aspects of the Downtown neighborhood are described by residents as challenges to address through revitalization. Many respondents are concerned about the impact of the many bars concentrated in the area, noting that while these establishments draw customers from elsewhere in the city, they can also create disincentives for people to come downtown, particularly those in search of family-friendly activities.

Many suggestions are offered to make Downtown more appealing for families and other age groups. Respondents urged to attract more locally owned businesses and stores that bring a unique culture which will create a competitive advantage for the Downtown area. Local restaurants, boutique shopping, an ice cream shop, coffee shops and other family-friendly retail establishments are among particular suggestions. Many advocate extending store hours beyond 5:00 p.m. during the week days and adding more activities and cultural events as strategies to increase patronage to the Downtown area [also see the Arts, Culture and History chapter].

Respondents frequently contrast commercial activity in the City’s center to that of Veterans Parkway. Many comments call for making Downtown’s public spaces more enticing with landscaping, lighting, outdoor seating, music and public art. Several respondents express a great desire to make Downtown friendlier to walkers, bikers and transit riders. There are just as many respondents

requesting improvements to the parking situation in Downtown, suggesting the need for a healthy balance between automotive and alternative modes of transportation [also see the Transportation section in the Infrastructure chapter].

Many respondents point to the redevelopment of Uptown Normal and suggest that Bloomington use similar strategies in the Downtown neighborhood. Bloomingtonians want a thriving Downtown that is a destination for all ages. Many point out the need to expand the housing options in and around Downtown. The link between the health of the inner city neighborhoods to that of the Downtown is clearly identified [also see the Downtown section in the Neighborhoods chapter].

Guiding theme: Downtown will be vibrant and thriving as a unique local attraction and a regional destination. It will be the cultural hub and entertainment center with positive and welcoming public spaces appealing to people of all ages for living, working and playing.

SHOPPING AND DINING

Bloomingtonians greatly appreciate the city’s many shopping and dining options. These activities are generally associated with the Downtown and the Veterans Parkway corridor. Many respondents associate local businesses and restaurants with Downtown, while chains and malls are frequently tied to the Veterans Parkway corridor.

While the mix of local and chain

I Envision

“A thriving downtown with outdoor venues and concerts, retail, restaurants, improved bike lanes, improved parks, and clean well-lighted streets and alleys lined with flowers.”

I Envision

“A place where the downtown is thriving, old neighborhoods are in vogue again, we have a plan for the future and are living it.”

“Diverse business community, meaning not just chain eateries and businesses, but local and unique establishments.”

“Bloomington has a small town feel yet with many amenities such as a great selection of restaurants, shopping, parks and rec activities, fine arts programs and so much more than you would expect.”

“We are a homeschooling family with 3 under 7 yrs. We value family events/activities and educational opportunities...”

“More family things to do. There are more family activities in the summer but nothing in winter!”

establishments is appreciated, there is a great desire to expand on local businesses and dining options, including ethnic stores and restaurants, within and beyond Downtown.

It should be noted that respondents under 34 years of age favored local business more than other age groups, suggesting that local establishments and the unique culture they bring are important factors to attract and retain younger members to Bloomington.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will continue to be a regional destination for shopping and dining with a wide variety of establishments for everyone to enjoy.

FAMILY FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES AND OTHER ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS

Bloomington’s “family-friendliness” is upheld as one of the City’s greatest virtues and a primary reason why many people live here. As can be expected, respondents between the ages of 25 to 44 (young adults) are most likely to value the family-friendly activities offered by the community. Many point out that there are plenty of things to do at your own pace. Arts and cultural events, sports programs, recreational opportunities provided through the parks and recreation department, trails, the farmers’ market, and the zoo are among the entertainment options identified by respondents [also see the *Community facilities* section in the *Infrastructure* chapter; *Health and Natural Environment*; and *Arts, Culture and History* chapters].

While many respondents agree that Bloomington has a good entertainment scene, gaps in the choice and affordability of activities for youth, young adults and seniors are identified. There is a desire to expand events and activities during both the summer and winter months that appeal for a broader audience such as festivals, fairs, and an increased variety of shows at the BCPA and Coliseum.

Respondents generally agree that it is crucial to make this community more appealing to younger adults to maintain a healthy workforce in our community. However, there is a greater opposition to a concentrated “bar scene” or “night life” that is typically appealing to that age group in the Downtown area, suggesting the need for a healthy balance and a careful consideration for certain land use types.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will be an active community year round with plenty of entertainment options for people of all ages and income levels.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

Bloomingtonians value each other. Several respondents believe that the caring and helpful nature of the people here is what creates a strong sense of community. Some point out the quality and variety of social services available to residents as evidence of how this community comes together to care for those who are less fortunate. A third of all respondents discuss social and economic

“Skating rinks for the kids. Dave & Busters, a Monkey Joe’s....Indoor arcade’s for families to take and have fun with their kids. Not just walking around our empty mall.”

I Envision

“It would look like Madison, Wisconsin, with lots of diverse restaurants, outdoor activities, attractions + lots of life with people of all ages doing things together (instead of the generation segregation we often see here)...”

“Friendly community; lots of variety of things to do; supports all of the arts; convenient location to other towns and communities; clean; family-oriented community but at the same time offers things for singles.”

“Raise awareness that there are pockets in our community that need attention. People and families are living in poverty despite the wealth that surrounds us.”

“More support for the parts of the city with humans who are struggling. There’s a serious homeless population who largely go unnoticed except for caring people and organizations...”

***I Envision
“Multicultural equal opportunity city.”***

issues in the City.

Respondents appreciate the social services provided by both public agencies and non-profits. The Bloomington Housing Authority, McLean County Health Department, City of Bloomington Township, Connect Transit, United Way, YWCA, Home Sweet Home Ministries, Western Avenue Community Center and the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP) are among the agencies many value.

The area food pantries, homeless shelters and other groups are also recognized as crucial services in the community. Programs such as Stepping Stones offered by the YWCA, free bus service offered through Connect Transit, and the SOAR program offered through the Bloomington Parks and Recreation department are among the valued social services.

Many Bloomingtonians are concerned about the City’s increasing income and social inequality and the community’s general lack of awareness of the problem. The stark socioeconomic differences between the East Side and the West Side are highlighted. Lower income levels and the related social issues are predominantly associated with the west. Many respondents are unhappy about the instant stereotyping about residents on this side of the City [also see *The East West Divide* section in the *Neighborhoods* chapter].

Homelessness is identified by some respondents as an issue in the City that typically goes unaddressed. They are unhappy to see

homelessness and deep poverty surrounded by affluence. In the short term, respondents call for increased public-private partnerships to provide additional support services such as soup kitchens and homeless shelters. People would like to see a comprehensive solution to assist people out of the homelessness cycle in the long run. The concentration of homeless people in the Downtown area is identified as a challenge for its future development.

While respondents generally agree that Bloomington is a family-friendly community with many activities for children, the gap in affordable activities for lower income youth is pointed out. Having more affordable activities for youth in their neighborhoods is offered as a strategy to “keep them out of trouble” [also see the *Neighborhood Safety* section in the *Public Safety* chapter].

Respondents note the challenges low income youth face in accessing higher education. Some suggest that school districts could help low income students move beyond high school by working with higher education institutions and providing scholarships. Additional opportunities through job training to help break the cycle of poverty are offered as a suggestion [also see the *Education* chapter].

The need for the community to accommodate retirees and seniors is another common theme. These residents need affordable and accessible housing. Public places, community facilities and public transportation should also be available and accessible

“More social services to help low-income youth and residents who fall through the cracks in our society.”

“Increase the focus on retirees/seniors equally with young families...”

“The partnerships between the various social services (United Way, Housing Authority, private programs like Home Sweet Home) in the area and their interaction with local businesses/churches/hospitals/community groups to provide services for those in town.”

***I Envision
“No separation between lower income (West Side) and rest off community. Equal opportunity & safety for all.”***

“...Programs and activities to address needs of seniors, homeless, mentally ill, disadvantaged youth, ex-offenders and other at risk populations. Equality in public schools (Irving, Bent + Sheridan on par with Washington, Oakland, etc.”

“As a retiree I can afford to stay in Bloomington because affordable housing allowed me to retire debt free.”

“Need a soccer complex (sports complex) for the kids to play, host tournaments, & generate revenue.”

[also see the Housing Section in the Neighborhoods chapter]. Activities for seniors are somewhat lacking, and there is a desire to expand the choice of activities.

A few applaud the community’s efforts in addressing the mentally ill, but others want to see a comprehensive solution and continued investment in this area.

While respondents appreciate the current volunteer opportunities, there is a desire for more of them. They believe that volunteer opportunities would help educate the community at large on the issues facing certain pockets of Bloomington. This could be a way to give people with various backgrounds a reason to interact with one another and build a unified community [also see the Community Leadership section in the Government chapter].

Guiding theme: Bloomington strives to be an inclusive City that provides a basic quality of life and opportunity for all.

COST OF LIVING

Respondents typically qualify the city as relatively affordable. They point out the relatively low cost of living given the high quality of services offered by the community. Housing and entertainment costs are frequently described as “reasonable”; however, some express concern that this is beginning to change. Respondents point out rising housing prices, rents and taxes [also see the Government chapter and the Housing section in the Neighborhoods chapter].

Guiding Theme: The City will seek to remain an affordable community.

A REGIONAL ATTRACTION

The rich history, arts and cultural events, sports and other entertainment opportunities attract many people to Bloomington, making it a regional destination. Some respondents suggest increasing the City’s appeal to visitors to the community. Respondents call for improving the appearance of the entrances to the City from the west and the south.

Some respondents identify a need for a new soccer complex that not only serves the needs of children and youth in the community, but is big enough to host tournaments and attract visitors. Several respondents feel the need to give the Coliseum visitors more compelling reasons to spend their time in the Downtown area. A few respondents believe that the Route 66 visitors center and the hotel proposal being discussed for the Downtown area may bring more people to the area.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will enhance its standing as an attractive regional destination.

I Envision

“...I think we need to provide more programs to help our at-risk children. Bloomington does have a lot of support, and organizations like Western .avenue Community Center do good work, but as more and more families slip into poverty in our community, we need more interventions to give our young people opportunities.”

“Cost of living and safety - ability to be appealing to families and be competitive in attracting people to this community”

I Envision

“By dint of its reputation, Bloomington will become a vibrant, vital city that is known statewide as the preferred location attracting permanent residents, visitors, statewide conferences by maintaining a remarkable quality of living, public safety, diversity, and a seamless integration of old and new that keeps the city’s historic charm, yet is on the pulse of innovation with an aim of Bloomington becoming a leading city within Illinois.”

EDUCATION

Education in Bloomington will continue to be a pillar of the community, enriching our culture and economic competitiveness.

GUIDING THEMES

- *Bloomington will continue to be a magnet for families by investing in its public school system. Public schools will strive to become more balanced socioeconomically.*
- *Beyond providing educational opportunities, our colleges and universities, in partnership with the community, will enrich our culture and boost our economic competitiveness.*

“Friendly, Safe, with good schools (k-College).”

“The high quality of public education available from elementary through post-secondary. I value it because it is the foundation for property and community health.”

“Redistrict the schools. Young families would rejuvenate the downtown and near east side if their children weren’t bussed past 2 schools to go to the one that is farthest west.”

A good education system is the bedrock of any community. One of the major factors in the consideration of a community for potential residential and business locations is the quality of educational opportunities provided to the residents. Nearly a quarter of all respondents cite Bloomington’s quality public, private and higher educational opportunities as the reason why they call this community their home.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Bloomington is served by two public school districts, District 87 and Unit 5, and several private schools. Respondents highly valued the public education provided by both school districts. Bloomingtonians cite the high graduation rates of the public high schools serving the area as evidence of quality education in this community. They linked the quality of life in this community to the local public education system. Many of these respondents also describe the City as a family friendly community, clearly indicating that the primary and secondary education system contributes to the community’s reputation as a “family-friendly community.”

