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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

PORT AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF
BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA



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INTRODUCTION

The City of Bloomington, Minnesota, (the City) and the Port Authority of the City of Bloomington (the Port Authority) present the Port Authority’s five-year *Economic Development Strategic Plan* (EDSP). The EDSP is a forward-looking blueprint designed to steer the City’s economic development efforts into a new era.

Economic development has risen to the forefront of City priorities in recent years. Since 2020, supporting businesses of all sizes has become an increasingly important goal for Bloomington leadership. In addition, the City’s recent strategic plan, *Bloomington. Tomorrow. Together.*, identified equitable economic development as one of three guiding priorities for the community. The EDSP represents this commitment to supporting inclusive economic growth across Bloomington and desire to provide staff and community with a guiding framework for those efforts.

Economic development activities in Bloomington are largely overseen by the Port Authority. This plan was created for that entity, with the understanding that execution will require collaboration across the enterprise and the region.

AN EXPANDING ROLE

Created in the 1980s to manage the transformation of a former stadium into Mall of America (MOA), the Port Authority’s duties have already expanded significantly to begin executing the City’s economic development goals. First, the organization’s purpose was redefined to include other projects in the South Loop District, and in 2023 its jurisdiction was extended to encompass the entire City. Along with broadening its geographic area, the Port Authority has added new programmatic responsibilities including small business services, creative placemaking, and technical assistance to the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) on large affordable housing developments. With its citywide footprint and new focus areas, the Port Authority must evolve to support new operating dynamics and an expanded set of constituencies.

This five-year economic development plan was commissioned to guide the Port Authority’s new work and includes several elements.

1. **Economic Development Strategic Plan.** Guiding document that includes the project’s context and process, lays out plan principles and focus areas, and offers a full outline of strategies and actions that may be undertaken by the Port Authority.
2. **Implementation Matrix.** Editable, living document that allows the Port Authority to track and prioritize strategies and actions into immediate (0–6 months), short-term (1–2 years), medium-term (3–4 years), and long-term (5+ years) goals.
3. **Online Dashboard.** Web-based implementation matrix to ensure transparency and accountability.
4. **Staffing Plan.** Recommendations to structure Port Authority operations to efficiently execute the EDSP.
5. **Executive Summary.** Brief document to summarize the EDSP.

This plan offers a broad range of options to shape Bloomington’s economic development efforts. It is understood that not every suggested task may be completed in five years, and that plans may shift with the priorities of City leadership and the community. The EDSP is a living effort that will evolve with the City of Bloomington.

A TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT

The City's elevated commitment to supporting equitable economic development and the Port Authority's expansion mark a transformative moment for Bloomington. With the implementation of a citywide levy to fund the Port Authority's operations, the community can now contemplate new possibilities for economic development and job growth. The EDSP serves as a vital instrument for aligning the City and the Port Authority objectives and priorities with the needs of Bloomington's businesses, neighborhoods, and residents.

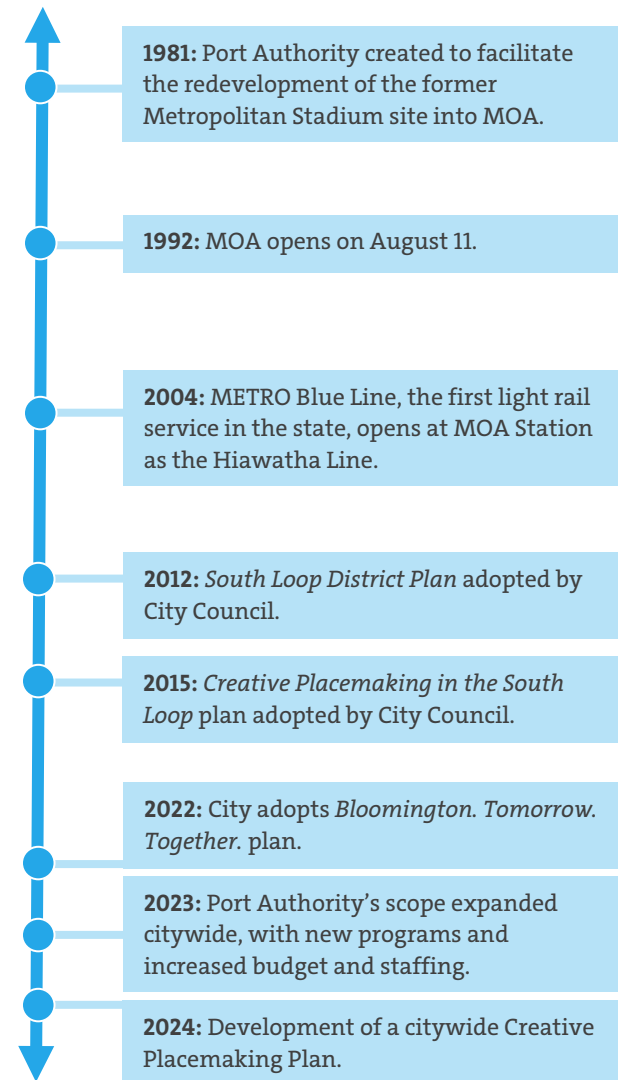
Along with its strategic location in the greater Minneapolis-Saint Paul (MSP) region, Bloomington's economic landscape is defined by its diverse industries, robust infrastructure, and collaborative partner network. The Port Authority's newfound ability to deploy its tools and resources across the entire City will allow it to leverage these advantages more fully. Bloomington is now better positioned than ever to support redevelopment, attract new businesses, support existing enterprises, and foster a more resilient and inclusive economy.

Key Focus Areas

Throughout the planning process, which included both qualitative and quantitative research, several themes rose to the forefront of the Port Authority's work and helped build the foundation of this plan.

- Equitable economic development and inclusive growth.** An inclusive economy refers to an economic system that prioritizes equal access to opportunities and resources for all members of the community, ensuring that economic growth benefits everyone, regardless of their background, income level, or location. In an inclusive economy, barriers to participation are minimized, and historically underrepresented groups, including small businesses, minority-owned enterprises, and marginalized populations, are supported in contributing to and benefiting from the City's economic activities. Bloomington's community has undergone significant demographic changes, diversifying from 1 percent non-White residents in 1970 to 32 percent in 2020. As the City evolves, it is critical that all members of the community benefit from the growth achieved through expanding businesses and increasing jobs. The Port Authority's efforts will focus on creating equitable access to business development services and entrepreneurial ecosystems, ensuring that economic prosperity is shared across all demographic groups. This approach fosters both a resilient economy and a socially sustainable future for the entire community.

FIGURE 1. SELECTED PORT AUTHORITY MILESTONES



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

- **Anticipating and supporting business needs.** One of Bloomington’s most promising opportunities is the potential to modernize commercial and industrial spaces and plan for future development. Many existing buildings are outdated and do not meet the needs of modern businesses. By proactively addressing these issues in key commercial nodes, the Port Authority can create environments that are attractive to both new and existing companies, thereby driving economic growth and job creation. A more structured approach to business retention and expansion and a concerted focus on small business programming are additional examples where the Port Authority’s revamped role can help. Bolstering efforts to support small businesses, attract and grow large enterprises, and foster an inclusive economic environment will contribute to the City’s ability to maintain a thriving, resilient economy.
- **Creating thriving places for an attractive and livable community.** The EDSP also underscores the importance of creative placemaking, a practice of integrating arts and culture into community planning and development to enhance public spaces, foster community engagement, and improve local economies. Advancing this innovative strategy, along with other efforts to enhance the City’s quality of place, can help the Port Authority align with broader City initiatives. These initiatives may include developing or enhancing new public spaces, supporting local art, and implementing [A Plan for Creative Placemaking in the South Loop](#) and the forthcoming [citywide creative placemaking plan](#) (expected completion in February 2025). A holistic approach that integrates economic development with community planning, public art, and recreational opportunities will provide Bloomington the opportunity to create vibrant, engaging environments that appeal to residents and visitors. Supporting these efforts will allow the Port Authority to improve the daily lives of Bloomington’s residents while making the City a more attractive destination for tourists, businesses, and talent.
- **Collaboration and storytelling.** Finally, this moment requires a rethinking of how Bloomington positions itself in the MSP area and beyond. Bloomington is prepared to promote itself as an individual City as well as a major player in a strong regional economy. Clearly articulating the Bloomington story and sharing it consistently across platforms and audiences will help amplify the efforts of multiple partners. The collective marketing effort outlined here considers how to connect existing campaigns around tourism as a means to attract and retain talent. It suggests opportunities to leverage events that can raise the City’s profile, as well as making the needed investments to support an event strategy. Tailored and coordinated messaging will be key to implementing the EDSP’s objectives and maximizing the transformative potential of this moment in time.

A COLLECTIVE VISION

As the role of the Port Authority evolves, it is imperative to have a strategic plan that addresses current economic conditions and anticipates challenges and opportunities. An in-depth analysis, presented as [Bloomington Economic Development Analysis](#), an interactive data visualization, provided an understanding of the City’s competitive position. (Findings from the analysis are presented in the Quantitative and Spatial Analysis section beginning on page 26.) The EDSP is built on this foundation, combining comprehensive research with insights gained from stakeholder engagement and a deep understanding of the unique characteristics that define the City. By leveraging Bloomington’s strategic location, robust infrastructure, and rich cultural assets, the Port Authority can help the City build a resilient and adaptable economy that benefits all members of the community.

Equitable economic growth was identified as a strategic priority in *Bloomington. Tomorrow. Together.*, the 2022–2027 strategic plan for the City of Bloomington. Likewise, this EDSP reflects an unwavering commitment to progress and equity. This commitment was evidenced by the central role engagement played in the planning

process. A broad outreach process, illustrated in Figure 2, meant that a range of stakeholders had the opportunity to shape the Port Authority’s plan of work and weigh in on Bloomington’s future.

FIGURE 2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW



This process, described in further detail in the Planning Context section, helped to clarify the collective vision and shared goals of Bloomington’s leaders, residents, and businesses. Stakeholder input, including interviews with Bloomington City Council members and Port Authority Commissioners, also informed the plan’s economic vision and guiding principles, which are central components of the EDSP.

A well-crafted **economic vision statement** provides a clear and inspiring direction for the plan, aligning stakeholders, fostering consensus, and instilling a sense of purpose.

