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BLOOMINGTON BRIEFING

FEBRUARY 2026



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2026 BUDGET
APPROVED

PAGE 2

BEHIND THE
BADGE

PAGE 7

CURBSIDE
CLEANUP IN
APRIL

PAGE 8

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RENOVATED BLOOMINGTON ICE GARDEN AND ITS PAST ON PAGES 4 AND 5.



BRIEFING

Volume 33, Number 02

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

BLOOMINGTON CITY COUNCIL



Mayor
Tim Busse
952-563-8782 (w)
952-457-7506 (c)
tbusse@BloomingtonMN.gov



Council Member At Large
Jenna Carter
612-284-8751
jcarter@BloomingtonMN.gov



Council Member At Large
Danielle Robertson
763-229-7582
drobertson@BloomingtonMN.gov



Council Member District I
Dwayne Lowman
952-270-2377
dlowman@BloomingtonMN.gov



Council Member District II
Shawn Nelson
952-479-0471
snelson@BloomingtonMN.gov



Council Member District III
Lona Dallessandro
612-231-6824
ldallessandro@BloomingtonMN.gov

Elected officials presented for informational purposes.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

council@BloomingtonMN.gov

EXECUTIVE STAFF

<i>City Manager's Office</i>	952-563-8780
citymanager@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Zach Walker, City Manager</i>	952-563-8780
citymanager@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Kathy Hedin, Deputy City Manager</i>	952-563-8780
citymanager@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Elizabeth Tolzmann, Deputy City Manager</i>	952-563-8780
citymanager@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Kim Berggren, Community Development</i>	952-563-8920
communitydevelopment@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Amy Cheney, Information Technology</i>	952-563-4885
it@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Lori Economy-Scholler, Finance</i>	952-563-8791
finance@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Janine Hill, Communications and Engagement</i>	952-563-8819
communications@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Booker T. Hodges, Police</i>	952-563-4900
police@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Ann Kattreh, Parks and Recreation</i>	952-563-8877
parksrec@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Nick Kelley, Public Health</i>	952-563-8900
publichealth@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Melissa Manderschied, Legal</i>	952-563-8753
legal@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Ulie Seal, Fire</i>	952-563-4801
fire@BloomingtonMN.gov	
<i>Public Works</i>	952-563-8760
publicworks@BloomingtonMN.gov	
General phone number	952-563-8700

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

MAYOR'S MEMO

2026 BUDGET APPROVED WITH FOCUS ON PUBLIC SAFETY

By Mayor Tim Busse

On December 15, the City Council approved Bloomington's 2026 property tax levy and general fund budget. The final levy increase is 6.96%, which is 2.48 percentage points lower than the preliminary proposed increase of 9.44%.

For the owner of a median-valued home, the approved levy equals an increase of \$124.39 per year, or about \$2.39 per week. The final increase is lower than the average preliminary 2026 levy increase among Minnesota cities, which is 8.7%.

More than half of the budget increase supports public safety as Bloomington Fire Department transitions to a combined full-time and part-time staffing model. On a larger scale, more than 82% of this budget will go toward the five areas that make up the nuts-and-bolts work of City government: police, fire, public works, parks and recreation, and community development.

The level of spending in these vital areas reflects the priorities, values and expectations of Bloomington residents. The Council's work on the annual budget is the most important work we do. I believe that the 2026 levy increase reflects the City's mission to cultivate an enduring and remarkable community where people want to be.

Residents pay property taxes to the City, Hennepin County and the school district. The City's share is roughly one-third of the total property tax bill with the remaining two-thirds going to Hennepin County and Bloomington Public Schools.

If you want to learn more, visit blm.mn/budget.



A NEW ARTISTIC LANDMARK COMING TO BRYANT PARK

A joint Creative Placemaking and Parks and Recreation project will be coming to Bryant Park, 1001 W. 85th St. After seeking an artist to design a nature-themed sculpture in 2025, a panel selected Minnesota artist Craig David.

Craig David is a visual artist known for vibrant, expressive works that celebrate community and culture. He gained recognition for his mural at Target Field, highlighting the team's history and local pride.

His proposed work for Bryant Park, *Cantus Mysterium – Song of Mystery*, draws on ancient stone-carving traditions and features large Minnesota stones. The piece is designed to invite visitors to pause, gather and connect with the natural landscape. *Concept drawing pictured above.*

Residents are invited to meet the artist, view examples of his work, hear about the planned Bryant Park sculpture, give feedback and ask questions at an open house on Monday, March 16, 5-7 p.m. Installation is planned for September 2026.

Visit blm.mn/placemaking for more details on the open house, updates and to learn more about how this project aligns to the City's strategic plan.

MIDDLE OR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: TRAVEL TO JAPAN NEXT SUMMER

The Bloomington Sister City Organization recently announced its bi-annual student delegation to its sister city of Izumi City in Osaka Prefecture, Japan on June 9-22, 2026. Delegates will stay with host families in Izumi City and engage in guided tours around the Osaka area. The Bloomington Sister City Organization is looking for 10 middle or high school students to participate. To learn more, or to apply, visit bsco-izumi.org.