The variety of activities and events available to young people, such as sports, recreational and extracurricular learning opportunities, are recognized as generally enhancing the holistic development of young people [also see *Family Friendly Activities and Other Entertainment Options* section in the *Econ-*

omy chapter]. A few respondents identified the diversity as a factor contributing towards the overall learning experience in the public schools, while others felt that these schools should become more racially integrated.

It is interesting to note that respondents of all ages value the public school system in Bloomington. Many of those who value the public schools also say they value the safety in this community, highlighting the deep connection between these two.

While a majority of respondents value the current public school system, a few note the stigmatization of the west side of the City and social inequality in educational institutions. Respondents point to a declining quality of schools serving the west side of the City. Issues related to declining property values in the core of the City served by District 87 and the related challenges to school funding were also identified [also see the *West Side Neighborhoods* section in the *Neighborhoods* chapter].

A lack of affordable after school activities for low income youth was pointed out as an issue. People identified the need for the community to get together to address this issue noting that it is crucial to keep these kids on a productive path and out of trouble.

Increased access to higher educational opportunities for lower income students was also called for. Providing scholarships to pursue higher education or job training for smooth transition into workforce were also among the suggestions to help the at risk youth.

“I would like to clean up the reputation of West Bloomington. There are wonderful people who live there but are painted to be less than those who do not. The same thing goes for the schools who service those populations.”

“Focus more on improving education, specifically high school education. More development on the west side to encourage growth.”

I Envision
“I would imagine a community that comes together to support the schools, is actively involved in attending local events.”

“Continue the educational opportunities for our young people in their 20’s and 30’s after they graduate from college...”

Respondents are worried about the funding for the public school systems and their capacity to continue providing the valued educational services. Some called for an increased intergovernmental cooperation among the school districts and the municipalities including exploring the option to merge the two public school districts serving the City [also see the Intergovernmental Cooperation section in the Government chapter].

Guiding theme: Bloomington will continue to be a magnet for families by investing in its quality public school system. Public schools will strive to become more balanced socioeconomically.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The universities and community colleges in both Bloomington and Normal provide tremendous higher education opportunities in our community. Illinois Wesleyan University, Illinois State University and Heartland Community College are all recognized as valuable resources in many comments.

In many instances, respondents who describe Bloomington as having “big city amenities” refer to these higher educational opportunities. Along with education, our colleges and universities also extend access to lifelong learning opportunities to community members of all ages. People also praise these institutions’ invaluable cultural contributions [also see the Arts, Culture and History chapter].

Bloomingtonians are proud of the City’s “highly educated” and “white-collar”

population. They link high levels of education to economic success. Colleges and universities are not only valued for the education they provide, but also as incubators of the highly-skilled workforce essential to support our existing employers and strengthen our future economy. Many identify this community as fertile ground for innovation and new industry.

Several respondents identify themselves as IWU or ISU alumni who decided to call Bloomington their home after finishing college. This demonstrates the community’s ability to not only attract but also retain the college graduates, vital for the City’s success now and in the future. However, some respondents see room for improvement in this area.

Other suggestions include increased workforce training opportunities, particularly for low skilled workers, to reduce income inequality [also see the Economy chapter].

Guiding theme: Beyond providing educational opportunities, our colleges and universities, in partnership with the community, will enrich our culture and boost our economic competitiveness.

I Envision

“More racially integrated schools, incentive for local children to attend ISU and IWU, more large business and/or manufacturing, and comprehensive mental health care.”

I Envision

“To be the best city in Illinois and in the nation, by having near full employment, excellent universities and colleges and more middle class families.”

I Envision

“Fun, attractive place for a variety of jobs and careers. With so many colleges and universities, we could be much better! People don’t desire to live here really. Why is that? I would love to stay here the next 20, but want to be where my grown kids desire to go. So far, that’s not here. It’s because of “options” with just about everything.”

GOVERNMENT

City government will work closely with its residents and public agencies at all levels. It will be responsive, transparent, and efficient in its management of resources and services.

GUIDING THEMES

- *The City will continually strive for organizational excellence by providing quality services at levels that can be sustained by revenue.*
- *The City will continue to use codes, ordinances and other tools to promote the health, safety and welfare of the community .*
- *Taxes and fees will strike a balance between supporting valued City services and maintaining Bloomington's affordable cost of living.*
- *Recognizing that certain issues are most effectively addressed at a regional level, the City will continue to work closely with public agencies at all levels towards achieving local and regional goals.*
- *City leadership will embrace a culture of cooperation, allowing it to move the community forward with a unified vision.*
- *The City will continually strive to provide critical and relevant information on a timely basis and facilitate two-way dialogue between City government and the community.*
- *The City recognizes that balancing land use is one of the most powerful tools available in structuring a sound tax base and managing the public cost of growth.*

“All the city services provided from parks to trash and yard pick up. I have not seen such services in other cities.”

“We enjoy amenities such as the trail, entertainment venues like BCPA/ Coliseum and we enjoy the parks. Bloomington also offers a lot of services such as curbside recycle and curbside debris removal.”

“Have police live in neighborhoods they patrol, instead of small towns like Heyworth.”

About half of all respondents address topics discussed in this chapter. The opinions of respondents who comment on the government and its services vary significantly. Some like things as they are, while others would like to see services improved. Some suggest lowering taxes, while others do not mind paying taxes as long as they are used efficiently. Overwhelmingly, respondents support using tax dollars to maintain the City’s existing infrastructure over building new [also see the Infrastructure chapter for additional discussion on this].

CITY SERVICES

Residents generally seem happy with City services and particularly appreciate Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Cultural District, Bloomington Public Library, and the Police and Fire departments. Respondents mention City services provided by the public works department such as garbage, recycling, yard waste and bulk waste pick up, and timely snow removal as valuable City services. There is a desire to see more recycling initiatives in the parks, Downtown and other public places. Many cite the new residential recycling program as a step in the right direction [also see the Health and Natural Environment chapter for additional discussion].

Respondents express concern about the street conditions. There is general consensus that infrastructure investment should be the City’s top priority. The definition of essential infrastructure varies greatly from

streets and sewers to bike trails and public transportation. However, many agree that, with the exception of bike infrastructure, maintenance of existing infrastructure should be prioritized over building new infrastructure [also see the Infrastructure chapter for detailed discussion on this].

The City’s Parks and Recreation department is highly regarded by the community. People are happy with the friendly staff and the affordable programming provided by this department. They are generally pleased with the parks infrastructure and the recreational programming and desire more of those opportunities [also see the Health and Natural Environment chapter for additional discussion]. Respondents call for providing an adequate budget for the parks department noting that they provide equitable access to all people as well as the social need for recreational opportunities.

The general safety in this community is one of the major factors contributing towards the family friendly nature of Bloomington and many credit the police department and the police officers for that. However, respondents identify the need for an increased police force to address the public safety issues on the West Side. Some identify the need for the police officers to be less abrasive towards minorities [also see the Public Safety chapter for additional discussion]. The fire department is a valued City service. However, respondents urged for an increase in funding to provide adequate fire protection for the entire City.

“The parks. The bus routes. The police dept. They are the best.”

“The Bloomington Police Department. They have always been easy to work with, quick on response times...”

I Envision

“People who risk their lives to help citizens of this city, such as firefighters and police officers, they need adequate staffing. Bloomington should be as safe as possible, I don’t want my ambulance taking longer because there are underfunded stations that cannot open or slow police arrival time because they don’t have enough officers. I hope in 20 years that can be resolved.”

“I wish PACE would fine more for people not doing the necessary maintenance on their properties. That would fix a huge part of the City!”

Residents value community facilities such as the BCPA and Bloomington Public Library. Many members point out the need to keep these facilities active, alive and appropriately funded [also see the *Community Facilities* section in the *Infrastructure* chapter].

Guiding theme: The City will continually strive for organizational excellence by providing quality services at levels that can be sustained by revenue.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Residents express concern over a lack of code enforcement, particularly on the west side, by the PACE department (now Community Development department) and the police department. Respondents want the City to take an active role in enforcing the property maintenance codes, particularly for rental properties. The West Side is frequently cited for a general lack of upkeep of the lawns and homes. Some respondents believe that stricter code enforcement will help alleviate these issues and revitalize the area [also see the *Neighborhoods* chapter].

A few respondents call for better code enforcement or revision of codes to reduce the visual clutter created by signage, billboards, and utility lines along Veterans Parkway.

Safety on the streets is one of the biggest concerns for drivers, bike riders and pedestrians. Many urge the need for stricter enforcement of the rules of the road in general, but more importantly around school

zones. People point out that college towns like Bloomington have less experienced young drivers. Many believe that increased police presence and stricter enforcement will make the streets safe for all.

The high concentration of bars in Downtown is identified as a major challenge [also see the *Downtown* section in the *Economy* chapter]. Many express concern over drunk driving, littering and loitering, particularly at night. Respondents discourage the City from issuing any more liquor licenses in the area and find ways to minimize the current licenses.

People point out that better enforcing of rules in the Downtown area will help with its revitalization and make it a family-friendly and pedestrian-friendly area.

Guiding theme: The City will continue to use codes, ordinances and other tools to help promote the health, safety and welfare of the community.

TAXES AND FEES

Respondents from all walks of life describe Bloomington as a very affordable community. Many refer to the housing costs, affordable public services and entertainment options, and the general cost of living in the community. A few express concerns that affordability is starting to decrease, citing the increase in taxes and fees in the community.

While many respondents acknowledge that state taxes are partially to blame for the unfavorable tax climate, there is a great

“Please hold landlords/property owners responsible for property both inside and out.”

I Envision

“The city to be promoting involvement in building our city up instead of focusing on cuts, taxes and politics. Focus on improving our community rather than looking at what we can do without.”

I Envision

“Pretty much the same, but spending must be reined in so that city services can still be provided @ a fair cost.”

“More forward thinking is needed. The conservative economic voices out shout those who are willing to pay more in taxes to help improve all aspects of community.”

I Envision

“A community with partnerships where different parts of the community work together for the good of the whole. It isn’t government vs churches vs schools vs social service agencies but rather all of us working together.”

desire for the City to do everything in its purview to keep Bloomington affordable for both residents and businesses. Some criticize the political leadership while others offer suggestions to address this situation. They range from lowering property taxes and utility fees to providing incentives to businesses to locate here. Some people suggest privatizing the Coliseum, which is in operating losses, to help lower the burden on taxpayers. Others support the public ownership of the Coliseum and would like to see more programming to make it profitable [also see the *Community Facilities* section in the *Infrastructure* chapter]. Along those lines, people want the City to use caution in the use of public dollars in future projects.

On the other hand, some respondents are willing to pay additional taxes to enjoy greater public services provided their tax dollars are being spent wisely. Respondents’ definitions of “wise spending” vary greatly, however, and include maintaining existing streets, adding new bike lanes, and providing equitable services for all. Several respondents suggest providing financial support to organizations and nonprofits that are already doing good work in the community, such as West Bloomington Revitalization Project [also see the *Neighborhoods* chapter].

A few respondents call for a balanced pension for both the police and fire department.

Guiding theme: Taxes and fees will strike a balance between supporting valued City services

and maintaining Bloomington’s affordable cost of living.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Many respondents identify the value in Bloomington-Normal being two cities operating as one community. This includes sharing natural resources, the variety of entertainment options, and the choices offered by two school districts. A handful of respondents suggest better collaboration among the two municipalities and the school districts for efficient use of tax dollars. Specific suggestions include sharing or merging public safety services, libraries, parks and the public school districts.

Guiding Theme: Recognizing that certain issues are most effectively addressed at a regional level, the City will continue to work closely with public agencies at all levels towards achieving local and regional goals.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Some residents appreciate the leadership of the City Council and City administration. They cite communication by certain aldermen with their constituents, customer service at City Hall, attempts to increase the transparency of City government, the vision for Downtown and efficient City operations. Others criticize the lack of coordination among the City’s political leadership. Respondents are disappointed to see many plans that are not implemented and urge

I Envision

“Bloomington/Normal governments, while still separate, have strengthened a symbiotic relationship, the exchange of wise dialogue has heightened as has the and transparency of leaders, McLean County and surrounding counties have aggressively worked together to protect the area’s water supply for future generations...”

