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BLOOMINGTON BRIEFING

FEBRUARY 2025



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ENJOY BEAUTIFUL VIEWS FROM THE HISTORIC OLD CEDAR AVENUE BRIDGE AT 9898 OLD CEDAR AVENUE SOUTH.
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BRIEFING

Volume 32, Number 02

The *Briefing*, published monthly by the City of Bloomington, is mailed to residents and businesses. Direct your comments and requests for Braille, larger print or computer file to Communications Administrator Janine Hill, 1800 West Old Shakopee Road, Bloomington MN 55431-3071; PH 952-563-8819; MN Relay 711; FAX 952-563-8715; Email: jhill@BloomingtonMN.gov Website: BloomingtonMN.gov

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The City of Bloomington does not discriminate against or deny the benefits of its services, programs, or activities to a qualified person because of a disability. The City will provide a reasonable accommodation or modify its policies and programs to allow people with disabilities to participate in all City services, programs, activities, and employment. The law does not require the City to take any action that would fundamentally alter the nature of its programs or services, or impose an undue financial or administrative burden on the City. To make a request for a reasonable accommodation, ask for more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Community Outreach and Engagement Division, City of Bloomington, 1800 West Old Shakopee Road, Bloomington, MN 55431-3027; 952-563-8733, MN Relay 711.

MAYOR'S MEMO

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE 2025 CITY BUDGET

By Mayor Tim Busse

In December, the City Council approved Bloomington's 2025 property tax levy and general fund budget with a tax levy increase of 9.18%. That levy increase translates into an actual increase in City property taxes of 6.85% for a median-valued home and equates to an annual increase of \$97, or \$1.87 per week. I believe this budget reflects the values, priorities, and expectations of the residents of Bloomington.

Like any budget discussion, our conversation was centered on revenues and expenditures. On the revenue side, the City continues to see increases in our collections from lodging and admission taxes. In both cases, we're at or above 2019 levels, which tells me that our hospitality industry is back to pre-pandemic numbers. That's good news. The City collects about \$10 million each year from those two revenue sources, which is significant. On the flip side, we'll see a decrease again this year in revenues from permits. That's the result of fewer big construction projects underway in Bloomington.

From an expenditure perspective, once again this year, the two biggest expense drivers are closely related to City services that residents have come to expect. City governments are in the service industry. The City of Bloomington does not make widgets, but instead provides services like police and fire protection, snow plowing, park maintenance, water delivery, and many others. For decades, Bloomington residents have made it clear that high-quality City services are a priority, and I agree that's how it should be.

On the topic of services we've all come to expect, Bloomington's investments in public safety are a major

expense driver. For years, the Council has heard that public safety is the top priority in this community. This budget and frankly budgets for the past couple of years reflect that. You all know that we have one of the best—if not the best—police departments in Minnesota. That requires investment in people, training and equipment. You also know that we're building a long-overdue fire department that is a combination of full-time and paid on-call firefighters. Even with federal grants to help defer those costs, a fire department is a significant investment. Of the 9.18% levy increase, almost 65% goes toward police and fire services. If you prefer raw dollar figures, the increase in the property tax levy for 2025 is \$7.4 million. More than \$4.7 million will go to police and fire.

On a larger scale, more than 82% of this budget will go toward the five areas that make up the nuts-and-bolts work of city government: police, fire, public works, parks and recreation, and community development. That level of spending in these vital areas reflects the priorities, values, and expectations of Bloomington residents.

As you've heard me say before, the Council's work on the annual budget is the most important work we do. I firmly believe that the 2025 levy increase reflects the City's mission to cultivate an enduring and remarkable community where people want to be.

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback in this process. You can watch my full comments on the 2025 budget in the episode of Council Minute at blm.mn/cm-budget.

BLOOMINGTON CITY MANAGER RESIGNS TO TAKE NEW LEADERSHIP POSITION

Former Bloomington City Manager Jamie Verbrugge announced on December 6 that he would be resigning his position, effective January 7. Verbrugge left Bloomington after almost 10 years of service with the City to become the president and chief executive officer of Catholic Charities Twin Cities.