[BLOOMINGTONMN.GOV](http://BloomingtonMN.gov)



NOTABLE NEIGHBOR: WILL WEYRENS

Bloomington resident Will Weyrens has built a seasonal tradition through the light shows he creates at his home each Halloween and winter. A lighting designer, he has been making these displays since 2016 and brought them to Bloomington when his family moved here in 2020.

Weyrens discovered his interest in production work in middle school after being assigned to the tech crew during a school play. "The mix of the creativity and the technical stuff was kind of what I fell in love with," he said. That early experience led him to study electrical engineering and later build shows that allow him full creative control. Each year he selects music, designs, themes and programs the display so it runs in a repeating loop. A popular feature is a short segment from the musical "Wicked" that rotates with the larger Christmas playlist during the holiday season.

Weyrens said feedback from neighbors has been positive, and he works to keep the experience welcoming. Music is broadcast through a low-powered FM station so visitors can listen from their cars. Watch our recent reel featuring Weyrens' work at blm.mn/weyrens.

HELP US CONTACT DONORS: NINE MILE CREEK MEMORIAL PARK BENCHES MUST BE REMOVED DUE TO CONSTRUCTION

Through the years, the City has offered community members meaningful ways to honor loved ones through memorial benches, trees and plaques placed in local parks.

As the Nine Mile Creek corridor renewal project begins construction in 2026, approximately 30 memorial benches in Moir and Central Park must be removed starting April 1 to make way for renovations to begin.

The City is asking for help reaching donors of memorial benches in the Nine Mile Creek corridor. If you or someone you know donated a bench or plaque, contact Deputy Parks and Recreation Director Renae Clark at rclark@BloomingtonMN.gov for more information on how to reclaim your donation or purchase another memorial at a reduced rate.

The City will store the donated benches and plaques for one year after removal. To learn more about the project, visit bloomingtonforward.org/9mile.

MAKE YOUR NEXT TRIP EASY WITH METRO MICRO

Looking for a convenient, on-demand way to get around? Metro Micro is an ADA-accessible, on-demand, door-to-door service that will take you from one address to another within the service area. It can also be used to connect to the METRO Orange Line at I-35W and 98th Street, as well as to local and express bus routes for trips that continue outside the service area.

Getting started is a breeze. Download the free Metro micro app from the App Store or Google Play or call 651-602-1170 to book your ride.

Service runs 5:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m. on weekdays and 7 a.m.-10:30 p.m. on weekends (holiday hours may vary).

Learn more at metrotransit.org/micro-bloomington.



BOOKMOTHER IS OPENING A NEW CHAPTER

Bloomington's literary scene is getting a plot twist, thanks to BookMother, the 2025 Hatch Bloomington winner founded by resident Twila Dang. After two decades in the community, Dang realized the city had gone more than 30 years without an independent bookstore.

"BookMother brings that cultural life home," she said.

For Twila, the idea grew from a lifetime of handing friends "the right book at the right moment." She imagines BookMother as a cozy, inspiring space for grown readers. Hatch Bloomington helped her turn that vision into a clear business plan.

But Twila's dream goes beyond the shelves. She sees BookMother as a cultural anchor, powered by partnerships with educators, artists and local businesses. BookMother is working toward opening in spring or summer 2026.

Thinking about launching your own idea? Hatch Bloomington 2026 applications open on February 17. Your story could be the next page-turner. Visit hatchbloomington.com for more.

BOOST YOUR CURB APPEAL WITH A GRANT

Vibrant businesses make neighborhoods thrive. The City's Site and Facade Improvement Program offers grants to help local businesses enhance their storefronts and outdoor spaces. Eligible improvements include building facades, signage, patios, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, murals and more.

Grants cover 50% of project costs, ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000, and require a one-to-one match with private funds. Applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis, so the sooner you apply, the better your chances. Preference is given to businesses in key commercial areas, including American and Portland, 98th and Nicollet, Old Cedar and Old Shakopee, Countryside Center, 90th and Penn, Central Lyndale, and Amsden Ridge Center.

Learn more and apply today at blm.mn/site-facade.



BIG HIGHLIGHTS

BIG hosts 450,000+ visitors per year including 25 special events drawing people from Minnesota, the U.S. and Canada; and is home to Jefferson high school hockey and the Bloomington Amateur Hockey Association. Here are some BIG highlights from over the years:

1970: Bloomington Ice Garden opens with its first rink.

1974: Soviet national ice hockey team practices.

1975: Rink 2 added.

1976: Dorothy Hamill skates at BIG.

1978: St. Louis Blues shoots commercial.

1979: The movie "Ice Castles" hits the rink, and actor Robby Benson learns how to skate.

1980: U.S. National Team scrimmage.

1981: Wayne Gretzky and the Edmonton Oilers practice.

1993: Rink 3 added.

1994: First electric Zamboni purchased.