I Envision

“A city cooperating with Normal to emphasize social, political, and environmental issues that improve the quality of life.”

“Well I kind of feel like the extra \$20 on my water bill is a little bit outrageous. It should take less garbage men doing less strenuous work now than it used to, I don’t think it’s right to pay a recurring \$20 a month for it.”

the political leaders to reach a consensus for implementation.

While some acknowledge that the City is moving in the right direction, they call for additional transparency. Many want the City to improve its communications with citizens. They feel that the City should find ways to communicate with certain demographics such as senior citizens and those without internet access. Many want opportunities to participate and assist the City in moving the community forward.

Guiding theme 1: City leadership will embrace a culture of cooperation, allowing it to move the community forward with a unified vision.

Guiding Theme 2: The City will continually strive to provide critical and relevant information on a timely basis and facilitate two-way dialogue between City government and the community.

GROWTH

Bloomingtonians are happy to see the City vibrant and thriving. Moving forward, many want to see the City continue to grow. However, several express concern over the type of growth that is going into the outskirts, abandoning the core. Respondents strongly believe that tax dollars are being used to heavily subsidize new growth while abandoning the existing infrastructure in the core. The City's development practices are believed to be conducive to the developers and not the tax payers. With reference to City expansion, respondents urge developers to pay the true

cost of development, including infrastructure and schools [also see the Neighborhoods chapter].

Guiding theme: The City recognizes that balancing land use is one of the most powerful tools available to the City in structuring a sound tax base and managing the public cost of growth.

I Envision

“The city is more vertical and has a vibrant, restored downtown. It’s less willing to annex in perimeter property and it looks strongly at long term operating costs as decisions are being made rather than just first costs. There is also a more proactive approach to quality of life issues that are keystone elements to attracting and retaining the kinds of businesses that we want to have in the community.”

I Envision

“Government is a reflection of what the people want, where my children can live in an affordable fashion and not want to simply leave the city upon graduation.”

“City government to be open to change by listening and implementing unfamiliar ideas that could be potentially the best foot forward for future.”

HEALTH & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Bloomington will practice environmental stewardship and provide healthy and active lifestyle choices for all.

GUIDING THEMES

- *Bloomington's enjoyable, accessible, safe, park system enhances quality of life and promotes a strong sense of community.*
- *Bloomington's walking and biking network will enhance healthy lifestyle choices in the community by connecting people to places in a safe and attractive way.*
- *Bloomington will become a food-secure community that promotes the ability to grow, consume, and distribute healthy, locally produced food. Our food system will benefit our community, our economy and our environment.*
- *Bloomington will be a community that provides quality physical and mental health care to all of its residents.*
- *Bloomington will demonstrate stewardship of its environment and natural resources.*

A focus on public health is one of the primary themes running through the survey responses, with nearly half of all responses touching on this broad subject. Respondents are concerned not only with the physical and mental health of individuals, but also environmental health. In general, respondents characterize Bloomington as a healthy and active community and a good steward of the environment; however, they have many suggestions for improvement.

PARKS AND GREEN SPACE

Respondents express a deep appreciation for the many parks and open spaces that dot the community. Bloomingtonians identify the parks as beautiful public spaces that provide free or affordable recreational and fitness opportunities for all people, provide access to the natural environment, and create a strong sense of community.

Particularly treasured by the community are neighborhood parks, the Miller Park Zoo, and the golf courses. The variety of programs offered by the Bloomington Parks and Recreation department, including SOAR, music, and other cultural events, are highly valued by the community. Many suggest that the parks' relative safety and accessibility make it easy for people to enjoy these amenities.

The most common suggestion for improvements is simply to have more of these facilities throughout the city. In particular, residents express a great desire to expand

after school programming for youth. They believe these positive activities will provide much needed enrichment to "bored youth" and keep them from getting in trouble [*also see the Public Safety and Education chapters*]. Other suggestions include creating more green spaces within the urban area; expanding sports fields to be able to hold regional tournaments; expanding entertainment opportunities during the winter months, when the choice of activities is limited; increasing recreational activities, such as aquatics, for people of all ages and incomes; and creating a dog park in Bloomington.

Guiding theme: Bloomington's enjoyable, accessible, safe, park system enhances quality of life and promotes a strong sense of community.

WALKING AND BIKING

Respondents enjoy the ability to walk or bike anywhere in the community for recreation, fitness, and commuting. The Constitution Trail is highly regarded as an amenity that promotes a healthy and active lifestyle. The trail weaves around the twin cities and lends to accessibility throughout the community, connecting areas of town for commuters and recreational users. Several respondents note that the Trail reduces traffic congestion, which provides environmental benefits.

For a variety of reasons, respondents want to see the City become more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. Some emphasize the fitness benefits of walking and biking; some focus on the environmental benefits; some

"Better, bigger, cleaner parks."

"More parks/sport/arts complexes/programs for youth"

"The trail and parks. I love the easy access to exercise, take walks with friends and family, and that it's easy to move about the twin cities on foot or bike."

"...I think Constitution Trail and our Parks and Rec departments ... are tremendously attractive features."

"The Constitution Trail! A wonderful exercise and commuter and recreation line!"

“It is a family oriented community with a lot of things for families to do. I also love the accessibility of the constitution trail.”

“Parts of the city are very unfriendly or unsafe for bicycles and pedestrians. Veteran’s Parkway is like a castle wall around the city, often with no safe way for pedestrian crossing...”

“Less sprawling. More walkable venues for dining and entertainment. Fully connected bike and walking trails.”

highlight the sense of community encouraged by walking and biking around the neighborhood. Whatever the reason, a large proportion of respondents want to be able to “go places” and “do things” in the community without using their cars.

Respondents have many suggestions for improving walking and bicycling infrastructure. Making it easier to cross Veterans’ Parkway is one of the most common suggestions. Veterans’ is perhaps the biggest barrier for both walking and bicycling in the community. While respondents realize that it is predominantly auto-oriented, walkers and bikers want to be able to safely cross this highway. Extending the Constitution Trail and thoughtful extension of on-street bike infrastructure would also make it easier for walkers and bikers to move around town. Some respondents discuss improvements to the public transit system in conjunction with the walking and biking network [also see the Transportation section in the Infrastructure chapter].

Respondents contrast the mostly walkable Downtown area to the auto-oriented Veterans’ Parkway, but they see a lot of room for improvement in Downtown walkability. Bloomingtonians want Downtown to be more pedestrian-friendly.

Respondents also discuss the relationship between the physical layout of the community and walking and biking accessibility. While the size of the community is conducive to non-automotive transportation,

the current separation of land uses and the street patterns make it difficult to get around without a car. Limiting sprawl and keeping the community’s footprint small is suggested as a way to facilitate travel by alternate modes of transportation [also see the Neighborhoods, Infrastructure and Government chapters].

Guiding theme: Bloomington’s walking and biking network will enhance healthy lifestyle choices in the community by connecting people to places in a safe and attractive way.

HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS

Many Bloomingtonians express a great deal of support for local food. There is a great desire to create awareness of the benefits of healthy, local food and extend those benefits to people of all incomes. Discussions included expanding access to fresh food through farmers’ markets, healthy/specialty grocery stores, food cooperatives, urban agriculture and farm-to-plate operations.

Some residents mention urban agriculture and community gardens as sources of fresh food and as a strategy for neighborhood beautification. Many link the local food options to achieving a healthy natural environment.

The Downtown Bloomington Farmers’ Market and Artists’ Alley is recognized as an asset to the Downtown area and the community at large. The Farmers’ Market is valued both for fresh produce and as a cultural event that brings the community together. It provides the opportunity to know “what’s

“...Bike lanes - especially protected lanes - would help invigorate downtown and make the city safer for motorists, bicycles, and pedestrians.”

“The Farmer’s Market – an essential way to connect to local farmers and get best produce and build community.”

I Envision

“We become a culture that depends and thrives on local businesses and food producers, that values environmental health, and is a community that becomes more unified in our shared spaces - allowing people of all economic status to enjoy safe and beautiful places together.”

I Envision

“We have as many people regularly biking, walking and bussing to locations and events as we do driving. We have a food cooperative that has become a community hub, socially and economically. We have a thriving population of people who value our local shops and food sources.”

I Envision

“A great downtown, bike/walking friendly streets to help with the obesity epidemic, local businesses, easy access to sustainable, organic foods, a city that put priority on wellness, health and the Earth.”

in your food” while supporting local farmers. It further boosts the local economy by bringing residents into the Downtown area who shop at local stores while visiting the Farmers’ Market.

While residents value access to the number of grocery stores offering fresh food, they are quick to point out the lack of options on the south and west sides of Bloomington. To improve this situation, Bloomington residents suggest attracting grocery stores to those areas to allow for more healthy food options. Some residents point out the value in programs offered by community organizations like the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP) to bring affordable produce to the West Side [also see the *Neighborhoods* chapter].

Guiding theme: Bloomington will become a food-secure community that promotes the ability to grow, consume, and distribute healthy, locally produced food. Our food system will benefit our community, our economy and our environment.

HEALTH CARE

Residents generally value Bloomington’s health care system. Citizens comment on the quality of services provided by local doctors and hospitals, as well as the McLean County Health Department and the Community Health Care Clinic. Residents speak of the importance of providing good health care to all of the members of the community.

Some residents identify mental health care as an overlooked service in the commu-

nity. These services are not always accessible for low income and at risk populations. Access to preventative health and oral care is also identified as an issue for our low income population.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will be a community that provides quality physical and mental health care to all of its residents.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

For residents, the health of the environment and the preservation of the community’s natural resources are high priorities. They want natural resources such as lakes, streams, and parks managed in an environmentally sound way.

Citizens praise the City’s relatively low pollution and current efforts in the realm of environmental stewardship. Efforts such as the curbside recycling program are lauded for the benefits they bring now and will bring in the future. Suggested improvements include expanding the recycling program and making more of an effort to preserve local farmland. A number of residents felt that the local farmland is a tremendous natural resource and has a huge impact on the local economy.

There is a great desire for revitalizing the existing urban neighborhoods and limiting suburban sprawl. This sentiment is predominant in the majority of comments [also see *Neighborhoods and Infrastructure* chapters]. Many feel that the current development pattern is not conducive to environmentally friendly modes of travel such as walk, bike or

I Envision

“A limit on urban sprawl and strip malls. Lots of trees. Clean and very safe city--no gangs. Something like a trolley system where you could get on and off at many different places. Top notch centrally located medical facility.”

I Envision

“Healthy, green economy that favors all citizens. Improved water supply and water conservation. Solar and power alternatives...”

“Good recycling program and parks. It adds to quality of life and protects the environment.”

I Envision

***“Less growth/ maintain farm ground/
More reuse of land already developed.”***

I Envision

***“Bloomington will have accounted for
the shifts in automotive transportation
and built infrastructure to take advantage
of this. Don’t waste so much space on
parking due to car sharing, and consider
automated cars when building out new
roads. Consider more electric charging
stations.”***

public transportation.

Long-term suggestions for sustained environmental health include switching to alternative forms of energy, maintaining lush green open spaces without the use of harmful chemicals, and taking steps to ensure cleaner air and water.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will demonstrate stewardship of its environment and natural resources.

I Envision

***“-Pedestrian and bicycle friendly -
Lots of green space - Less asphalt in
particular smaller parking lots - Pesticide
(Chemical) free Community, parks, and
community property.”***

I Envision

***“- The current borders still the borders
but more densely developed within.
In other words, no more suburban-like
sprawl of subdivisions into the farmland.
Build up not out, w/ more apartments
+ smaller lots of homes - Thriving
downtown area - Well used public
transportation w/in + to/from town 100%
renewable energy (solar + wind) - More
community vegetable garden areas w/
recreational programming for youth.”***

INFRASTRUCTURE

Bloomington's public infrastructure will provide a solid foundation for the City's quality of life and economic prosperity.