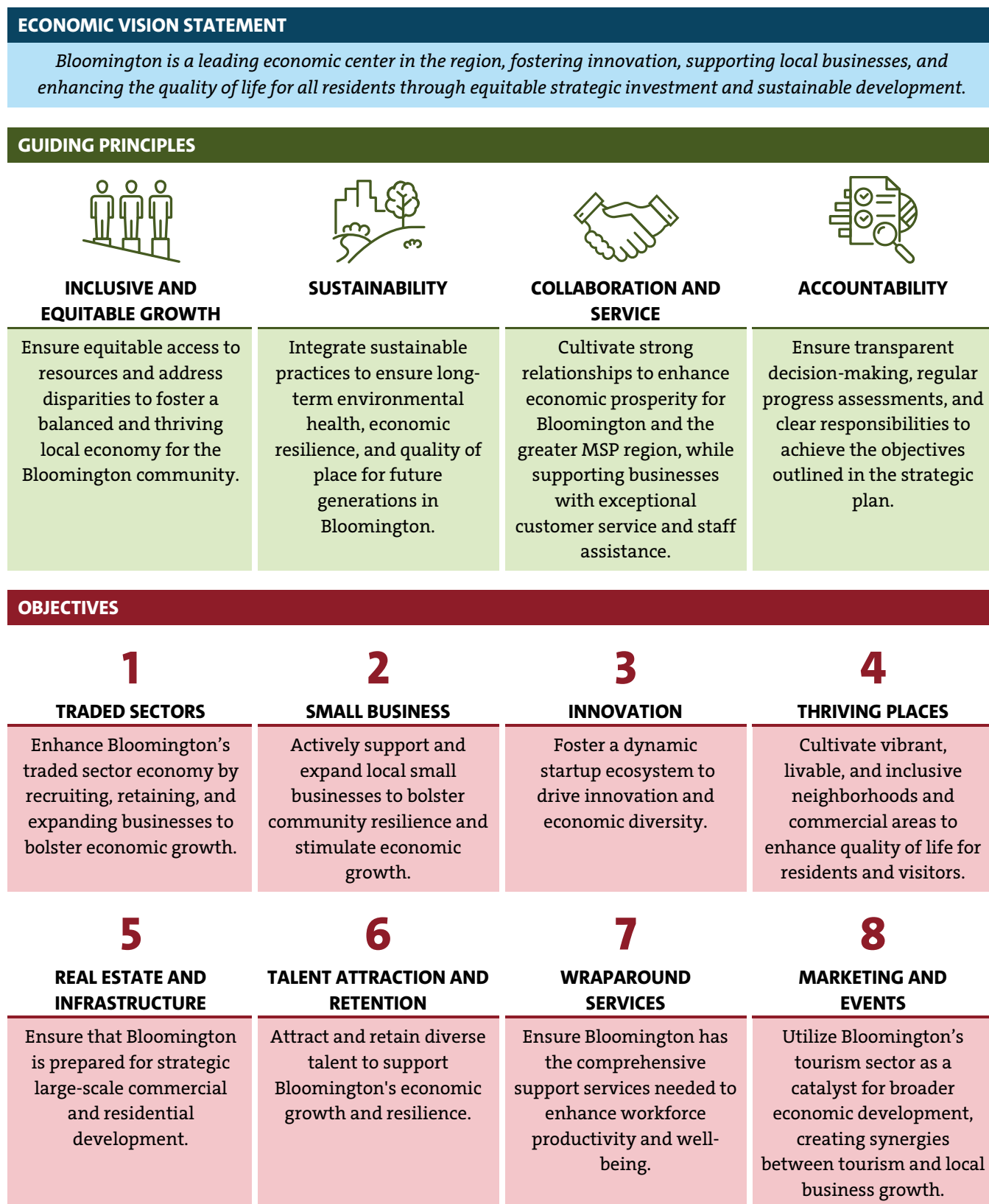
Bloomington is a leading economic center in the region, fostering innovation, supporting local businesses, and enhancing the quality of life for all residents through equitable strategic investment and sustainable development.

Guiding principles form the foundation of the plan’s strategies and initiatives. They ensure a unified and purposeful approach to directing investments and developing strategic actions.

- **Inclusive and Equitable Growth.** Ensure equitable access to resources and address disparities to foster a balanced and thriving local economy for the Bloomington community.
- **Sustainability.** Integrate sustainable practices to ensure long-term environmental health, economic resilience, and quality of place for future generations in Bloomington.
- **Collaboration and Service.** Cultivate strong relationships to enhance economic prosperity for Bloomington and the greater MSP region, while supporting businesses with exceptional customer service and staff assistance.
- **Accountability.** Ensure transparent decision-making, regular progress assessments, and clear responsibilities to achieve the objectives outlined in the strategic plan.

Together, these elements articulate the Port Authority’s aspirations for the community and its core values, laying the groundwork for the plan objectives. The collaborative efforts of the EDSP Steering Committee helped integrate the diverse perspectives of stakeholders and local priorities into the plan framework, which is presented in Figure 3 (page 5).

FIGURE 3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK



A UNIFIED FUTURE

The objectives and strategies presented in the Action Plan section represent a comprehensive commitment to the long-term success of Bloomington. They include investments in physical assets, such as infrastructure, commercial and industrial sites, and public spaces, as well as initiatives to enhance economic sustainability, drive innovation, and foster community well-being. By centering its efforts on spurring inclusive economic growth, supporting small businesses, and fostering partnerships with local and regional organizations, Bloomington aims to create a thriving, resilient economy that benefits all residents. The plan's emphasis on accountability, regional collaboration, and sustainability are also woven into the strategies and actions. This action plan serves as a road map for navigating the challenges and opportunities ahead, positioning Bloomington for corporate investment, and aligning necessary resources to harness its full potential and cement its reputation as a leading economic center in the region.

Aligning the work of an expanded Port Authority with that of other partners will require a more unified and intentional approach to economic development. For this alignment to be successful, however, the Port Authority and its partners must be intentional about equity and inclusion. This means actively addressing disparities and creating opportunities for all, regardless of race, religion, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics. Advancing the plan's objectives must not leave any group behind. Rather, the plan's implementation must ensure that economic development benefits everyone in the community. This objective requires a holistic and balanced approach that explicitly recognizes and addresses the unique challenges faced by underrepresented groups. By doing so, the Port Authority and its partners can foster a more inclusive economy where people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from Bloomington's economic growth.

The EDSP seeks to foster an environment that supports an array of economic activity including but not limited to tourism, creates a quality of place that is a draw for talent and visitors while continuing to accommodate existing residents, and positions Bloomington as a dynamic hub for businesses of all sizes. It is a call to action for all who believe in the City's potential to build a brighter, more prosperous future. In the implementation of this plan, challenges will be transformed into opportunities, fostering a Bloomington that is a great place to live and work and a model of sustainable and inclusive growth.

ACTION PLAN

The eight objectives encompassed by the action plan present a comprehensive road map for expanding the Port Authority's activities and resources citywide. While they were developed with the Port Authority in mind, translating them into reality will require collaboration that engages the entire Bloomington ecosystem and regional partners. An Excel-based implementation matrix (delivered separately) will provide a flexible, ever-evolving tool for coordinating resources and tracking progress toward the plan's implementation. In addition to capturing the strategies and action items for each objective, the matrix can be used to assign responsibilities, identify potential partner organizations, establish timelines, and track the status of each strategy and action. A staffing plan, published separately, offers guidance on the resources required to carry out the recommendations and potential metrics for gauging success.

Case Study Indicators

Brief examples of relevant case studies have been provided at the end of each objective. A numbered symbol (1) is shown next to the most closely associated strategy or action.

OBJECTIVE 1. TRADED SECTORS

Enhance Bloomington's traded sector economy by recruiting, retaining, and expanding businesses to bolster economic growth.

- 1.1. **Business Retention and Expansion (BRE).** Develop a robust BRE program to grow Bloomington's traded sector cluster (see Figure 4, page 8). While the Port Authority serves both local sector clusters and higher growth traded sector clusters, differentiating between the two allows for a more tailored approach. Traded sector clusters typically operate in broader markets, requiring significant capital investments and extensive resources and exhibiting rapid growth trends. In contrast, local sector clusters primarily serve nearby markets, with more modest capital needs, fewer resources, and less volatile growth patterns.
 - 1.1.1. Use subscription-based or publicly available data sources to identify traded sector businesses in Bloomington and tailor outreach efforts citywide. Companies should be prioritized based on industry, number of employees, and geographic location.

BUSINESS RETENTION

Business retention is a critical economic development strategy because it leverages the existing business base to drive job growth and economic stability. [Studies](#) show that up to 80 percent of job growth in communities comes from existing businesses rather than new ones, making retention efforts crucial for sustainable economic development.

Moreover, [supporting existing businesses](#) helps build stronger community ties, encourages reinvestment, and creates a more resilient economic environment, as businesses that feel valued are more likely to stay and expand within the community. This approach is often more cost-effective and less risky than attempting to attract new businesses from outside the area.

- 1.1.2. Conduct annual business visits to understand their needs and challenges and develop a feedback loop to continuously improve support and services (see strategy 3.4).
 - Engage these businesses as a source of business recruitment leads to build the sector’s supply chain and support traded sector cluster development once a strong relationship with the Port Authority is established.

FIGURE 4. LOCAL AND TRADED CLUSTER CHARACTERISTICS

TRADED CLUSTERS	LOCAL CLUSTERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve outside markets. • Free to choose where they locate. • Concentrated in a few regions with specific advantage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily serve local markets. • Present in virtually every market. • Location not dependent on competitive advantage.
WHY IT MATTERS	
<p>Increasing the ratio of traded-to-local clusters is a common strategy for enhancing economic prosperity. Traded clusters are emphasized by economic developers because they include industries and firms that typically produce goods and services for customers beyond the local region. These traded activities are thus more likely to produce externally generated revenues, which can, in turn, filter back to the local economy. As an example, a dentist office might serve local customers exclusively, while a manufacturing plant, a data center, or a hotel would typically serve paying customers beyond the local area. The ability of traded clusters to serve larger markets also presents greater opportunity for employment growth, whereas a dentist office might face more finite geographic limits to expansion.</p>	

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

- 1.1.3. Develop a standardized survey to ensure consistency in the format of each visit. The [University of Minnesota Extension](#) provides guidance on how to build an effective BRE survey with sample questions about workforce, capital, equipment, supply chain, business development, and facilities, among others (see actions 2.1.2 and 6.3.2).
 - Coordinate with City and Port Authority partners to identify site and facility needs for traded sector businesses. Align existing buildings with suitable industries, for example, a building with clean room space should be promoted to high-tech users.
 - Support existing businesses at industry events and with business development, including international export assistance. Consider assembling a delegation of businesses to attend an [international trade mission](#) with the Minnesota Trade Office and the Governor’s Office.
- 1.1.4. Track all business visits using a customer relationship management (CRM) system to ensure that services are deployed citywide, visits are concentrated on targeted industry sectors, and that they include significant employers.
 - Classify each business engagement (retention/expansion or recruitment) as a lead, prospect, or project to track and understand the impact of the outreach (see Figure 5, page 9). Track the conversion rate from leads to prospects, prospects to projects, projects to wins.

- 1.1.5. Ensure the Port Authority’s website is up-to-date and easy to navigate with relevant, engaging content. Leverage articles from site selector industry organizations or economic development industry organizations to determine the data and content most relevant to target audiences.
- Consider a website audit to ensure content is relevant and accessible to existing businesses, business prospects, and site selectors. Accessibility should include compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act ([ADA guidance](#)), as well as optimization for mobile platforms.
 - Review other economic development organization websites to identify appealing design and content. The International Economic Development Council’s [annual excellence in economic development awards](#) (internet and new media category) are a good source for inspiration.

FIGURE 5. LEAD CLASSIFICATION FOR BRE AND BUSINESS RECRUITMENT



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

1.2. Business Recruitment. Pursue opportunities to bring more traded sector businesses to Bloomington, enhancing the City’s economic diversity and growth.

