

INTRODUCTION

In August 2020, the City of Bloomington Division of Public Health hosted two listening sessions and one general information session for Bloomington residents to learn more about tobacco policies being studied by City Council. These potential policy options include restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products, creating tobacco licensing buffer zones around parks and schools, and capping the number of tobacco licenses in the city. All of these policy options have the intention of preventing youth initiation and addressing the youth vaping epidemic in Bloomington.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Background

Virtual listening sessions were open to young adults aged 18-25 and parents of youth ages 13-18 that live in Bloomington. Registrants had to provide their full street address for verification purposes. In exchange for their participation, participants were offered a \$25 Target gift card, which was paid for with funding from the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) through the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Providing gift cards for listening sessions, especially for hard-to-reach populations is considered a best practice in equitable engagement. The listening sessions were advertised via email to school and community partners, as well as via paid Facebook ads targeted at youth and parents.¹

The two sessions yielded ten registrations, and six of the ten registrants actually attended one of the two sessions. Of these six, two participants were parents with children ages 13-17, and four participants were young adults ages 18-25.

Listening sessions consisted of a formal presentation by Public Health staff and staff from the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota (ANSR), a technical assistance provider of MDH. The presentation covered information on the evolution of e-cigarette products, e-cigarette health effects, tobacco industry marketing, data on youth tobacco use and policies being considered in the city of Bloomington. The presentation was followed by a facilitated conversation with six questions for the listening sessions, which yielded the findings below.

Listening Session Findings

Participants said they were surprised most by the youth use rates from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey, and were concerned about the influence of tobacco marketing on young people. They were also surprised by the amount of substances found in e-cigarette aerosols. One young adult participant commented that e-cigarettes were always presented as a “clean” option. Another participant noted that youth “don’t always have the capability to make an informed decision [about the safety of using e-cigarettes] amidst powerful marketing” from the tobacco industry.

Because these products are relatively new to the market – the bulk of today’s most-used products have been around five years or less – many people do not have basic knowledge of these products. Parents were concerned about detecting and preventing use in both the home and school environments and noted that the discreteness of the products makes it “hard to monitor” and intervene on behalf of their youth.

¹ Excerpts of the Facebook ads with a permalink to the full posts are included in the Appendix to this report.

Menthol and Flavoring Info Sessions: Report

A young adult said he didn't receive formal curriculum education on e-cigarettes because he graduated high school before the rise in popularity of e-cigarettes, which has led to a lot of confusion and susceptibility to these products among young adults his age. He said, "I didn't see [widespread e-cigarette use] during my time in middle and high school and now it is very different." He noted later that there is "wide acceptance" of these products among his peer group and he was concerned about how many of his friends were getting addicted to these products as a way to "cope" with the stressors of college life. Several other young adult participants affirmed his observations and also noted widespread use among college students.

Many participants were also surprised by the federal landscape. Most did not realize the loopholes that exist in the current federal language that restricts the flavors and types of some flavored tobacco products, but leaves many products still on the market. They were also concerned about the lack of research regarding the safety of these products. A parent noted that this lack of research "would make me think that they would want to give a pause on these products given all that we know about the harms of smoking [conventional] tobacco products."

Although we did not ask participants directly whether or not they would support an ordinance, no concerns were raised about the value of working towards restricting access to flavored and menthol tobacco products to protect public health and several participants voluntarily expressed their direct support for an ordinance. While not in opposition, a few young adult participants expressed concerns about the effectiveness of a local sales restriction, noting that their friends that use these products are often buying them online, and could easily go to a neighboring jurisdiction that allows sales.

We asked participants what should be communicated back to Bloomington City Council about policies and gained a lot of insight. Parents said:

- "(Restricting flavored tobacco) would help strengthen Tobacco 21 in preventing future youth initiation and having an impact on communities of color."
- "Bloomington has been a leader, and they can continue to be a leader (in tobacco control)."

The young adults said:

- "The juices and e-cigarettes are what the youth go toward. Making change now will prevent more people wanting to start using e-cigarettes or other tobacco products."
- "With inaction at the federal level, it is important that the council step in and provide leadership where we see these regulatory gaps."

