

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bloomington Community Farmers' Market Suspended for Two Weeks

Bloomington, Ind. – Recent events at the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market have raised concerns about public safety, and the City today announced the suspension of the Market for the next two Saturdays.

Since the recent public discussion of ties between a vendor at the market and white nationalist causes and groups, the City has identified increasing threats to public safety.

“As Mayor, I have spoken for our City to condemn white nationalism and white supremacists as a scourge on our country and our community, and to promise that we will do all we can to overcome their legacies and any current efforts,” said Mayor John Hamilton. “We also want to assure that everyone knows that all are welcome in our inclusive Bloomington, and that our Farmers' Market will embody those values of inclusion and welcoming, as well as be a safe space for all to gather, as our community expects every Saturday.”

Over the past several weeks the City has taken numerous steps to address the challenges posed by the presence of the market vendor, including increased public safety patrols, increased staffing at market, community-wide forums on the issues, the support of nonviolent protest and advocacy in accord with market rules, and engagement with the vendor community and other interested parties to evaluate operations and options. These steps all follow the mayor's statement, issued June 17, attached below.

Unfortunately, escalation of tension and conflict at the market over the past weeks, and information gathered identifying threats of specific individuals with connections to past white nationalist violence, present the potential for future clashes. “In light of recommendations from our local public safety officials, advice from national experts, and awareness of recent tragic incidents of violence at similar public gatherings, we are hitting the pause button to protect public safety in Bloomington,” said Hamilton. “We will be gathering with a wide range of local folks to identify how best our community embodies our values of justice and inclusion, and protects our treasure of the Farmers' Market.”

The mayor will hold a press conference to address the situation on the morning of Wednesday, July 31.

Mayor John Hamilton's Statement on the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market, issued June 17, 2019

Recent allegations about a vendor at our City's farmers market having white-supremacist affiliations have alarmed and activated our community. Including me, personally and as Mayor. I join the vast majority of Bloomingtonians in abhorring and unequivocally condemning the odious doctrine of white supremacy. We know how important speaking out against hate is these days, with events and statements in our country and around the world seeming to open the door for hateful ideologies.

We know too that today's progressive Bloomington has grown through our 200-year history in a soil laced with the toxin of racism. Like our state and country, our community was long home to both overt and covert white supremacy, in our laws, culture and mores. Generations have struggled together to make progress in Bloomington, to eliminate many legacies that persist. We know much remains to be done, and that we must redouble our efforts to stand together and affirm our belief in inclusion and welcoming and opportunity for ALL.

That's why it's so important to respond – together and directly – to racism whenever and wherever it appears. We report hate and bias incidents, annually compiled and published by our City's Human Rights Commission. Our community teems with individuals and organizations that work every day to weave that big, wide welcome mat that we want to be as real and inclusive as it should be.

One place where that welcome mat is vital is at the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market, where, for decades of Saturday mornings, residents and visitors have gathered for fellowship and community-building along with their fruits and vegetables. The City has run the market through those years, explicitly committed to offering a space "where all can feel welcome and safe regardless of race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, housing status, or disability status" (as stated in the vendor handbook).

The City will not tolerate any vendor displays or behaviors at the market inconsistent with that fundamentally welcoming environment. We will vigorously protect against any behaviors that threaten those values. On the other hand, we must also comply with the US Constitution's First Amendment, which prohibits governments from restricting individuals' rights to believe and speak as they choose, within very wide ranges, including those who sell at (or attend) a City-run farmers market.

Repeatedly and consistently throughout the last century, the US Supreme Court has said that government may not silence or punish people for disfavored beliefs, in cases involving viewpoints including Communists, anarchists, civil rights protesters, and Nazis. Our constitutional government's prescription for odious speech isn't government control or censorship. It's MORE SPEECH. That is, our community, including this Mayor, can make clear our values, even when our government cannot directly intervene.

That's why it's vital that individual Bloomingtonians and groups are stepping

up and making their presence known at the market. To stand against hate and bigotry. Period. To welcome and embrace people without regard to all those characteristics used throughout history and still today to divide us one from another. To spend our money thoughtfully, knowing who we are buying from and how our purchases affect the wider world.

That's why as Mayor I want to make clear my loud condemnation of racism and bigotry, and my commitment to do all we can to keep working together to pull them out, root and branch, from our common soil. They and their descendants, privilege and implicit bias, continue to fester, demanding our vigilance and energies every day.