- 1.2.1. Prepare custom responses to business recruitment requests for proposals (RFPs) that align with Bloomington’s target industries and business ecosystem.
- Coordinate with regional partners, such as the GREATER MSP Partnership, to ensure Bloomington’s assets and amenities are included in their proposals.
 - Develop a set of criteria for evaluating RFPs to determine their suitability for Bloomington. Considerations should include site parameters, transportation needs, utility demands, workforce and training requirements, and the industry’s potential to support or diversify the existing business ecosystem.

1.2.2. Coordinate with the City of Bloomington Communications Division to develop targeted marketing materials to attract businesses from key sectors, including high tech (see action 8.1.2).

- Use learnings from existing businesses and from collaborative partners that sell the region like the Minnesota Trade Office and the GREATER MSP Partnership to create content. Message creation should be driven by the Port Authority team and should align with City branding efforts (see strategy 8.1).
- Include these materials in proposals created in response to RFPs, as well as in proposals for proactive business development outreach.

1.2.3. Target proactive business recruitment efforts toward the advanced manufacturing industry, including semiconductor companies and engineering services, to bolster the emerging high-tech cluster and develop a robust supply chain.

- Use a data-driven approach to identify companies that align with Bloomington's assets, including workforce skill sets and commercial/industrial availability.
- Leverage existing business leaders to identify potential recruitment leads, such as suppliers or end-users. Existing businesses are one of the best sources of business recruitment leads, and their leaders should be champions for the community. They should be included in candid conversations with other business leaders looking to relocate to Bloomington.
- Build rapport with the Minnesota District Export Council, the Greater Metropolitan Area Foreign Trade Zone Commission, the Minnesota Trade Office, and other regional organizations that promote foreign direct investment to build a pipeline of international recruitment prospects.

1.2.4. Develop relationships with site consultants, real estate professionals, and real estate developers to support the growth of Bloomington's traded sector economy (see action 5.1.4).

- Include professionals located in the Greater Minneapolis region, as well as those working projects across the country, in this effort.
- Consider partnering with the GREATER MSP Partnership on business development missions to meet with site selectors and build awareness of the opportunities for businesses in Bloomington.
- Meet regularly with property owners and the real estate community to understand what properties are available and to share feedback from prospects on the space.

1.2.5. Track business recruitment leads, prospects, and projects in the CRM system, as well as the conversion rate from leads to projects (see Figure 5, page 9).

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

Although it is mega-projects like [Amazon's HQ2](#) that often come to mind when thinking of business recruitment, a business recruitment project does not need to bring hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in capital investment to a community to be considered a success. Attracting a high-tech engineering firm that employees 25 people, supports Bloomington's existing semiconductor businesses, compensates employees with a living wage, and occupies a vacant commercial/industrial space would qualify as significant win.

- 1.3. Partnerships.** Deepen partnerships with local, regional, state, and national organizations, utilities, and leaders to build industry knowledge and build awareness of Bloomington (see action 5.4.3).
- 1.3.1. Leverage the Bloomington Economic Partnership to advise on BRE and business recruitment activities.
- 1.3.2. Build rapport with state and national level industry groups and higher education facilities, including, but not limited to, the Manufacturers Alliance and the Semiconductor Industry Association.
- Continue to be actively engaged in the growth and development of the Minnesota Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) Coalition.
 - Leverage the knowledge of Bloomington-based businesses to identify relevant trade organizations.
- 1.3.3. Consider coordinating or attending a peer city best practices trip with public and private sector regional partners to learn how other communities have addressed public policy and economic development challenges (see actions 2.2.1, 7.1.1, and 8.2.2). ①
- 1.3.4. Monitor industry publications and insights to stay informed about trends, opportunities, and challenges in high-tech manufacturing.
- Cultivate relationships with high-tech manufacturing experts and feature them as guest speakers for industry events.
 - Consider attending industry events with Bloomington businesses and regional partners, such as the Minneapolis Regional Chamber, to build industry knowledge and support business development efforts.

① Best Practices Trips (Portland, Oregon, Region)

Greater Portland Inc. organizes best practices trips annually, bringing together public officials, business leaders, and education professionals to learn from the successes and challenges of cities across the US and around the world. These trips focus on strategic planning, project management, and economic development. Participants explore topics including business attraction, land use, transportation, and public policy. The initiative aims to apply these insights to enhance the local economy in the greater Portland area.

OBJECTIVE 2. SMALL BUSINESS

Actively support and expand local small businesses to bolster community resilience and stimulate economic growth.

- 2.1. Business Support.** Maintain and enhance existing local sector, small business development programs by providing training, mentorship, and support to these businesses across Bloomington.
- 2.1.1. Build a strong understanding of the regional small business support network to provide efficient referrals to programs and stay updated on small business offerings (see action 4.2.5).

- Develop and maintain an asset map to identify the assets and resources, including culturally significant organizations, available to small businesses in Bloomington, as well as the greater Minneapolis region and the state of Minnesota.
 - Build strong relationships with workforce and community development partners to ensure seamless and informed referrals to external partners and organizations.
 - Prioritize staff attendance at regional small business events, including events that prioritize underserved communities.
- 2.1.2. Strengthen small business development by enhancing the relationship between the Port Authority and local enterprises through business visits, especially those that have been identified as historically underserved (see actions 1.1.3, 4.1.2, and 6.3.2).
- Define criteria for proactive business visits, such as number of employees, years in business, geographic location (to ensure broad geographic representation across the City, including key commercial nodes), and those certified as a Minority-Owned Business Enterprise (MBE) or a Women-Owned Business Enterprise (WBE) by the [Central Certification Program](#) (see action 4.3.4).
 - Develop a standard set of questions to guide business visits. The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension, Community Economic Development has [sample survey questions](#) specifically for small, local sector businesses.
 - Ensure appropriate accommodations are made when visiting businesses with language barriers.
 - Track all business visits using a CRM system to ensure that services are equitably deployed citywide, follow-up needs and action items are noted, and success stories are captured.
 - Engage with national Small Business Development Center (SBDC) resources, including conferences, to ensure that national best practices are being studied and pursued.
- 2.1.3. Administer, promote, and refine current business assistance programs, including, but not limited to, the Site and Façade Improvement Program, Welcoming Wednesdays, Sewer Availability Charge (SAC) Deferral Program and Credit Policy, CEO Start, and Elevate Hennepin (referral) (see strategy 7.1).
- Evaluate programs on an annual basis and refine as needed to ensure positive impact. Be open to new partnerships as programs and City needs evolve.
- 2.1.4. Advise and support small businesses interested in seeking public procurement and government contracting opportunities with the City of Bloomington and with large local and regional businesses.
- Understand the challenges small businesses face with procurement processes, as well as success stories, and document them in the CRM system.
 - Support the City of Bloomington in efforts to improve procurement processes to better engage WBEs and MBEs.
 - Understand local purchasing initiatives such as GREATER MSP Partnership’s Business Bridge and contract-ready training initiatives. Share findings with Bloomington’s local small business community and support as appropriate.

2.1.5. Support the exploration and development of a satellite Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Bloomington.

- Develop pilot programming with MnSBDC, with emphasis on promoting or bringing services to underserved populations and ongoing evaluation.
- Ensure SBDC services would be deployed citywide with the flexibility to work with business owners at their location or a neutral location, such as the library, community college campus, or civic plaza.
- Engage with national SBDC resources, including conferences, to ensure that national best practices are being studied and pursued.

2.1.6. Coordinate with the City Communications Division to design a template for the business resource newsletter, *Blooming Briefing*. Update content priorities as services are refined.

2.1.7. Track all business visits in the Port Authority's CRM system to ensure that services are equitably deployed Citywide, follow-up needs and action items are noted, and success stories are captured.

2.2. Annual Business Forum. Develop an annual gathering that celebrates Bloomington businesses and allows them to connect directly with City leadership.

2.2.1. Include discussion topics such as feedback on business visit questionnaires, annual/biannual business surveys, City procurement processes for small businesses, and potential programs and/or policies the City is considering (see actions 1.3.3 and 8.2.2).

2.2.2. Consider segmenting the event to have sessions tailored to small businesses, larger businesses, etc.

2.3. Permitting. Collaborate closely with other City of Bloomington staff to modernize code and permitting processes that are challenging for small businesses to navigate.

2.3.1. Advocate for the creation of a permitting liaison who can guide small businesses through the entire permitting process to provide consistency and clarity.

2.3.2. Consider programs and policies that provide business owners with comprehensive information prior to the permitting process. This includes initiatives such as building/space walkthroughs before finalizing a lease or purchase agreement and pre-permitting conferences to detail all costs and requirements before the permitting process begins. 2

2.3.3. Track common code and policy concerns that impact businesses, and work with the Planning Division and other colleagues to document and improve those issues.

2.4. Buy Local. Launch an initiative encouraging residents and businesses to purchase goods and services from local vendors.

2.4.1. Seek a lead partner in this program that is well-equipped to lead a marketing campaign. The City of Bloomington's Communications Division, Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism, Hennepin County Love Local program, or a private consulting firm are all options. Design the program with consultation from small business owners (see action 8.1).

2.4.2. Work with partners on buy-local awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of supporting local enterprises, which include fostering economic growth and strengthening the community's economic resilience.

② Streamlining the Permitting Process (Vancouver, Washington)

The City of Vancouver, Washington, has developed an innovative permitting process that significantly reduces both time and costs for the city and applicants. By adopting a team-based review system, streamlining concurrent reviews, offering pre-application conferences, and utilizing electronic plan reviews, Vancouver has set a high standard for efficiency and customer service in the permitting process that benefits all parties. The following components define this successful approach.

Pre-Lease Program. Although not part of the permitting process, the Pre-Lease Program is managed by the permitting department to support small businesses. It assists business owners and property owners in leasing, buying, or renovating commercial spaces, as well as food truck vendors. The program includes a walkthrough of the potential space(s) with the business/property owner and their partners (such as realtors and contractors), city staff from various departments (including the Fire Marshal's Office and Land Use Planning), and staff from partner agencies (for example Clark County Public Health and the Washington State Liquor Control Board). Participants learn about allowable business types, building occupancy classifications, the permitting process, and building suitability. This free service is recommended before signing a lease or purchasing property.

Pre-Application Conference. For larger projects, the city offers a pre-application conference where review staff discuss all code requirements, fees, and process timelines before permits are applied for. This proactive approach provides applicants with comprehensive information upfront, reducing the likelihood of delays and misunderstandings later in the process. Vancouver has been recognized as a leader in delivering high-quality information to applicants during this stage.

Team-Based Review. Every land use project submitted is assigned a dedicated case manager. This case manager coordinates the review process with a consistent team of reviewers from various departments, such as engineering, fire, and building. This approach ensures applicants have a single point of contact, streamlining communication and enhancing efficiency.

Streamlined Land Use and Engineering Review. Vancouver's award-winning streamlined review process allows land use applications to be reviewed concurrently with engineering plans, rather than consecutively. This concurrent review process is completed within 90 days of city review time, offering a faster and more efficient timeline for applicants. Additionally, if building plans are ready for submission at the same time, all three processes—land use, engineering, and building—can be handled together, further expediting the approval process. This streamlined option is available at no extra cost to the applicant.