GUIDING THEMES

- *Bloomington will grow responsibly with careful consideration of the long-term benefits and costs of the public infrastructure.*
- *Bloomington will be proactive in assessing water requirements now and in the future.*
- *Ongoing investment in sanitary and storm sewers will provide systems which function efficiently and protect the local environment.*
- *Bloomington residents benefit from a wide array of community facilities that offer recreation, entertainment, sports, city events and cultural resources for the entire community.*
- *Bloomington's state of the art transportation network will provide residents access to all their needs and enhance the region's economic competitiveness.*
- *Bloomington will become more accessible through an expanded public transportation system.*
- *Bloomington recognizes the challenge of evolving energy resources and supports the use of energy alternatives.*

Nearly half of all respondents addressed infrastructure related issues. They appreciate the work city departments do to maintain and improve the City's infrastructure while forcefully noting that there are deficits in nearly all City-managed systems. The most common concern is the state of the street network and the need to prioritize extensive investment in repair and maintenance. Residents note issues with current water quality and the need to move forward on securing water resources for the future.

GENERAL INFRASTRUCTURE OBSERVATIONS AND GROWTH

A number of respondents are satisfied with the state of the City's infrastructure, but more urge a concerted effort to maintain or upgrade infrastructure to meet future needs. A good state of infrastructure repair is necessary to maintain a positive business climate and quality of life in the City.

General comments on needed improvements refer to streets, bridges, water quality and sewers as primary systems in need of priority attention. Some commenters also note that sidewalks are a matter of concern. Respondents cite a need for improved and expanded bicycle capacity, transit expansion, and an increase in the use of green technologies. A number of respondents advocate infrastructure maintenance and upgrading over system expansion. This may be achieved by keeping Bloomington within or near its current physical size. Continued sprawl will create a demand for costly new infrastructure

and its ongoing maintenance.

Respondents understand the relationship between infrastructure and community growth. While growth is viewed positively in terms of increased economic opportunity, respondents express concern for growing the corporate limits and its associated infrastructure costs.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will grow responsibly, with careful consideration of the long-term benefits and cost of the public infrastructure.

WATER

Respondents discussing Bloomington's current water system sometimes express satisfaction with water quality, but suggest improvements to correct periodic quality problems such as taste, and to address the impact of drought like that experienced in the late 1980s.

Residents look to a future Bloomington that has established reliable and resilient water sources that can meet the City's needs, as determined by the growth and any environmental conditions that affect the water supply. There is also support for an upgraded and improved water treatment and delivery system, to ensure continuing water quality.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will be proactive in assessing water requirements now and in the future.

SANITARY AND STORM SEWERS

Few respondents made specific comments regarding the sanitary and storm sewer systems. Those who did, believe both

“Reduce sprawl, refocus on redevelopment of the urban center and older neighborhoods.”

“We need to improve the infrastructure. We cannot continue to put off the need to maintain roads, sewers, etc. Those are much more important to all residents rather than adding more parks and walking trails. Without a good source of water-we will not grow now and/or in the future.”

“Bloomington use to have the best tasting water. Now it tastes terrible!”

“A long term water source. Establish a major plan for our city.”

I Envision

“Same size as now!! With updated infrastructure so that water mains, etc are not bursting all over town every other week. Infrastructure also includes top notch streets and BIKE paths/trails everywhere!!! We need more and safer trails throughout BLM/Normal and surrounding countryside.”

“We have to invest in our infrastructure – this HAS to be priority number 1. The city has millions of dollars of street and sewer work that needs to be done, especially in the core of the city. We have to find a way to make this happen, and happen now...”

“The Bloomington Public Library, Miller Park Zoo, BCPA, the David Davis Mansion. BCPA is really great for improving the cultural life of Bloomington and gets some great performances. The Bloomington Public Library has a great staff and great book, movie, audiobook, and electronic resources... The Miller Park Zoo is a nice place for the whole family to visit and teaches children to love animals. The Jr. Zookeeper program and their classes are a great learning opportunity for kids in our community. The David Davis Mansion is a really important part of our local history...”

systems require improvements. Although some respondents find the current system reliable, many note the need for system repair and updates citing the cost estimates from the Public Works department. Updated sewer systems are an important element in future development.

Guiding theme: Ongoing investment in sanitary and storm sewers will provide systems which function efficiently and protect the local environment.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Respondents are enthusiastic about community facilities, particularly the programs more than the physical spaces in which they are offered. Residents appreciate and patronize Bloomington Public Library, Miller Park Zoo, the Senior Center at Miller Park, entertainment and sports events at the BCPA, U.S. Cellular Coliseum and Pepsi Ice Center and cultural experiences at the McLean County Museum of History, David Davis Mansion and the Creativity Center. Residents also mention health care facilities as an important resource, and the Downtown Farmers’ Market as both a cultural and healthy living resource. Local parks and the Constitution Trail are among the most valued community facilities [also see the *Health and Natural Environment* chapter].

Suggestions are offered regarding facilities at Miller Park and possible expansion or replacement of the Bloomington Public Library. With respect to several of the community facilities, including the BCPA and the

Coliseum, respondents note that parking is not adequate and should be upgraded.

Some difference of opinion regarding the Coliseum persists; while many of the comments approve of the events there and at the Pepsi Ice Center, there remain a few respondents who argue for the sale of the Coliseum to a private concern. It should be noted that the Pepsi Ice Center and the Coliseum share the same facility [also see Government chapter].

The community facilities valued by the respondents are seen as integral to the future of the city. Residents want these places and programs to thrive and expand where possible.

Guiding theme: Bloomington residents will benefit from a wide array of community facilities that offer recreation, entertainment, sports, city events and cultural resources for the entire community.

TRANSPORTATION

Residents have much to say about the city streets; summarized in two words – fix them. The street system allows for quick access to destinations throughout the community, with few trips requiring more than twenty minutes. Some note that recently, congestion has increased travel times, particularly in the Veterans Parkway corridor. Sidewalks, the primary location for pedestrian travel, are also in need of repairs and expansion.

The Constitution Trail is recognized as a commuting facility used to access schools and employment locations. Those who

“Add parking for the BCPA. Sorely needed.”

“This one is so simple and obvious ... FIX the ROADS!!!...”

***I Envision
“Our infrastructure would be repaired and able to withstand normal traffic. Also, our street system would not be compromised...”***

I Envision

“Better streets, more bike paths, more diverse employer base”

“... Constitution trail is awesome. Being able to bike and run without the threat of automobiles is very liberating and lets people see more of the city from angles they don’t usually get to notice.”

“Make downtown even more vibrant and livable. There needs to be more foot traffic and better transit downtown. There should be a transit hub not just a few bus stops by each other. People should think of downtown as a destination where they want to work, live, and be entertained.”

“...Bloomington is very easy to get around... It does a great job of keeping traffic moving even when it’s rush hour.”

use the trail system for commuting would like to see trail expansion, on-street bicycle improvements and secured bicycle parking. Specifically noted are trail and bicycle lane extensions which connect to one another and to high-volume destinations such as schools and universities, large employment centers and retail districts.

Concern for the condition of the City’s streets extends into comments regarding Bloomington’s future. A well-maintained street network is viewed as important to safety, quality of life, economic development and tourism. Some residents see the City accommodating newer transportation technologies such as alternative fuel cars, more electric car charging stations, car sharing and automated cars. An updated street system can be an element in reducing congestion and controlling traffic in residential areas. A handful of respondents comment on the East Side highway project, some in favor and others in disagreement.

With respect to other modes of transportation, respondents note support for high-speed passenger rail service, particularly to Chicago. Residents like the service at Central Illinois Regional Airport (CIRA), but would like to see a broader range of direct destinations from the airport.

Guiding theme: Bloomington’s state of the art transportation network will provide residents access to all their needs and enhance the region’s economic competitiveness.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Residents value the service and access provided by Connect Transit, the local public transit system. Transit users note that the system makes daily life easier to manage in a very automobile-oriented community. They appreciate the affordable fares and note that it provides access to school and employment for those without cars.

Respondents generally request faster service, greater coverage of the city by the route system, and longer hours of service. Some commenters note that the infrequent service on many routes makes it difficult to use the transit system for daily commuting. Many further note that there should be transit service on Sundays for access to worship and employment. Longer service hours, perhaps even 24-hour service daily, would allow residents with non-standard working hours to use public transit. Expansion of the route system would also increase the pool of riders.

Guiding theme: Bloomington will become more accessible through an expanded public transportation system.

ENERGY

A few survey respondents note a need for expanded energy resources and a reduction in the use of fossil fuels, both by the City and by residents. They support development of new energy resources, and particularly the use of renewable energy sources.

Guiding theme: Bloomington recognizes the challenge of evolving energy resources and supports the use of energy alternatives.

I Envision

“Many more trees and much much more “walkable” as a city, from the down town core to the fringes of town. A unified single beautiful community not so addicted to car culture.”

I Envision

“If you want to go somewhere, you don’t need a car. Buses, trails integrate even more into the city. Local establishments are more prominent than chains.”

“Extend public transportation buses to run on Sundays.”

I Envision

“Better access to commuter passages Electric trolleys Work from home High speed rail to larger cities. Garbage shoots outside No garbage pickup Quieter neighborhoods.”

I Envision

“City buildings are mostly powered by renewable energy sources, and technology is the hub of our economy.”

NEIGHBORHOODS

Bloomington's vibrant and diverse neighborhoods will remain the framework of our community.

GUIDING THEMES

- *Bloomington's neighborhoods, in all their diversity, are the core of community life and provide the foundation and framework for a safe, vital and successful city.*
- *Bloomington's historic older neighborhoods will be sought-after residential areas where growth and change are accommodated with respect for their historic context.*
- *Bloomington's revitalized West Side will be a fusion of renewed residential areas, local businesses and community members enjoying the results of their engagement and initiative.*
- *The City will continue to leverage public/private resources to ensure that it is developed equitably.*
- *Housing in Bloomington will be affordable and accessible with a range of choices for all.*

“I love that though Bloomington is a small city, we have elements of a larger city - lots of local businesses, culture & arts, a rich history, the Constitution trail, wonderful parks & entertainment, etc...”

“Family feeling-- no matter what neighborhood, I feel like there is a feeling of ‘family’ and ‘togetherness’.”

“I was born and raised here, as I feel safe here, Bloomington is growing fast, but it still has a “smaller town” feel. People are friendly and ready to help. We are very caring here.”

Almost all responses touched on topics relevant to neighborhoods in some fashion. The responses reveal a deep connection between residents and their neighborhoods. Respondents describe how the experience of living in Bloomington’s varied neighborhoods creates a sense of the city as a unique and welcoming community.

NEIGHBORHOODS DEFINE BLOOMINGTON’S QUALITY OF LIFE

Neighborhoods are bound together with the values and experiences of residents’ families and their view of the community as a wonderful place to grow up and raise the next generation. Many identified themselves as Bloomington natives or long-term residents, and expressed the hope that their children and grandchildren could enjoy the same neighborhood atmosphere in years to come. Neighborhoods are valued as the framework for community, the setting in which people experience their city most directly, and the tangible manifestation of the quality of life they find here. Several respondents value their friendly neighbors and good neighborhoods.

The fundamental significance of Bloomington’s neighborhoods is seen in their contribution to stable and prosperous economic conditions, community health and safety. Frequently cited is the connection between neighborhood vitality and infrastructure maintenance. Residents want the public infrastructure in their neighborhoods to be maintained in serviceable condition

and improved as necessary [also see *Economy, Infrastructure, Health and Natural Environment, Government, Arts, Culture and History*].

