

Mayor's remarks as released by City of Bloomington, July 31, 2019

Welcome and thank you for being here today, in person or on CATS. I'll be making some prepared remarks this morning, and then taking questions, first from the press, and then from anyone present. I appreciate being joined by Corporation Counsel Philippa Guthrie, Director of Parks and Recreation Paula McDevitt, and Police Chief Mike Diekhoff, who may join in during the question period. Two days ago, I announced that due to public safety concerns I was directing the cancellation of the Community Farmers' Market for the next two Saturdays. I took this action based upon specific recommendations from our local public safety officials, and after consulting with others locally and nationally. It was a very painful decision to suspend our beloved Farmers' Market -- affecting hundreds of local farmers and family members and thousands of patrons and visitors -- but it was necessary because our first obligation is to protect public safety.

Today I want to share some background of the decision, continue our ongoing conversations, and also begin to chart the path forward in light of current realities. We have work to do together, including more conversations to have, to move forward and reclaim our Community Farmers' Market. Perhaps today's Herald Times editorial put it best: we want our Farmers' Market back.

With public safety as a top priority for any city administration, I begin by highlighting two major challenges to our ability to provide that public safety. Both are avoidable challenges, created by humans, by terrible policies and actions, but not under our local authority.

First is gun control. Let me state the obvious -- when conflict and tension are present in public gatherings, it is dramatically more difficult to protect public safety when firearms and other weapons are also present and pervasive. If any here are familiar with the memoir "Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun," by Geoffrey Canada, you'll recall that story among other things vividly and poignantly portrays how the presence of guns dramatically changes fights and conflict and culture. Our national laws, and particularly our Indiana laws, are disgraceful and endanger us and should be changed. Most directly here, they work to hamstring us locally from virtually any attempts to manage the presence of firearms at our Farmers' Market. I have publicly opposed these dangerous laws and policies from my first day in office and that remains a priority.

Second is a toxic stew of bigotry and hatred, of intolerance and divisiveness, that is being brewed by many, all across the country, including our own President. I am ashamed, agitated, and angered, I'm furious, that coming from our White House are messages of bigotry and racism -- we cannot hesitate to say so -- that seek to affirm and foment those deep and dangerous parts of humanity, parts that civilization and enlightenment and progress work so hard to improve. I won't give those words the dignity of repeating them here. We all have heard them. Shamefully, dangerously, evilly disrespecting four US Congresswoman of color. And also a great American city, once home to Frederick

Douglass and Thurgood Marshall. These are outrageous. And destructive. They are encouragement to those who are racist, disgruntled, who suffer from mental illness. A threat to public safety. We see far too many eruptions of violence from organized groups and from individuals, spurred on by this atmosphere of bigotry.

In dealing with potential local violence, among other things, we face these two terrible external realities of guns and a toxic national atmosphere. They affect our community and our Farmers' Market, like they affect every community in America. And it's worth noting, not only in America, but across the globe as authoritarian leaders foment hate and violence.

Amid these two external realities, locally we've also witnessed tension and conflict increasing in the market over the past several weeks. Despite intensive efforts from city staff and volunteers (and would you please join me in thanking city staff and volunteers who have worked so hard and with such dedication over the past weeks.....) focusing our attention on the market, two days ago, our public safety officials reported to me information identifying threats of specific individuals with connections to past white nationalist violence. After discussion, we made the determination that protecting public safety required the two week suspension.

So another reality we have in Bloomington is the presence of the doctrine of white supremacy -- its pervasive role in our collective history, and its presence still today. I realize that this does not jibe with the Bloomington many of us think of, that we are proud of, that we cherish. But as I said last month, we know and must continuously acknowledge that today's more progressive Bloomington has grown through our 200-year history in a soil laced with the toxin of racism. Like our state and our country, our community was long home to both overt and covert white supremacy, built in our laws, culture and mores. That doctrine and system of beliefs is still a scourge on our community and country. It demands and deserves unqualified condemnation and vigorous opposition.

Thank goodness so many Bloomingtonians, and I count myself among them, have worked and do work against that scourge, striving to repair damage done over generations, seeking to quell revivals or uprisings of the bigotry and hate that can appear among us, and envisioning our community moving forward from that past. Our community is indeed dedicated to inclusion, and welcoming all. That is part of our local DNA now. But we have to recognize that legacies and remainders and reminders persist, in us and among us. And at our Farmers' Market.

