



City of Bloomington Common Council

Notes from 11 September 2024 Consensus-Building Activities

Group 1 (Piedmont-Smith)

Group 2 (Stosberg)

Group 3 (Asare)

Group 4 (Rollo)

Group 5 (Daily)

Group 6 (Zulich)

Group 1 Notes - IPS

Focus on Street Homelessness: Part 2

Bloomington City Council – September 11, 2024

Group 1 City Council Member: Isabel Piedmont-Smith

CJAM Notetaker: Wilson Mosley

Option 1

Add Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings as an allowed use.

Initial

- SROs Housing is healthcare. SRO is a good housing option in general, especially in Bloomington. Especially for affordable housing.
- SRO is important for special populations like young and older generations.
- Recognizing the reality of people experiencing homelessness needs to be looked at before affordable housing. They are being displaced by police. Shelter needs to be at square one for people to afford SROs in the first place.
- How sustainable is it? Landlords are not here to look. How does this generate support to be something more?

Secondary Conversations

What actions best meet the needs for the SROs? How do we meet the challenges?

- We should value of dignity in housing over safety. Everyone deserves housing. Advocates of supporting services. Some people would really benefit from increased services for mental health and chronic conditions. Dignity over safety. Get more homeless people at the table for discussion.
- What are our values in the community? It's not the experience. Look at People Park, and Seminary, police have criminalized homelessness. People are being harassed rather than being housed and this actually increases homelessness. Not sustainable. (Need to view unhoused neighbors as people and citizens trying to survive) Police do not fix the problem.
- SROs have turned into "projects" that increase crime. Tiny home villages are another solution* Grant, Oregon. SROs have turned into more police suppression.
- Group home setting, with healthcare on sight would benefit certain populations that respect autonomy with vouchers.
- There are levels of housing. A place for them to go not to end up back in the shelter.

Group 1 Notes - IPS

- There are people who do fine in housing like SRO but need accommodations & training to be healthy in housing. A more transitional housing. Single room vouchers.
- Managers who make sure homeless people are in their housing get transportation for meds.
- SROs are an option not a solution, and do need to be community-based. Lack of stable housing is a health issue and issue in the community. Encourage (provide leadership) the community to work together to make solutions work - not just enact a policy.
- Less than \$300 to stay in the month. We need SROs, in a dormitory style. And normalizing for everyone and mixing the homeless with those with housing. To get rid of the stigma and make friends.
- Remove the age restriction to allow more vouchers to assimilate unhoused
- Proximity, third places/confide in, a place to be yourself.
- Horizontal Housing
- Ex. Bicycle apartments. Parking was not an issue, just needed public transit.
- The stigma: Including them in the community - using support services to give homeless people a place of belonging. A case manager could be a person to do this.
- In New York they use a Superintendent, not a Resident Assistant, who specializes in taking care of the homeless along with traditional building issues that need to be addressed.
- Must be a managed building not to become a homeless encampment with the stigma.
- Condominiums could be used.
- A document on how to run the building so that the building cannot be turned into expensive apartments.

How about existing apartments?

- There may be tensions in large groups that arise with being assigned to a room to space.
- Randomly assigned people may not be the best, and rather the supporting organizations who know these communities can help in making best rooming situations.

Group 1 Notes - IPS

- Some housing is self-governing situations, with a decision on who is managing the property.
- Any safety net is needed. So, SROs need to be explored.
- Housing can be centralized and having help workers assist by living in this Housing (New York Times, Housing in Austin Texas <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/08/headway/homelessness-tiny-home-austin.html>.)

Option 2. Change of Definition of Family

- Housing how they defined family needs to be acknowledged. There should be a legal definition on how they defined family. Legally married for 6 months should be arbitrary to their definition of their family.

No

- Not sure how this relates to the issue. Though it needs to be removed as a barrier to housing.
- Allowing single-family homes to make into homeless housing could give landlords an option to rake up prices.

Rooms: Yes

- If SROs, a layer in zoning. "Boarding Housing" Maybe fuse the definition of SRO. To use this route landlords must follow a code set by the city.
- Use different housing permits that do not allow price gouging.
- IU has been growing with these old rules in the 1980s, and they are not creating housing. Two-thirds of housing in Bloomington is rentals.