Verbrugge has served as Bloomington's city manager since 2015, overseeing several key initiatives and accomplishments. Under his leadership, Bloomington reimagined the South Loop through significant development and creative placemaking. The City made critical investments in affordable housing and sustainability to support long-term infrastructure, equitable growth and climate resilience. During Verbrugge's tenure, the City's leadership and workforce became more diverse; and the City advanced strategic planning in racial equity, community engagement and innovation. Resident satisfaction with City services and quality of life remained high, as reflected in annual surveys, and Bloomington maintained top-rated triple-A bond ratings from all three credit agencies. Verbrugge also spearheaded the City's bid to become a finalist as a U.S. host for the 2027 World Expo.

"Bloomington is a remarkable and enduring community where people want to be. I am proud of the work that has been cultivated and accomplished during my tenure," Verbrugge

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said. "It has been a pleasure serving with our City Council, along with many dedicated and talented employees that will continue to advance the City's mission, vision, values and goals."

The City of Bloomington appointed assistant city managers Elizabeth Tolzmann and Kathy Hedin to serve as interim city managers as it looks for Verbrugge's successor.



I-494 CONSTRUCTION RECAP AND A LOOK AHEAD

Throughout the 2024 construction season, MnDOT attended events and pop-ups, conducted outreach, and released information to keep people updated about the extensive I-494 project.

Along with utility work, major construction work on I-494 in Bloomington, Edina and Richfield included sidewalks, ramps, bridges, interchange reinforcements, a turbine ramp, and pedestrian and ADA compliance improvements.

A LOOK AHEAD

Expect bridge construction, utility relocations and informational public outreach this winter. During winter, I-494 will have three lanes of traffic open in both directions. You can expect Penn Avenue to eastbound I-494 to remain closed through spring 2025.

Planned major construction activities in 2025 include the full reconstruction of Portland Avenue, including the bridge over I-494 and all ramps. Work will also continue on East Bloomington Freeway and the pedestrian bridge near Chicago Avenue.

Reconstruction of American Boulevard between Highway 100 and France Avenue will conclude. A right turn lane will be constructed at westbound American Boulevard and Lyndale Avenue. Bridge deck repair at the France Avenue and the I-494 interchange. Deck and sidewalk repair will occur on Penn Avenue. And the I-494 bridge and I-35W/I-494 interchange will be reconstructed.

For a complete list of activities past, present and future, visit MnDOT's project website at blm.mn/i494.

INTERACTIVE MAP OFFERS VIEW OF WHAT'S DEVELOPING

Bloomington Community Development offers an interactive development map for the public. The map shows new development projects in Bloomington in their various stages including projects under review, approved, under construction, and recently completed. For each project, the map includes an overview, renderings, project status, as well as links to all materials submitted in the application process.

"We receive frequent calls from residents who see grading or construction start on a site and are curious about what is proposed," said Planning Manager Nick Johnson. "Having the development map available online allows interested parties to learn more about upcoming development 24/7."

For more information and to view the map, visit blm.mn/developmentmap.

CITY COUNCIL ADDRESSES SANITARY SEWER CAPACITY

Strong interest in redevelopment in Bloomington has caused portions of the City's sanitary sewer to reach capacity limits. Around \$55 million in sanitary sewer improvements will be needed by 2040 to allow for continued growth within the city.

Throughout 2024, City staff engaged with local stakeholders and residents about sewer capacity and potential solutions. Based on feedback and available options, the City Council selected a funding path that includes fees on new development and modifications to future utility rates.

State statute allows cities to apply a city sewer availability charge (City SAC Fee) on new development. Many cities charge such a fee. On December 2, the City Council adopted an ordinance to charge a City SAC Fee of \$2,026 per unit on all new building permit applications received after January 1. The City Council also directed staff to further research possible SAC Fee exemptions and alternative funding sources in early 2025.

Visit letstalk.bloomingtonmn.gov/sewer-capacity-funding for more information about sanitary sewer capacity and the SAC Fee.



SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS INVITED TO WELCOMING WEDNESDAYS

Learn about startup and small business resources available in Bloomington. Welcoming Wednesdays is on the second Wednesday each month, 12-2 p.m., at Civic Plaza, at 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road.

The host for 2025 will be Hiromi Yokoi, pictured above, business advisor with NextStage.

"The City of Bloomington is committed to advancing economic development in the city," said Assistant Port Authority Administrator Barb Wolff. "This ongoing series serves to connect and strengthen the city's small business community. Join us!"

For more information, visit blm.mn/welcomingwednesdays.

GET DOWN TO BUSINESS WITH THE COMMUNITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

Bloomington is proud to host the Community Entrepreneurship Program, a 10-month, hands-on program by St. Thomas University's Small Business Development Center to support any community member who has a dream of starting and growing a business, including those who have already started a venture but need help to grow.

The program provides a six-week business training bootcamp, one-on-one mentorship, consulting support, connections to community resources, a micro-grant program and networking opportunities.

The fee is \$500*, and classes will be held 8 a.m.-2 p.m., at Bloomington Fire Station 3, 2301 E. 86th St., on the following Saturdays: April 26, May 3, May 10, May 17, May 31 and June 7.

For more information and to register, visit blm.mn/cep. Register early as seats are limited.

*\$475 scholarships available to those with financial need.



ENERGY RESOURCE FAIR OFFERS HELP MANAGING ENERGY COSTS

You're invited to learn how to navigate your energy bills, apply for energy assistance and implement smart energy-saving tips in your home at the next Energy Resource Fair on Wednesday, February 19, 2-4 p.m. at the Penn Lake Library, 8800 Penn Ave. S.

Representatives from Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota, Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County and the City of Bloomington will be on hand to help you figure out how to save money and reduce energy usage. There will be complimentary snacks too.

For more information, visit blm.mn/powerupsavings.



ICE MANAGEMENT BEGINS WHERE WATER FLOWS

Ice can be a dangerous part of winter. Since dry pavement does not form ice, Bloomington Public Works wants to encourage you to control water to stop ice. The goal is to prevent the water from flowing over the pavement where it can freeze and becomes a hazard.

"Ice is a common winter hazard that can be managed by how we direct water," said Water Specialist Jack Distel. "The problem often starts with water that melts from snow and ice that we call melt water. Melt water from snow piles, roof drips and downspouts flows over pavement and then refreezes. To stop ice from forming, identify melt water sources and redirect water away from walkways and roads."

Distel recommends fixing the issue as soon as possible. However, if it's too late this year, plan to make changes or adjust drainage over the summer to keep water off pavement. A little effort can make winter safer for everyone.

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NO CURBSIDE CLEANUP IN 2025, USE BULKY ITEM PICK-UP INSTEAD

The City and Better Futures Minnesota have partnered to collect bulky reusable and recyclable items at the curb to reduce the number of items that end up in a landfill. Households with City garbage and recycling service can schedule a monthly pickup of reusable and recyclable items.

Items are picked up the first full week of each month on your regular garbage and recycling day. The service is included

in the monthly bulky item management fee on the residential Utility Bill, so there is no additional cost.

Pickup must be scheduled by 4 p.m. at least two business days ahead of your regular monthly pickup day by calling 612-353-5400 (weekdays 8 a.m.-5 p.m.) or visiting betterfuturesminnesota.com/curbside-collections.

For a list of items eligible for pickup, visit blm.mn/bulkies.

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BULK ITEM REUSE AND RECYCLING WEEK

Items will be picked up the first full week of each month, on your regular garbage and recycling day. You must schedule pickup ahead of time with Better Futures.

HOLIDAY; PICKUP IS DELAYED BY ONE DAY

City observed holidays that are not listed on the calendar do not delay collection

IT'S ON! THE PLASTIC-FREE CHALLENGE HAS BEGUN

The plastic-free challenge started February 1. Sign up is open for individuals and teams all month long. Once you're signed up, you can browse categories and actions to reduce plastic consumption, especially single-use plastics, in ways that fit best in your lifestyle and have the most impact. Throughout the month you can connect with others and see your impact add up. Learn more at blm.mn/plasticfree or join the Bloomington Plastic-Free Pioneers at blm.mn/join.