2007: Renovations completed to Rink 1 for new cement floor, energy-efficient refrigeration system, extended players' boxes and seamless glass.

2009: Hosts U.S. Synchronized Skating Championships practices.

2010: Hosts the U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships.

2016: Host to U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

2017: BIG takes second place in the third annual, Kraft Hockeyville U.S.A. competition. Minnesota Wild hold team practice.

2024: Hosts 2025 Winter Warm-Up youth hockey tournament.

March 2025: Closes for a major renovation.

September 2025: Soft opening with ribbon-cutting to celebrate the partially renovated facility.

November 2025: Newly renovated BIG hosts a grand reopening celebration.



BLOOMINGTON ICE GARDEN THEN AND NOW WITH A FRESH NEW LOOK

The renovation of Bloomington Ice Garden is the first of three Bloomington Forward projects to be completed. Construction finished on time and on budget.

The updates improve safety, accessibility and the overall experience for athletes, families and visitors throughout the facility.

High school locker rooms

The high school locker rooms are larger and offer more secure storage for equipment. They give hockey teams direct access to the rink, which reduces congestion and improves safety on game days.



Concessions area

The concessions area was rebuilt with updated equipment and a more efficient layout. The added space helps reduce lines and improves the experience for families attending events. Its location near the main rink also improves access during the biggest events.

BLOOMINGTON YESTERDAY: BLOOMINGTON ICE GARDEN

When the City of Bloomington opened the Bloomington Community Ice Garden, 3600 W. 98th St., in 1970, the facility had just one sheet of ice. Construction began in 1969 and the building was finished the following March. The new arena gave residents a place to skate close to home and quickly became a popular spot for lessons and hockey.

As Bloomington grew so did the need for more ice time. A second rink opened in 1975. A third rink followed in 1993 and was built to Olympic size, which helped attract larger events and made the Ice Garden a regular stop for teams and tournaments from across the region.

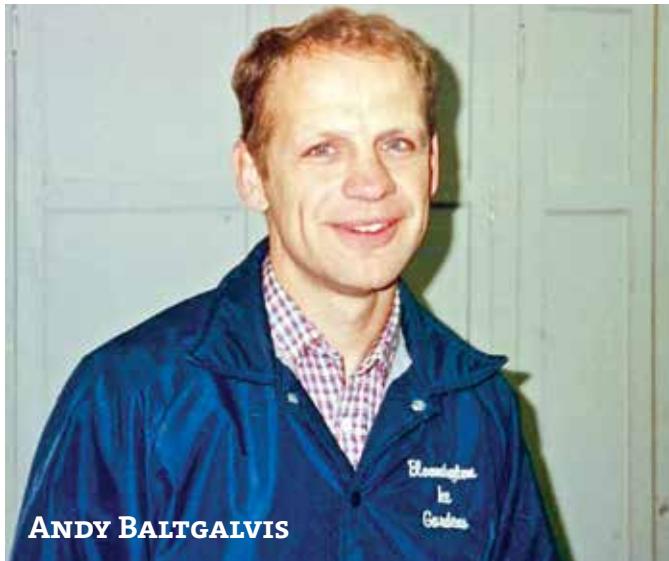
For many families the Ice Garden became a place to learn to skate, cheer on local teams and gather during Minnesota winters. Today, as the renovated facility enters its next chapter, its beginning as a single rink remains an important part of Bloomington history.

Source: Vintage MN Hockey





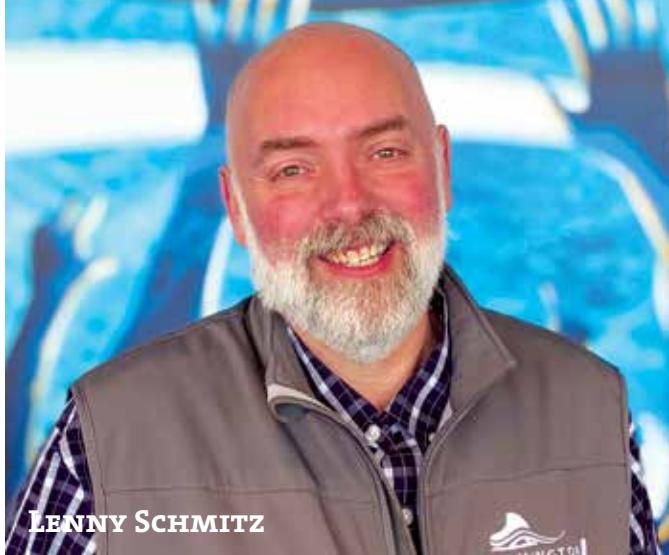
DENNY MAY



ANDY BALTGALVIS



BOB CARR



LENNY SCHMITZ



THE MANAGERS WHO SHAPED BLOOMINGTON ICE GARDEN

Since opening in 1970, the Bloomington Ice Garden has had four managers who helped guide the facility through more than five decades of change. The first was Denny May, who started work one month before the arena opened. Known for his steady presence and passion for hockey, he led the facility for more than 30 years and built lasting relationships with skaters, staff and visitors.

