



**City of Bloomington
Office of the Common Council**

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211 S. College Avenue
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Re: Input from City officials into Convention Center Expansion Project

Dear Monroe County Capital Improvement Board of Managers (CIB),

Thank you for your work on the Convention Center Expansion Project (Project). As you move the Project forward, you will undoubtedly have many pieces of information to consider, and the Bloomington Common Council (Council) appreciates your efforts. In that vein, this letter is meant to provide the CIB with additional input into the Project from the Council to help ensure alignment during the design phase and prior to any request to bond for the project. It is also meant to help clarify the Council's expectations on a variety of topics related to the project. The Council hopes the CIB will incorporate this information and guidance into its decisions and processes as it continues to meet and advance the Project. We look forward to updates in regard to these issues from our CIB appointee, Doug Bruce, and/or from the CIB president, John Whikehart.

FINANCES & APPROVALS

Food & Beverage Tax Revenues

1. City expenditures on the proposed convention center expansion should be limited to food & beverage tax revenues only, the funding source previously identified for this project.
2. In line with limits communicated in a 2017 Letter of Intent from Mayor Hamilton, the Council plans to reserve 7.5% of city food & beverage tax revenues for other valid uses. Possible uses the Council hopes to see and would support include the following Bloomington Transportation Plan projects related to downtown vibrancy, safety, and sustainable connectivity, all located near or adjacent to the convention center:
 - a. Conceptual design and engineering design costs for the Kirkwood Ave. conversion to a shared street (Bloomington Transportation Plan, Project SS-1);

- b. Engineering design costs for the redesign of College Ave. and Walnut St. following completion in 2024 of the College/Walnut Corridor Study (Bloomington Transportation Plan, Project CS-1);
- c. Smith Ave. right of way connector (from Howe St. & Morton St. to Smith Ave. & College), part of a Priority Bicycle Facilities Network project (Bloomington Transportation Plan, Project NG-4; planned for construction by the end of 2025 and not currently funded).

City Property

- 3. If the expansion project seeks to utilize all or part of the property north of the existing convention center, currently owned by the Bloomington Redevelopment Commission, the CIB (or any other entity seeking to utilize the land) should expect to budget no less than \$6,895,000 to acquire the property (the price paid for the property utilizing TIF revenues) or a proportional amount if only a portion is needed for the Project. This could include potential use for a private hotel.
- 4. If other city- and RDC-owned property currently being used for the convention center (for surface parking) is proposed to remain a part of future use, the CIB should engage the Mayor and Council directly about these plans since the use of this land involves opportunity costs (e.g., the ability to develop affordable housing).

Bonding Capacity

- 5. In considering total project costs and the total bonding capacity supported by 92.5% of the city's food & beverage tax revenues (current balance and projected revenues), the CIB should include in the expansion project budget a minimum 10% contingency to buffer against unexpected construction costs and to decrease the likelihood that the project will draw on city resources besides the food & beverage tax.

City Subsidies

- 6. City funds (from the food & beverage tax or other sources) or real property should not be used to subsidize surface parking lots or structured parking in excess of any *current* subsidies (e.g., subsidized parking rates at the 4th Street parking garage).
- 7. To the extent possible, parking for an expanded convention center should be directed to the city-owned 4th Street garage, the current utilization of which is significantly below capacity. (A new private hotel may also wish to add structured parking, much like the Hyatt or Graduate hotels.)

CIB Expenditures and Budget

8. Going forward, the CIB should not contract for services or make other financial commitments prior to receiving all necessary approvals from the Bloomington Common Council, including budget approval. This is regardless of whether food and beverage tax revenues have been appropriated in the city's annual budget.

Operations and Maintenance

9. Before bonding for the project, the CIB should develop and present a financial plan for long-term operations and maintenance of the expanded convention center and any government-owned assets, including after the food and beverage tax sunsets. This should include optimistic, moderate, and cautious scenarios for conference attendance revenue given the inherent uncertainty about attendance projections and existing data demonstrating that post-expansion attendance often does not match pre-expansion projections.

Project Approvals

10. The project should have all requisite design approvals, such as Plan Commission approval, prior to bonding.
11. The project should follow the city's Unified Development Ordinance as much as possible. If variances are requested, these should not undermine city policy goals as reflected in relevant city plans and city code.

DESIGN & USE

Sustainability

12. All government-owned buildings should meet or exceed a LEED silver standard or equivalent and achieve certification (a current requirement of Bloomington Municipal Code for city-owned buildings).
13. New buildings that use public funding sources and/or land should not utilize combustion of fossil fuels for space heating and water heating. They should instead rely on electric heating methods such as air-source or ground-source heat pumps, solar hot water heaters, etc.

14. New buildings that use public funding sources and/or land should dedicate roof space primarily for on-site solar energy generation, energy storage, and/or green roof features.
15. Design, operational, and financial plans for the expansion should include sustainable transportation options, including the following:
 - a. An option for airport shuttles coordinated by the convention center as needed for conferences;
 - b. Consideration of a downtown circulator shuttle to minimize the need for and use of single-occupancy vehicles for conference travel and a covered bus stop with ample space (NB, a downtown circulator shuttle would likely require additional dedicated funding and entail more discussion among the city and county governments).

High-Quality Architecture and Compact Urban Form

16. All new buildings or updates to existing buildings should support community character through high-quality architecture and compact urban form (Bloomington Comprehensive Plan Policy 4.1.1), including but not limited to:
 - a. All main entrances fronting on public streets, with additional forward-facing design along the B-Line Trail where relevant;
 - b. No “skywalk” connections (elevated walkways connecting buildings), which undermine human interaction with and the quality of public space—important issues for the improved vitality of downtown often cited in support of the Project;
 - c. Retention and inclusion of alleys (or other public rights of way) wherever feasible, including potential replatting of alleys that were formerly vacated.
17. The CIB should work with the city and county governments to establish a collaborative process for public input and architectural review of designs.
18. All Project designs should anticipate and accommodate street changes in line with the city’s Transportation Plan, especially: the redesign of the College Ave. and Walnut St. corridor to improve multimodal travel options (Bloomington Transportation Plan project CS-1) and a planned bicycle and pedestrian network connection utilizing Smith Ave. right of way between College Ave. and the B-line Trail (Bloomington Transportation Plan, Project NG-4).
19. Any portion of the project funded with city revenues should follow the city’s Percentage for the Arts program (BMC 2.12.021).

Civic Uses

20. The design and operational plans for the expansion should include options for civic uses. The CIB should work with the city and county governments to establish a collaborative process for public input and decision making related to civic uses, including operational funding. Potential civic uses could include the following:
- a. Bookable meeting rooms;
 - b. Performance space;
 - c. A teen-focused youth center;
 - d. Senior care or related programming;
 - e. Food or drink establishments that are open to the public, possibly as part of a market or food court;
 - f. Market options for local growers, craft makers, etc.

The Council expresses these expectations and offers these recommendations to help assist the members of the CIB in its work to advance the project. The Council looks forward to continued dialogue and collaboration on the project with the CIB, county officials, and all other interested parties.

Respectfully,

City of Bloomington Common Council

Isabel Piedmont-Smith, President
Bloomington Common Council