

Sponsor:

Zach Ammerman

RESOLUTION 2026-03

**CONCERNING THE PEDESTRIANIZATION OF KIRKWOOD AVENUE AND
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION**

WHEREAS, the Bloomington Municipal Code establishes the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability and Resilience to "promote and advance sustainable policies and practices in Bloomington across environmental, social, and economic dimensions"; and

WHEREAS, The Bloomington Municipal Code empowers the Commission to "advise and make recommendations to the Bloomington Common Council, city administration, and city boards and commissions on policies and programs that infuse the work of city government with an operating philosophy based on sustainability and community resilience"; and

WHEREAS, United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 ("Sustainable Cities and Communities") calls upon signatories to provide sustainable transport systems and universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces; and

WHEREAS, Kirkwood Avenue between the Indiana University Sample Gates and the Courthouse Square represents the most iconic and heavily trafficked pedestrian corridor in Bloomington; and

WHEREAS, the Bloomington Common Council unanimously passed Ordinance 2025-02¹ establishing a multi-year Kirkwood Outdoor Dining Program, with the stated intent of providing businesses certainty and a clear path toward a more pedestrian-oriented Kirkwood; and

WHEREAS, the administration's February 2026 proposal to suspend the seasonal street closure program drew criticism from multiple councilmembers and members of the public, who characterized it as violating the spirit of the ordinance and undermining years of progress toward pedestrianization; and

WHEREAS, when configured for automobile traffic, motor vehicles dominate the streetscape, relegating pedestrians to narrow sidewalks and excluding cyclists from a corridor that lacks dedicated cycling infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, Church Street in Burlington, Vermont; Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado; and the Main Street Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Virginia, demonstrate that

¹ <https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/legislationFiles/5850>

permanent pedestrian corridors in analog university communities can thrive year-round economically while creating vibrant, sustainable public spaces; and

WHEREAS, research consistently demonstrates that business owners overestimate the proportion of customers arriving by automobile, underestimate the percentage of customers arriving by transit, biking, or walking, and that pedestrianized commercial districts often experience increased foot traffic and economic activity²; and

WHEREAS, the current uncertainty regarding Kirkwood's status, oscillating between pedestrian and automobile setups, prevents businesses and the City from making long-term investments in streetscape improvements; and

WHEREAS, the administration's primary quantitative justification for suspending the program, an 8% decline in visitor traffic along the Kirkwood corridor, is derived from an AI analytics firm with no available methodology, falls barely outside the firm's own self-reported 5% margin of error for visit data, and does not account for confounding factors including broader national economic and political conditions, making it an extraordinarily thin evidentiary basis for abandoning a popular public program; and

WHEREAS, the administration has framed the Kirkwood program as a revenue question by comparing approximately \$80,000 in forgone parking meter revenue to approximately \$17,000 in outdoor dining permit fees, yet these figures combined represent a negligible fraction of the City's annual operating budget (the amount is equal to 0.0004% of the 2025 operating budget), and decisions about the use of public space should not hinge on such comparisons; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor, in a February 18 interview with Indiana Public Media, stated that “only five” businesses along the corridor expressed support for the pedestrianization program, but according to the city’s published survey results, at least 20 businesses surveyed along the corridor expressed “strong support” of continuing the program, the largest category, with more than 50% indicating support of any degree, but that such decisions nonetheless should not be made based solely or largely on the opinions of individuals who happen to own businesses nearby, but rather primarily on the benefits of the program to the Bloomington community as a whole; and

WHEREAS, the administration plans to unilaterally abandon the Kirkwood pedestrianization program starting in summer 2026, violating the spirit if not the letter of Council Ordinance 2025-02.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED BY THE BLOOMINGTON COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY, THAT:

² von Schneidemesser, Dirk, and Jody Betzien. 2021. “Local Business Perception vs. Mobility Behavior of Shoppers” Findings, June 2021. <https://doi.org/10.32866/001c.24497>; and <https://ggwash.org/view/96602/survey-most-shopkeepers-shoppers-overestimate-car-use>

SECTION 1. The Commission finds that:

- (a) Street design and transportation infrastructure implicate environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability and fall within the Commission's statutory mandate.
- (b) Pedestrian-oriented street design promotes sustainable transportation, public health, social interaction, and economic vitality.
- (c) The years-long pattern of seasonal closures has established a community expectation that Kirkwood will function as a pedestrian space, and reversing this trajectory undermines both business planning and public trust.

SECTION 2. Recommendations

The Commission respectfully recommends that the Bloomington Common Council and City Administration:

- (a) At minimum, reverse the decision made by the administration and continue the seasonal closure of Kirkwood Avenue to vehicle traffic during summer months, consistent with the intent of Ordinance 2025-02.
- (b) Strongly consider taking measures in favor of the permanent, year-round closure of Kirkwood Avenue to motor vehicle traffic between at least the Sample Gates and the Courthouse Square, with provisions for emergency and limited service/delivery vehicle access, and without including provisions that would allow the city administration to unilaterally end the program without the consent of the council.
- (c) Study Church Street in Burlington, Vermont; Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado; and the Main Street Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Virginia, as models for successful permanent pedestrian corridors in comparable university communities.
- (d) Prioritize investment in permanent streetscape improvements, including planters, landscaping, shade structures, seating, and accessibility enhancements that would maximize the corridor's function as a public space.
- (e) Move administration of the Kirkwood pedestrianization program from the Department of Economic and Sustainable Development to the Department of Planning and Transportation.
- (f) Reframe the program from one of outdoor dining and economic development to one of public space and sustainable transportation.
- (g) Repeal Section 7 of Ordinance 2025-02, which gives discretion to the City Engineer to unilaterally and permanently suspend the program.
- (h) Cease framing the Kirkwood program in terms of parking revenue versus dining permit revenue and instead evaluate the program based solely on its contributions to

public health, sustainable transportation, quality of life, and Bloomington's identity as a walkable community.

SECTION 3. Statement of Values

The Commission affirms that sustainable cities prioritize people over automobiles, especially in their most central public spaces, and that Bloomington's identity as a walkable, bikeable community should be reflected in the design of its most prominent and iconic pedestrian corridor.

SECTION 4. Transmittal

The Chair is directed to transmit copies of this resolution to all members of the Bloomington Common Council, to the Mayor, to the Director of Planning and Transportation, to the Director of Economic and Sustainable Development, to the City Engineer, to the Chair of the Board of Public Works, and to the Chair of the Transportation Commission.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability and Resilience upon this ____ day of _____, 2026.

_____, Chair

Bloomington Commission on Sustainability and Resilience

The views expressed here are solely those of the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability and Resilience, as approved in their public meetings, and do not necessarily reflect the views, policies, or positions of the City of Bloomington. Only the Office of the Mayor has the authority to issue policy statements on behalf of the Executive Branch of the City of Bloomington.