Safety, Civility, and Justice Project: Stage 3

This spring, Mayor Hamilton asked the Community Justice and Mediation Center (CJAM) to lead a public deliberation project focusing on aggressive panhandling and other unwelcome behaviors on Kirkwood Avenue and in the downtown area.  Underlying these behavioral issues are problems of homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health.  In the first stage of the process, the project Steering Committee met with seven stakeholder groups (homeless persons and panhandlers, organizations that provide services to them, business owners, patrons and public who frequent downtown, neighborhood and advocacy organizations, government agencies, and the justice system).  In the focus group meetings we obtained the information and perspectives from the groups’ diverse viewpoints.  From the focus group meetings, the Steering Committee discerned six themes that were of concern to all or most of the focus groups. Those themes were:

1. Insufficient resources for certain human needs have a systemic community impact, including resources for: public institutions, private businesses, and nonprofit organizations; the homeless; those in need of services for addiction; and those in need of services for mental health.
2. There is a perceived need for more organized collaboration across public, private, and nonprofit sectors to deal specifically with alcohol or substance abuse or addiction and mental health issues.
3. Downtown residents, employees, volunteers and the public perceive increased safety risks related to public health and aggressive behaviors in public spaces, including parks, public library, sidewalks, alleys, parking area.
4. There are perceived risks regarding safety, civility, and justice related to East Kirkwood, IU campus boundaries, and student alcohol consumption, and perceptions of inconsistent enforcement policies as to students and homeless.
5. Panhandling, although legal in certain circumstances, may be perceived as aggressive and motivated by a desire for inexpensive alcohol or drugs; there appears to be organized, systemic panhandling at highly visible traffic locations.
6. There is insufficient mainstream information on the issues, laws, and problems related to panhandling, vagrancy, mental illness, and homelessness. There is need for more education, on-going communication and effective distribution.

In Stage 2, representatives of the focus groups met to achieve a more rounded view of the complex problems involved and to determine solution priorities and generate action ideas in those areas. Important priority areas and action ideas in them are detailed on the next pages.

The community is invited to give input in the Stage 3 meeting scheduled for December 3, 2016 from 9 a.m. – noon at the Bloomington City Hall. Participants will be given the opportunity to review and respond to the product of stages one and two and give input on priority actions for individuals, organizations, and government (see following Solution Areas and Action Ideas).  The product of this work will be embodied in a report to be finalized in early January, to be forwarded to a task force appointed by the Mayor which will take the results of this process and information from other sources to recommend a program of specific actions.

**Solution Areas with Action Ideas**

**Note:** We have attempted to present Action Ideas as they were put forward by participants in stage 2 of the process. CJAM and the Steering Committee have not evaluated and do not endorse the action ideas.

1. **Housing: Ensure affordable housing to meet growing community needs.**

**Building actions**

* Create, fund and build more affordable housing. Some example options could include:
  + Build small, low priced apartments, these can be section 42 nonprofit apartments
  + Identify vacant buildings that can be used as resources
  + Identification of private/public partnerships
* Legally protect affordable housing
* Consider feasibility of establishing an all-hours drop in center with weekend hours

**Non-building actions**

* Partner with apartments and landlords to consider giving working people a chance because of an eviction in the past
* Have someone of an organization oversee the others (landlords) and how they treat people. Have guidelines for their behavior. They kick people out unfairly sometimes.

1. **Legislative:  Strengthen/create legislation at the local, regional and state level to address prioritized problems.**

**Bloomington city actions**

* Create ordinance to prohibit panhandling at all intersections.
* Partner with and draw on IU resources (leverage, money and research)
* Pass a mandated living wage
* Pass local legislation to use parking meter revenue to support community needs
* Require a license to buy alcohol. Chronic abusers have it revoked and can’t buy it
* Partner with and draw on IU resources (leverage, money and research)