Electronic Plan Review. To further enhance efficiency, Vancouver allows applicants to submit plans and applications electronically. Reviewers provide comments and corrections electronically as well, saving substantial time and costs for both the city and applicants. This digital approach reduces the need for physical document submissions and expedites the overall review process.

OBJECTIVE 3. INNOVATION

Foster a dynamic startup ecosystem to drive innovation and economic diversity.

- 3.1. **Ecosystem.** Develop a thriving entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem to foster a diversified and growing economy. The Port Authority’s programming serves both traditional small businesses and higher growth entrepreneurial companies. There are, however, important distinctions to be made between the two. These distinctions extend to markets, capital needs, resource requirements, and growth trends (see Figure 6, page 15).
 - 3.1.1. Create an asset map of the entrepreneurial resources available in Bloomington, the greater MSP region, and the state of Minnesota that can be used by entrepreneurs, as well as economic and community developers. Utilize information from the [Minnesota Technology Association](#), [Forge North](#), [Launch Minnesota](#), [BETA](#), and [Grow Minnesota!](#), among others to inform the map. 3
 - 3.1.2. Perform research through local partners, networking, news articles, etc., to identify high-growth startups located in Bloomington and document the findings in the CRM system. Develop a brief survey to learn about needs of the entrepreneurial community.
 - 3.1.3. Identify gaps in services and needs areas where the Port Authority could strengthen the support system for startups, especially in historically underserved populations.
 - 3.1.4. Assess the physical space requirements for high-growth startups and identify barriers to growth, such as the availability of lab space or specialized equipment.

FIGURE 6. COMPARING TRAITS OF HIGH-GROWTH STARTUPS AND SMALL BUSINESSES

CHARACTERISTICS	ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPANIES	SMALL BUSINESSES
Market focus	Serve external markets (traded clusters)	Serve local markets (local clusters)
Capital needs	Capital intensive	Low capitalization
Role of intellectual property (IP)	Highly IP dependent	Little or no proprietary information
Expectations for growth	High growth	Modest growth

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

- 3.2. **Funding.** Develop a capital access program that connects startups, especially for historically underserved founders, with diverse funding sources to help them grow and scale.
 - 3.2.1. Partner with venture capital firms, angel investors, and financial institutions to create a robust funding network.
 - Identify partners that have a strong history of working with WBEs and MBEs to improve equitable access to funding.
 - 3.2.2. Provide information on grant opportunities, government funding programs, and alternative financing options that can help startups secure low-cost capital.
 - 3.2.3. Explore creating or advocating for tax incentives, grants, and subsidies that can reduce the financial burden on new businesses.

3.2.4. Prepare startups to be investment-ready through targeted support.

- Offer training and workshops on creating compelling business plans, financial modeling, and investor pitching.
- Provide one-on-one coaching and mentorship to help startups refine their value propositions and growth strategies.

3.3. Networking. Build relationships with partners across the region and state that support high-growth startups.

3.3.1. Attend established networking events, such as MN Tech Happy Hour, Hackers and Founders Minneapolis, and Make It.MSP.Tech, to better understand the needs of startups in the region.

- Advocate for hosting these networking events in Bloomington.

3.3.2. Strengthen partnerships with higher education institutions in the region to build awareness of the opportunities for emerging businesses in Bloomington.

- Deepen knowledge of research and development occurring at universities to support commercialization and tech transfer.
- Organize regular events and workshops that bring together academia, industry, and startups to facilitate collaboration and innovation (see actions 1.3.2 and 8.2.2).

3.3.3. Establish a network of professional service providers, including IP and patent attorneys, accountants, and financial service experts, to support the growth of emerging companies.

3.4. Industry Engagement. Engage with established companies to create opportunities for startups (see action 1.1.2).

3.4.1. Foster corporate-startup partnerships that encourage innovation and provide startups with access to larger markets and resources.

- Formalize programs that encourage established companies to mentor and invest in startups and explore opportunities to colocate startups on existing company campuses.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Investing in entrepreneurship is an important driver of economic growth and long-term sustainability. Research consistently shows that high-growth startups are responsible for a significant portion of new job creation across economies, while also playing a crucial role in bringing innovative technologies to market. Startups are often more agile than established firms, allowing them to commercialize groundbreaking innovations faster, thereby fueling economic dynamism and creating new industries.

In addition to fostering innovation and job creation, prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion within entrepreneurial ecosystems is essential for building wealth in underserved communities. For example, Black business owners have a median net worth that is 12 times higher than Black non-business owners, highlighting entrepreneurship's potential to close racial wealth gaps. Similarly, while Latino entrepreneurs boast the highest startup rate in the US, they face systemic barriers to accessing capital, which hinders growth.

Nationally, access to capital remains one of the most significant hurdles facing minority-owned businesses leaders, with lending rates for non-White borrowers disproportionately lower than for White borrowers. Supporting diverse startups not only drives economic growth but also fosters resilience, reinvestment, and a more inclusive economy.

- 3.4.2. Host reverse pitch competitions where large companies present problems for startups to solve. Offer prizes and support for winning solutions to encourage innovative problem-solving (see strategy 8.2).

3 Northeast Tennessee Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Map

Northeast Tennessee's [Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Map](#) was developed and is maintained by Sync Space, the primary entrepreneurial support organization for the region. The map visualizes organizations, resources, support systems, and pathways that foster entrepreneurship. By enhancing collaboration and efficiency, it aims to support and empower entrepreneurs, streamline access to resources, and drive regional economic growth.

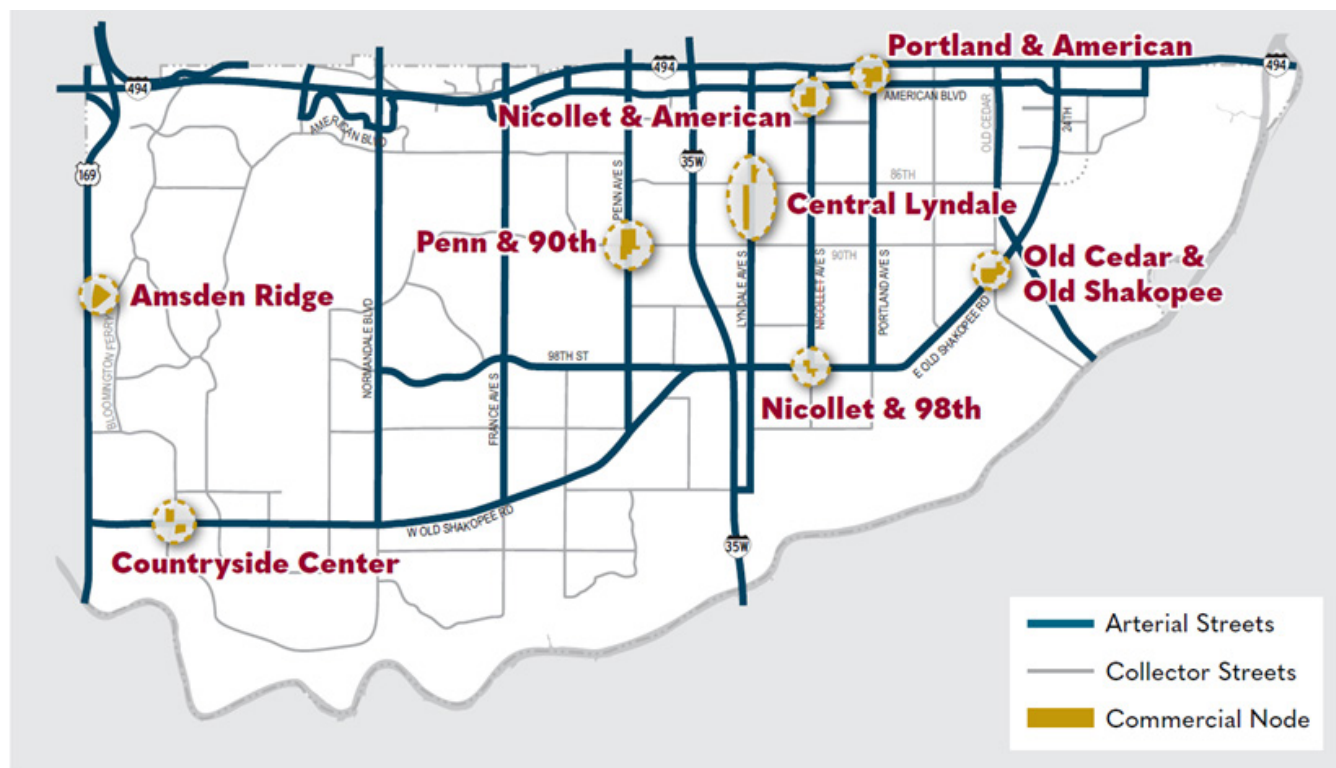
OBJECTIVE 4. THRIVING PLACES

Cultivate vibrant, livable, and inclusive neighborhoods and commercial areas to enhance quality of life for residents and visitors.

- 4.1. Creative Placemaking.** Continue implementation of *A Plan for Creative Placemaking in the South Loop*, and initiate implementation of the citywide plan upon its completion in 2025 via the Office of Creative Placemaking.
- 4.1.1. Continue to commission temporary and permanent public art, recognizing its benefits for social connection, aesthetic enhancements, community identity, tourism, cultural dialogue, and local pride.
 - 4.1.2. Collaborate closely with the Port Authority's small business development team to ensure creative entrepreneurs have access to resources and business support (see action 2.1.2).
 - 4.1.3. Advocate for affordable workspaces, growing capacity, and offering opportunities and connections that support artist and creative economy workers.
 - 4.1.4. Support unique events developed and implemented by community members, such as Bloomington Street Arts Festival and Celebrando las Fiestas Patrias (Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month), and cultural festivals, such as Latino Nature Fest and On the One Music Festival. Cultivate partnerships with individuals and organizations to leverage expertise and community connections and support implementation of events.
- 4.2. Commercial Nodes.** Focus resources and efforts on updating Bloomington's commercial nodes to be neighborhood amenities (see Figure 7, page 18). Seek opportunities to modernize and redevelop key commercial nodes across Bloomington or support natural redevelopment, while mitigating displacement of existing businesses. (See Objective 6 for additional details on the built environment.)
- 4.2.1. Develop strong working relationships with property owners to build trust and rapport with the City and the Port Authority.
 - 4.2.2. Leverage existing programs and initiatives to spur improvements in the commercial nodes, including the Site and Façade Improvement Program, and consult on the development of the Commercial Nodes Toolkit.

- 4.2.3. Develop awareness of the City's mural ordinance (2023), and advocate for additional policy changes that could increase vibrancy of the built environment.
- 4.2.4. Identify opportunities to add and incorporate public spaces and green spaces adjacent to commercial nodes. This could include the development of pocket parks or plazas, or trail expansions to connect nodes to trail systems.
- 4.2.5. Implement measures to mitigate business displacement through small business outreach, including maintaining or expanding Bloomington's Business Retention Program (see action 2.1.1).

FIGURE 7. PRIORITY COMMERCIAL NODES FROM NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL STUDY



Source(s): City of Bloomington, Minnesota.