Units:

Should we pursue it?

- Probably help students and not unhoused students.
- Should we include CPS? Social Services?
- Kid as a primary vector to be in New Hope.
- Do not claim you are solving homelessness in the language by changing the language of family.

Group 1 Notes - IPS

- Why are frats in IU allowed but not dorms for housing?
- Give homeless families the option of demonstrating "family."
- Have a board that certifies families for housing. Have lawyers helping us/advocating.
- Ways to solve parking in housing by having pricing but give homeless permits for homeless housing residents. A way to resolve a drawback.
- Quality of life issue, need for homeowners not to raise an issue of privilege.
- Support services, a case manager can also help with the noise drawback.

Short term

- An army of caseworkers is needed to solve the problem. Working with the short-term, constant displacement needs to end.
- Challenging to keep relocating while trying to raise trust with the homeless community.
- Now many are moving on their own without the psychiatric and medical assistance they need.
- BPD monitoring by food operations. Need more community support from the city.

Group 2 Notes - HS

Focus on Street Homelessness: Part 2

Bloomington City Council – September 11, 2024

Group 5 City Council Member: Hopi Strosberg

CJAM Notetaker: Amy Roche

Option 1

Add Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings as an allowed use.

- Definition and Discussion of SRO's
 - Participant gave ~100 yr history brief of commonality of rooming houses throughout the country, referring to it as bottom-rung housing, cost-wise
 - A question about the definition of a cooperative housing entity in Bloomington in relation to these housing distinctions was raised
 - What about student housing? Hopi said 5 BR, 5 BA max
 - An individual mentioned other places where there are curated home-sharing programs that match people who need similar housing with one another

- **What is important from your perspective as we consider SRO's? And drawbacks?**
 - In favor of modifying RRH to include SRO and loosening it to not require as many restrictions. Note that there are “permitted, permitted with conditions”, etc. Wants for RRH to be permitted by-right somewhere, esp R2 and R3, though may be easier to pass, but not better, in RM and RH (thought would prefer all-by-right everywhere).
 - Highlighted the “messiness” drawback mentioned in the big group introduction and potential conflicts in shared residential areas, maybe an increased need for mediation or other go-between, esp. if people are in year leases together. Some cooperative housing have mediation agreements. It was noted that CJAM offers mediation services for roommates.
 - SRO's could probably offer leases of differing lengths.
 - SRO would be maximally beneficial if located in areas with needed resources/services, or maybe be the chicken/egg leading to those services being added, hopefully.
 - Must consider transportation with housing.
 - The benefit of dense housing is the likelihood of neighbors connecting, and possibly sharing resources.
 - We need a variety of housing in a variety of places in the housing ordinances. It was noted that for these kinds of changes, members of the public may get concerned about the area becoming student-dominant, as has come up in the past with public UDO debate.

Group 2 Notes - HS

- SRO's could lessen the demand on housing for students who will be here regardless and hopefully provide for non-students who have similar housing needs.
- HAND has seen landlords taking advantage of student housing and making unfortunate, over-crowded conditions.
- SRO's would add more lower-cost housing that doesn't currently exist.
- We should allow the SRO's in mixed-use zones and suggests expanding mixed-use zoning.
- Group took a straw poll: unanimous SRO's as an option in UDO as own thing or redefining RRH (less process such a BOZA approval-process step)

Option 2 Change the definition of family.

- Think it was changed in 2019 to the current definition. It excludes the 55+ age group presumably to avoid large groups of students and landlords taking advantage and creating bad, crowded conditions.

The facilitator discussed the different options listed for discussion and the listed benefits and drawbacks. Took questions for clarification.

- Someone questioned the origin of the definition of family at all. The facilitator proffered that it was a culturally informed definition.
- As a renter, had to sign an affidavit to swear that there would only be related roommates. The facilitator shared the concerns about renter privacy, etc., that came up when the affidavit policy was established in 2021.

Benefits and drawbacks?

