

For 18 years our community has been working towards a new convention center. The creation of the Capital Improvement Board, followed by the positive development of an agreement between city and county government, created a framework for success and recognized that the project has multiple elements: new expansion, renovation of the current convention center, parking considerations, convention center host hotel. That long arc of planning required sustained public leadership, intergovernmental partnership, and a willingness to invest in Bloomington's long-term potential. The result is a new community vision, now rising from the ground at 3rd and College, and literally bridging the past to the future by connecting the expansion to our existing convention center.

Bloomington is a top convention site in our state, second only to Indianapolis. In this moment, when our community is giving birth to new companies and attracting tourists who, upon experiencing Bloomington, surprise themselves by considering a relocation, our schools are simultaneously experiencing a crisis in funding, which is partially caused by our population decline. Strategic economic development is the tool we use to address these challenges and the convention center is a critical piece in the puzzle of our community's future vibrancy.

To maximize the potential of our new convention center, we must have a partner hotel. Convention Center hotels operate quite differently from typical hotels, guaranteeing room blocks at discounted prices to ensure convention attendees can be proximate to their meetings and events. Because of this unique operating model, they also almost always require a subsidy to get started. Municipalities know this funding is not a gift, but instead an investment in our own future, which pays its dividends in food and beverage taxes, sales taxes, prosperity for our locally owned businesses, and importantly, a growing TIF, which is being used to subsidize affordable housing here in Bloomington.

A vibrant and thriving Bloomington requires commitment to economic development, a thriving housing market, and quality of place investments. These elements create the ecosystem to allow us to grow wages, educate our children well, and ensure that housing is safe and attainable. That means tourism dollars circulating back into local businesses, strengthening our tax base, and directly supporting investments like affordable housing that expand opportunity for residents.

For these reasons, the City and the Capital Improvement Board with their initial choice as a hotelier, worked to drive a deal that would get the convention center hotel created at the College Square property. The previous administration's purchase of the College Square property has lasting repercussions on the decision-making for this property, as City council and Redevelopment Commission (RDC) members have sought to recover those initial costs. There was also a serious funding gap on the part of the developer, which led to the end of negotiations. While that proposal ultimately did not move forward, it provided essential financial clarity and reinforced oversight.

As the CIB prepares a new RFP that may include other properties for development, we are committed to working together, and the Thomson administration fully supports advancing the

necessary public processes that would allow the south properties to be considered for transfer to the CIB at no cost for project development, subject to approval by the appropriate boards and commissions. These land parcels are owned by two different city entities: the Redevelopment Commission and the Board of Public Works. These are structured public decisions made by boards and commissions, not unilateral administrative actions. We are working towards the most seamless transfer possible, with the intention to provide the land value as an incentive to the expansion project. The county announced this week that it will require a similar public process to transfer its land. Projects like these are complicated, but are not intended to be adversarial or political. That is why the CIB was established as a neutral body with representation from all four city and county units of government.

As mayor, I remain committed to a collaborative process that will allow the CIB to do its job: providing a comprehensive convention center expansion project to serve and nurture a thriving Bloomington. We will use every responsible lever available to us to actively cultivate what is possible.

As president of the CIB, I know our board is equally and fully committed to addressing all of the needs of the project as broadly defined to include the expansion, parking, renovation of the current facility, and selection of a developer for the unique needs of a convention center host hotel. The county has been a major contributor to this project with its legacy of more than 30 years of stewardship of the current convention center and its donation of land for the expansion construction project that is already well underway and scheduled for completion in early January, 2027. The city's dedication of their portion of the food and beverage tax, as well as the offer by the mayor of properties at no cost for further project development, is another critical and positive step toward success, and I applaud her offer and continued commitment.

Together, our commitments demonstrate that when we align resources across jurisdictions, we multiply impact rather than divide it.

The windshield is much larger than the rearview mirror. Our road forward can be wide and bright.

Sincerely,

Mayor Kerry Thomson and Capital Improvement Board President, John Whikehart