After May retired in 2006, Andy Baltgalvis stepped into the role. He began working at the Ice Garden in 1971 and spent more than four decades supporting tournaments, events and

daily operations. His long service made him one of the City of Bloomington's most tenured employees.

After years of working in several roles at the arena, Bob Carr followed as manager in 2016 when Baltgalvis retired. Carr guided the facility through upgrades and major events until his retirement in 2021.

The current manager, Lenny Schmitz started at BIG in 2021, bringing a background in parks and recreation and a commitment to continuing the Ice Garden's long tradition of community service.

SEE BIG'S UPDATED DIGS DURING OPEN SKATE

Hit the ice during open skate at the Bloomington Ice Garden. It's a fun, easy way to spend time, whether you're skating solo or with friends.

Open Skate runs through June 7 on weekday mornings and Sunday evenings, with summer sessions June 8 through August 31 on Thursday and Sunday evenings. Schedules and holiday closures vary, so be sure to check ahead.

All ages welcome. Skaters must skate independently. Admission is \$5, with skate rentals available for \$5 and sharpening for \$10. A six skate coupon book is available for \$25.

View the full schedule at blm.mn/ice-schedule.

FROM FIRST STEPS TO FUTURE CHAMPIONS: ONIA AND BIG'S FIGURE SKATING TRADITION

For more than five decades, the Figure Skating Club of Bloomington has called the Bloomington Ice Garden home. Onia Gelecinskyj, *pictured then and now at right*, took her first steps onto the ice at BIG at just two years old. Today, she serves as club president and is a U.S. Figure Skating gold and sectional-level judge, a full-circle story rooted at BIG.

Founded in 1976, the club has grown hand in hand with BIG. Many skate school instructors are also club coaches or skaters, making it easy for student skaters to grow from learning basic skills to competing and performing.

"I've never known life without BIG, and I truly think of it as my second home," Onia said. "BIG has been a place of comfort for me. Not only have I grown from a competitive skater to a skate school instructor there, but I'm now a U.S. Figure Skating official and even an occasional Zamboni driver."

Opportunities to advance are built into the BIG skating community. Onia's story mirrors that legacy: growing talent, building community and keeping figure skating thriving.

To learn more about open skate, lessons or joining the club, visit blm.mn/big.



IN YOUR WORDS: BIG'S IMPACT

“The Bloomington Ice Garden is truly a world class facility where skaters feel welcomed, supported and celebrated every day, from toddlers learning to skate to national and international champions. The staff, the fans and even fellow athletes create an incredibly supportive environment, making BIG a place where people connect, traditions grow and unforgettable moments are made.”

—Skating Coach Trudy Oltmann

“The Bloomington Ice Garden is more than a rink, it's a second home. It brings our teams, fans and community together, honors the tradition of Jefferson hockey, and gives today's players and future generations a place to grow, connect and create unforgettable experiences.”

—Jefferson Boys Varsity Hockey Head Coach Matt Elsen

“Continued investment in Bloomington matters. The Bloomington Ice Garden is the heartbeat of Jefferson Hockey—fueling youth development, strengthening community connections and honoring the proud traditions that make Bloomington a true Minnesota hockey town. From the excitement of young players stepping onto the new Rink 1 to the upcoming Heritage Wall celebrating our alumni, BIG reflects a legacy intentionally preserved while inspiring the next generation.”

—Jefferson Youth Hockey Association President Ryan Comstock



DISCOVER YOUR WINTER WILD SIDE AT THE MINNESOTA VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Winter in Minnesota is made for adventure, and one of the best places to experience it is right here in Bloomington. The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, 3815 American Blvd. E., invites residents to explore its snowy trails on snowshoes and enjoy fresh air, exercise and beautiful winter scenery.

No snowshoes? No problem. When at least six inches of snow is on the ground, visitors can borrow adult or child-sized snowshoes for free at the Refuge Education and Visitor Center.

The refuge also offers family-friendly programs that make winter exploration fun and accessible for all ages. From spotting wildlife to following crisp tracks in the snow, every visit promises something new.

Embrace the season and discover the magic of winter, right in your own backyard. Visit blm.mn/snowshoe for details and maps.

CAMBODIAN HERITAGE DAY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN MINNESOTA

More than 900 people gathered in Bloomington on September 27 to celebrate Cambodian Heritage Day 2025: Honoring Our Roots and Celebrating Our Future—50 Years in Minnesota.

Hosted by the Cambodian American Partnership of Minnesota (CAPMN), the event featured classical dance, traditional music, youth-led performances, cultural exhibits and Khmer cuisine. Interactive displays highlighted the Cambodian journey from surviving the Khmer Rouge genocide to building strong, multigenerational lives in Minnesota.

CAPMN Executive Director Chinda Kim Gregor accepted a proclamation from Governor Tim Walz, honoring both the resilience of Cambodian Americans and the two million lives lost during the Southeast Asian War.

With 41 vendors and 100 volunteers, the day reflected not only the past but also on the vibrant future of Cambodian life in Minnesota. Learn more at capmn.org.



SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAMS OPEN REGISTRATION STARTS SOON

Priority registration for Bloomington's weeklong summer youth programs has closed. Open registration begins Thursday, February 19, 9 a.m., and is available to both residents and nonresidents on a first-come, first-served basis. A waitlist will be available for full sessions.

Before registering, make sure your household account in the Parks and Recreation online system is active. New accounts can take up to two business days to process, so plan ahead to avoid delays.

Learn more and register at blm.mn/youth-programs.

DONATE, FIND, SHARE AND PLAY (OF COURSE) AT BABY GEAR SWAP 2026

Mark your calendars for Saturday, April 11, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., in the Civic Plaza Black Box Theater, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road, for a fun-filled Baby Gear Swap. Bring gently used baby items, or just yourself, and find new-to-you treasures for babies ages 0–24 months.

All items are given and taken freely, and you do not have to donate to take items home. Items are offered "as is," so come early for the best picks.

Strollers, high chairs, carriers, toys, books, bouncers, play yards and diaper bags in good condition are welcome. Note, car seats, large furniture, clothing, stuffed animals, broken or recalled items are not accepted.

Donate items at the swap by 12 p.m., or on Thursday, April 9 or Friday, April 10, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., in the Black Box Theater. The swap runs alongside the Early Childhood Expo for a full day of family fun!

To volunteer, visit blm.mn/bg-swap-volunteer. For more details, visit blm.mn/bg-swap.



CONNECTING COMMUNITY: MEET OUTREACH CHAMPION JILL COLLINS MATTSON

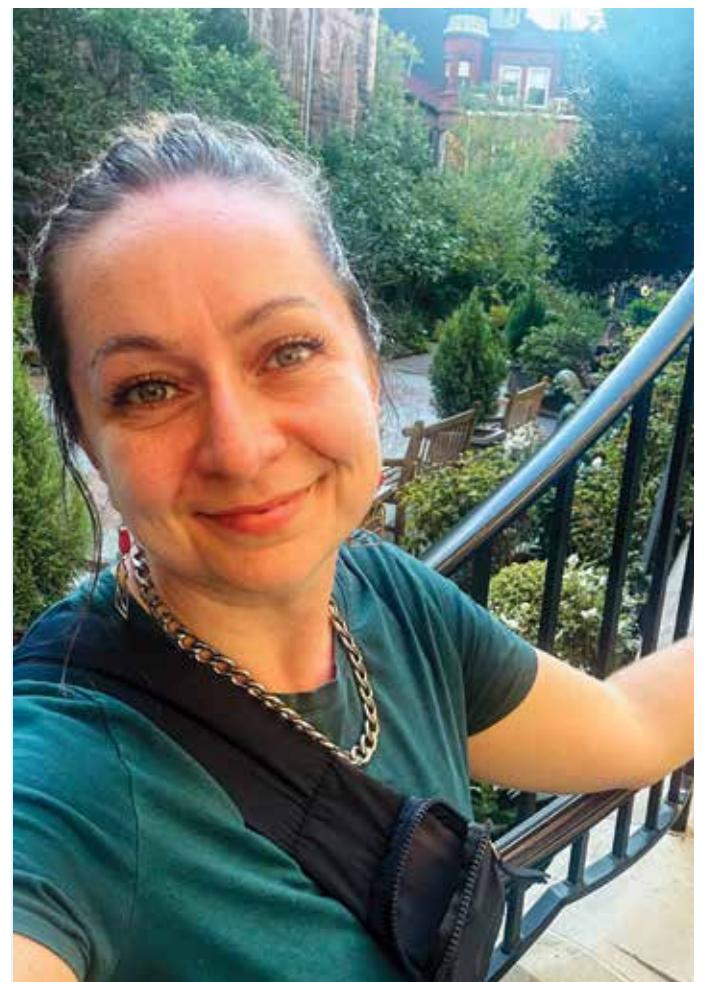
With a master's degree in public health and a background in several service-oriented roles, Jill Collins Mattson, pictured at right, has built her career on helping people navigate systems with dignity and support. Jill joined Bloomington Public Health in October 2024, bringing her passion for community connection and her belief that local policies play a powerful role in shaping health.

As an outreach coordinator, Jill loves being out in the community, asking residents what public health means to them and highlighting the often-invisible work that keeps our cities healthy, from clean drinking water and emergency preparedness to parenting support and vaccinations to substance use prevention and mental health initiatives and beyond.

Currently, Jill is promoting the Infant Health Initiative, which offers free classes, drop-in support and supplies for families.

When she's not working, you'll find Jill with her husband, Tim, and their border collie, Trebek. She also enjoys hiking, reading, tending her houseplants and listening to a good podcast.

Jill's public health advice: "Public health is all around us every day. See if you can shift your mindset to start noticing public health more often and celebrate it!"



