

To: City of Bloomington Common Council
From: Bob Costello, President Kirkwood Community Association
Date: February 2, 2026
Re: Formal Rebuttal on proposed reopening of Kirkwood during summer months

The Kirkwood Community Association formally recommends that the City of Bloomington continue the seasonal pedestrianization of Kirkwood Avenue as agreed by the Bloomington City Council in 2025. We contend the staff memo's economic and safety data is insufficient to justify a policy reversal that undermines the city's long-term vision.

The staff memo does **not present sufficient evidence to justify abandoning seasonal pedestrianization of Kirkwood Avenue**. The data cited does not establish causation between street closures and reduced economic activity, and several conclusions drawn are internally inconsistent with the memo's own findings. Furthermore, the **Kirkwood Community Association was never approached as a stakeholder**.

The recommendation to keep Kirkwood open to vehicular traffic represents a **policy retreat from a widely supported long-term vision shared by the Bloomington City Council as recently as 2025**. This vision prioritizes pedestrian experience, downtown vitality, and Bloomington's identity as a cultural destination. Implementation challenges should be addressed through improved design, investment, and management, not by eliminating the core strategy.

1. Data Interpretation: Correlation Is Not Causation

Staff relies heavily on an 8% decline in average daily visits from 2024 to 2025 to support reopening Kirkwood to vehicles. However, the memo does not demonstrate that street closure caused this decline.

Notably absent from the analysis:

- Any control comparison to other downtown corridors or peer cities
- Adjustment for broader economic trends affecting retail and dining
- Segmentation by business type or time-of-day patterns
- Analysis of visitor quality versus quantity
- **Any mention of the closure of Indiana Ave. last summer**
- **Any mention of the closure of both of the IU street level parking lots on N Dunn**
- **Any mention of the loss of on street parking spaces due to construction workers using them during the Poplars project (6th St., Dunn St., 7th St. etc.)**
- **Any mention of a reduction in football games and key games**

Without isolating variables, the data cannot support the conclusion that pedestrianization negatively impacted economic activity. At most, it shows that challenges coexist with closures—not that closures are the cause.

2. Dwell Time: A Key Metric Is Undervalued

The memo acknowledges that **average dwell time is longer when Kirkwood is closed**. This is a critical point that is underweighted in staff's conclusions. **Dwell well time offers deeper insights into customer experience, interest levels, and potential conversion rates.**

Longer dwell time is widely recognized as a stronger indicator of economic value than raw foot traffic. Visitors who stay longer are more likely to spend money, visit multiple businesses, and return.

The memo's own data suggests that pedestrianization enhances the quality of downtown engagement, evidenced by longer average dwell times.

3. Safety Concerns Are Asserted Without Supporting Evidence

Public safety is framed as a central justification for reopening Kirkwood, yet the memo provides:

- No quantitative incident data
- No comparison between open and closed conditions
- No distinction between special event days and ordinary days
- No crime/accident data

The memo also acknowledges that infrastructure was removed due to concerns about undesirable activity, which likely exacerbated safety and activation challenges.

Safety issues should be addressed through **design, lighting, staffing, and enforcement strategies**, not by reintroducing vehicular traffic into a space intended for people.

4. Budget Constraints Reflect Policy Choices, Not Impossibility

Staff cites budget limitations and staffing capacity as barriers to permanent infrastructure and activation. However:

- Parking revenue loss is acknowledged but no creative solution has been offered
- Lack of activation by the City of Bloomington
- Alternative funding models (BIDs, sponsorships, phased capital investment) are not explored

The lack of infrastructure investment is not evidence that pedestrianization fails.

5. Equity and Accessibility Require Better Design, Not Cars

Concerns about accessibility, deliveries, and maintenance are real, but solvable. And were solved in the preceding years.

Peer cities have successfully addressed these issues through:

- Timed delivery windows
- Designated service access hours
- Curbless or shared-street designs
- Strategic loading zones

Equitable access is not always a car centric design. Closing Kirkwood provides a unique and safe corridor for pedestrians and cycling enthusiasts.

6. Vision Deferral Undermines Momentum

The memo repeatedly references a 2027 corridor study as the venue for long-term decision-making, while recommending a significant policy reversal in 2026.

This approach:

- Creates uncertainty for businesses
- **Businesses invested in the outdoor project because of the ordinance passed last year anticipating the three year trial would continue**
- Undermines public trust
- Risks losing momentum built over multiple years

- **The City of Bloomington has already paid for a previous Kirkwood study. Instead of spending more tax payer dollars on another study, let's implement the one we have.**

If Kirkwood is truly envisioned as a cultural gateway and third space, that vision should be reinforced.

7. Micro-Events Cannot Replace a Baseline Pedestrian Experience

Staff places heavy emphasis on micro-events as an alternative to street closure. While events add value, they:

- Require continuous staffing and coordination including ballard removal: 10 micro events plus 8 home football weekends = 18 weekends in 2026
- Benefit only certain businesses
- Do not create daily vibrancy

A successful downtown should feel welcoming and active on an ordinary weekday—not only during programmed events.

Conclusion

The challenges identified in the 2025 program reflect **a lack of dedicated city management, temporary infrastructure, and consistent activation**, not a fundamental failure of the pedestrian concept. Reopening Kirkwood to vehicles addresses symptoms rather than causes and risks diluting the corridor's identity at a critical moment of downtown growth.

Instead of abandoning seasonal closure, the City should:

- Commit to a pedestrian-first framework
- Invest incrementally in permanent infrastructure
- Improve management and activation strategies
- Use 2026 as a refinement year, not a reversal

Kirkwood Avenue is not merely a transportation corridor but rather the artery connecting our town and gown. Policy decisions should reflect that role.