Neighborhoods contribute to an oft-cited aspect of life in Bloomington, that the City combines the feel of a small town with the amenities and resources of a larger city. That small-town feeling is embodied in the neighborhoods, where respondents expressed their sense of safety and connection to their fellow residents. While people are attached to their own neighborhoods, they often cited their affection for the older, historic neighborhoods, sometimes even specific homes with particular historic, architectural or aesthetic value. There is concern that these special areas of Bloomington are being left behind as the city grows.

These established areas of the City are viewed as essential to Bloomington’s character and charm, which contribute to its personality and draw new residents and visitors to our community. Several respondents also noted the attraction of the mix of history and enduring Midwestern culture that is at the center of Bloomington’s appeal.

Many envisioned preserving the historic neighborhoods, enhancing the residential options in Downtown and adding mixed use and transit oriented neighborhoods where walking, biking or taking the bus can become the norm [also see the *Transportation section in the Infrastructure chapter*].

Guiding theme: Bloomington’s neighborhoods, in all their diversity, are the core of community life, and provide the foundation and

“I value the ability to live here and raise children. It is a well rounded community with many facets for having a family. Good schools, nice neighborhoods, churches, parks, family activities, good employment, easy access to medical professionals, clean environment, athletic opportunities. In order to have a stable family life, a community must have the facilities and aspects for children and parents, as well as extended care givers and grandparents.”

“Public services are excellent. My neighborhood is very nice...”

“The small town style open plan neighborhoods in the old city...the ones with old trees, garden’s, front porches, and sidewalk’s. I value my privacy, but I value the sense of community, kids walking to school, families riding bikes, neighbors talking across yards and alleys.”

“The downtown area and the historic neighborhoods because they bring character and charm to the town.”

I Envision

“Bloomington will be an employment incubator with high densities near downtown and reinvestment in old industrial facilities. Neighborhoods will maintain their character with mixed use development filling the void for new and affordable housing. Transit oriented development will be encouraged, especially connecting Downtown Bloomington to Uptown Normal, perhaps with fixed guide-ways transit, but at least increased frequency.”

“The city (downtown) need to be revitalized. it’s not that we have too many bars it more that it need more real businesses. This is a community with vitality.”

framework for a safe, vital and successful city.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Respondents regard keeping and enhancing the vitality of the residential areas within and around Downtown as a primary tool to bring new energy and a neighborhood sensibility to Downtown itself. In the areas adjoining Downtown there is clear support for revitalization and investment to elevate surrounding neighborhoods and support Downtown as well. Many respondents discussed the special characteristics and challenges of the Downtown neighborhood, resulting from its mix of commercial, corporate and residential functions.

There are concerns arising from Downtown being a gathering point for homeless people, although respondents acknowledge the complicated social forces that perpetuate homelessness. These and other factors create the impression that the Downtown neighborhood is unsafe. Respondents want these issues addressed directly through revitalization and renewed commercial development, so that the resources in the neighborhood will be more readily used by all residents [also see the *Economy* chapter].

Guiding theme: See the Downtown section in the Economy chapter.

HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

Bloomington is fortunate in its long and colorful history. The numerous historic

buildings, sites and neighborhoods reflect various stages of the City’s development. They demonstrate the community’s historical continuity and contribute to its identity.

Respondents suggest actions to preserve historic neighborhoods. In the context of neighborhoods, finding a way to upgrade and maintain all public infrastructure is frequently noted as the essential predicate to all other neighborhood improvements. This includes streets, bicycle and pedestrian trails and routes, sidewalks, water and sewer systems [also see the *Infrastructure* chapter].

Respondents also emphasize the importance of green space and neighborhood parks. Residents often preferred rescuing older neighborhoods as opposed to expansive new residential development at the edges of Bloomington. Residents also express preferences for the traditional neighborhood design of straight streets and sidewalks rather than the curved streets and cul-de-sacs of suburban style residential development. The structure of older neighborhoods promotes faster travel times and reduces the potential for congestion.

Residents expressed concern that our older neighborhoods frequently receive less attention in comparison to the newer subdivisions. These neighborhoods are visible reminders of where we have been and deserve active protection and enhancement.

Guiding theme: Bloomington’s historic older neighborhoods will be sought-after residential areas where growth and change are accommodated with respect for their historic context.

I Envision

“A marriage of historic buildings with new. Easier access for bicyclists to the downtown, An end to streets that don’t go anywhere (cul de sacs).”

“Improve downtown. Normal did a wonderful job revitalizing uptown. They tore down bars, put in unique stores and restaurants, and made it look beautiful. Having access to healthy stores is also important. I’d add a Trader Joe’s and Whole Food. A dog park would be great too!”

“I would revitalize downtown Bloomington. As it is now there is not much to do there and some parts of it are not very safe to walk around in especially at night. I think that if the downtown was better it would encourage growth in the city and stop the sprawl.”

“Completely revitalize the downtown area to be more reflective of our citizenry. Move public works out of central core, and create opportunities for more health oriented shops and activities. Hotel, convention center, restaurants.”

“Better bike infrastructure. Pedestrian zone in downtown Bloomington - and I’m a business owner in the downtown district.”

WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOODS

There is concern about the status of neighborhoods on the West Side, including areas adjacent to Downtown and along the Market Street corridor. Concern is not limited to those living on the West Side. Comments noted issues relating to infrastructure maintenance, community facilities, and the perceived and actual disparity between conditions on the east and west sides of the city.

Suggested infrastructure improvements include rethinking the West Market Street gateway, adding neighborhood-scale businesses and services, and eliminating blight while maintaining neighborhood diversity. Information infrastructure, such as data networks, is also important as the information economy expands.

Many respondents noted the influence and successes of the West Bloomington Revitalization Project. This program demonstrates the progress that results from community engagement and commitment. Respondents repeatedly called for economic development that provides for West Side needs, such as accessible grocery stores, pharmacies and other retail, and employment opportunities.

Access to grocery stores providing a full range of foods, particularly fresh produce, is needed on the West Side. Bloomington’s western and southwestern neighborhoods have very few full-scale grocery stores at present and they are difficult and even dangerous to reach without access to a car. Residents express the need for manageable access to

fresh food for pedestrians or bus riders. Food stores should have choices available for users of the SNAP and WIC supplemental nutrition programs.

Some cited the need to improve neighborhoods through city action against neglectful landlords and blighted properties [also see the Government chapter].

Guiding theme: Bloomington’s revitalized West Side will be a fusion of renewed residential areas, local businesses and community members enjoying the results of their engagement and initiative.

THE EAST/ WEST DIVIDE

Neighborhood revitalization is discussed as a means of addressing the social and economic divides between the East and West Sides of Bloomington. Respondents express concern about the polarization of interests and resources in the city and a need for solutions that are equitable for all. Approaches suggested for the West Side concentrate on improving affordable housing, engaging in economic development that creates jobs and reduces poverty, and ensuring that residents in need of assistance receive the support they need to move out of poverty.

Other steps include correcting the West Side food desert, supporting more extensive transit service, improved school performance in the District 87, and providing community facilities to support education, employment and accessibility.

On East Side, the state of infrastructure has improved and is maintained, as is

“Less division between east and west. I hate that people have perceptions of a “good” side of town and a “bad” side of town. Need balance.”

“Revive, reinvigorate the inner city, older neighborhoods and the west side. Change the perception and remove the stigma of these areas to attract younger families.”

I Envision

“The west side would be a welcoming place, strong neighborhoods empowered under the one unified blanket of Bloomington, solvent government.”

“We need a grocery store on the west side.”

“I’d like to see all of those beautiful old houses on the near west side cleaned up and the neighborhoods revitalized.”

***I Envision
“Each area is easily walkable, with conveniences of neighborhood groceries, parks, entertainment, etc. available to everyone. There would be no more East side/West side divisions, every area would be maintained equally with pride. And every building would be accessible to persons with disabilities.”***

access to community resources and facilities. Survey responses note the importance of additional bike infrastructure on East Side, coupled with improvements to allow safe access for pedestrians and bikers to the commercial corridor along and radiating from Veterans Parkway [also see the Transportation section in the Infrastructure chapter].

Guiding theme: The City will continue to leverage public/private resources to ensure that it is developed equitably.

HOUSING

As noted in the discussion regarding the West Side, survey respondents commented on the need for affordable and accessible housing. Affordable housing should be available throughout the community, with public transportation providing access to schools, places of employment, and goods and services such as fresh food and health-care. Respondents noted the need for affordable rental housing options in denser neighborhoods with services, such as Downtown Bloomington. Some comments noted the particular needs of older residents, in terms of preferred housing types for people with reduced mobility, limited incomes, and those requiring levels of assistance with day-to-day activities. Affordable housing is also needed for lower income families, and is best located close to schools, parks and other community resources.

Some respondents noted that more and better affordable housing distributed throughout Bloomington’s residential neigh-

borhoods would foster more social equality among city residents, whatever their economic, ethnic, disability or other status. This could be encouraged through broad access to public transit and other transportation choices, and would aid in developing and maintaining a culture of diversity, excellence and achievement in neighborhood schools.

Locating both rental and owner-occupied affordable housing throughout the community would lessen the perception that rental housing is detrimental to neighborhoods. Some respondents felt that the city is over-supplied with rental housing options, a view often expressed in context with comments suggesting that the respondents agreed that rental housing is inherently less desirable.

With respect to housing choices for older residents and those residents with disabilities, comments noted the need for the city’s ordinances to acknowledge and perhaps promote the use of universal accessible design and “visitability” standards in new home construction. The acceptance of these standards would enable residents with mobility, physical or cognitive challenges to engage fully in their neighborhoods and the community at large.

Guiding theme: Housing in Bloomington will be affordable and accessible with a range of choices for all.

“More development of westside: revitalization or current businesses to promote jobs, affordable quality childcare near bus stops, buses running 8pm-8am, grocery store on westside, safe after school activities for ages 6-18.”

“Enforce the existing property code with specific attention to rental properties in areas of blight.”

“More affordable housing in nicer neighborhoods...”

“The Boomers are coming of age; keeping them, and their assets, is important to this community...especially with the State Farm restructuring. There are too few affordable, attractive options here...”

PUBLIC SAFETY

Our responsive police, fire and emergency services will ensure safety and security for residents to live, learn, work and play.

GUIDING THEMES

- *All of Bloomington neighborhoods will be safe places to live, learn, work and play.*
- *The Bloomington Police Department will work closely with neighborhood residents to maintain a safe atmosphere in our communities.*
- *The City, in partnership with community organizations and citizens, will ensure safety on the streets for all modes of travel.*

Ensuring the safety and security of its citizens is paramount for any City government. Being the kind of City where people feel safe and want to raise a family is crucial for the growth and development of any community. About a third of all respondents directly addressed public safety issues and many more commented on subjects discussed in this chapter. These respondents generally characterize Bloomington as a safe place for them to live and raise their families. Respondents on the West Side did comment that safety is a concern for them and the City should be working towards improving it.

“There are so many things to value. Most important to me is safety from crime through law enforcement, fire, & rescue.”

“Safety. Because not much else matters if you and your loved ones are not safe.”

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

Residents treasure the safety in their neighborhoods. They describe their neighborhoods and the community in general as family friendly and a safe place to raise their kids. Some respondents said that the peace and quiet are reasons to live here. Commenters draw a connection between safety and a sense of community and togetherness among neighbors.

While responses indicate a general happiness with the City’s safety level, East and West Side residents have very different perceptions about the levels of safety in their own neighborhoods. Respondents who identified themselves as living in the Wards 6 and 7 (West Side wards) were the only groups who were more likely to call for safety improvements than to say they value their current level of safety. West Side respondents are very

concerned about the increase in drugs, gangs, theft and other criminal activities.

Many respondents from all areas of the city express concerns about safety in the West Side and Downtown. These commenters feel that much needed revitalization efforts on the west side of the community would lead to an increase in safety. Beautification efforts such as upkeep of lawns and homes and improving the general aesthetics of neighborhoods are often mentioned in conjunction with safety issues, suggesting these concepts may be seen as connected. Many identify a need for continued investment in housing and improving social conditions as a prerequisite for making the West Side a safer and more attractive place to live [also see *West Side neighborhoods in the Neighborhoods chapter*].