**Monroe county/Bloomington actions**

* What laws or ordinances need to be in place to remove harassing and intimidating behaviors?
* Determine actions Bloomington/Monroe County can take to impact the flow of people in need of services coming to Bloomington. This includes practice of Indiana Department of Corrections dropping off newly-released prison inmates to Monroe County.
* Investigate reasonable, non-discriminatory, legal restrictions on panhandling
* Hold the seller of alcohol financially accountable for damages, cost of arrest, domestic abuse
* Vote

**State/county/city actions**

* Consider legislations to change law to stop arrests of people who obtain and use non-prescribed hypodermic needles.(SEP) (in order to  reduce discarded syringes in public spaces)
* Increase severity of penalty for dealing drugs
* Elect people who will legislate for greater resources for human needs

**Federal/state actions**

* Begin dialogue with state and federal representatives regarding increased funding for mental health, addiction and justice related support

1. **Mental Health: Develop holistic strategy to address mental health needs of people in public spaces.**

* Move locations of some services away from downtown
* Provide nighttime outreach counselors and advocates
* Educate about mental illness. Include how symptoms can mimic substance use disorders.
* Allocate more public funding for community mental health and to increase availability and services offered in both the community and within our local justice system (problem courts, jail)
* Reevaluate the continuum of care for mental health service delivery and foster more collaboration among mental health resource providers
* Increase capacity for mental health support at local hospitals

1. **Police: Increase and inform enforcement of illegal activities.**

**Increase effective enforcement actions**

* Fund and hire more police officers (meet recommended federal outlines)
* Support on-going efforts of collaboration and cooperation of IUPD/BPD and County Sheriff’s office. All three agencies take calls in all areas of the city.
* Increase number of white shirts along Kirkwood the square, Seminary and People’s Park and B-line trail specifically and reeducate the public about their role
* Increase IU police presence in both on-campus and off-campus
* Increase police response time when businesses call
* Increase cameras in public spaces and known gathering places that are ground zero for issue
* Fund more emergency services: fire trucks, police cars
* Explore IUPD cadets participation as part of downtown ambassador program

**Improve enforcement behaviors**

* Oversee the police and sheriffs, if you’re mistreated by them who can you turn to?
* Enforce panhandling ordinances
* Enforce laws consistently (regardless of appearance/homeless vs. student status)
* Create a downtown ambassador program, escort workers to cars, inform law enforcement of suspicious activity
* Stop hostile environment
* Use arrest and police call data to understand when and where nuisance behaviors occur – use data to drive decision making

1. **Detox Services: Reduce street-based addiction and create long term treatment facilities.**

* Fund local more local overnight detox and recovery facilities, not just outpatient
* Establish and fund long term residential treatment facility
* Identify doctors willing to detox individuals from illegal substances and do psych evaluation for true diagnosis
* Enhance case planning and coordination of care when people are released from detox

1. **Addictions/Abuse: Address growing problems of addictions and abuse.**

**Enforcement actions**

* Hinder drug dealers, especially those who are profiting from the spice and heroin sales

**Service actions**

* Collaborate to provide more addiction treatment options and coordinated continuum of care including needle exchange program. Fund.
* Create peer run program downtown location
* Establish a Shalom-type” outreach “office at the public library
* Evaluate individuals on a case by case basis regarding why they’re homeless, panhandling, drinking, or drugging
* Increase coordination between local hospitals for substance abuse and mental health
* Monitor needle exchange programs

1. **Enhanced Collaboration: Charge key stakeholders (IU, city, county, state, fed, local and out of town business owners, non-profits, faith organization, community organizations and leaders) to address the problems.**

**Organization actions**

* Work to establish a regional system of communication to address unmet needs
  + - Determine data collection needs and resources in order to inform decision making. For example, collect and share data on infractions and enforcement - what is perception or what is reality?
* Create coordinated task forces for alcohol and drugs, and mental health (include City, County, IU faculty, staff and student participation)
* Consider creating a single entity to act as clearing house/referral for panhandlers
* Determine resources IU has available to students and faculty and staff for substance abuse
* Consider ways to provide shared case management among agencies serving those living in poverty and or experiencing homelessness
* Increase collaboration among stakeholders in advocacy efforts
* Form an organization called Better Bloomington to talk and encourage individuals, businesses and law enforcement and organizations to do better