GET YOUR GAME ON AT THE WINTER SPORTING GEAR SWAP

Join Solid Waste staff for another community swap this winter! Everyone is welcome to donate or take home gently used winter sporting gear at the Winter Sporting Gear Swap on Saturday, February 8, 11 a.m.- 1 p.m., at Bloomington Ice Garden, 3600 W. 98th St. Accepted items include skates, skis, sleds, winter coats and more. Learn more and see the full guidelines for donating used items at blm.mn/winter-swap.



SOCIAL CONNECTION CAMPAIGN OFF TO A GREAT START

Last November, the City’s “Start with Hi!” campaign kicked off with an event at the Minnesota Masonic Heritage Center. More than 60 community members attended. Community partners including the Minnesota Department of Health, NAMI, Meals on Wheels, Friends & Co. and the City’s “Better Together” Employee Resource Group hosted tables and provided mental health resources.

Friendships were made, games were played and a meal was shared. Attendees wrote postcards to homebound older adults, contributed to a gratitude tree and made pledges for continued connection.

“The Start with Hi! campaign supports the City’s strategic plan goals of improving both individual and community health,” said Mayor Busse. “This campaign fosters a sense of belonging, helping community members to feel valued and welcomed.”

Learn more about the campaign at blm.mn/StartwithHi.

SPEED LIMITS IN SCHOOL ZONES

In summer 2024, the City of Bloomington reduced speed limits on local streets from 30 to 25 miles per hour. In October 2024, the City activated a 20 mph school zone speed limit around Kennedy High School, Olsen Middle and Elementary Schools, Poplar Bridge Elementary School and Oak Grove Middle and Elementary schools.

The 20-mph speed limit is in effect when the yellow beacons are flashing or when students are walking to or from school in the morning and afternoon. Drivers should slow down and pay extra attention anytime they are near schools. Drivers can expect to see more school zone speed limits rolling out at the more than 20 public and private schools throughout Bloomington in the future.

Obey the speed limits and stay safe.



MEET POLICE OFFICER CASSI ENGELEN

Officer Engelen has been serving the city of Bloomington for three years. She holds a bachelor’s degree in prelaw and political science with a minor in law enforcement and master’s degree in criminal justice leadership.

Engelen began her career at the Minnesota State Hospital in St. Peter followed with a supervisory role at the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

Ready for her next challenge, Engelen applied for BPD’s Pathways to Policing program.

“Having worked through many stages of the criminal justice system, it was a natural transition,” Engelen said. Now she describes her role as the “best job on the planet. Being there for people in their time of need is a privilege and provides a feeling of purpose that is indescribable.”

A morning person who loves mint chip ice cream, Engelen enjoys time with family and friends, and her Australian Shepherd, Annie. A favorite childhood memory is spending time with her grandparents. Her grandmother was Norwegian, and Cassi would love to travel to Norway someday to visit her roots.

ENGELEN’S SAFETY ADVICE

You’re your own first line of safety. Be aware of your surroundings and create safety plans.



KEYS AND KEY RINGS ARE NOT CHILD’S PLAY

Lead in the environment remains a persistent hazard especially for babies and small children. No amount of lead in our bodies is safe. An overlooked source of lead exposure for little ones who put things in their mouths is keys and keychains.

A 2019 study by the Minnesota Department of Health of 362 keys and keychains found lead in each key. The highest lead concentration was found in door keys. Gold-colored keys contained significantly more lead than silver-colored keys and copied keys were also found to contain significantly more detectable levels of lead than original keys.

Lead exposure, even in small amounts can cause harmful health effects and developmental delays in children. Simple actions such as not letting little ones play with keys could help lessen unnecessary exposure.

Visit the MDH website: data.web.health.state.mn.us/lead for more information.