- 4.3. Public Spaces.** Support the investment and activation of public spaces that stimulate local economic growth, enhance community engagement, and attract new businesses.
- 4.3.1. Continue to support the implementation of the [Lyndale Avenue Suburban Retrofit Plan](#) to improve walkability and connectivity in central Bloomington.
- Build relationships with property owners to understand redevelopment opportunities.
 - Consider strategic Port Authority or City acquisitions of property.
- 4.3.2. Support the development of pocket parks, especially adjacent to shopping corridors and restaurants, to encourage informal gathering and prolong visitors' time in the area.

- 4.3.3. Encourage local art and amenities, such as gardens, to activate public areas and parks. Prioritize traditionally underserved areas of the City, including areas experiencing health disparities or those lacking greenspace, for improvements.
- 4.3.4. Support investments in infrastructure that underpins the visitor economy, such as Wi-Fi in public areas, signage in areas of interest (including culturally significant assets), transportation (including nonmotorized corridors), and digital information applications (such as the South Loop Public Art Audio Tour).
- 4.3.5. Encourage the development of nonmotorized corridors to connect parks and trails, promoting active transportation, especially in areas where connectivity is lacking. ⁴
- Support the implementation of Bloomington’s [Active Transportation Action Plan](#), encouraging nonmotorized transportation options throughout the City.
 - Support implementation of the [Bloomington Park System Master Plan 2021](#) by regularly meeting with Parks and Recreation Department leadership and the Office of Creative Placemaking.
 - Explore temporary or long-term commercial opportunities along trail corridors to encourage social gathering, such as food trucks, cafes, etc.
 - Continue to evaluate recommendations for trail/sidewalk improvements and implement as appropriate.

⁴ Atlanta Beltline (Atlanta, Georgia)

The [Atlanta Beltline project](#) is a transformative urban redevelopment initiative aimed at reshaping Atlanta's infrastructure and community spaces. Encompassing a 22-mile loop of multi-use trails, parks, and transit options, the project connects 45 neighborhoods around the city's core. It promotes sustainable growth, enhances mobility, and fosters economic development by repurposing former railway corridors into vibrant public spaces. The Beltline has become a catalyst for urban revitalization, encouraging investment, promoting active lifestyles, and strengthening the sense of community throughout Atlanta.

OBJECTIVE 5. REAL ESTATE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Ensure that Bloomington is prepared for strategic large-scale commercial and residential development.

- 5.1. **Development.** Continue to evaluate, administer, and support large-scale development and redevelopment projects, including infill, in Bloomington.
- 5.1.1. Manage development-related grants, including those from Minnesota Investment Fund (MIF) agreements, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Metropolitan Council, and Hennepin County, and complete related reporting requirements.
- 5.1.2. Refine evaluation criteria for providing incentives to development and offer more predictable development opportunities.
- Continue to refine the Equitable Development Evaluation worksheet and use it when considering potential projects.

- Consider establishing a sustainable building policy in coordination with the City’s Sustainability Commission, or a sustainable building evaluation worksheet. 5

5.1.3. Continue to support planning projects throughout the City, including the update to the *South Loop District Plan*.

5.1.4. Strengthen relationships and networks to establish Bloomington as a primary place to do business (see action 1.2.4 and strategy 8.2).

- Perform dedicated outreach to real estate professionals to engage them in Bloomington’s development opportunities.
- Continue hosting and evolving the annual broker breakfast to share City updates with the commercial real estate community.
- Allocate staff time to attend, speak at, or help organize industry events.

5.1.5. Enhance the Port Authority’s financial incentives, programs, and tools to stimulate and support development and redevelopment projects.

- Consider the use of industrial revenue bonds to support large-scale developments.
- Continue to leverage public-private partnership models to move projects forward, especially those that have significant barriers to investment and would not develop without public investment.
- Utilize state and federal environmental programs to advance sustainability initiatives in development projects. Grants.gov is a good resource for identifying federal funding opportunities across agencies, especially for funding outside of the US Economic Development Administration. The Department of Energy, Department of Agriculture, Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Science Foundation have offered grants in the past to fund sustainable economic development projects.

5.2. Affordable Housing. Continue to support and administer large-scale affordable and mixed-income housing developments in Bloomington in coordination with the HRA (see strategy 7.3).

5.2.1. Maintain affordable housing records in preparation for the annual housing reporting.

5.2.2. Continue to review the Opportunity Housing Ordinance for code updates and make any adjustments as needed.

5.2.3. Provide technical support to the HRA and private developers to support project analysis and development of affordable housing in Bloomington.

5.2.4. Provide oversight and management of project financing mechanisms managed by the City, including tax increment financing (TIF).

5.2.5. Seek additional state and federal funding to assist in delivering affordable housing developments that meet the needs of Bloomington residents.

5.3. Land Banking. Establish a working group to study the needs and opportunities for creating a land banking program that facilitates the acquisition, management, and redevelopment of underutilized properties, while promoting sustainable urban growth and revitalizing underserved areas.

- 5.3.1. Conduct a detailed analysis of the City's current land use, identifying all publicly owned properties, as well as underutilized sites and infill opportunities, to identify target areas and parcels for acquisition.
 - 5.3.2. Coordinate with the City's Planning Division, Finance Department, and Legal Department teams to evaluate legal and operational framework that would enable the Port Authority to acquire, hold, and dispose of properties. This should include ordinances, policies, and procedures.
 - 5.3.3. Identify potential funding sources (e.g., grants, municipal bonds/industrial revenue bonds, and public-private partnerships) to support land acquisition and management to ensure sustainable operations for the program.
 - 5.3.4. Establish a land banking fund to facilitate land banking and draft high-level procedures and policies for implementing a land bank plan, if recommended for approval by the working group.
 - 5.3.5. Make a recommendation to proceed or pause further exploration of a comprehensive land banking program.
- 5.4. Infrastructure.** Ensure Bloomington has the necessary infrastructure to support the City's economic growth, especially in areas of the community where systems may be aging.
- 5.4.1. Track the Public Works Department's comprehensive assessment of Bloomington's sewer capacity, identifying areas with aging infrastructure and potential bottlenecks.
 - 5.4.2. Support partners such as the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development on initiatives to expand consistent access to high-speed internet across Bloomington.
 - 5.4.3. Support strong partnerships with Bloomington's electric and gas utility providers, Public Works Department staff, and Bloomington's Sustainability Commission to ensure adequate power infrastructure to support the growing high-tech and advanced manufacturing cluster and to prepare for future development (see strategy 1.3).
 - Support electrical grid modernization efforts to incorporate smart grid technologies that enhance reliability and efficiency.
 - Promote the integration of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, to diversify the energy supply and enhance sustainability.
 - Facilitate and coordinate meetings between critical power users and providers to develop and implement plans for emergency power redundancy to ensure the continuous operation of critical services during outages.

5 Sustainable Building Ordinance (Saint Paul, Minnesota)

The Sustainable Building Ordinance in Saint Paul, Minnesota, adopted in 2010, aims to reduce the environmental impact of publicly funded projects. Any new construction or significant renovation receiving over \$200,000 in public funding must comply with specific green building standards. The ordinance was introduced as part of the broader *Saint Paul Climate Action & Resilience Plan*, which seeks to improve energy efficiency, reduce waste, and manage stormwater. The ordinance reflects the City's long-term commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship in urban development.

OBJECTIVE 6. TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

Attract and retain diverse talent to support Bloomington's economic growth and resilience.

- 6.1. Talent-Focused Promotion.** Showcase Bloomington for potential talent by expanding on the City's quality-of-place advantages in regional and state economic development marketing (see action 8.1.2)
- 6.1.1. Leverage partnerships with Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism, Make It. MSP., and Explore Minnesota (Star of the North) to showcase Bloomington as part of their talent attraction marketing campaigns.
 - 6.1.2. Partner with the Bloomington Communications Division and others to use social media platforms to attract talent, including remote workers, by sharing engaging content that highlights Bloomington's job opportunities, unique community assets, and innovative business environment.
 - Direct social media messaging and engagement efforts to organizations that are likely to reach workers in targeted occupations, demographic groups, and geographic areas.
 - Support and develop content for programs such as [Welcome to Bloomington](#) that engage new residents.
 - 6.1.3. Build relationships with local and regional media partners, including, but not limited to, the *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal*, to share and promote economic development stories in Bloomington.
- 6.2. Higher Education.** Strengthen connections with local higher education institutions to promote postgraduation job opportunities for students.
- 6.2.1. Work with local educational institutions to understand their student demographics and employment goals.
 - 6.2.2. Coordinate with the private sector to understand internship and co-op programs at Bloomington businesses to retain graduates and grow the local workforce. Make employer and higher education connections as appropriate.
- 6.3. Talent Retention.** Increase talent retention in Bloomington by fostering a supportive work environment, promoting professional growth opportunities, and strengthening community connections.
- 6.3.1. Utilize BRE visits to engage and understand employer's needs and challenges in retaining and attracting talent, and offer ways for employees to connect to the community. Promote City programs that foster connections to the community, including volunteer coordination, Learn to Lead, and Bloom in Bloomington.
 - 6.3.2. Support employers in the development of programs and policies that promote employee well-being and reduce staff turnover. Examples include policies that allow for increased flexibility in work schedules/shifts, offer best practices in equity and inclusion work, identify clear pathways for advancement, and offer employee training opportunities (see actions 1.1.3 and 2.1.2). 6
 - 6.3.3. Continue to invest in the quality-of-place amenities that make Bloomington an attractive, enjoyable, and supportive place to live and work (see Objective 4 and Objective 7).

6 The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Handbook for Businesses (Atascadero, California)

The Atascadero Chamber of Commerce's [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Handbook](#) is an initiative led by the Chamber's Diversity Council. It aims to provide businesses and community members with practical resources to foster inclusive environments and improve cultural competency. The handbook offers guidelines on understanding and respecting diverse backgrounds, creating inclusive workplaces, and addressing biases in professional and community settings. It reflects the chamber's commitment to building a more equitable and supportive community for all residents and businesses in Atascadero.

OBJECTIVE 7. WRAPAROUND SERVICES

Ensure Bloomington has the comprehensive support services needed to enhance workforce productivity and well-being.

- 7.1. Workforce.** Maintain strong relationships among the Port Authority team and local and regional workforce development partners, including higher education and trades organizations (see action 2.1.3). Support workforce development efforts in Bloomington by regularly convening partners to ensure alignment of services.
- 7.1.1. Develop a strong understanding of local and regional workforce development programs and administrators to ensure efficient referrals to other organizations and service providers (see action 1.3.3). Include in this research large employers and schools, to understand their existing internship, apprenticeship, and pipeline programs.
 - 7.1.2. Leverage the Bloomington Economic Partnership to collect feedback, make connections among partners, and advise on business-friendly workforce policy development.
 - 7.1.3. Cultivate relationships with the Hennepin-Carver Workforce Development Board to support the development and implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) [Regional and Local Plan](#) for Bloomington.
 - Collaborate with workforce development partners to identify pathways from entry-level positions to livable-wage careers in alignment with the WIOA *Regional and Local Plan*.
 - Emphasize pathways that build on the region's tourism and hospitality industry skill sets.
 - 7.1.4. Ensure that workforce development outreach is targeting underserved populations and geographic areas to reduce disparities.
 - 7.1.5. Lead program development and execution for the Bloom in Bloomington internship program, with particular emphasis on employer partner recruitment. Develop and evaluate program in consultation with the Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and others.
- 7.2. Childcare.** Launch a childcare needs assessment and feasibility study to better understand the needs and market dynamics in Bloomington.
- 7.2.1. Explore public-private partnerships to provide affordable childcare solutions to support the workforce. Leverage existing business forums and organizations, such as the Minnesota CHIPS Coalition, to understand unique employer needs.