As a community, then, one thing we must do together is fight against racism and bigotry and their legacies, wherever they arise, including at our Farmers' Market. Like many, I have spoken out condemning connections to white supremacy in our market. We know active community members have organized education and advocacy campaigns, as well as economic responses including boycotts, and I am

fully supportive of those efforts. As I'll talk about more in a minute, it takes a community to respond to these challenges. As a city government we also must fight to protect and defend our constitution. That document, and the ideals that inspire it, the principles contained in it, more than anything define our country. As a mayor, I swear to uphold our constitution in my work. The First Amendment certainly allows a mayor to speak out forcefully against white supremacy and work against racial injustice in all its forms. The First Amendment also prohibits using the coercive power of government in response to the content of individual speech or thoughts, even those odious to our community. It means not punishing individuals with government action because of the content of their beliefs or statements. We don't police your thoughts. The First Amendment prohibits government from that, and any actions to the contrary could just result in civil money awards to organizations we certainly don't want to support.

Let me directly address the arrest last Saturday of a protestor against white supremacy -- whose spirit and goals I certainly share. As is widely known, longstanding market rules prohibit flyers or placards in certain areas. Protesters have been complying with those rules for weeks, leafletting and educating at entrances to the market. The First Amendment requires our government to enforce this rule in a viewpoint neutral manner, regardless whether a sign advocates something that I as mayor, and our own government and the vast majority of us supports, such as denouncing white nationalism, or whether it's a sign we find abhorrent like favoring white nationalism. Or a sign for or against a woman's right to choose, or any sign at all. That even-handed approach to enforcing market rules regarding protest is constitutionally required, and resulted in the actions last Saturday.

So what comes next? Where do we go from here? As I said at the outset, given the threat of violence that has required this pause, we have more work to do, conversations to have, knowledge to gain. What happened over the last two months has gone beyond our local control, in a sense, as some of these external realities and other forces combined to threaten our community's safety. We need to reclaim our market.

There is a key role for city government. We will protect public safety at the market. And manage and run the market for the vendors and patrons, in a way that reflects our city and our values. We have to examine, together, whether and how we can do that better, including with next year's vendor contracts and agreements. We have to understand all the nuances of constitutional boundaries. In the immediate two weeks, we will be improving programming, increasing staff and volunteer presence, and enhancing safety procedures at the market. But we certainly don't know all the answers. We welcome ideas about how best to do our work, as we gather in coming days. That will include ongoing convenings with some national experts to help us respond effectively and safely to the situation we face. There is a key, perhaps more essential, role for the community at large. Our Farmers Market doesn't belong to the City government. It belongs to the community. It has for 45 years. Our market has been damaged.

Attendance has recently declined 50%. Repair won't be simple or easy. The City government will play our role, but recovery will absolutely depend upon the community embracing the market, as individuals and as organizations, to help restore it to the thriving central place we want it to play on our summer Saturdays.

Many individuals and organizations have been embracing the market, seeking to protect it and help it -- help us -- move ahead. Even in the past two days, we've seen heartwarming efforts from folks identifying new options for vendors for the coming two weekends, offering their spaces as alternate venues. We saw a beautiful bustling Tuesday market yesterday. United Way and Downtown Bloomington Inc and others are offering help. This is Bloomington, pulling together to get through challenges. We collaborate and cooperate. Please keep your eyes out for a list of those alternative spaces, and go patronize our hard-working farmers, who've already dealt with crop loss this year due to a very wet spring. My office and Parks and Recreation welcome any and all ideas and suggestions about the best steps to take. We will be announcing more gatherings and more plans in coming days. I encourage, and expect, many of you, individually and in groups, to manifest your support for the market and this community too, with your own gatherings and your own collaborative efforts. Our goal is to reopen and restore the market as a place that reflects Bloomington's best, and that reflects our values. In other contexts we've talked about our Safe, Civil, and Just community. That's what the market should be too. We know that safe civil and just doesn't necessarily mean tranquil. It doesn't mean always easy or comfortable. It means physically safe. It means civil and just, meaning respectful and inclusive, equitable and fair. It also should be fun. When we reopen the market it will be because our community embraced the market as something we believe in and will not let go.

Take a deep breath. Look around you. This is Bloomington, and this is one of our challenges to meet. It's a community market. With community challenges. That we will meet with community solutions. This is Bloomington. We got this.

Thank you all very much. We'd be happy to take some questions. First from the press.