

Bloomington City Council, District 5

Kurt Babcock (D)
Gabe Colman (D)
Isabel Piedmont-Smith (D)

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

BABCOCK: Personally-20 plus years living in Bloomington and the last 10 in District 5. I'm a respectful and active listener and as a parent I desire to make Bloomington a better place for my kids.

Professionally- I've worked at both the state and local levels of government for over 10 years, currently a member of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Technical Advisory Committee, Metropolitan Transportation Plan Task Force, Monroe County Emergency Coordinators Board, Outdoor Warning Study Committee, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Indiana Geographic Information Council.

BS Public Affairs- IU School of Public & Environmental Affairs

COLMAN: As a Bloomington native with strong skills in communications, creative thinking and coalition building, I am deeply committed to the betterment of our community. I am a small business owner who is eager to work closely with a broad array of community stakeholders to ensure a bold and bright future for all of Bloomington. I believe we can do so through a compassionate and collaborative approach to City government.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: I served on the City Council 2008-2012, with one year as president and 2.5 years as representative on the Plan Commission. Before that, I served on the city's Environmental Commission (1 year as chair), the South Central Community Action Program board, the IU Bloomington Professional Staff Council (1 year as president), and the IU Anti-Sweatshop Advisory Committee. I was born and raised in Bloomington and have lived here consistently since 1995. I have a BA in History (Oberlin College) and an MA in Social Studies education (Boston University), as well as 17 years' experience as a fiscal officer at IU.

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

BABCOCK: To help maintain its charm and ensure economic prosperity, I will strive to enhance what makes Bloomington unique. I believe the uniqueness comes from the blend of a forward thinking community with a diverse cultural heritage plus a mix of some good old Hoosier hospitality along with a strong Midwestern work ethic. Citizen input will be key, as it's ultimately the citizens who will drive economic growth.

COLMAN: My approach will be to keep downtown Bloomington vibrant, safe and accessible, and to promote the area as an exciting arts, entertainment, shopping and fine dining destination.

The cultural diversity that exists within a several-block radius of the Courthouse Square makes it a highlight of Southern Indiana. As a small business owner within that area, I strongly advocate the promotion of downtown to both locals and visitors as a place to spend time and money. This can be achieved in part by helping to facilitate and encourage cross promotion and communication among businesses and other community partners.

I'd also like to help make our paid parking process more user-friendly, and streetscapes even cleaner and safer for everyone. I would work hard to nurture collaborations with organizations such as Indiana University, Downtown Bloomington Inc and Visit Bloomington to promote our area on a regional level in order to help our local art galleries, restaurants, museums, stores, coffee shops, churches and other downtown businesses thrive.

In addition, development of the downtown needs to be organized in such a way as to strike a balance in preserving the look and feel of our community, while also meeting the convenience needs of our citizens.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: City government should continue to nurture local businesses downtown through grants and low-interest loans. Tax incentives should be used only in cases where there is a clear community benefit. For example, development of tourism through support for the arts, development of new businesses that fulfill an unmet need, or redevelopment of sites that have been vacant for several years. Our downtown has catered too much to IU students with high-rent apartments and bars replacing existing, more affordable houses and more diverse retail establishments. Through the planning process and the economic development department, the city should encourage downtown investment to meet the needs of all Bloomington residents, including the elderly, lower-income residents, people with disabilities, and families.

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

BABCOCK: Hold regularly scheduled constituency meetings, use social media as a tool for mass communication, be approachable when out in the community, and maintain current public notice requirements.

COLMAN: I will be open, accessible and accountable. I will explain myself with the goal of informing the public of the issues, and factoring their needs and ideas into my decision-making. As Stewart Huff once said, the three hardest words to say are "I don't know." I promise not to be afraid to admit when I do not know the answer to a question, and I will use my network of support and the input of the community to solve problems effectively. I will invite people to communicate with me via email or in person in my place of business, or in a comfortable setting along the B line trail.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: I will hold monthly, open constituent meetings like I did during my first term on the City Council, when I will summarize what the City Council has done during the past month and preview the agenda items ahead. I found these meetings very helpful in gathering feedback on city issues, and both my constituents and I learned a lot in the process. I will also

communicate with constituents via Twitter (@PiedmontSmith), Facebook (Piedmont-Smith for City Council), and my website (www.piedmontsmith.us), and attend community events to talk face to face with residents.