7.2.2. Collaborate with local childcare providers to enhance the availability and quality of services. Identify and address barriers to the expansion of existing facilities. 7

7.3. Housing. Support a broad spectrum of housing creation and preservation programs that are vital to sustaining and growing the City’s workforce (see strategy 5.2).

7.3.1. Work in alignment with Bloomington’s HRA, which oversees housing programs for the City. Ensure that Port Authority staff are well-informed on housing opportunities in Bloomington to share this information with businesses.

7.3.2. Provide input on policies that impact housing development citywide as they relate to the economic growth of Bloomington.

7.3.3. Advocate for housing development that is accessible to employment centers via walking or public transportation.

7.4. Mobility Support. Cultivate relationships among the Port Authority and partners that provide residents access to meaningful and gainful employment in Bloomington through transportation services and infrastructure.

7.4.1. Catalog mobility service providers operating in Bloomington.

7.4.2. Collaborate with mobility service providers to access funding opportunities that enhance the services they provide.

7.4.3. Advocate for improved walking and rolling infrastructure, specifically in and around Commercial Nodes and Transit Oriented Development areas.

7.4.4. Prioritize development that reduces single occupancy vehicle use.

7 Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium

The Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium (SWCCC) is a public-private partnership and the largest community-run childcare system in the US, operating 26 centers across three counties and serving over 1,500 children annually. SWCCC was started in 1989 when business, education, and civic leaders came together to address the growing need for high-quality, affordable childcare in the region. When the program began, all SWCCC facilities were built on-site at private companies and operated by the Educational Service District 112. Although facilities were open to the public (space permitting), companies often subsidized employee’s costs for childcare. Special considerations are also made based on employer needs, for example, the facility connected to PeaceHealth is open extended hours to accommodate the long shifts of medical staff. Today, in addition to the on-site facilities, SWCCC also operates community-based centers and offers before- and after-school care at public elementary schools.

OBJECTIVE 8. MARKETING AND EVENTS

Utilize Bloomington’s tourism sector as a catalyst for broader economic development, creating synergies between tourism and local business growth.

8.1. Marketing and Communications. Collaborate with the City of Bloomington’s Communications Division and Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism to promote the City as a place to work or do business (see actions 1.2.2 and 2.4.1).

- 8.1.1. Consider a brand refresh for the City of Bloomington, which can help inform future marketing, collateral, etc., potentially informed by Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism’s existing branding and marketing work.
- 8.1.2. Develop a marketing campaign focused on business and talent attraction in Bloomington, modeled after the Explore Minnesota for Business initiative (see action 1.2.2 and strategy 6.1).
- Create a professional promotional video highlighting innovation and quality of place in Bloomington that can be used for business recruitment and talent attraction. Explore examples such as [Calgary, Alberta](#); [Vancouver, Washington](#); [Portland, Oregon](#); [Ann Arbor, Michigan](#); [St. Petersburg, Florida](#); and [Greeley, Colorado](#).
- 8.1.3. Leverage social media to promote different parts of Bloomington, along with the businesses and amenities in those areas, to encourage residents and visitors to explore the City. These efforts should complement the Discover Bloomington series.
- 8.1.4. Align business recruitment materials to match the style and tone of the marketing components.
- 8.2. Events.** Explore opportunities to bring or create industry events in the City of Bloomington that promote economic development (see actions 3.4.2 and 5.1.4).
- 8.2.1. Advocate for the development of a dynamic, multipurpose center that can host industry conferences and trade shows.
- 8.2.2. Support Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism’s efforts to market the City as a prime location for industry events, especially for the high-tech and semiconductor industry (see actions 1.3.3 and 3.3.2).
- Consider hosting a conference without walls that convenes in different locations, including outdoor venues. Not only does this allow participants to get a change of perspective but it also limits the need for an extended reservation at one place. For example, the plenary sessions could be held at Bloomington Civic Plaza and smaller breakout sessions at other venues throughout the City. **8**

8 Project for Public Spaces, International Placemaking Week

In October 2019, the Project for Public Spaces held its third International Placemaking Week conference in Chattanooga utilizing an innovative and immersive conference-without-walls format. The event was cohosted with Chattanooga’s Innovation District, a downtown catalyst designed to develop an environment conducive to creativity and entrepreneurship. In addition to indoor venues throughout the city, the conference basecamp was an open-air event space in the center of downtown Chattanooga’s Innovation District that offered free, high-speed Wi-Fi. The format was repeated for the organization’s fourth International Placemaking Week, held in Baltimore, June 5–8, 2024.

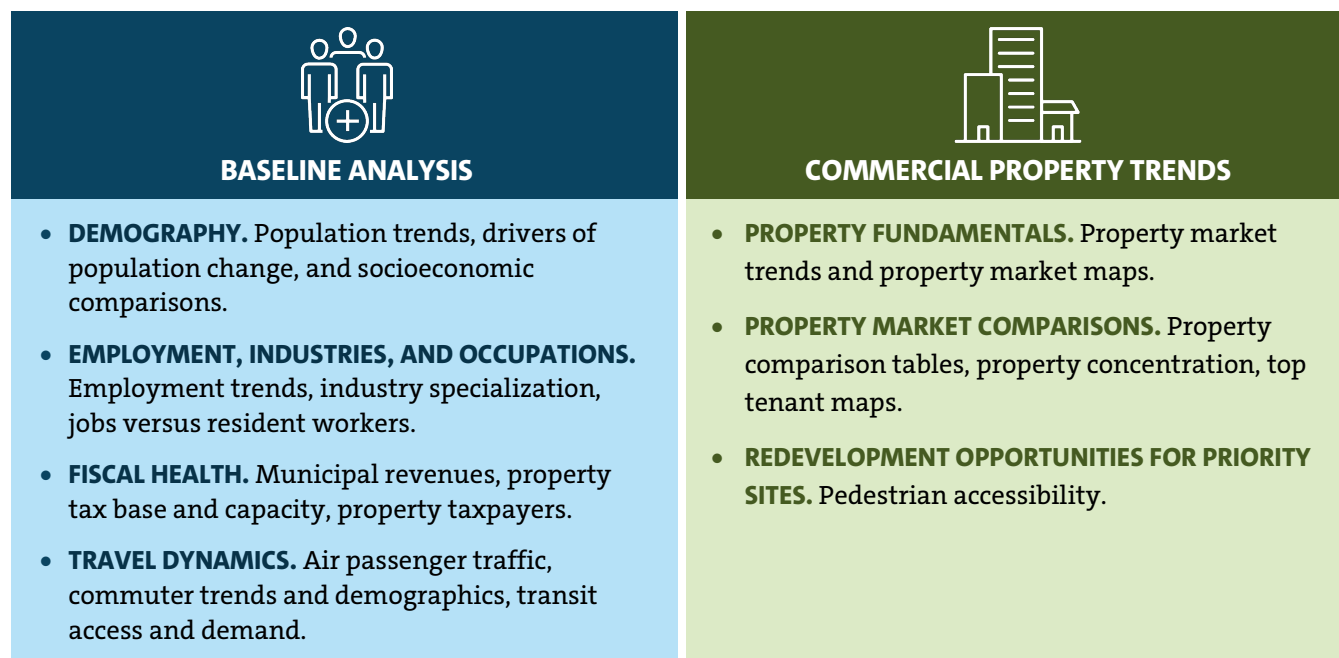
PLANNING CONTEXT

TIP's three-phase planning model, which combines quantitative and qualitative research, was used to explore Bloomington's competitive position, identify challenges and opportunities, and shape the recommendations. Findings from these tasks are summarized in this section, culminating with an analysis of the City's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, known as a SWOT analysis.

QUANTITATIVE AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS

TIP conducted a targeted analysis of Bloomington's competitive position, with comparisons to the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI metropolitan statistical area (MSA), the state, and the US, as well as to a selection of peer communities. Initial data collection began in January 2024 during TIP's discovery phase and the analytical work continued into the final phase of the engagement. Along with a baseline assessment of demographic, fiscal, and employment data, TIP prepared a citywide analysis of real estate fundamentals, with an emphasis on Port Authority-owned properties. An in-depth interactive data visualization, [Bloomington Economic Development Analysis](#) (the menu of which is shown in Figure 8), was delivered to the Port Authority in the spring of 2024.

FIGURE 8. OVERVIEW OF INTERACTIVE DELIVERABLE MENU



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

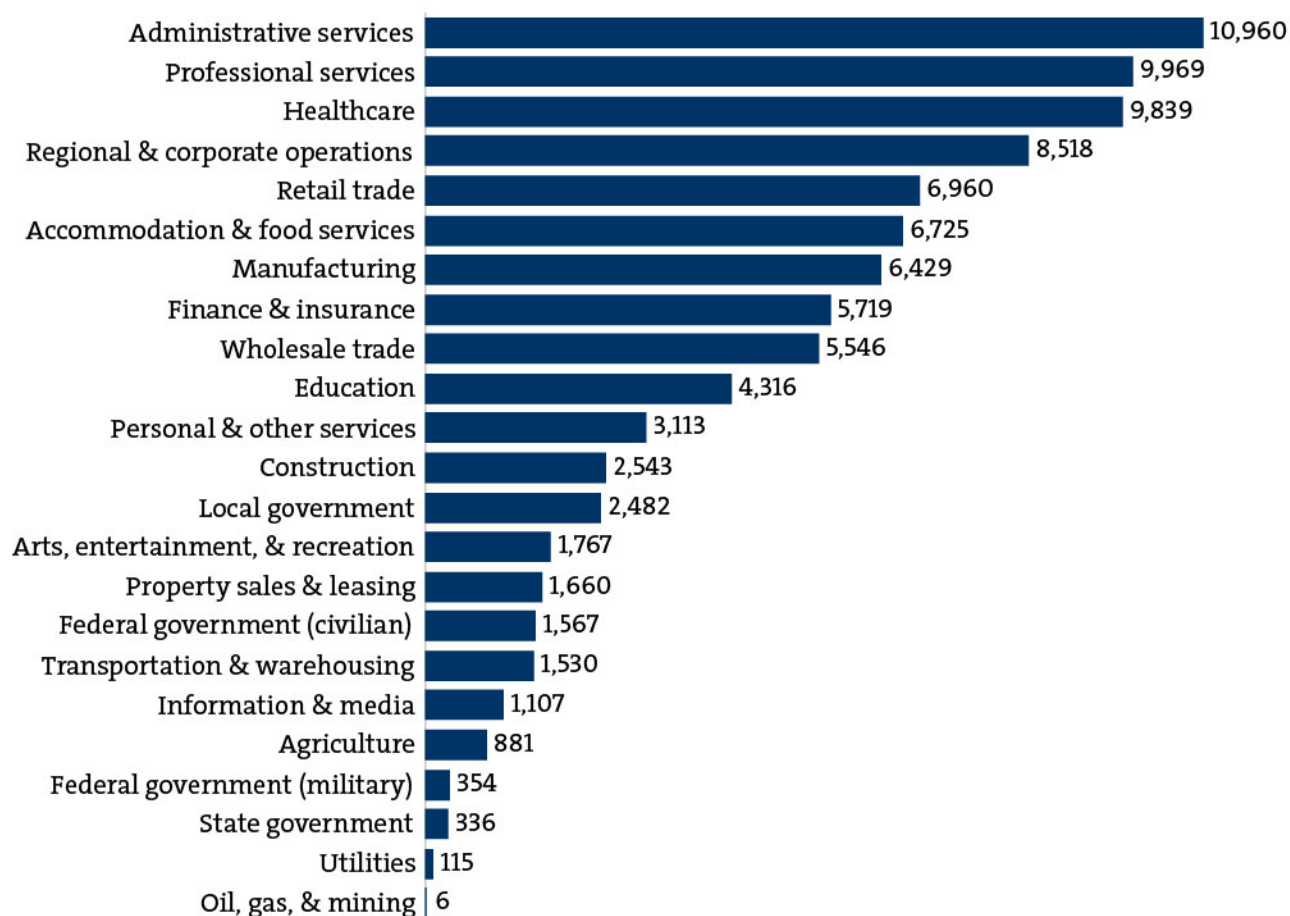
In addition, TIP prepared [Bloomington Job Quality and Access](#), a custom analytical tool offering a deep dive into the factors affecting job quality (such as earnings, job stability, and workplace conditions) and accessibility (as measured by barriers to entry and demographic composition of the occupation) for more than 700 detailed occupations in the region. This interactive analysis is designed to promote equitable growth and opportunity by helping organizations in the workforce and educational arena obtain a better understanding of job quality and