LET’S GET SOCIAL

Stay connected with your community through the City’s social media! From safety updates to engaging content, our channels keep you informed and involved.

An Instagram Reel featuring Bloomington’s snowplow crew dancing before the big storm on December 19 has become a massive hit. Garnering over 20,000 likes, 294 comments, and 9,300 shares, the video’s engagement stats are extraordinary. The Reel has racked up 450,190 views, gained 624 new followers. KARE 11 even picked up the story, featuring the video on both their Breaking the News and Sunrise programs. For the latest happenings, follow us on Instagram (@bloomington_mn).



SUMMER PROGRAM ENROLLMENT

The City of Bloomington will offer priority registration for residents to enroll in summer programs through a lottery system. The lottery opened January 2 at 9 a.m. and closes February 6 at 11:59 p.m. Selected residents will be notified by email on February 7 at 9 a.m. and will have until February 17 to complete registration. Registration will be week by week.

Programs include Playground Programs, Camp Kota and five new weeklong camps running June 9-13, June 30-July 2, August 11-15, August 18-22 and August 25-29. General registration opens February 18 at 9 a.m. Financial assistance applications must be processed before registering.

For more information and registration details, visit blm.mn/youth-programs.



JOIN THE ADULT COFFEE CLUB AT BLOOMINGTON ICE GARDEN

The Skate School Adult Coffee Club continues at Bloomington Ice Garden through March 5. Adult skaters of all skill levels are invited to participate in weekly sessions every Wednesday.

Each session includes a 30-minute group lesson with a coach from 12-12:30 p.m., along with 30 minutes of free practice time both before and after the lesson. Sessions run from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., with no classes on holidays.

The cost is \$25 per day, which includes skate rental if needed and one free coffee or fountain beverage. Individual lessons are also available for \$10 per 10 minutes during the practice ice before or after the lesson.

For more information, visit blm.mn/big or contact Rene Gelecinskyj at 952-563-4626 or via email at rgelecinskyj@BloomingtonMN.gov.



A rendering of the future Bloomington Ice Garden concessions area.

BLOOMINGTON ICE GARDEN WORK UNDERWAY

The Bloomington Ice Garden renovation began in November. Upgrades include reconfiguring Rink 3 to NHL size, improvements to ticketing, security, locker rooms, restrooms, concessions and offices, as well as mechanical, roofing and ADA accessibility upgrades. High school locker rooms, an indoor training area and a mural in the vestibule will also be added.

BIG WILL CLOSE FOR CONSTRUCTION MID-MARCH

No interruptions to BIG operations are expected as a result of the renovation until mid-March 2025 when the facility is expected to close for construction through fall 2025. For more information, visit bloomingtonforward.org/big.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER: DRAFT DESIGN AVAILABLE TO REVIEW

HGA Architects and City staff are in the process of creating a draft design of the new community health and wellness center. The public is invited to review and comment on the draft design on Saturday, February 8, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. in the Black Box Theater during the Indoor Market at Civic Plaza, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road. If you can't make it to Civic Plaza for the event, you can see the draft design and provide your feedback online. Learn more at bloomingtonforward.org/chwc.

BUILD THE URBAN CANOPY, BUY AND PLANT A TREE THIS ARBOR DAY

You can help build Bloomington's urban canopy by ordering a tree for your yard through the City's annual Arbor Day tree sale. Bloomington residents can pre-purchase affordable bare-root trees that will be delivered during the first week of May.

Now in its 18th year, this program helps the City maintain its Tree City USA designation and has added more than 3,000 trees to Bloomington's urban forest. Residents may purchase a maximum of five trees per household. To place a tree order, visit blm.mn/treesale, mail in the order form below or call 952-563-8760.

Find more information on the trees and how to plant them at blm.mn/forestry.



ARBOR DAY TREE SALE ORDER FORM

Bloomington residents only. Trees are bare-root and approximately one inch in diameter. Spruces are in five-gallon pots. Trees cost \$50 each. They are viable at the time of sale. No refunds will be issued. *All trees on this form are native to Minnesota.*

Name _____

Phone _____

Address _____

Email (needed to arrange deliveries) _____

Fill in number of each tree type desired. First come, first served. Maximum five trees total per household, \$50 each. Check must accompany order.