A notable proportion of public safety comments focus on youth issues. Many respondents suggest more activities for youth as a measure to improve safety within the community. Having more positive activities through parks and recreation, BCPA, etc. for young people would provide enrichment and are perceived to divert them from negative influence.

Guiding theme: All of Bloomington neighborhoods will be safe places to live, learn, work and play.

DOWNTOWN AND BARS

Residents and visitors to Downtown identify a significant need to improve safe-

“Better police control of areas that are known problems.”

“There is really nothing for our teens and tweens to have for a positive place to gather. Develop some areas that tweens and teens can safely hang out with activities... dances, bonfires, learning job skills.”

“Limit the number of bars in downtown. Good businesses are driven out by the filth + inappropriate behaviors. Police seem to be unresponsive...”

“A police force that is more considerate of minorities and less abrasive towards the Bloomington community as a whole.”

ty and the perception of safety in the area. Downtown’s cluster of bars that attract college students are a public safety concern. Reducing the concentration of bars and attracting family friendly stores and restaurants were suggested as a strategies to make Downtown safer, particularly at night [also see the Downtown section in the Economy chapter].

POLICE

Respondents are divided in their views of the Bloomington police force. Some are happy with police services, while others have encountered harassment, racism and poor community interaction and communications. Better relations with residents, particularly with minority groups, are widely called for.

Several respondents want to see an increased police force to protect all neighborhoods, including those that are currently underserved.

Guiding theme: The Bloomington Police Department will work closely with neighborhood residents to maintain a safe atmosphere in our communities.

BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Residents who enjoy walking and cycling comment that they feel unsafe in certain areas due to a lack of sidewalks, issues with traffic and alignment of roads, and neighborhood conditions. Making Bloomington’s streets more pedestrian and bicycle friendly through efforts such as bike lanes,

better lighting, and extending Constitution Trail would increase pedestrian, cyclist and auto safety throughout the community [also see the Transportation section in the Infrastructure chapter].

Guiding theme: The City, in partnership with community organizations and citizens, will ensure safety on streets for all modes of travel.

I Envision

“... A place the people want to visit, live, work, and raise their family.”

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

As the people of Bloomington responded to the community survey, an ongoing review of the survey responses began. MCRPC staff read and re-read comments made by survey respondents, reviewing them for common themes to be applied to the comprehensive plan.

When the public outreach period ended on October 31, 6% of responses consisted of topics that are not generally raised by the respondents as a whole. These responses, presented in this chapter, focused intently on limiting the role of government, and sometimes repeated the same response to all four questions. The contents in this chapter are an acknowledgment of this voice. These responses, however, cannot be considered during the comprehensive planning process for reasons explained below.

While responding to questions 2 and 4 of the survey, these respondents focused on the following general themes:

- Dissatisfaction with the current elected leadership of Bloomington, or portions thereof;
 - Recommendations for the following, as elements of a preference for limited government:
 - Actions requiring a political process, such as the removal of elected officials;
 - Management of city staff/employees requiring policy decisions on the part of elected officials or senior staff,
- such as across-the-board salary reductions, dismissals or departmental restructuring;
 - Changes to pension or other benefits for city staff, requiring policy decisions and/or ordinance or statutory changes at the local or state level, or renegotiation of contracts;
 - Privatization of a substantial portion of municipal services;
 - Public assistance programs, including public housing, to be restricted or eliminated, although such programs are not controlled at the municipal level;
 - Restricting or prohibiting residence in Bloomington for persons perceived by the respondent to be undesirable, sometimes defined by the place of origin of the person as presumed by the respondent;
 - Lower taxes, including the recommendation of tax reductions for taxes not levied by the City of Bloomington;
 - Use of tax revenues only for “basics” or “needs” or “necessary” services and programs as defined by the respondent;
 - Substantial cuts in municipal expenditures combined with expectations of increased municipal services;
 - Sale or other disposition of City assets, most commonly the U.S. Cellular Coliseum, and
 - A balanced municipal budget, elim-

ination of municipal debt or fiscal responsibility (used interchangeably).

Recommendations made in the following group of comments raise questions of policy which cannot be settled within the scope of the comprehensive plan:

- Recommendations for action require political decisions by Bloomington’s voters, by the City Council, and in some instances by outside governmental entities, including the state and federal governments. Political decisions such as these are outside the scope of the comprehensive plan, and in some instances outside the purview of the City of Bloomington.
- Recommendations for alterations in the City’s terms of engagement for its staff fall outside the scope of the comprehensive plan. Such actions and may require policy changes respecting the terms of service for city employees, negotiations with respect to city employees represented by unions, or the City’s ability to make unilateral contract revisions for outside service providers or consultants.
- Recommendations for the revision or elimination of public assistance programs administered or funded under state or federal provisions cannot be executed by the City of Bloomington. This also applies to the implementation of policies

created for the purpose of excluding residence by persons of a specific national or ethnic origin, or economic or educational status.

In the limited number of comments which attempt to define a distinction between the essential and non-essential expenditures, respondents in this group did not agree on a definition of which municipal programs and activities fell within those categories; some comments saw parks as essential spending, while other found them frivolous. Others did not attempt to distinguish between the two categories, and provided no guidance in the planning process as to how such determinations should be made. Their call for limited government is beyond the scope of the comprehensive planning process.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

BRING IT, BLOOMINGTON!

PLAN IT . SEE IT . LIVE IT.



The comprehensive planning process for the City of Bloomington began in early 2014. The City contracted with the McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) to completely overhaul the previous plan based on a broader community input. The goal of the outreach process was to reach at least 10% of the population. It fell slightly short of that goal, but the process reached over 6,100 residents, including 2,076 survey responses, making it Bloomington's biggest outreach effort ever.

LOGO

The first step in the Comprehensive Plan process was branding the public outreach phase. A graphic design professor from Illinois State University, Julie Johnson, assisted in that area. The slogan "Bring It On Bloomington: Plan It, See It, Live It" was an instant winner. This phrase used a fun use of language to encourage and challenge residents to provide a future direction for the City. This logo was used to brand all the marketing materials, from the survey to informational posters to lawn signs. This graphic representation of the public outreach phase could be seen on the City's website and social media accounts.

PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

The "Bring It On Bloomington" video, produced by Phil Vandivier, a local videographer, introduced the Comprehensive Plan process to the general public. The video

provided viewers basic information about what a comprehensive plan is and why they should get involved. It featured great visuals of the city, including Downtown, local parks, and a few of the businesses synonymous with Bloomington. The video featured several community members, each of whom gave a reason why have chosen Bloomington as a place to live, work, and play. The video lasted approximately three minutes and helped drive the spirit of the Bring It On Bloomington public outreach campaign. The video reached over 25,000 community members via the social media and was featured at public meetings and on the web portal.

WEB PORTAL

The Bring It On Bloomington web portal, www.bringitonbloomington.com, was created as a "one-stop shop" for anyone looking to learn more about the Comprehensive Plan. The web portal hosts a variety of information, including the current state of the process, survey responses, and the existing conditions report. This portal will continue to be used throughout this process to keep the public informed on the progress of the plan.

The "Engage" page of the web portal was the online home of the Bring it On Bloomington survey. The page contained a link to the survey, a word cloud showing the most common survey responses, and a link to each week's actual responses. The word cloud and responses were updated weekly. The goal was to encourage people to participate in the



BRING IT, BLOOMINGTON!

PLAN IT. SEE IT. LIVE IT.

It is time to update the City's comprehensive plan. Bring on your ideas, input, and dreams to make our City better.

Learn more and participate in the many available activities.

Great Reasons to get Involved

PLAN IT. SEE IT. LIVE IT.
www.bringitonbloomington.com
#bringitonblm
Bring It On Bloomington
@bringitblm

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| 1 Your Right You have a right to be involved in decisions affecting you. Participating in the plan can influence decisions and give you the opportunity to recommend issues for the City's consideration. | 2 Your Leadership Leadership in our community isn't just for elected officials - take this opportunity to play a leading role in Bloomington. | 3 Your Early Involvement The Comprehensive Plan sets the framework for long-term City policies and programs. Getting involved early in the planning process is an opportunity to shape long-term policies. | 4 Your Inclusion Do you feel like your group has been left out? It's time to change this. Voice your concerns in the planning process and make sure your viewpoint is represented. | 5 Your Relations Involvement in the planning process can pave the way for long-term relationships among agencies working for the same goals, and with your local government. |
| 6 Your Future Is Bloomington the home you choose for you and your family's future? Participate in the plan to help make Bloomington the hometown you want it to be. | 7 Your Social Network Is Bloomington a good community for you and your family? Do you plan on living in Bloomington in the future? Why or why not? Let the comprehensive plan be a focus for these discussions. | 8 Your Retirement Do you want to enjoy your retirement in this community? Help the plan reflect ways to make Bloomington the best place to retire. | 9 Your Business Bloomington businesses are key to our community's prosperity. Your perspective on the City's economic future is vital to the planning process. | 10 Your Community Whether you represent yourself, your family, your neighborhood, or a community group, adding your voice makes for a better Bloomington. Engage in the planning process and make it happen. |

process in as many ways as possible, so after residents finished the survey online, they were directed back to the web portal, where they could find further ways to get involved with the process.

POSTERS (10 WAYS AND 10 REASONS)

Two pieces of literature were created to help get the word out, "10 Great Reasons to get Involved" and "10 Ways to Get Involved." Each of these pieces could be printed on a regular sheet of paper or turned into a poster. These provided easy ways to get information to people at meetings and events. Both pieces had information directing people to the website and social media sites.

"10 Great Reasons to get Involved" was an informational guide that provided ten reasons why one should participate in the comprehensive plan update. The guide attempted to explain the unique opportunity this process provides residents to fulfill their civic duty and help shape their community's future.

"10 Ways to Get Involved" listed ten tools a person could use to voice their opinion or concern. The guide encouraged readers to (among other things) visit the website, fill out the survey, and contribute feedback through social media, community meetings, and discussions with neighbors.

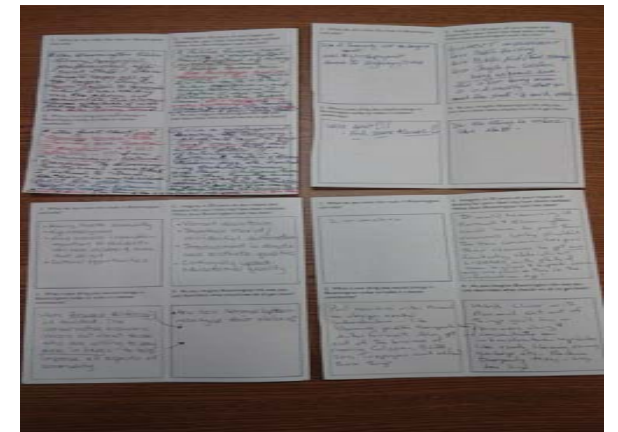
THE SURVEY

The survey consisted primarily of four short, open-response questions designed to

discover 1) what residents like most about Bloomington now; 2) how they would like it to change in the near future; 3) what their ideal Bloomington would look like 20 years from now; and 4) what can be done to bring that ideal future about. Ten demographic questions allowed staff to break the responses down by demographic group.

The survey was made available in both physical and digital formats. The paper survey was made available through a wide variety of channels. Most significantly, it was mailed along with the city water bill to over 25,000 residents. Because not all residents receive water bills, MCRPC also made a concerted effort to reach people in rental housing and mobile homes by contacting landlords and residents and placing surveys in common areas. Community events provided opportunities to reach residents outside their homes, so staff attended a number of events and venues and handed out both paper surveys and the link to the online survey. Several organizations and businesses throughout the community contributed by making surveys freely available to patrons. Connect Transit, for example, made surveys available to riders and placed drop boxes inside buses, allowing people to contribute their voices without interrupting their daily routines.