accessibility and make data available for decision-making. Findings from these analyses, which are highlighted in this section, informed and guided the strategic planning process.

Formalizing and expanding Bloomington’s business development effort will allow the City to better leverage its traded sector strengths.

Bloomington’s largest industrial strengths lie in the professional and business service clusters, with Administrative Services, Professional Services, and Regional & Corporate Operations among the City’s top industry sectors by job count. Further traded sector strengths lie in tourism, healthcare, and a burgeoning tech industry (which leverages the presence of numerous semiconductor manufacturers and the related skilled workforce). Focusing business retention and expansion efforts at these important sectors can foster the growth of high-wage, high-skilled jobs and attract outside investment. A targeted BRE program can also allow Bloomington to improve its local business climate by providing technical assistance (see strategy 1.1), making the case for business infrastructure investment (see strategies 4.2 and 5.1), and guiding businesses through the permitting processes (see strategy 2.3). The Port Authority can further catalyze high-growth startups by developing the entrepreneurial ecosystem needed to facilitate partnerships between established companies and new business ventures (see strategy 3.4).

FIGURE 9. EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY SECTOR, BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA, 2023



Source(s): US Bureau of Labor Statistics; Lightcast 2024.1—Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Bloomington, Minnesota, is approximated by ZIP Codes 55420, 55425, 55431, 55437, and 55438.

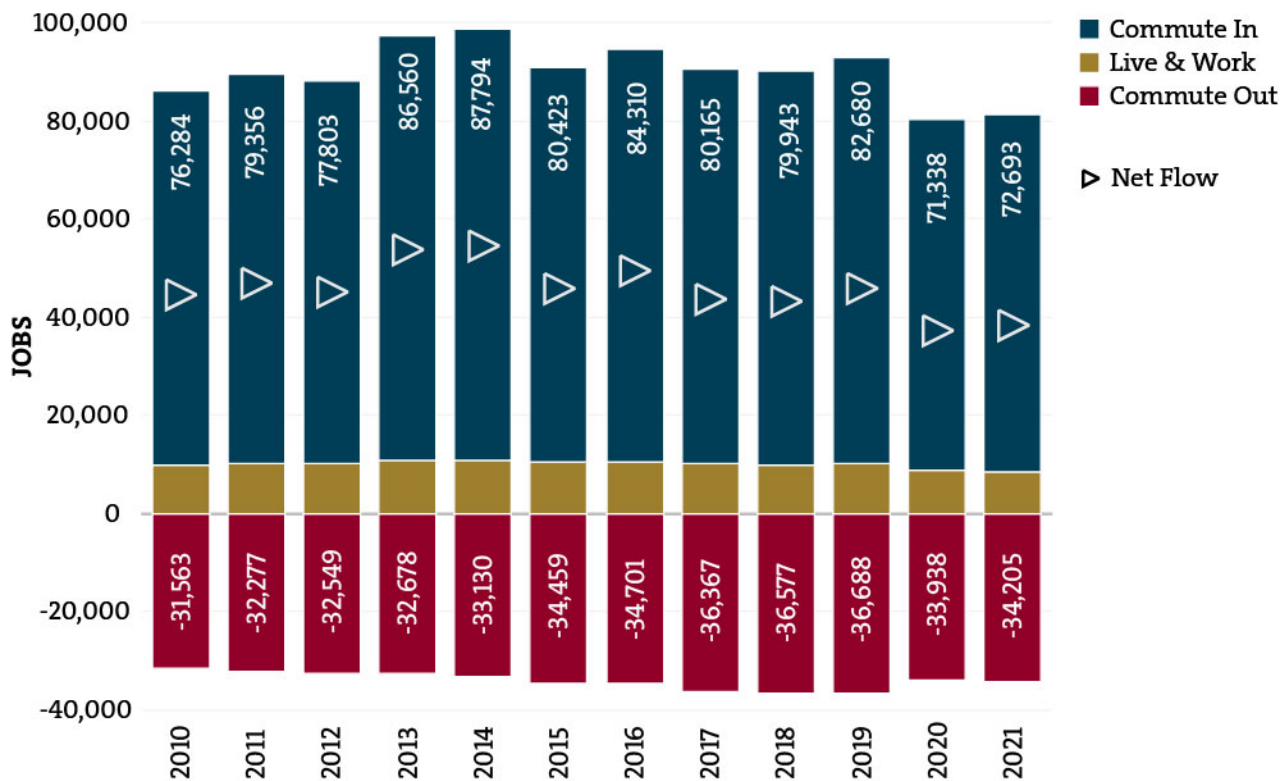
Investing in talent attraction and retention will be critical to support business growth.

Compared to the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington MSA, which has added more than 1.1 million people since 1990 (an increase of over 42 percent), the population of Bloomington has increased only nominally. Over the same period, the City has experienced extended stretches of population decline, resulting in a total net gain of less than 2 percent. Bloomington’s population also skews older than many of its peers and the City contains the lowest share of households with children among its peer communities. As the City seeks to attract early career professionals (see strategy 6.1), to retain existing talent (see strategy 6.3), and to further develop its workforce pipeline, it must provide an adequate worker support system, including expanded options for career development (see strategy 7.1), childcare (see strategy 7.2), and ensuring a high quality of place (see Objective 4).

Although suburban communities are often net exporters of labor, with workers living in bedroom communities and commuting to an urban core, Bloomington demonstrates a daily net inflow of labor. More than 16 percent of Bloomington workers commute in from Minneapolis or Saint Paul, and nearly 20 percent of Bloomington residents remain within the City for work. Bloomington's strategic position as a net importer of labor and its unique demographic composition offer significant opportunities. By undertaking targeted marketing initiatives, Bloomington can attract early career professionals and existing commuters to live in the City, while it works to develop a talent pipeline to support business growth and enhance its overall economic vitality.

FIGURE 10. COMMUTING PATTERNS, 2010–2021

Flow of workers and residents through Bloomington, Minnesota

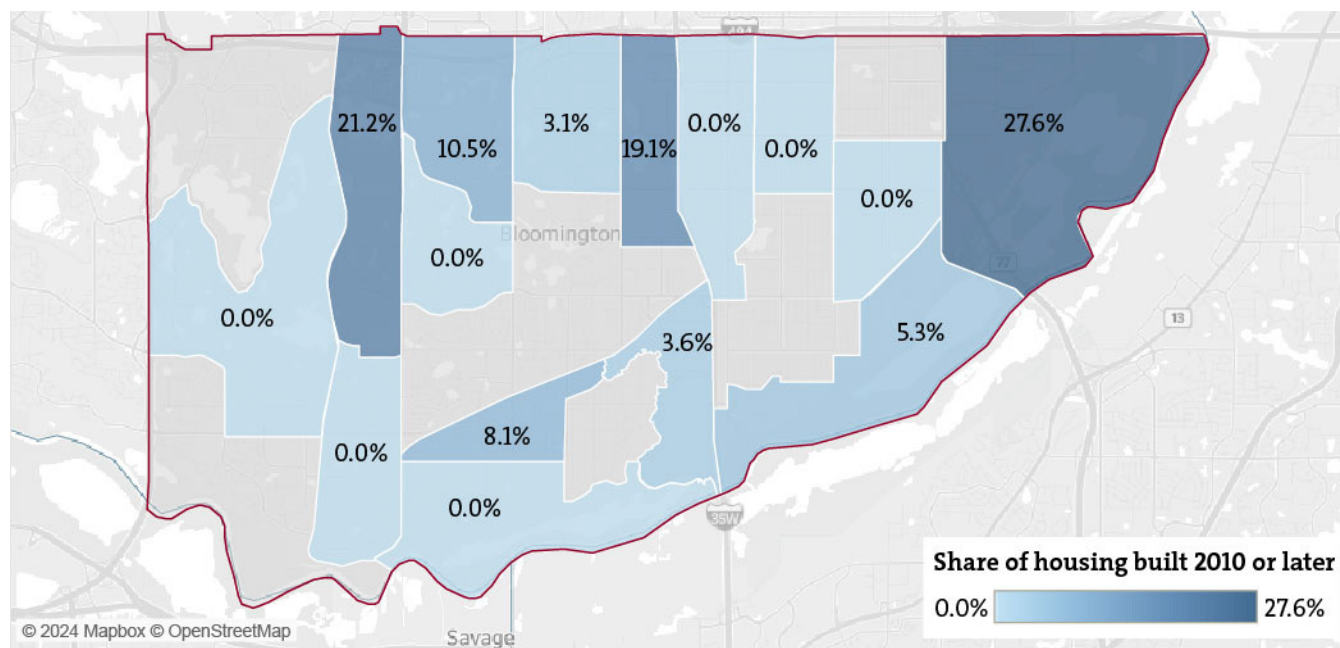


Source(s): Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, Origin-Destination Employment Statistics; TIP Strategies, Inc.
 Note(s): Goods-producing sectors include agriculture, mining, oil and gas extraction, construction, and manufacturing. Trade, transport, and utilities sectors includes retail and wholesale trade, transportation, warehousing, and utilities. All other sectors are aggregated. Only includes residents and workers in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

While Bloomington has made critical quality-of-place investments that support visitors and residents, limited residential development has constrained workforce growth.

