

Bloomington City Council, District 1

Kevin Easton (D)

Chris Sturbaum (D)

1) What are your qualifications for the office you are seeking?

EASTON: My day job involves helping people wade through complex information, process it, and make the best use of it. I am a problem solver that digests the difficult problems, researches them to the ground, and makes informed choices with potentially creative solutions. I work every day with government officials and business leaders at all levels. I have been an auditor and have an MBA, and I understand the process of developing budgets and keeping an eye on things that look out of sorts. I also have worked as a contracts specialist and understand the creation of legal documents.

STURBAUM: I have many years of experience in neighborhood issues, business issues as well as the workings of city government. I have a commitment to neighborhood and constituent problems and a deep concern for the city's well being. I have a balanced approach of listening to all sides of issues. On the infrastructure side, I worked to achieve the intersection at Country Club and Rogers and the sidewalks and bike paths along Rogers Street. I worked for the roundabout at 17th and Arlington and will work to get sidewalks and side paths both to the east and west of that roundabout.

2) What approaches will you take to manage economic growth downtown?

EASTON: Positive economic growth downtown depends on making it a destination to live, work, and play for the permanent residents of the city. The goal is to keep the historic charm of the city that provides its current draw while providing a top of the line living experience for the inhabitants. First is a focused development of the tech park. I believe it should be a mini-model of the successful version in West Lafayette, leveraging both IU and Crane. Overall we need to bring more businesses downtown and slow the building of student apartments. I would only approve incentives such as abatements using the city's own guidelines, mostly to improve truly blighted areas. I would also oppose granting variances on established zoning laws, the granting of which I believe creates inequities among developers, angers residents, and ultimately stifles growth.

I want to see Bloomington leverage its assets for economic growth. The current development of the GPP is crucial. The proximity to Crane and I69 should be highlighted for potential businesses downtown. Quality of life downtown with shops, restaurants, trails, and parks should be emphasized and cared for appropriately. The city should help young entrepreneurs start and grow businesses downtown.

STURBAUM: Growth is good. It brings jobs and keeps the city as a place where people want to live and also be able to make a living. But uncontrolled growth is not so good. The assessment of our last ten years is that we have filled in old parking lots and one story building sites with

housing and long lasting buildings with a future. This has helped keep our downtown viable. We are now in need of some corrections: We want and need more diversity of housing for all types of citizens of all levels of income. We need to refine our design guidelines as well. Adding to the Convention Center and bringing non-student residents downtown will bring different customers to the shops and restaurants on a regular basis so we can maintain and enhance diversity as well as maintain a vibrant downtown. The quality of life in Bloomington does attract businesses and retirees but it also affects our own happiness and is therefore a precious resource to protect.

3) What will you do to ensure transparency and accountability in city government?

EASTON: I understand that the government at all levels must be accountable to the citizens it represents. I am in favor of providing every tool practical to citizens to hold its representatives accountable. For example, public meetings should be held at times that are favorable for attendance by residents, not in the middle of the work day. Non classified records should be kept in a way that is easily accessible on demand. City spending should be easily accessible through a public portal similar to the state's MPH. Too many documents are stored in hard copy, which creates a burden on city staff to maintain them and makes access difficult for the public when records are requested for viewing. More specific to the council, the city should not be approving the hiring of unneeded consultants and bureaucrats. I do not believe the council has been a good steward of the city's money on this issue and has given passes to the hiring of new positions without properly questioning their need.

STURBAUM: I am always available to citizens and their concerns. This is part of the job of being a representative of those who live in my district and one of the most enjoyable parts of it. Every regular City Council meeting also has public comment at the beginning and the end of the meeting. Our system of city commissions involves citizens in the activity of government. I am working to expand our commissions by adding advisory positions so it will be easier to be part of the process. Anyone who is really interested should be able to be a member of one of our commissions. Neighborhood organizations are another way to be a part of our government's decision making. The Housing and Neighborhood Department (HAND) works with neighborhood groups and the Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) also helps bring neighborhood issues to the attention of representatives. If someone really wants to be involved, the doors are open.

