

To: Bloomington Common Council Members
Cc: Stephen Lucas, Council Administrator/Attorney
Beth Cate, Corporation Counsel
From: Mayor John Hamilton
Date: December 23, 2022
Re: Veto Message re: Resolution 22-20 - A Resolution Responding to Monroe County Board of Commissioners Ordinance 2022-46

Members of the Common Council:

I am returning Resolution 22-20 without my signature. Fundamentally, I do not believe that the Capital Improvement Board (CIB) created will deliver our community the outstanding, state-of-the-art convention center expansion that we need and deserve.

On November 9, 2022, with essentially no public notice or comment, the Monroe County Board of Commissioners adopted Ordinance 22-46 and established a CIB to manage and direct the affairs of the downtown convention center and its expansion. By its terms, the ordinance took effect immediately but was also made contingent upon the City Council and Mayor agreeing to its terms by January 1, 2023.

With passage of Resolution 22-20, the Bloomington Common Council supported "efforts taken by County officials to form a CIB," but requested the City administration to negotiate "interlocal agreements to resolve matters not addressed" in the county ordinance and identified several such specific components.

With this message and veto of Resolution 22-20, I affirm I do not agree with the terms of County Ordinance 22-46.

My administration has worked energetically and diligently for seven years to advance an expansion of the downtown convention center, believing it offers important positive opportunities for downtown and our whole community. While we are frustrated by delays, we will continue to collaborate with all interested parties on the best path forward.

What is needed in the short term is an entity that can effectively oversee the design, financing, and construction of a major expansion of the downtown facility. I respect that some believe a CIB meets that need. I do not, and I note that neither my approval nor City Council's is needed to create a CIB and pursue that path.

I do not believe a CIB is the best path forward because it is not likely to succeed in designing, financing, and building a signature, efficient, state-of-the-art downtown expansion that will bring the desired benefits to our community. I reach that belief in light of both the inherent structural and procedural qualities of a CIB and the past history of efforts to pursue this path.

A CIB is not likely to excel at the complex tasks of expansion. If designed fairly, a CIB is inherently cumbersome and unwieldy. Adding City voices to key financial decisions like bonds and budgeting—necessary for any semblance of fairness—makes a CIB more bureaucratic and potentially micromanaged, and state code still leaves veto power over those decisions in County hands during the critical short-term work of expansion.

I believe many also underestimate the extensive government staff coordination and engagement needed with such a board to navigate years of decisions and choices in financing and design, construction oversight, and more. I believe county staff will be exceedingly occupied with many demands in coming years, in particular with the long-overdue community justice reform efforts, which will likely include very major construction projects.

Moreover, public funding for an expansion will be almost exclusively from City revenues. And the project will affect and interact with numerous other downtown city activities and projects led by City government and our partners, including our arts community, our infrastructure and transit investments, our parking assets, our housing and neighborhood developments, overall downtown vitality, and more.

Thus, I continue to believe that a nonprofit created by and coordinated closely with City government is the appropriate entity to oversee the design, finance, and construction of an expansion project. It can be more nimble and efficient in the short term. It offers better opportunities to amass and deploy sufficient financial resources to design and build a signature downtown facility. Food & Beverage (F&B) tax revenues should provide the majority of funding, but additional public and private sources may well be needed to achieve the overall excellence and impact that our community expects and deserves.

As described in extensive detail in other documents provided to Council, the County, and the public, such an entity would coordinate fully with other County and City entities and with a full range of interested parties to assure broad public participation and careful fiscal oversight. Transparency and accountability would be assured. Compliance with process and consistency with public goals is assured because nothing could proceed without support from city and county fiscal bodies, the Convention and Visitors Commission, and the F&B tax advisory commission.

A CIB, if designed fairly and operated in good faith, could perhaps be a useful vehicle for the long-term operation and guidance of a convention center after an expansion is accomplished. Such a CIB, even if inherently cumbersome and unwieldy with multiple layers of overlapping approvals, perhaps could serve that eventual role if staffed and populated appropriately.

Different views may steer a different course for our community, and I respect such efforts. I remain focused on how to advance our downtown and our wider community with a project worthy of our energies and resources.

Respectfully,



John Hamilton
Mayor, City of Bloomington