- Eliminate age 55+ for equity. Maybe grandfather existing senior residents when changing the age limit.
- One per bedroom plus one to allow for roommates who want to sleep one in bedroom *and one in LR. In essence, the legality of sleeping in a studio apartment LR/BR could be extended to a one-bedroom apartment.
- Currently two families could not co-reside.
- Leans toward allowing more people and not having family distinction required. Maybe we need to define adults vs children in numbers allowed.
- Would parking really be an issue given lower-income people have less cars, may have shared cars? Thinks the problem is exaggerated.
- Single-family residents statistically have more cars than renters.
- Could some of the drawbacks be "perceived" versus factual?

Group 2 Notes - HS

- The issues of difficulty in enforcement of some of the current housing definitions will need to be considered
- The downsides of family definition: could be leveraged in an abusive relationship to make a victim stay, and it isn't equitable for unmarried partners.
- Need factoring on numbers.
- Could limited numbers of children be effectively limiting family size?
- What action would be best? Unanimous to eliminate 55+ (but allow current seniors situations); define based on size of home (e.g. number of bedrooms or other measures.)

Group 3 Notes: INA

Focus on Street Homelessness: Part 2

Bloomington City Council – September 11, 2024

Group 5 City Council Member: Isak Nti Asare

CJAM Notetaker: Joelene Bergonzi

Option 1

Add Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings as an allowed use.

Allowing SROs, what is important?

- Expanding the use of SROs is potentially a “medium-term” (vs long-term) action to help people experiencing streethomelessness
- The fiscal aspect: the dollar problem of rent cost needs to be balanced by low cost to set up, as in perhaps converting existing structure, like a hotel
- With folks whose SS income is less than \$1000 monthly, it’s impossible to afford rent
- Pets can be a factor in people accepting housing, where pets may not be allowed
 - Won’t give up a pet, even if could be housed
 - Encourage landlords re allowing pets
- Education for community of what different types of housing are allowed under the code: group home, rooming house, SRO
- Tradeoff of the cost to clean up an encampment (\$10,000 in a recent experience)
- Need to increase the Housing Development Fund especially for landlord risk mitigation, incentivizes acceptance of BHA vouchers for leasing
 - Now at \$2000 per property, which is not enough to mitigate costs
- Section 8 vouchers CAN be used for SRO leases (not for trailers)
- Development of SROs needs to happen ASAP: how to help in flipping existing structures, while being nice and visually appealing, and accommodating pets
- What is the broader community support for these actions? how to get people in

What actions are needed to address challenges?

- Accommodating pets is important to help people to accept housing
- Location is a factor; city can’t require SROs to be built
 - Consider density, if there is larger plot, could accommodate better
- Could Res Rooming House ordinance be tweaked on a quicker timeline?
 - Difference is that landlord lives on site in RRH
 - Savvy to alter RRH requirement to make SRO part of that use, by right
 - Or as use on a floor of a mixed-use building, so property manager has increased profit potential
- How can we address the stigma with people using BHA vouchers
 - Perception/assumption/bias of cleanliness
- Keep focus on narrative that increases housing availability and addresses demand
- Scatter units to mix in SRO among other neighborhood housing
- RRH is based on 30 days or longer rental basis, timely payment required to avoid loss
 - 30 days is threshold for short vs long-term
 - Avoid creating opportunities for more short-term rentals

Group 3 Notes: INA

- City doesn't regulate short-term rentals, like AirBnb
- City occupancy affidavit is updated by a landlord with each change of tenancy
- Equally important issue is encouraging higher-paying employers in area

Option 2 Change the definition of family.

What is important regarding changing the definition of 'family' in the UDO?