BEHIND THE BADGE: MEET COMMANDER CHRISTOPHER YATES, CHAMPION OF SAFETY AND COMMUNITY

Commander Christopher Yates has been serving the Bloomington community since 2003. After beginning his law enforcement career with the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, he joined the Bloomington Police Department, working primarily in the Patrol Division.

Over the years, Christopher has held specialized roles including field training officer, SWAT, investigations and the special investigations unit, and has served as a sergeant in several of those assignments. Today, Christopher leads the Night Patrol team and oversees the UAV (Drone) Unit, Honor Guard, Street Crimes Unit, Explorers and the Reserve Unit.

A University of Wisconsin-River Falls graduate, Christopher is committed to ongoing training and professional development. He was drawn to policing for the teamwork and the variety each shift brings.

"I genuinely enjoy my work, and the variety of people I get to meet," Christopher said. "Bloomington is one of the safest communities out there."

Outside of work, Yates enjoys golfing, boating, cooking (smoking food) and coaching his daughter's softball team.



NAME:
CHRISTOPHER YATES
TITLE:
COMMANDER



SLOWER SPEEDS = SAFER STREETS: WHY BLOOMINGTON REDUCED SPEED LIMITS

Even small reductions in driving speed can significantly improve safety. This principle is the basis for Bloomington's newly adopted lower speed limits, now in effect on many local streets. The primary objective is to enhance safety for all roadway users, particularly children, older adults, and individuals who walk or ride bicycles. Bloomington joins neighboring cities including Richfield, Edina and Minneapolis that have implemented similar changes as part of a broader regional initiative to reduce traffic-related injuries and promote community livability.

"Our goal is safer, more comfortable and welcoming streets for everyone," said BPD Sergeant Jeffry Bailey. "Lower speed limits are a straightforward yet effective tool for achieving that goal."

Residents and visitors are encouraged to watch for updated signage, reduce their speeds accordingly and contribute to a safer environment in which to live, work and play.

If you would like a sign for your yard, visit the Information Desk at Civic Plaza, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road.

— DON'T WING IT! — DRIVE SAFE SLOW DOWN



MEET A FIREFIGHTER: CAPTAIN ROUSSEL BALANCES FAMILY, FUN AND FIREFIGHTING

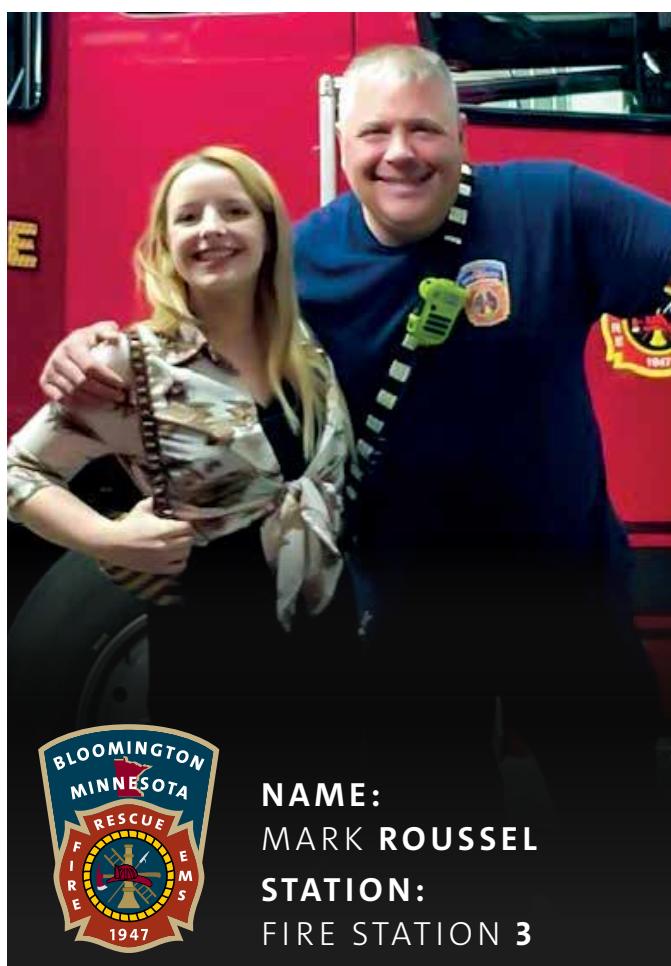
Captain/Paramedic Mark Roussel has served Bloomington for more than a decade. He started with the Bloomington Fire Department as a part-time firefighter 11 years ago, later becoming a full-time firefighter/paramedic, and recently was promoted to captain.

Before joining BFD, Mark spent many years in the restaurant industry. After discovering he enjoyed medical calls, he pursued paramedic school.

Encouraged by firefighter friends, Mark completed Firefighter I and II training and joined BFD shortly after. Now, he holds certifications as a Nationally Registered Paramedic, Hazmat Technician, Rope Rescue Technician and Car Seat Technician. Mark believes what makes him a strong firefighter is his genuine enjoyment of helping others.

Mark credits his wife, Theresa, as his greatest supporter. He encourages anyone considering firefighting to give it serious thought: "If you truly enjoy helping others, there is no better job."