Northwood Red maple
 Black Hills spruce
 American Linden
 Honeylocust
 River birch
 Serviceberry
 Snowdrift crab apple
 Prairie Fire crab apple

Total trees X \$50 ea. = Total cost

Trees will be delivered to the address listed on the order form in the first week of May. Send a check and this form to Bloomington Park Maintenance, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road, Bloomington, MN 55431-3027.





Karen Fiedler, left, and Tom Archibald, right, receiving an award for their decades of service from former mayor Gene Winstead, center, during the April 2019 volunteer breakfast.

NOTABLE NEIGHBOR: TOM ARCHIBALD, VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Tom Archibald, a dedicated City of Bloomington volunteer for more than 40 years, passed away in hospice care in late November at the age of 72. As a longtime Bloomington resident, Tom’s kind and selfless contributions left a lasting impact on the community.

Tom devoted his time to several Community Services programs, including the Creekside Senior Dining program, where he supported kitchen operations and the Fare for All program. He and his close friend Karen Fiedler maintained a welcoming library coffee area at Creekside. Tom also volunteered in early cablecasting for City Council meetings and participated in adaptive recreation programs.

Lorinda Pearson, a former City employee who worked closely with Tom, said, “Tom Archibald was a dedicated volunteer whose contributions enriched the city of

Bloomington for more than 40 years. His reliability and genuine enjoyment helping others made him a cherished member of the community. He will be deeply missed.”

Despite physical and mental challenges, Tom lived independently and often walked up to two miles or took buses to volunteer. While his demeanor could appear gruff, those who knew him appreciated his compassionate nature. Amanda Crombie, a City employee, described him as having a “very good heart” and appreciated his thoughtful annual tradition of sending handwritten Christmas cards to those he knew.

A celebration of life service was held at Creekside Community Center, a place Tom considered his home away from home. Tom’s legacy of kindness and service will be long remembered by those who had the privilege of knowing him.



NEW RESIDENTS ENCOURAGED TO CHECK OUT WELCOME TO BLOOMINGTON

To support connections and create an inclusive community, Welcome to Bloomington hosts new resident meetings that provide general information about Bloomington and its services.

The group also offers a list of fun things to do and places to see to get to know Bloomington better called the Bloomington Bucket List. The list has 12 activities including touring the Mall of America, visiting a Bloomington park or trail, checking out the Bloomington Farmers Market and more. Once you check off the items, you can trade the list in for a Bloomington T-shirt.

The next new resident meeting is Thursday, February 20, 6-7:30 p.m. To learn more about Welcome Bloomington meetings and location and activities, visit blm.mn/welcome.



Members of Bloomington Freedom to Read Club celebrate their Omar Bonderud award at a City Council meeting in January.

BLOOMINGTON FREEDOM TO READ CLUB WINS OMAR BONDERUD AWARD

In a tradition going back to the 1970s, the Human Rights Commission honors individuals and organizations making significant contributions to ensure the human rights of people in Bloomington with the Omar Bonderud Award. This year, the award winner is the Bloomington Freedom to Read Club.

A group of students from Kennedy and Jefferson high schools created the Bloomington Freedom to Read Club to advocate against banning books at Bloomington Public Schools. The club has eight founding members—Kevin Bovin, Nora Rikansrud, Johnny Kerwin, Ayla Rash, Lily Mortenson, Abigale Klevan Schmitz and Mars Colvinand—but grew quickly to several dozen students between the two schools.

Students in the club spoke frequently at school board listening sessions, urging the district to ensure access to

books that reflect the entire student population, including LGBTQ+ topics. They went beyond the school board in their advocacy for book access. The students reached out to local newspapers and TV stations to share their story and raise awareness.