I would seek early input from residents on issues affecting them, such as new real estate development petitions and changes in traffic regulations. The best way to ensure transparency in government is to involve a broad range of residents in government decisions. That way people have buy-in to the decisions and the varied expertise of our residents can be put to use for the public good.

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

BABCOCK: The city needs to be at the forefront of promoting safe and affordable housing and help protect low-income tenants from fraud and unjust treatment. I will also promote development that leverages current infrastructure with future needs and is economically inclusive.

COLMAN: The City of Bloomington should continue and expand its effort to develop environments that allow a person of reasonable means to have a nice home in a safe and civil neighborhood. The City should make an effort to integrate affordable housing options throughout the entire community, as opposed to concentrating it to specific areas. City Council should seek firm commitments of affordability provisions from developers seeking abatements and variances.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: Recently the Plan Commission approved a 70-ft high boutique hotel on Kirkwood Avenue even though our Unified Development Ordinance calls for a maximum height of 40 ft. I publicly disagreed with this decision because there was no community benefit obtained by the city in exchange for allowing the developer to circumvent our UDO. If the developer had proposed to build affordable housing as part of the project, then this exception to our rules would have been justified.

The city should continue to encourage affordable housing through higher density incentives. Such incentives already exist, but they haven't attracted much interest from real estate developers. Therefore, I propose the city go further and implement inclusionary zoning. Under this policy, a certain percentage of any new housing development must be rented or sold at affordable rates. The percentage and the rates would be determined with input from the community. Alternately, the developer could pay into a local housing trust fund, and the city could use that fund to provide grants for affordable housing elsewhere. This has been done successfully in many cities across the US including other college towns like Boulder, CO; Cambridge, MA; and Chapel Hill, NC.

5) How will you address downtown parking issues?

BABCOCK: I will propose reducing the times the meters are enforced and encourage the use of other options. Currently there are two city parking garages that offer 3 free hours of parking with minimal requirement. Also, our expanding bicycling infrastructure is helping to make biking a safer and more efficient form of transportation. While Bloomington Transit and Rural Transit are valid options for those outside of the downtown area. Both biking and mass transportation would reduce the number of cars downtown and thus making parking easier.

COLMAN: I will address downtown parking issues openly and fairly with the reality of the parking supply in mind, and with the goal of striking a balance among the interests of the downtown business community and its patrons, visitors and residents. As a downtown business owner, I am aware of the concerns of both visitors and business owners as well as of the overall picture of the parking-space inventory. We need to refine the parking systems we have in place in an effort to entice our own residents to spend more time downtown while ensuring that parking remains an open, affordable and usable amenity.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: I will work to make the parking garages safer through better lighting and increased staffing. The city should have a consistent policy of a certain number of free hours in all downtown garages. As for the on-street parking meters, I think the effective hours should be reduced so that there is no charge after 8 pm. This makes it safer for people feeding the meters after dark, and would help many downtown businesses. Also one free day per month, possibly in combination with the Gallery Walk, should be considered.

Overall, we must be clear about the goals for parking downtown. Are we trying to raise money to pay for the parking garages? Are we trying to make sure that we have good parking turnover, and that no one “stores” their cars in prime parking spots? The goals need to be clearly articulated by the City Council and the mayor’s administration, and then logical decisions should follow. I think both of the above questions represent valid city goals, but I would welcome further conversations with stakeholders. Administrative hassle is a bad reason not to tweak the current on-street and garage systems. There is sufficient revenue to hire new staff if necessary.

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

BABCOCK: I know this has been an emotional topic and my approach will be one of respect, patience, and logic, the same way I will approach any issue.

COLMAN: Regarding urban deer, it is easier to say what my approach will not be: I do not advocate the use of lethal means for deer population control in our community. We would do better to find, and use innovative solutions. I will not address this issue without involving my own due diligence. I will physically involve myself in the areas being affected, and base my opinions on a combination of my personal experience, in conjunction with evidence provided by others. I will collaborate with local and national groups, experts and resources to help educate my neighbors on how to protect their property from deer. I will not support lethal force being used in District 5 to address this issue.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: Legitimate concerns have been raised about deer eating both decorative and edible plants, deer causing traffic accidents or scary near-misses, deer running through plate glass doors, and even deer attacking small pets. While the deer in Bloomington are doing fine, many humans feel there are too many of them.