Mark's safety advice: Change those smoke detector batteries during daylight savings and check expiration dates.



NAME:
MARK ROUSSEL
STATION:
FIRE STATION 3

SHOW YOUR HEART SOME LOVE THIS VALENTINE'S DAY

February isn't just for sweethearts; it's also the perfect time to give your heart a little extra care. Here are some simple tips from Bloomington Public Health Dietitian Katelyn Broz to make heart-healthy eating easy to enjoy all year long.

- Boost your fiber game.** Aim for 25+ grams a day. Add high-fiber heroes like whole wheat pasta, chia seeds, beans, berries, fruit and grains.

- Say yes to healthy fats.** Avocados, nuts, seeds, olives and olive oil add flavor and support health.

- Cut back on saturated fats.** Swap butter for olive oil, choose fat-free or low-fat dairy and throw in a few meatless meals each week.

- Color your plate.** Eat the rainbow with bright fruits and veggies packed with antioxidants.

- Watch the sodium sneakiness.** Check labels and aim for under 2,300 mg of sodium per day.

Need more delicious ideas? Search the heart healthy section of eatingwell.com or visit recipes.heart.org.

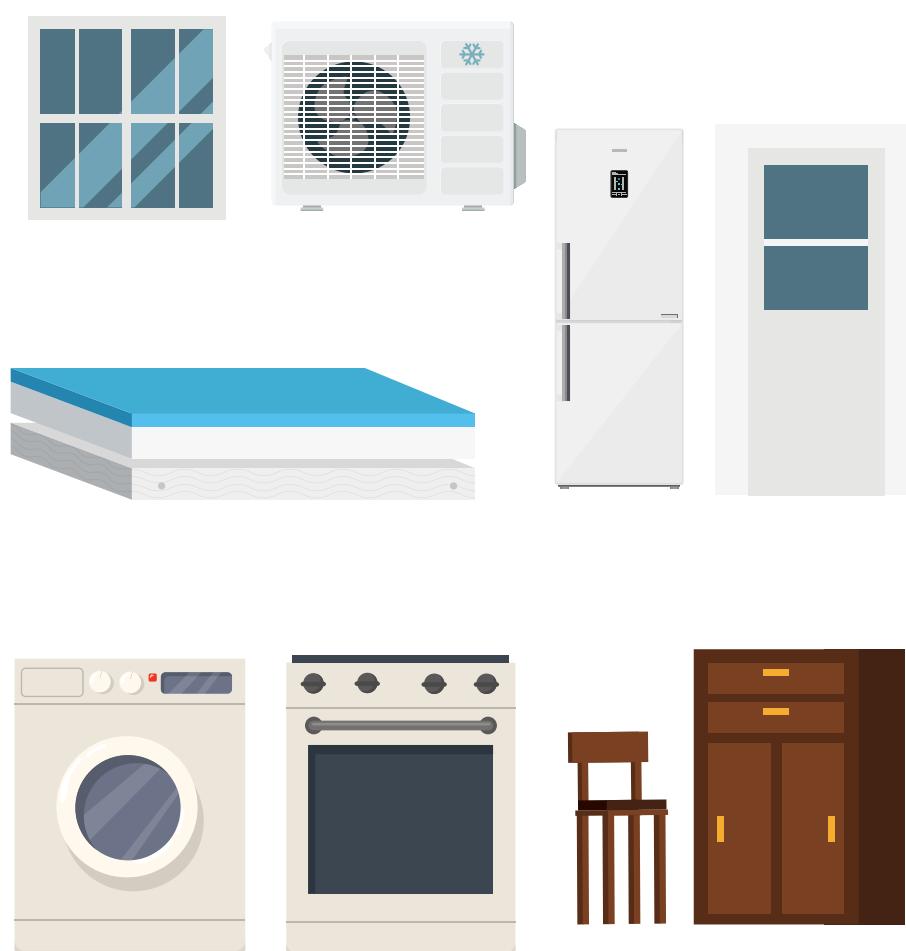
GET TO KNOW BLOOMINGTON

New to Bloomington? Welcome to Bloomington is here to help you connect with your community! New resident meetings provide a friendly introduction to the City, its services and the many ways to get involved.

Or explore Bloomington in a fun way and grab the Bloomington Bucket List, featuring 12 must-do activities including touring Mall of America, visiting a local park or trail, checking out the Farmers Market and more. Complete the list and trade it in for a Bloomington T-shirt as a keepsake of your adventures!

Learn more about meetings, locations and activities at blm.mn/welcome.

WHAT IS ACCEPTED AT THE CURB



WHAT IS NOT ACCEPTED AT THE CURB



CURBSIDE CLEANUP COMING IN APRIL

Curbside Cleanup is offered every other year, occurring only in even-numbered years, which means it'll be back in 2026. The program allows residents to dispose of certain large or hard-to-manage items that are not accepted through regular trash pickup.

On their assigned Saturday, participants may place a limited quantity of appliances and bulky trash at the curb for collection. More details about which items are accepted, and which are not, will also be included in the *March Briefing*.