General Information Session

One General Information Session was held which was open to the general public. No compensation was offered in exchange for participation in the virtual listening session. The General Information Session was advertised via email to school and community partners, as well as via a paid Facebook ad.² No pre-registration was required, but participants were asked to identify themselves as a resident when they spoke. A total of four participants attended the general information session, of which only one explicitly identified herself as a Bloomington resident.

The info session consisted of a formal presentation by Public Health staff and staff from the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota (ANSR), followed by a time for questions and comments from

² While the General Info Session had four participants and received only one question from a non-Bloomington resident, the Facebook Ad garnered additional conversation on social media. A link to the post is included as an Appendix to this report.

Menthol and Flavoring Info Sessions: Report

participants. Only one question was received from a non-Bloomington participant inquiring as to the process for how a potential ordinance would proceed if the council chose to pursue any of the options presented. Otherwise, no conversation or questions were generated from this session.

NEXT STEPS

These findings are presented to City Council to inform members as they consider new tobacco policies in the City of Bloomington. Public Health staff awaits further direction as to how to proceed with any of the policy options currently under consideration.

Appendix A: Facebook Ad targeted to young adults in Bloomington

Bloomington MN City Government
July 27 · 🌐

The Beautiful Lies and Ugly Truth about Menthol Tobacco
Give us the scoop and we'll give you \$25! The City of Bloomington is seeking the input... See More

**BEAUTIFUL LIE
UGLY TRUTH**
ABOUT **MENTHOL** TOBACCO

0:00 / 0:30

Like Comment Share 7 · 5 Comments

All Comments

Mike Opsahl
I completely understand trying to discourage kids from smoking, but what about those of us that are of age that have stopped smoking cigarettes and now vape. Kids are just gonna go to another city that is 18 to buy and still sells flavors. I know you... See More

Like Reply 4w

Kati Stamato
We can just order flavors online anyways, why make it more difficult for adults who make a choice to vape or smoke menthols and flavored vape juices, and take away revenue from smoke shops, which are primarily mom and pop shops?

Like Reply 3w

**Kris King
Megan Benson**

Like Reply 4w

Pamela Pommer
I'm totally against tobacco for people of all ages, but is \$25 per person really a wise use of money at this time?????

Like Reply 3w

Joel Schram
Simple. Don't tell adults what they can and cannot purchase.

Like Reply 4w

Permalink to full Facebook post:


<https://www.facebook.com/68661688425/videos/3718971891463689/>

Appendix B: Facebook Ad targeted to parents in Bloomington

Bloomington MN City Government July 27 · 🌐

Did you know 80% of youth who tried tobacco used a menthol or flavored product? The City of Bloomington is in the early stages of considering a restriction on the sale of menthol and flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes. Menthol and flavoring in tobacco products are a powerful attraction to youth. Flavorings make it more appealing to begin using tobacco and are marketed to youth to get them hooked.

The City is hosting a series of meetings about a proposed flavored tobacco ordinance. Youth, parents and caregivers are invited to attend one of two listening sessions in early August. This will be followed by an information session for the general public on August 13. Visit blm.mn/tobacco for more information on how to participate in one of these meetings.



Bloomington MN City Government
Government Organization [Learn More](#)

4,913 People Reached 395 Engagements [Boost Again](#)

Boosted on July 27 By Dan Marfield Completed

People Reached	1.5K	Post Engagements	25
----------------	------	------------------	----

[View Results](#)


👍👎👏 24 32 Comments

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#) 🌐

All Comments ▾

Eric Sathre
So what are we doing about flavored vape liquid? That seems more of a problem than tobacco. [Like](#) [Reply](#) [Message](#) · 4w 1

Becky Strohmeier
Fruit Loops Vodka? That couldn't be targeted towards kids like the cereal is... Right? [Like](#) [Reply](#) [Message](#) · 4w 2



Permalink to full Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/blm.mn/posts/10158498064758426>