Most of the surveys were filled out online. The success of the online survey can be attributed to several factors. The survey's prominence on the Bring It On Bloomington website made it easy for web visitors to fill out the survey. Facebook and other social me-





dia outreach clearly boosted the number of surveys filled out online, especially during the last two months of outreach, when social media outreach efforts were increased. Many of the same organizations that helped distribute paper surveys also promoted the survey on their websites and encouraged people to fill out the survey through newsletters and email blasts to subscribers. Finally, for Internet-savvy residents, filling out the online survey and clicking “send” was probably faster and easier than filling out the paper survey and mailing it back to MCRPC.

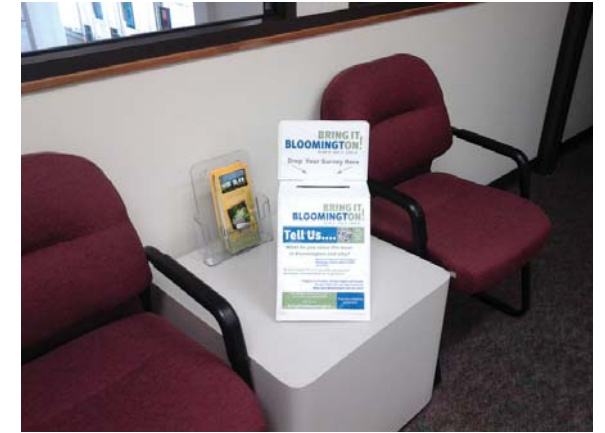
All told, the survey outreach process reached tens of thousands of residents and brought in 2,076 responses.

DID YOU FRIEND US, TWEET US, OR INTERACT?

Social media was and continues to be a critical tool for disseminating information and gathering input from residents. The three social media tools used for the public outreach were Facebook, Twitter, and Mindmixer.

With over 1,000 likes, the Facebook page played a major role in getting the word out about the Comprehensive Plan and the survey. Residents were asked to “like” the Facebook page and share posts regarding meeting information, public feedback updates, and other elements of the outreach process. The page continues to be used to share information regarding the next steps of the Comprehensive Plan with the public.

Twitter has been used for the same





purpose, though it has not been as popular as the Facebook page, perhaps because Facebook allows residents more opportunities to respond and talk to each other. Through the end of the outreach process, the Bring It On Bloomington Twitter account had 107 followers and had posted 84 tweets.

Mindmixer has provided community members more targeted opportunities to interact with each other and with staff. Mindmixer is a website that gives organizations a way to start conversations with individuals, which are enhanced by the various interactive software tools the site provides. Members of the public can then join conversations through written comments, ratings, and sharing posts. One conversation on the Bloomington Mindmixer portal asks participants to pinpoint their favorite places in Bloomington on an interactive map and describe what they like about it. Another asks participants to submit their best photographs of the city, several of which were eventually used in this document. Conversations such as these are useful as a way to keep people involved once their interest has already been piqued through Facebook or Twitter.



people and other events included more than 100. MCRPC staff and volunteers attended over 30 events and meetings in the four month public outreach period, including neighborhood organizations, PTO meetings, the Farmers' Market, and various other civic organization meetings.

Community events provided a further opportunity to present information about existing conditions, get more public feedback, and encourage people to fill out the survey. Events included the farmers' market, a quad fair, service clubs and block parties.

Throughout this process, MCRPC staff presented at various City of Bloomington meetings, including the City Council, Planning Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, and Zoning Board of Appeals. At these meetings, staff gave updates on the progress of outreach efforts, the number of surveys received by the time of the meeting, and an overview of the feedback that had been gathered, and presented draft plan documents such as the Existing Conditions Report to the various Boards and Commissions and the Council.

MEDIA

Along with attending meetings and events, MCRPC took advantage of local media to help spread the word about the Comprehensive Plan and community survey. Over the course of the public outreach phase, MCRPC's executive director gave four radio interviews on local stations (two on WGLT, one on WJBC, and one on WBNQ) to give





insight into the comprehensive plan, providing information on why the public should be involved and how they could provide their input. Local newspapers and blogs also covered the public outreach process. An article and editorial piece in The Pantagraph and an article in the McLean County News Bulletin helped increase the outreach process's public visibility.

HISPANIC OUTREACH

For this plan, a special effort was made to reach the Hispanic community. The community survey and “10 Reasons to get involved” poster were both translated to Spanish. The web portal a Spanish-language section with information about the City’s planning process, reasons to get involved and a link to the survey in Spanish. During the month of September, Hispanic Heritage Month, El Porton, La Carniceria, and Lupita’s hosted three outreach events where volunteers transcribed and translated Spanish-language surveys. More than 100 residents participated in Hispanic outreach activities throughout this process.



I WANT IN BLOOMINGTON....

One of the many ways in which people could give their opinions without filling out a survey was to fill out a sign or sticker that had the phrase “I want... in Bloomington” with a thought bubble for people to write in their suggestion. People submitted a wide variety of things they wanted, including

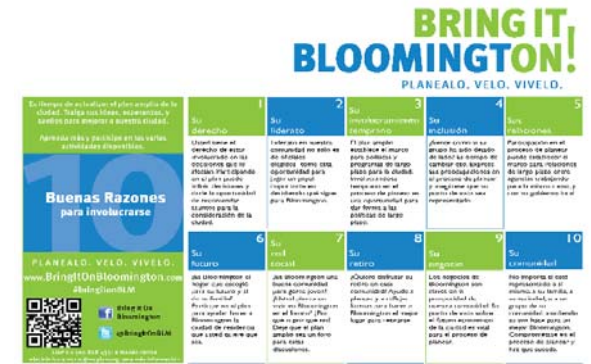
particular restaurants and shops, more parks, better bike access, and improved interactions between police and residents, among other things.

The signs and stickers were obviously incapable of capturing as much information as the surveys, but they had the advantages of being more visually appealing and taking less time to fill out. As such, they were an excellent way to attract attention and quickly capture feedback at community meetings and events. Stickers were posted on a whiteboard display at the Farmers’ Market and outside the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department. The signs, meanwhile, turned out to be very photogenic, as several participants agreed to have their photos taken while holding their signs up for the camera.

WHO RESPONDED

The total number of responses to the survey was 2,076. A majority of responses, 1,517, were completed electronically using a survey link in an email, on the website, or on Facebook. Despite the number of surveys sent through the water bill (over 25,000), this method of distribution only brought in 294 surveys. Neighborhood meetings and events brought in 182 surveys. The remaining 83 surveys were gathered from drop boxes on Connect Transit buses and at local businesses.

Along with the four open ended questions, the survey asked 10 demographic questions to give a better picture of who was responding to the survey. We made a concert-





ed effort to reach as many different people as possible. This was especially important in regards to the information gathered about age, geographic area and homeownership.

The first demographic question, “How long have you lived in Bloomington?” received 2,008 responses, with 68 people choosing not to answer. Responses to this question were distributed fairly evenly among those who have lived in Bloomington between six and 15 years and 25 years+. Those who have lived Bloomington for 1-5 years were a small minority of the comments, perhaps because they have enough time to develop strong opinions about the community and think about its future in a long-term sense.

The second, third, and fourth demographic questions asked for information regarding age, gender, and race/ethnicity. In regards to age of respondents, 2,011 people answered with 65 people skipping the question. The vast majority of respondents who provided their age were at least 25, with the largest number of responses coming from those in the 35-44 and 45-54 age brackets. The 18-24 and 17 and under demographics were the lowest represented demographics among respondents to the survey. Realizing that this was going to be an issue, MCRPC staff worked closely with the local universities and high schools to encourage younger members of the community to take an active part. The participation rate improved in September and October once the schools and colleges opened.

The question regarding gender received 1,918 responses, with 158 people not responding. More than half of the respondents to this question were women (63%) while 37% were men.

Of the 1,901 people who responded to the race and ethnicity question, 88.8% identified themselves as Caucasian. The other available responses (aside from “other”) were “African-American” (5.7%), “Hispanic/Latino (2.7%),” “Asian (1.9%),” and “Native American (0.8%).” Given the demographic makeup of the City of Bloomington, it was anticipated that the majority of respondents would be Caucasian. In order to gain a more representative sample of the community, staff made efforts to reach out to all segments of the community, including targeted outreach to the Hispanic Community.

There were 1,956 responses to the education attainment question, with 120 people choosing not to answer the question. Of respondents who completed this question, 65% had a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, with another 20% indicating that they had completed some college. Only 3.9% of those who responded to the question stated that they did not have a high school diploma or GED. Given the high education levels of the community, this was expected.

Question 6 asked if the respondent spoke a language other than English. The majority of respondents (1,589) chose to skip this question. The remaining respondents (487) had a wide variety of languages spoken (see word Cloud). Many of those



2,076
Total # Survey Respondents

Question 1

What do you value the most in Bloomington and why?

1,942

Answered the question with **134** opting not to answer

who responded stated they spoke “none” or “only English”. Among those who did write down a foreign language, the top three responses were Spanish, French, and German. A small percentage of the respondents stated that they speak at least two different languages, with some listing as many as four languages spoken.

Demographic questions seven, eight, and nine requested information about the household. Household income was asked in question seven, with 1,902 people responding and 174 people skipping the question. Over half of respondents identified that their household income is \$60,000 per year or more with 32% indicating a household income of \$100,000+ annually. The income data gathered from this question is representative of the income levels within the City.

Question 8 was about home ownership. This question received 1,959 responses with 117 people choosing to skip the questions. 80% of those who responded to this question stated that they own their homes, while 20% responded that they rent. While there are more homeowners than renters in the city of Bloomington, the City still has a higher rate of renters (nearly 40%) than were represented in this survey. Efforts to reach a more representative sample by contacting renters and landlords did appear to affect the response rate.

Question 9 was about the number of people in the household. The total number of responses received was 1,983 with 93 people skipping the question. Over half of

responses stated that 1-2 people lived in their household (54.97%). Coming close to equaling those responses were people responded by stating they had 3-5 people in their household (41%). Only 4.03% of respondents indicated that there were more than 5 people living in their household.

The final question asked in the survey was for the respondent to provide their address or the city ward in which they lived. Where a street address was given (some in various degrees of incompleteness), staff attempted to match the address to the corresponding city ward, both for ease of analysis and to protect the respondent’s privacy. This question received 1,601 responses, with 474 people opting to not answer the question.

Nearly 87% of non-blank responses fell into a city ward; however a small percentage, 13%, did not have a specific ward to which the response could be matched. Depending on the information provided, these responses were categorized as either “Bloomington (5.62%)”, “Normal (4.75%)”, “Outside of Bloomington (2.12%)”, or “Other (0.62%)”. The ward with the most responses was Ward 4 (18.03%) with the second highest number of responses coming from Ward 8 (12.93%). The ward with the fewest responses was Ward 7 (6.12%). In order from most to least responses, the other wards were ranked as follows: Ward 1 (9.81%), Ward 9 (9.62%), Ward 6 (8.74%), Ward 3 (7.31%), Ward 2 (7.25%), and Ward 5 (6.81%).

Question 3

Imagine, in 20 years, all your hopes and dreams for your ideal city have been realized. What does Bloomington look like then?

1,864

Answered the question with **212** opting not to answer

Question 2

What is one thing you would change in Bloomington today to make it a better community?