4) What should the role of the city be in supporting the development of more affordable housing?

EASTON: Affordable housing in Bloomington is largely tied to rental prices. Median housing prices actually declined since 2008 and are just now rising to pre-recession levels, but rental demand has increased sharply. Unfortunately, most of the supply increases have been geared towards students. Demand increases have driven up prices, and that is where the city must focus. Much of the current help being provided is through partnerships such as SCCAP, which we should continue to support. The city can help also through its own policies. We should not be

approving five-bedroom apartment housing units, for example. We can control zoning to discourage such developments and possibly provide incentives to developers to build units focused on permanent residents throughout the city. We should continue to develop transportation, including BT, to allow lower income housing to be built throughout the city yet still allow people to get to work. Tied to that, we need to bring more living wage jobs to Bloomington so people can afford the housing we have, and the city's own policies can encourage that.

STURBAUM: While the city has done a lot by helping both Habitat and Bloomington Restorations in their affordable home ownership programs and encourages affordable housing in many other ways, it is not enough. One danger of prosperity and growth in a community is that this is often not shared and housing costs in a university town have an added cost inflation issue. The market will not create new affordable housing without city involvement in the way of incentives, tax credits, zoning variances and even requirements that a percentage of new apartments be affordable. I am part of a working group that is researching this issue in a timely way right before the new planning revisions take place. The Unified Development Ordinance or UDO is being developed now and has a timeline of approximately a year to complete. Now is the time for real action on a vital issue to keep Bloomington a place for all.

5) How will you address downtown parking issues?

EASTON: I believe that the installation of parking meters in downtown Bloomington continues to have an overall negative effect on the livability of the downtown area and the city on the whole, and as such I believe they should be removed. I believe the decision to implement them was rushed with contradictory reasons – underutilization of the garages and a lack of available spaces, combined with a need to pay for the garages. The current system is confusing for residents, let alone visitors we hope to attract downtown. Most businesses downtown remain opposed to them due to losses in revenue and difficulty in employee retention.

I favor 1) removing the meters, 2) returning limited free parking strictly enforced throughout a downtown-wide parking zone to eliminate the “2 hour shuffle”, 3) establishing uniform payment policies among all the garages, 4) considering incentives for downtown employers and their employees, 5) working with the county on a parking plan for its employees, including a separate garage, and 6) establishment of a fund specifically from garage and parking fine revenue to pay off the garage amortization and nothing more.

STURBAUM: There are three hours of free parking downtown to help workers and citizens in the Scotties and the 4th Street garages until 6 PM. Just drive in and get a ticket and you can drive out without paying or you will be billed for only hours after the three free. There is some fine tuning of hours needed so the meters might change from 9 to 9 instead of 8 to 10 to help coffee drinkers and late night diners for instance. Nearly every city of this size has meters because it is the best way to allot the use of a common resource in short supply. When cars are warehoused on the street and moved from spot to spot, there is no parking for customers.

6) What will be your approach to the urban deer problem?

EASTON: I believe the urban deer problem should be focused on the deer within the urban city, not those at Griffy. That said, I think the hired deer cull at Griffy was a mistake, although I believe the city should follow the deer task force's secondary recommendation to allow managed hunts. Rather than a one-off sharpshooter, regular managed hunts have proven successful in other cities. They will provide revenue via licenses and their ongoing success can be monitored as they are by the state at its parks. I also agree with several of their other recommendations and findings for deer within the city. The deer are not starving and have not reached a biological capacity, so reducing them depends on what we find an "acceptable level". Hunting in neighborhoods is unacceptable, so I think we must give people the tools they need. First, I agree with allowing taller fences for those who wish to install them. Second, we should leave bowhunting on the books for those with sufficient land. I also agree that contraception and sterilization are not suitable or practical for an open environment. Regardless, the city needs a written deer management plan.

