



The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Chamber Advocates for Greater Transparency in Government

Bloomington, IN – Feb. 21, 2020 – The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce supports efforts to make government at all levels more transparent, consistent and accountable. As part of our advocacy efforts on this issue, the Chamber has launched a transparency initiative to track the work of local government and to identify ways that openness and access can be improved.

“Open government gives our members and the broader community the ability to be more informed and to influence decisions, which in turn will help build economic equity, equality and accessibility,” said Erin Predmore, the Chamber’s President & CEO.

The City of Bloomington and Monroe County government already take actions related to these goals. Many public meetings, but not all, are recorded by Community Access Television Services (CATS) and are broadcast live or available later on the CATS website. The agendas, packets and meetings for many public meetings, but not all, are posted online. Many meetings, but not all, are noticed in a timely and accessible way.

The Chamber is tracking 82 councils, boards and commissions that govern and advise the City of Bloomington and Monroe County. We are tracking whether meeting minutes, agendas and packets are posted online in a timely way, and whether contact information is posted for these entities. As of January 2020, 45 are in the “red zone,” with up-to-date information unavailable in at least two of the four categories that we’re tracking. We will continue to monitor these groups and post updates on our Transparency in Government site at ChamberBloomington.org/transparency.html.

We can do better. Here are some ways that local government can improve.

- Post all meeting agendas, packets and minutes online and in a timely manner. A Chamber review revealed that more than 50% of local public boards and commissions do not currently provide these materials in a timely way, if at all.
- Hold meetings at times that are accessible to members of the general public. Keep in mind that the length of meetings will affect whether residents can participate. For evening meetings, consider limiting the end time to coincide with bus schedules.
- Do not meet in caucus to deliberate on government actions. Caucus meetings are intended for political party business only and are not open to the public. Elected bodies with all members from the same political party, such as the Bloomington City Council and Monroe County Board of Commissioners, should not use the caucus to discuss public business out of public view.

- Provide childcare for public meetings whenever possible.
- Communicate with residents in a timely, respectful manner. For example, when residents apply to serve on volunteer advisory boards/commissions, make sure their applications are acknowledged and that they are informed when the vacancy is filled, even if they aren't appointed.
- When appointing someone to fill a vacancy in an elected position, the appointing body should make candidate applications and other materials available to the public and provide opportunity for public input. Deliberations and voting on filling the position should be made in public as well.

“Elected officials often encourage residents to get involved in local government, but don’t remove the barriers that prevent people from engaging,” Predmore said. “Easier access to information, a true commitment to transparency, and systemic changes are needed as we aspire to more inclusive decision-making for our community.”

About the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce:

The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce is a nonprofit membership organization serving as our community’s leading advocate for business. We offer unique leadership opportunities, meaningful volunteer activities, and exclusive business-building programs focused on critical economic, civic, and social priorities. Chamber members support each other and community initiatives, sharing information and resources to help create economic opportunity and community well-being. At the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, we believe that better business leads to a better community.

Contact:

Erin Predmore

President & CEO

812-336-6381

epredmore@chamberbloomington.org

<https://www.chamberbloomington.org/>

###