1,969

Answered the question with **107** opting not to answer

Question 4

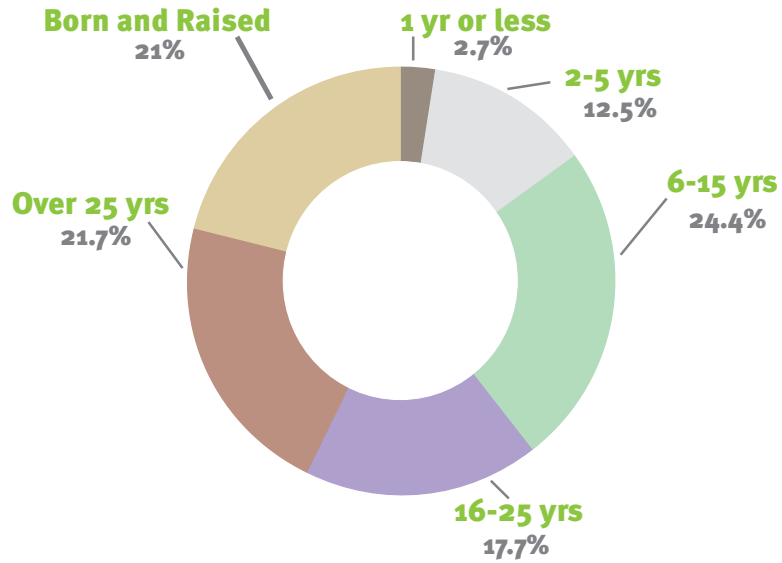
As you imagine Bloomington the way you just described, what should we do to get there?

1,798

Answered the question with **278** opting not to answer

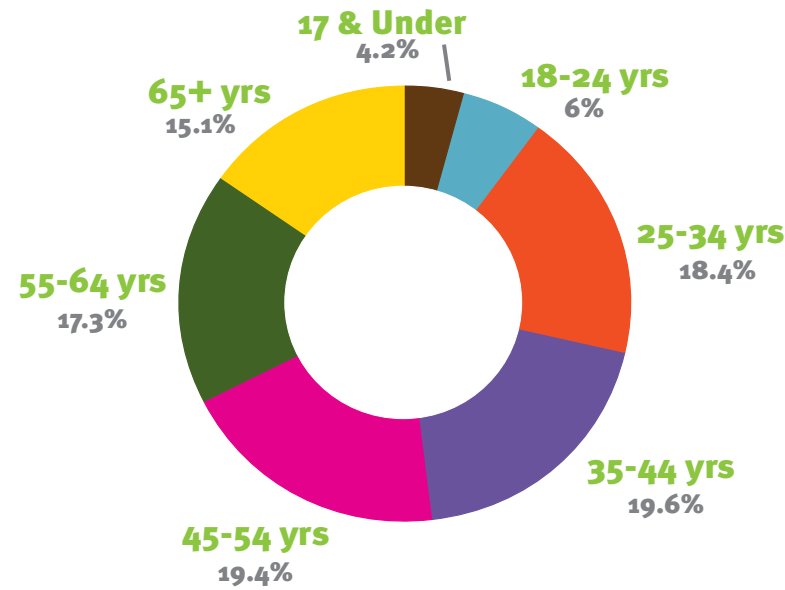
1. How long have you lived in Bloomington?

total responses=2,008 skipped=68



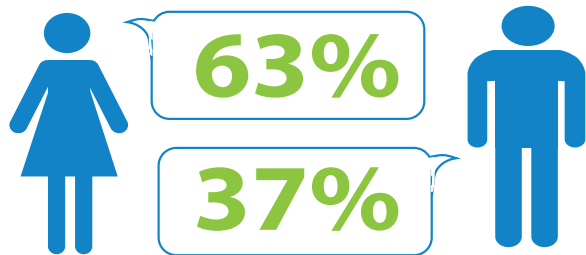
2. Your age?

total responses=2,011 skipped=65



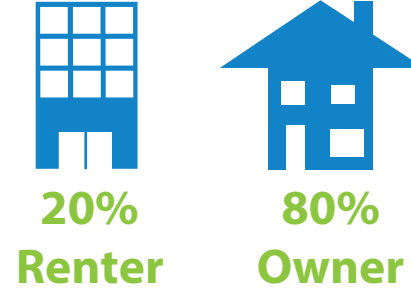
4. Gender?

total responses=1,918 skipped=158



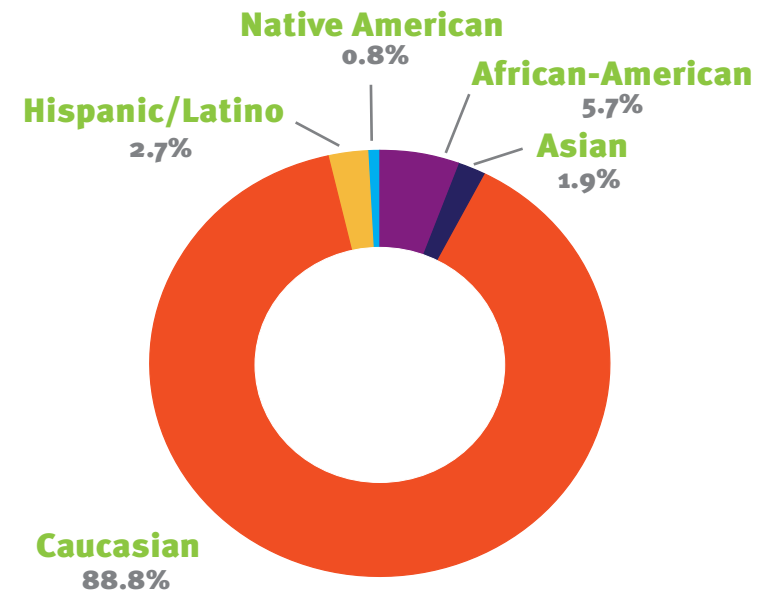
8. Home Ownership?

total responses=1,959 skipped=117



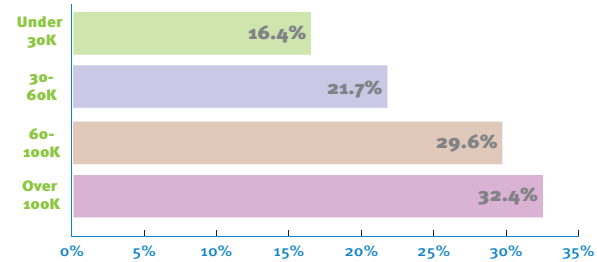
3. Race/Ethnicity?

total responses=1,901 skipped=175



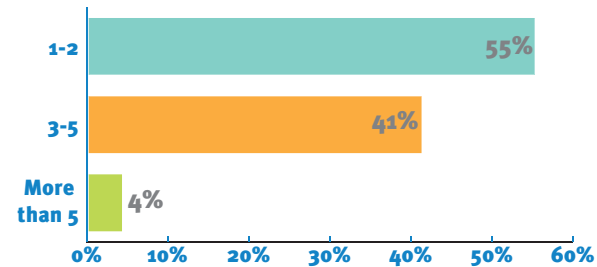
7. Household Income?

total responses=1,902 skipped=174



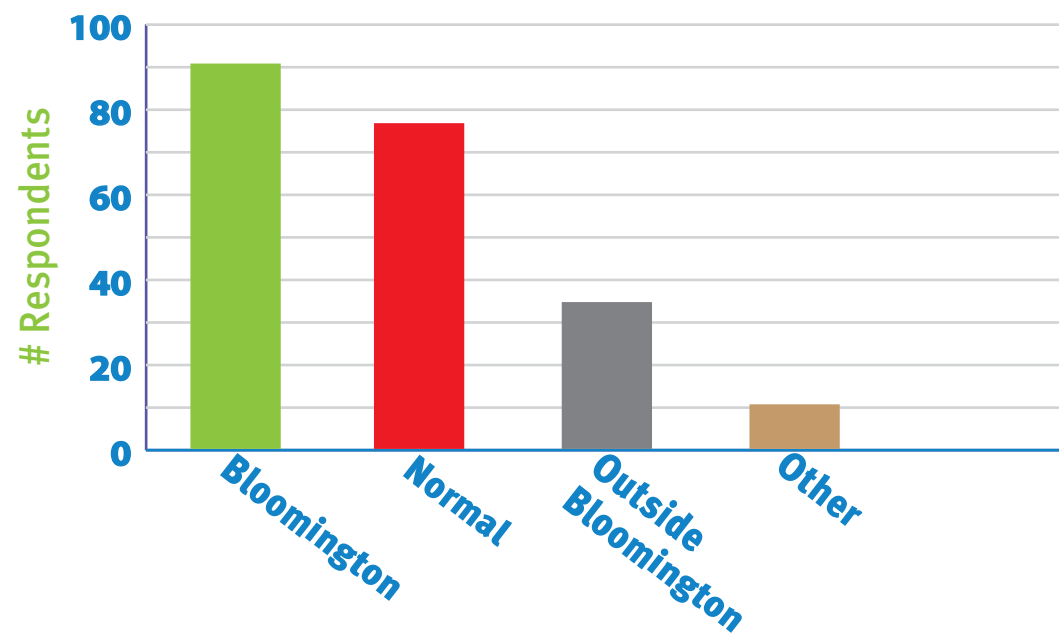
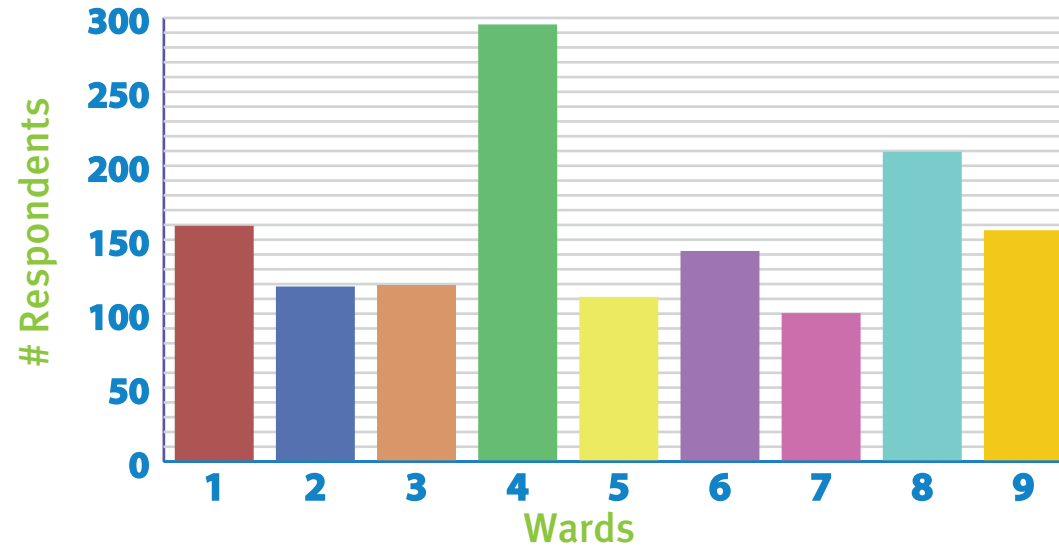
9. Number of people in the household?

total responses=1,983 skipped=93



10. Please provide your address or city ward?

total responses=1,636 skipped=440



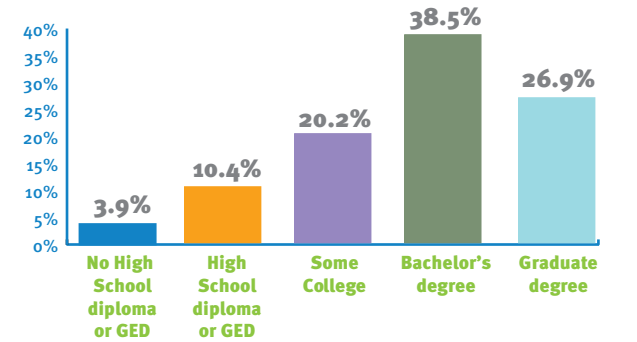
6. Language spoken other than English?

total responses=487 skipped=1,589



5. Educational Attainment?

total responses=1,956 skipped=120



McLEAN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION & STAFF

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County of McLean

Mary Jefferson, Vice Chairman
Town of Normal

Michael Buragas
City of Bloomington

Mary Kramp
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William Jackson
G.I.S. Coordinator

Teresa Casselman
Office Manager



McLean County Regional Planning Commission
115 E. Washington Street, Suite M103
Bloomington, IL 61701
(309) 828-4331
MCRPC@mcplan.org

<http://www.mcplan.org>



McLean County Regional Planning Commission



@McLeanCountyRPC