**Individual actions**

* Encourage and insist that businesses not harass or lie about their customers. This is abuse.
* Invite out of town business owners to participate and share in responsibility

1. **Educate IU Students.**

* Acknowledge genuine concerns for student safety, encourage IU to be active community partner and to take steps to decrease party school culture, change IU culture re: alcohol
* Ensure IU is at the table of collaboration; mobilize student involvement in solutions, key resource
* Request IU accountability in off-campus drinking culture
* Address behaviors equitably across all populations
* Education: use Facebook to inform student about agencies for giving
* Education in IU orientation:
  + Bloomington is lovely but not “Mayberry”: Lock doors, walk with someone, no valuables in car, etc.
  + How to interact with those experiencing homelessness; how to give and best ways to help

1. **Build public bathrooms**

* Maintain public restrooms in all parks and downtown (research Portland Loo project)
* Fund RV-type public bathrooms
* Staff public bathrooms
* Consider providing shower and laundry facilities
* Fund converting ten vacant government properties to serve as 24 hour bathroom, bed, counselling for ten people each

1. **Evaluate and improve employment opportunities.**

* Fund an employment program that supports people who panhandle examples include:
  + Offer day work simple jobs stuffing envelopes, cleaning, raking leaves, and shoveling snow, possibly in city buildings and public areas. I.e. Albuquerque N.M. program provides bus transportation and a meal to day workers
  + Research “Real Change” and other similar initiatives– newspaper for homeless to stay sober and earn own $. (i.e. Seattle, Nashville)
* Help people buy affordable cars so they can get to jobs
* Charge penalties to employees who fire people unfairly
* Create an advocacy program for the homeless in obtaining work

1. **Develop Public space opportunities/downtown improvements.**

* Redesign People’s Park
* Create and support more art in alleys downtown including murals
* Designate a special business improvement district
* Increase downtown lighting and visibility
* Engage community in learning about others that could include:
  + Public events in parks, including east Kirkwood, that lead to more positive interaction
  + Sunday dinner at Shalom
  + Increase family friendly activities in public spaces

1. **Establish work release program.**

* Educate community about need for program outlining benefits, impacts and outcomes
* Research costs and potential funding models

1. **Address overserving and overconsumption of alcohol on Kirkwood near campus.**

* All downtown business that sell liquor must be part of solution and be held accountable
* Understand problem is not isolated to this area
* Consider establishing a code of conduct for bar owners and businesses selling alcohol
* Lower tolerance for stores overserving patrons
* Enforce drinking age laws

1. **Create a Public Campaign to Educate.**

**Panhandling and aggressive panhandling actions**

* Develop comprehensive city, county, IU, PR campaign to discourage/eliminate panhandling; how to respond to panhandling and how to give instead to agencies; facilitate candid conversations and hold community meetings.
* Create public service announcements on radio and TV with the law about panhandling; create 1-2-minute promotional educational video to be shared/posted
* Provide the public w/ info cards of all local resources, they can give the cards to panhandlers rather than money
* Share info about legal boundaries of panhandling w/ persons who panhandle.
* Collect and distribute quantitative data ;collect data on organized panhandler
* Make big signs with the law about aggressive panhandling and put them up. Pay a few people to stand and hold the sign near a panhandler.

**General actions**

* Establish norms-code of conduct for safety and civility
* Separate our efforts on reducing negative behavior from economic need
* Educate media more so stories will highlight whole and not misconceived perceptions [Change the Narrative]
* Increase availability of information regarding laws and ordinances and how to report problems (what to do)
* Continue posting public signs encouraging organization giving/public signs discouraging street donations
* Smile and talk w/ panhandlers
* Consider other public education campaigns re: public health issues, substance abuse, lack of mental health services, lack of affordable housing/homelessness