- Safety concerns arise if # of bedrooms is used as the basis instead of by unit
 - Regulation by HAND, re safety, becomes complicated/impossible [title 16]
 - # of bathrooms, smoke detectors, etc. are factors
 - Need to go house by house, complications for permitting process
 - Can't go retroactively through houses if there's a non-uniform code
 - Now it's by district, e.g. no more than 3 unrelated adults
 - If unit by unit, hard to enforce
 - HAND fines homeowner for safety violations
 - Also difficult to track zoning violations [title 20]
- Enforcement obstacles, as noted above, are a potential challenge
 - Currently, no capacity to track if proposed changes are made
 - Every time tenant changes, landlord submits change
- What would need to change about regulation, if no uniformity?
- Fair Housing laws required landlord to accept "family" with unlimited # children
- 55+ exception was done to foster access for elderly to affordable housing
 - Delete senior housing exception if increase of 'unrelated adults' broadly
- Option 2, Increase # of unrelated individuals, is best, but *explore enforceability*
- Option 3, limit by # of bedrooms, is too hard to enforce
- *Is direct enforceability something we are willing to lose to address street homelessness?*
- *Currently, there is no regulation of short-term rental units.*

Group 4 Notes: DR

Focus on Street Homelessness: Part 2

Bloomington City Council – September 11, 2024

Group 4 City Council Member: Dave Rollo

CJAM Notetaker: Susan Klein

Option 1

Add Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings as an allowed use.

- Will the housing authority be able to move people?
- The Housing Authority could buy some buildings.
- Putting into SRO doesn't guarantee affordability.
- Will owners of property accept vouchers?
- One challenge is to get landlords to accept vouchers.
- There is a difference between voucher subsidy and market value.
- How many SROs are there now?
- Where are they located?
- Are they restricted to where there are current apartment buildings?
- Can properties be grandfathered in?
- Do all SRO's have kitchens/kitchenettes?
- Clients will be cluttering.
- Will SRO be able to access full support and can that be permanent or is it considered?
- Transitional housing?
- Current rentals allow SROs.
- Some SRO's are not affiliated.
- What is the problem we are trying to solve?
- Are there limits to the number of SROs?

Group 4 Notes: DR

- What does this all have to do with the lack of housing availability?
- What are the feelings about zoning?
- The label, homeless, is demeaning.

- Can't we use a different label, like nomadic?
- Homeless has a negative connotation; nomadic folks are not all bad.
- Rooming houses have their own stigma.
- With assumption of crimes and drugs.

Location of SRO is Critical:

- Could neighborhood vacated buildings be converted?
- Nomads are being blamed and for what?
- Employ nomadic folks with SRO.
- Placement of SRO: Integrate into neighborhoods but not into high intensity
- What is a methodological way for a city to create SROs?
- Will they have different designs?
- Could current buildings be reclassified/converted into SROs?
- What organization will oversee SROs?
- Decampment is a "community"/culture: breaking apart breaks up the community.
- In "communities" everyone feels accepted. If one applies for a voucher to live in SRO, how does income factor in?
- Residents of BHA are required to have drug testing and background checks; is it true that with the voucher system, there is no drug testing?

Group 4 Notes: DR

- Do all SROs come with support?
- Rapid housing is needed.
- What about the 160 acre family farm owned by the county?
- By using it, the “encampment” community need not be broken apart.
- Best practice is to disburse and make smaller, BUT if you have a hotel you can provide full services in one place.

Option 2

Change the definition of family.

- What are other comparable cities with governmental supported SROs doing?
- Can anyone’s house be converted to an SRO?
- What is the occupancy limit?
- Does affordability apply?
- Within a single family home, how many bedrooms could determine numbers .
- Quiet neighborhood will resist.
- Perception and labeling of “family” varies widely.
- Defining family is dangerous if the issue of affordability gets mixed in.
- Maybe use HUD Guidelines.
- Lower the age to 20’s or delete age completely: it is discriminatory.
- Car parking issue is not real.
- How many people truly comprise the “group” for whom this issue is being addressed?
- What are we trying to accomplish by making changes?
- What does it cost to build structures?

Group 4 Notes: DR

- Why can't the city dedicate 10-15 acres of Hopewell instead of changing the definition of family.....is there really a need for all of this?
- For whom are more housing options needed?
- The Heading Home plan proposes 1000 units are rental below 500.

Group 5 Notes: CD

Focus on Street Homelessness: Part 2

Bloomington City Council – September 11, 2024

Group 5 City Council Member: Courtney Daily

CJAM Notetaker: Vanessa Roberts

Option 1

Add Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings as an allowed use.