In the end, Bloomington Public Schools updated their policy related to the review of books in the school libraries. Even with that win under their belts, the Bloomington Freedom to Read Club continued speaking at school board listening sessions about the need to protect all students no matter their gender, pronouns or sexual orientation. By the spring of 2024, the district had adopted a new gender equity policy for both staff and students.

For more information, visit blm.mn/bonderud.



FINAL CALL FOR EXHIBITORS: EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPO

The City of Bloomington and Bloomington Public Schools are seeking exhibitors for the Early Childhood Expo on Saturday, April 26, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at Civic Plaza. Organizations supporting parents and caregivers of children ages 5 and under are encouraged to apply.

Registration is free for nonprofits and \$150 for for-profits, with forms due by February 21. Learn more and register at blm.mn/ece.

BLOOMINGTON PIONEERS AND CHANGEMAKERS

Bloomington Pioneers and Changemakers is a series that honors Black leaders who have a connection to Bloomington every February for Black History Month. These pioneers and changemakers have done so much to chart the path to where we are today and pave the way for future generations.

Video interviews with the following 2024 Pioneers and Changemakers are available on the City's YouTube account at [blm.mn/pcvids](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1).

TERON BUFORD

Teron Buford is a champion of inclusion and intercultural awareness. He spent the first 10 years of his career guiding historically underrepresented high school students to and through their college admissions processes on their way to earning their undergraduate degrees. He later spent three years leading Diversity Equity and Inclusion efforts at a staffing agency in Minneapolis before joining Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota as the Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

Teron helped found the Minnesota Alliance of Officials of Color, formerly served on the Board of People Serving People (the homeless shelter he lived in when he moved to Minneapolis) and currently serves as the DEI Chair on the board of a charter school in Bloomington/Richfield. Teron and his family are Bloomington residents.



KENNETH WHITE

Kenneth White has spent the last 20 years in education working for various TRIO Upward Bound programs, with the last five years being at Normandale Community College. TRIO UB is a college access program that provides support to high school students who are first-generation college students and/or financially underprivileged. Kenneth, a TRIO UB alumnus himself, understands the barriers facing students who strive for a post-secondary education and empowers students to break through those barriers.

He is also a major advocate for STEM careers, using his degree in information technology and management to expose students to a variety of STEM careers and teach them about robotics and programming. Kenneth is also highly involved in his state professional organization, Minnesota TRIO, as technology chair and an elected member-at-large on the executive board.



CHRIS PETERSON

Chris Peterson is retired military veteran with 27 years of service who is currently working at Normandale Community College.

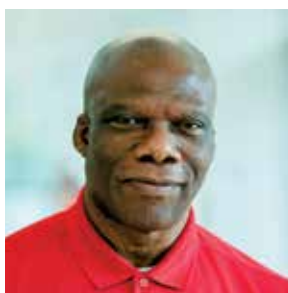
As a member of Minnesota State Indigenous Men and Men of Color and the BIPOC Employee Resource Group co-chair at Normandale, Chris loves to extend a helping hand to all who seek one. This includes assisting with the City's first Juneteenth event in 2023, setting up pop-up museums on campus, raising money for juvenile diabetes and assisting with the Army Family Readiness Group. Chris has always believed that "history has been made and the future is in our hands." That is why he loves to be a mentor to all, just like he was mentored by the community leaders, teachers, and staff workers growing up.



IFEANYI HOWARD ODOR

Ifeanyi Howard Odor has been with Normandale Community College for 24 years in the Advising Counseling and Career Center advocating on behalf of students. He was hired in 2000 in Student Support Services as part of the TRIO program with a team of advisors who work with low-income, first-generation students.

In addition to Ifeanyi's duties as a retention specialist, he serves as the international student advisor for students with an F1 Visa. Ifeanyi came to America from Nigeria as an international student in 1989. He knows how it feels to leave everything behind and start over in a new country and culture. He has lived and worked in Bloomington since 1989. With his wife, Pamela, he raised his kids here. They went through Bloomington Public Schools. He also serves on the Bloomington Police Department's Multicultural Advisory Committee, which he has done for more than four years.