STURBAUM: I was convinced that Griffy needed management. Experts from DNR testified about the program that has been used in Brown County State Park and other state parks for years. But the apparent lack of deer raises questions for me, which I will look into. As for the city deer problem, I am not in favor of the same procedure. There may be evidence that the city deer act more like a closed system, which might allow for other methods. Allowing taller fences and other fencing options are a fair start for the city deer issue, plus research into alternatives and their costs.

7) What will you do to improve and enhance cooperation with Monroe County, IU, and Ivy Tech?

EASTON: I believe Bloomington already does a good job of working with Monroe County on key issues. For example, differences were resolved to complete the sidewalk along Leonard Springs Road. Further discussions should continue on the parking garage and annexation of lands. Further studies can be done on overlap of services that could result in lowered expenses for both. I would welcome the development of a countywide bus system.

I would like to see city leaders open better dialog with IU leaders. It seemed there was a lot of antagonism between IU and the city over the relocation of the FIJI house to west 8th street. While IU is not obligated to the city on most things, having a better relationship is more likely to generate a favorable response. The city can work with IU on issues such as the merging of bus service, the tech park, and overlap of city services.

Ivy Tech has been positive for the city. Its main Bloomington campus lies outside city limits, but it has been open and positive towards the city. Its rapid growth has shown a need to connect it to the city, which would be improved with the proposed county bus service.

STURBAUM: The recent issue of a fraternity house in University Courts is a good example of town - gown cooperation. The initial proposal was to demolish six historic houses in one of the

most historic neighborhoods in the city. Citizen and city groups spoke out and the president of the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission set up a meeting with myself, the head of IU facilities, and the president of Indiana Landmarks. As a direct result of these meetings, the University agreed to move five of the wonderful historic homes. The houses are already being moved to fill vacant lots from previous tear-downs in University Courts. IU has plans to restore them and use them for faculty housing, thus enhancing the residential nature of the brick-streeted neighborhood. Interestingly, the original owners of many of these houses were IU faculty, so the neighborhood will have come full circle. This kind of sincere and respectful dialogue with IU or the county commissioners or Ivy Tech can often bring about good results for all sides.

8) What other issues do you think will be the biggest concerns for the city in the coming years?

EASTON: A major issue I see is the retention of young professionals in the city. Many employers in Bloomington report difficulty recruiting and retaining 20 and 30 somethings who largely want to go to big cities. This relates to Bloomington's quality of life, which is the focus of my campaign. Some of it is perception. We need to do a better job marketing the city's assets. Some of it relates to the changes Bloomington has gone through recently with all the student centric housing and businesses downtown. We need to attract a better mix of businesses, especially tech businesses, with resources such as the tech park. Good jobs will attract young professionals, and the quality of life will keep them here.

Another major issue is city sanitation. The city is running a significant deficit in its sanitation fund. Sanitation is a basic city service that I do not oppose subsidizing. Still, I want the city to open the contract to competitive bidding. I am not in favor of trash transfer stations within city limits, such as the JB Salvage site. I favor continued use of the trash sticker system versus monthly fees to encourage lower trash use, and free curbside recycling.

STURBAUM: The homeless issue is the most distressing issue for our growing city. We are becoming a regional destination for those in need. With no permanent shelter or detox center, the need is being partially filled by volunteers and churches. This is a regional issue, not just the city's problem. But it is everyone's moral dilemma to find the way to help those in need while protecting our hardworking businesses and citizens and keeping public spaces safe and welcoming for everyone.

On a positive note, achieving Platinum Bike Status may be one of the key issues for Bloomington's future. The recent New Urbanism Conference featured cities favored by today's new generation. The common thread was great transportation and safe bike travel. Cities like this are experiencing baby booms. Good transportation makes the city an affordable place and a healthy, sustainable one.

And lastly, we need jobs in the future. Building out the Tech Park and hospital site will provide opportunities to get new businesses close to the B-Line and Bloomington's downtown. Combining housing with work environments will be an attractive lifestyle. Decisions with the Showers and hospital site will shape our city for the next hundred years. We must choose wisely.