NEW IN 2026: BUNDLED BRUSH NO LONGER ACCEPTED.

For questions about Curbside Cleanup, visit blm.mn/curbside or call 952-563-8777.

To learn how to dispose of items not accepted at the curb, visit the Green Disposal Guide on Hennepin County at blm.mn/green-dispose or call 612-348-3777.

2026 CURBSIDE CLEANUP SCHEDULE

East of Portland (Monday hauling district) April 4
 Penn to Portland (Tuesday hauling district) April 11
 France to Penn (Wednesday hauling district) April 18
 Normandale to France (Thursday hauling district) April 25
 West of Normandale (Friday hauling district) May 2



MAKE EVERY DROP COUNT: RAIN BARREL SALE

Want to make a big difference in your own backyard? Consider installing a rain barrel or two. Up to 40% of summer water use goes to irrigation, so capturing rain is an easy way to conserve water, save money and support a healthy ecosystem.

Bloomington and Richfield residents can order discounted rain barrels through the Recycling Association of Minnesota's spring sale.

Online ordering opens Saturday, February 28, 12 a.m., at blm.mn/sustainability. Rain barrels cost \$100 and residents may qualify for a \$50 rebate.

A rain barrel offers cost-effective watering, eases demand on treated water, protects your home's foundation and helps keep local waters cleaner.

Learn more and find ordering and rebate details at blm.mn/sustainability.

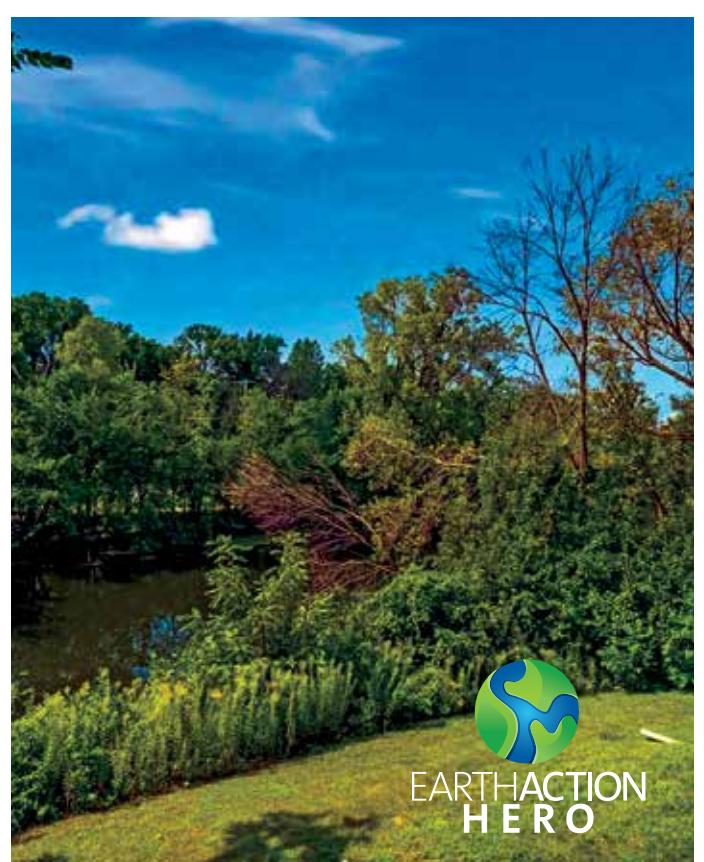
EARTH ACTION HEROES:
A SMALL CONDO COMMUNITY MADE A BIG ECO SPLASH

When Lochmoor Condo Association residents grew concerned about an overgrown pond losing both its beauty and ecological health, the association began exploring solutions. When cost and contractor availability posed early challenges, they made a call to the City and connected with Water Resources Specialist Jack Distel, who helped launch the project.

"Jack didn't just answer our questions, he opened the door to partners, resources and a vision we didn't know was possible," said Jeff Wanat, an association board member. "He helped show us how even our small community could make a big environmental impact."

With support from the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District and restoration expertise from Native Resource Preservation, Lochmoor began a four-year plan to remove invasives, reintroduce native plants and expand natural buffers that protect water quality.

Lochmoor's success highlights the power of collaboration and offers a model for other condo associations looking to make meaningful ecological change.



EARTH ACTION HERO

MANAGE UTILITY BILLS WITH FREE RESOURCES

Come to the City's Utility Bill Skills resource fair for help finding ways to manage and lower costs on your utility bills on Wednesday, February 25, 2-4 p.m., at the Penn Lake Library, 8800 Penn Ave. S.

Representatives from Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota, Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County and the City of Bloomington Solid Waste and Sustainability will be there with resources to help you save money on electric, gas, water and waste bills.

Enjoy complimentary snacks, coffee and tea as you learn how to navigate your utility bills, apply for assistance and implement resource-saving tips for your home. Spanish and Somali interpretation will be available. For more information, visit blm.mn/billskills.