TYNIKA SMITH

Tynika Smith is a Bloomington resident and a mother to four kids. She has four jobs at US Bank, Cedar Kindercare, Spencer's and Bloomington Public Schools. Tynika has been doing what she loves for years now, providing support to the unhoused community throughout the Twin Cities. She's made friends with a lot of them, who affectionately call her Mrs. T. If they're uprooted and evicted, they still stay in contact with Tynika and reach out to let her know where they are. Tynika wants people to know that people who are unhoused are humans who shouldn't be judged. Tynika will continue to support them with donations until she reaches her goal of opening a free store people can come to to get items they need. "The help from the community is awesome the outpouring of love is one of a kind. I'm very blessed to be able to help do what I can, when I can," Tynika said.



[BLOOMINGTONMN.GOV](https://www.bloomingtonmn.gov)

TIFFANY BLACKWELL

Tiffany Blackwell, a Bloomington resident of fourteen years, has been at the helm of VIP Hair and Nails for over three decades. In downtown Minneapolis, her business is one of the longest standing and largest BIPOC-owned cosmetology service salon. Beyond her salon's doors, Tiffany's spirit of community service shines brightly. Her commitment to giving back has seen her sponsor numerous initiatives, from Girl Scouts events to various civic and public health campaigns.

This ethos was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when the Minnesota Department of Health featured her and her salon in the "Make an Impact" campaign, spotlighting their efforts to foster COVID safety awareness and support other business owners across the state through challenging times. The University of Minnesota has also honored her as one of the "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," a testament to her quiet yet profound impact on the community.



WENDY PUCKETT

Wendy, a Bloomington Public Schools alum, embarked upon the journey of entrepreneurship with a desire to own something for herself and her family. Her restaurant, Wendy's House of Soul, has been supported by community members, with the SoulRoll being the signature item that keeps customers coming back. Wendy is proud to have an African-American-woman-owned business and of being a veteran and single mother. She gained national attention when she was featured on The Cooking Channel show "Food Paradise." The magic happens in the kitchen, but it doesn't stop there. Chef Wendy uses her skills to give back. She cooks up free meals for kids on the north side of Minneapolis. At her restaurant, there's a pay it forward system. If a customer doesn't have the cash, it's covered.



LEE DAVIS

As a mortgage loan officer at US Bank serving the Bloomington and Minneapolis areas, Lee works to help find the right mortgage for each buyer's unique situation. Homebuying education is a passion of Lee's no matter what stage of the process a buyer is in.

Lee has also served on the Welcome to Bloomington Committee and provided valuable feedback and support for the committee's initiatives. He works to advance racial equity in the housing industry and partners with nonprofits to host pathway to home ownership events for BIPOC community members. He is focused on building bridges and is well respected in the community.



TIMMY NGUYEN

Timmy is a licensed school counselor who recently served in the role of career and college counselor at John F. Kennedy High School. His professional commitment revolves around guiding students through the intricate process of exploring opportunities in post-secondary education and career development. Timmy's dedication lies in overcoming potential obstacles that students may encounter along their journey. He firmly believes in the inherent potential of every student to achieve success, recognizing that each individual's path to success varies. Timmy's objective is to discern and nurture each student's distinctive path. He aims to offer unwavering, constructive support to every student, fostering an environment conducive to their personal and academic growth.



AARICA COLEMAN

Aarica L. Coleman has over 25 years of real estate experience in various roles in both public and private sectors. Aarica was the City's administrator of the housing and redevelopment authority until June 2024. She is now the president of Land Bank Twin Cities. Aarica leads with the philosophy that housing is a basic human right. She has always had a passion and commitment to social and reparative justice through real estate.



GROUP AWARDS

ON THE ONE MUSIC FESTIVAL

Chadwick "Niles" Phillips, founder of the Avant Garde, and Parks and Recreation's Leah Hughes and Mark Morrison.

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

Church of Life Ministries (Pastor Joe Brown, Pastor Sam Nero and Public Health Nurse Afaf Saleh) and the Juneteenth planning committee.