What is important to consider?

- Security issues. Packing people in could cause security problems.
- Isn't SRO similar to a co-op? What would we see if we changed the UDO to designate housing units as such? How would these units be kept affordable?
- Are there apartments available in the city that could supplement (quicker than changing zoning)? Apartments are already set up for SRO with shared common spaces.
- Is it possible to use housing trust funds?
- Could landlords be "encouraged" to reserve some units for Section 8?

Benefits

- Rent could be maintained at or below \$500
- Resource for not just for street unhoused but other people looking for low-cost housing (brings diversity).
- Certain segments of income eligibility.
- Opportunity for those with special needs to live independently.
- Consolidates delivery of services (like mobile psych help from HealthNet).
- Money up front gets people on a productive path.
- Service providers – continuity in service and relationship building.
- Potential for less police trauma.

Drawbacks

- Easy to lose focus – focus should be:
 - a. Get people off the street.
 - b. Provide services to sustain them (so they don't return to street homelessness).
- We have to have a reality check – is their reality being confirmed (not believing what we think is what is, instead of checking with them to ensure we understand their reality).
- Landlords would get greedy and "pack them in."

Option 2 Change the definition of family.

What is important to consider?

- The definition of family is what it is for a reason. Any change would have to address and communicate how/why changes to the ordinance are not re-creating a problem the ordinances resolved.

Group 5 Notes: CD

- How to manage parking.
- Not all cultures see family as we do.
- Some limits to protect the integrity of the neighborhood(s).
- Needed revisions to noise ordinance(s).

Benefits

- Some homeowners would rent out a room for the extra income. Helps both homeowner and renter.
- Would more people become landlords or innkeepers if they could have more renters in a house.
- Could create tight (relationship) communities.

Drawbacks

- AirBnB-like situation (traffic, noise, lack of care of property).
- Hard to give up how we define family.
- Community members may fear a recurrence of problems the ordinances were put in place to resolve (too many people living in one place, too many vehicles, noise, unkempt properties, etc.).

Group 6 Notes: SZ

Focus on Street Homelessness: Part 2

Bloomington City Council – September 11, 2024

Group 6 City Council Member: Sydney Zulich

CJAM Notetaker: John VanderZee

Option 1

Add Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings as an allowed use.

Sydney Zulich conceded to the group's wishes to pursue **public restroom conversation** for 20 minutes. Group members were mostly unhoused persons.

What is important from your perspective as we consider this option?

- Homeless and nomadic people have to walk miles in often extreme weather conditions to relieve themselves.
- Places should be clean and safe.
- Disability access needs to be improved.
- Make portable restrooms more sturdy and well-designed.
- Whole community has access as well as unhoused.
- Strategically place portable toilets.
- Every person needs to be respected.
- Restrooms must provide a place for bio-waste such as tampons and needle drop boxes.
- Should be designed to be built on sidewalk extensions.

What actions would best meet our needs and community values?

- *Portland-loo* is the best designed portable toilet.
- The Department of Corrections unit is indestructible. Are used in downtown Indy.

Group 6 Notes: SZ

Option 2

Change the definition of family.

What is important from your perspective as we consider this option?

- Family is not necessarily blood relation.
- Family is those whom you respect and keep close to your heart.
- Old family rule in UDO was negatively targeted to IU students.
- We have a massive housing problem and drastic measures need to be taken to remedy it, and that includes changing the definition of family to include non-traditional families.
- Delete the age 55+ option.
- Increase the number of unrelated to five.
- One person per bedroom

Add Single-room Occupancy Buildings

What is important . . . ?

- How will SRO's be zoned?
- Similar to residential rooming houses.
- Good and affordable for elderly who want to share living space.
- May help solve affordability problems.
- Rent by week or month.
- Give tax breaks for developers and landlords.
- Cumbersome red-tape and rules prevent timely implementation.
- Make sure the cost stays low. Rent control?

Actions

- Streamline process of approval.
- Expand the pool of appropriate properties.
- Provide short, medium and long-term SRO availability.