The Dear Task Force outlined many options for dealing with this problem, which was first brought to the City Council's attention in 2009 through a petition signed by 501 city residents. I have read the report and think we should act incrementally. A deer feeding ban should be enacted, and residents should be allowed to build higher fences (depending on the material) than currently allowed under city code. Gardeners should be educated on which plants are deer-resistant, and all residents should know to stay away from a doe when she is with her fawn(s), and to keep pets and small children away as well. Following an educational effort and relevant changes to city code, residents should be surveyed again to see if they still perceive a problem. Only then should more drastic measures be considered, if necessary.

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

BABCOCK: Be proactive and seek opportunities to build and develop relationships that foster trust and promote the betterment of the community, such as the Small Business Development Center. This is a prime example of the potential benefits the community can garner when the major players work together.

COLMAN: Collaboration is the key to success, and we have some amazing community partners. A great deal of headway has been made in nurturing relationships with our major institutions and I will work hard to take these relationships to the next level. I will help coordinate and facilitate efforts among these institutions to highlight and promote the cultural diversity and opportunities that make Bloomington a worthwhile visitor destination. When significant community issues arise, I will advocate for the use of joint task forces made up of representatives of each institution. As Bloomington grows, I look forward to sharing policies that will allow infrastructure, utilities, transportation, police and fire departments to benefit Ivy Tech, Indiana University and the City.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: Though many forms of collaboration already exist, more communication between these entities would benefit our community as a whole. Historic preservation is a topic on which IU and the city should have more conversations, as the city's historic districts don't require compliance by IU, a state entity, but IU does have an interest in upholding the vibrant architectural history that makes Bloomington special. Likewise, we see tensions between the County and the City about the County's parking garage proposal. An overall vision for the Morton Street corridor, where both county and city offices are located, would have been useful prior to the issue coming to the city's Plan Commission.

I propose monthly meetings between leaders from the city, county, IU, Ivy Tech, and the Monroe County Community School district to discuss both an overarching vision for Bloomington's

future and specific projects for which collaboration and cooperation are essential. From the city government, both the City Council and the Mayor should have a seat at that table, and the meetings should be open to the public. Such meetings used to take place in IU's Bryan Hall and can once again be a helpful tool for community leadership.

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

BABCOCK: One of the biggest issues coming down the 'road' for the city is the completion of I69 and the true impact it will have on our wonderful community. I will do what I can to make sure it is as positive as possible.

With manufacturing jobs leaving the city, it's vital the city create job growth opportunities and the Certified Technology Park has the potential to help fill the void.

COLMAN: The development of Switchyard Park needs to be organized in such a way as to balance the presence of business and homes, in an effort to create a safe, civil atmosphere akin to Bryan Park, and in contrast to Seminary Park. We've seen what happens when a park is surrounded on all sides by business that close up shop and leave the area unattended. It is in Bloomington's best interest to create a community around Switchyard that identifies with the space as a neighborhood, cherishes it as a resource, and protects it like it's their own backyard. It has such tremendous potential to be a driver of not just the economy but of a community that celebrates and benefits from a healthy lifestyle, full of beauty and multiple recreational options.

PIEDMONT-SMITH: The move of Bloomington Hospital outside the city limits will have a profound impact on all of Bloomington, especially District 5, which lies just south of this historic institution. We must bring all stakeholders together, as the mayor is doing with the current task force, and talk with IU Health representatives to prepare a smooth transition and to ensure that many health care needs can still be met downtown, on a portion of the current hospital site. While the main hospital building may not be reusable, the city can, through incentives and partnerships, encourage other development on the site that meets community needs, such as affordable housing.

Bloomington continues to make strides toward sustainability, but there remains much to be done. The Center for Sustainable Living has been working on an ordinance to ban free plastic bags at grocery and other stores. The Bloomington Food Policy Council has proposed a Food Charter to address food security (hunger) in Bloomington and encourage the development of resources to grow and process food locally. The city should also look into renewable energy sources such as solar panels on city buildings and, possibly, some hydroelectric power at the water treatment plant at Lake Monroe.