Attracting more than 40 million visitors per year and generating nearly \$2 billion in annual economic activity for the state of Minnesota, Mall of America (MOA) stands apart as one of Bloomington’s most important economic assets. Since opening its doors in 1992, MOA has turned tourism and hospitality into major industries in Bloomington. As the City evolves, opportunities for live entertainment events and experiential retail offerings can increase, keeping pace with nationwide trends in consumer preferences. A multipurpose center for business events and entertainment could further this development (see action 8.2.1). Bloomington’s proximity to Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport and the existing hotel and transit infrastructure in the South Loop neighborhood position the City well for hosting regional and national events. South Loop’s proximity to the airport also provides local firms with easy access to national and international destinations, enhancing the area’s attractiveness to relocating businesses. Bloomington also boasts an abundance of parks, green spaces, and trails, providing recreational opportunities that appeal to both residents and visitors (see action 4.3.2). Ongoing creative placemaking efforts like public art and cultural events, which support local artists and the creative sector, as well as trail network expansion demonstrate the City’s commitment to community involvement (see strategy 4.1). While the City has made many critical investments in quality of place, Bloomington’s residential development has not kept pace (see strategy 7.3). Just under 9 percent of the City’s total housing units have been built since 2000, with a large share of its newest units constructed in the South Loop area (see Figure 11). As it maintains a high number of inbound commuters (see Figure 10, page 28), Bloomington should continue to pursue support of live-and-work opportunities through increased development of diverse and affordable housing options. Additionally, investments in key areas like aging commercial nodes will continue to build the City’s local sector economy.

FIGURE 11. PERCENTAGE OF HOUSING UNITS BUILT 2010 OR LATER, BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA

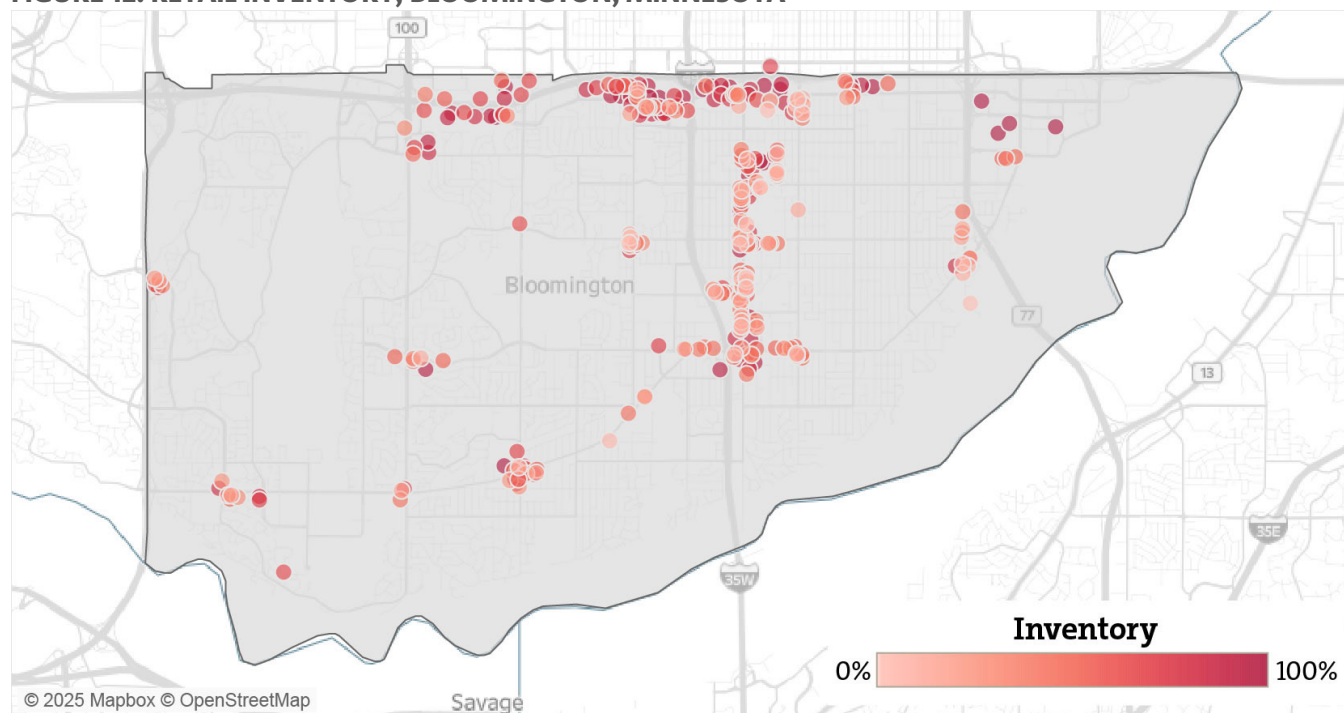


Source(s): US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2022 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.
 Note(s): Data value estimates include a margin of error (± value) for a 90 percent confidence interval. Areas where the margin of error is larger than the estimated value have been excluded from the map.

Modernizing and expanding Bloomington’s commercial nodes will enhance local retail offerings and support traded sector growth.

Outside of MOA, much of Bloomington’s retail inventory exists in the form of big-box retailers along the I-494 corridor or as smaller properties along multiple nodes throughout the City. Many of these nodes dot Bloomington’s western half, while an abundance of retail properties along Lyndale Avenue represent the greatest opportunity for a traditional downtown area within the City limits (see strategy 4.2). Similarly, office inventory exists in clusters, with seven of the City’s ten largest office occupiers located at I-494 and State Highway 100, while other major office tenants reside in South Loop or along I-35W. Although development along Bloomington’s northern border has proliferated in recent years, thanks to both proximity to Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport and the presence of a major tourism destination, commercial developments in much of the City are aging (see strategy 5.1). As the City looks to support large-scale commercial, residential, and industrial development projects across its jurisdiction, further developing and updating commercial nodes represents an opportunity to expand retail strengths beyond the local tourism industry, improve quality of place and retail offerings for residents, and further develop a distinctive sense of place through pedestrian-scale development (see action 7.3.3). Financial tools like tax increment financing districts and industrial revenue bonds represent opportunities for the City to fund major capital projects that will drive local economic activity, like improvements to local transportation infrastructure, revitalization of commercial real estate, and construction of industrial facilities that will stimulate job growth (see strategy 5.1). As the City pursues development that aligns with its long-term goals, it must also ensure that improvements do not displace existing residents. Tools like land banking represent a way to combat gentrification that may result from redevelopment by preserving land for affordable housing and community use amid changing market conditions (see strategy 5.3).

FIGURE 12. RETAIL INVENTORY, BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA



Source(s): CoStar Group; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Darker reds indicate larger properties. Inventories are measured in square feet. All data are estimated by CoStar as of late January 2024 and represent a snapshot in time.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the planning process, the project team engaged extensively with stakeholders from Bloomington, as well as the broader Minneapolis-Saint Paul area and the state of Minnesota. This engagement aimed to gather a thorough understanding of the City's economic development strengths, challenges, and opportunities. The feedback obtained was instrumental in crafting the SWOT analysis and forming the basis of the action plan. As illustrated in Figure 2 (page 4), engagement activities included roundtables, interviews, and regular meetings with the 14-member EDSP Steering Committee. The committee was comprised of diverse business and economic development leaders representing various sectors and parts of Bloomington who provided oversight throughout the project.

Over a span of three months, the project team organized a variety of virtual and in-person roundtable discussions and interviews involving a diverse group of stakeholders. Roundtable topics included economic development, small business development, marketing and tourism, workforce development and higher education, large employers, real estate and development, and members of the Bloomington Learn to Lead program. Interviews were conducted with all the members of the Bloomington City Council and the Port Authority Commission, as well as the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and the GREATER MSP Partnership. The roundtable sessions served as a platform for collective dialogue, while individual interviews provided a more detailed exploration of specific issues and allowed for personal insights that might not surface in a group setting. This comprehensive engagement strategy ensured a wide range of perspectives were considered, enriching the strategic planning process with valuable community input.





In addition to roundtables and interviews, the steering committee played a crucial role by providing guidance and expertise to ensure the plan's development aligned with the community's goals and needs. Responsibilities included reviewing data and analysis, contributing to the SWOT analysis, offering feedback on proposed strategies, and ensuring that the plan is comprehensive and actionable. Over the course of the engagement, the committee was convened seven times, including an opportunity workshop where members gathered in small groups to build out core strategies and identify plan priorities. An implementation workshop with the steering committee was held in December 2024 to support the plan's launch. The steering committee's involvement ensured that the strategic plan was well-informed, balanced, and reflective of the community's vision for economic growth and development.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Following the discovery phase of the project, the consulting team compiled findings from the stakeholder engagement to form the base of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. This qualitative input was combined with findings from TIP's quantitative data analyses, including the *Bloomington Economic Development Analysis* and the *Job Quality and Access Analysis*. Findings from the SWOT analysis are summarized in Figure 13 (page 32). The four components of a SWOT analysis can be defined as follows.

- **Strengths.** Assets and resources that can be built on to grow, strengthen, and diversify the local/regional economy.
- **Weaknesses.** Liabilities and barriers to economic development that could limit economic growth potential.
- **Opportunities.** Competitive advantages and positive trends that hold significant potential for the attraction of new businesses, investments, and skilled workers.
- **Threats.** Unfavorable factors and trends (often external) that could negatively affect the local/regional economy.

FIGURE 13. SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

 STRENGTHS <i>Assets and resources</i>	 WEAKNESSES <i>Liabilities and barriers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation infrastructure and accessibility (surface network, light rail) • Proximity to Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport • Arts and cultural assets • Outdoor recreation (parks, trails) • Tourism and amenities, including Mall of America • Diversified economy (local/traded sector) • Local sector businesses (retail) and small business support structure • Semiconductor industry (regional/state leader in Minnesota CHIPS Coalition) • Higher education (local and regional) • Engaged business community • Healthcare and livability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of large, developable sites for target sector growth (office, commercial, and industrial users) • Depth of traded sector industries (lack of defined industry clusters) • Overlap in service/focus areas within City departments, divisions, offices, and committees • Lack of robust/comprehensive suite of services and programs for traded sector businesses • Lack of east-west connectivity • Lack of a central community gathering place • Access to broadband varies significantly across census tracts • Difficulty of navigating the permitting process, especially for small businesses
 OPPORTUNITIES <i>Competitive advantages and positive trends</i>	 THREATS <i>Unfavorable factors and trends (usually external)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship/high-growth startups in traded sector industries • Semiconductor and advanced manufacturing supply chain development • Increased collaboration across City departments, divisions, offices, and committees, as well as regional and state partners • Define and focus economic development efforts for the Port Authority • Targeted business recruitment efforts (economic diversification) • Willingness to support a large-scale transformative project (Expo, etc.) • Leverage Port Authority's ability to utilize unique tools for economic development • Talent retention and attraction • Placemaking and the activation of public spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentrification/displacement, especially for small businesses in aging developments • Infrastructure keeping pace with growth • E-commerce growth and the impact it will have on the large retail presence in Bloomington • Rising cost of living and the large percentage of low-wage retail workers • Impact of state-level policies on Bloomington businesses • Perceptions of business climate

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.



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