

# ALBION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

EDC Board of Directors Approval - 06/02/2022  
City of Albion City Council Approval - 08/1/2022



# 2022- 2026

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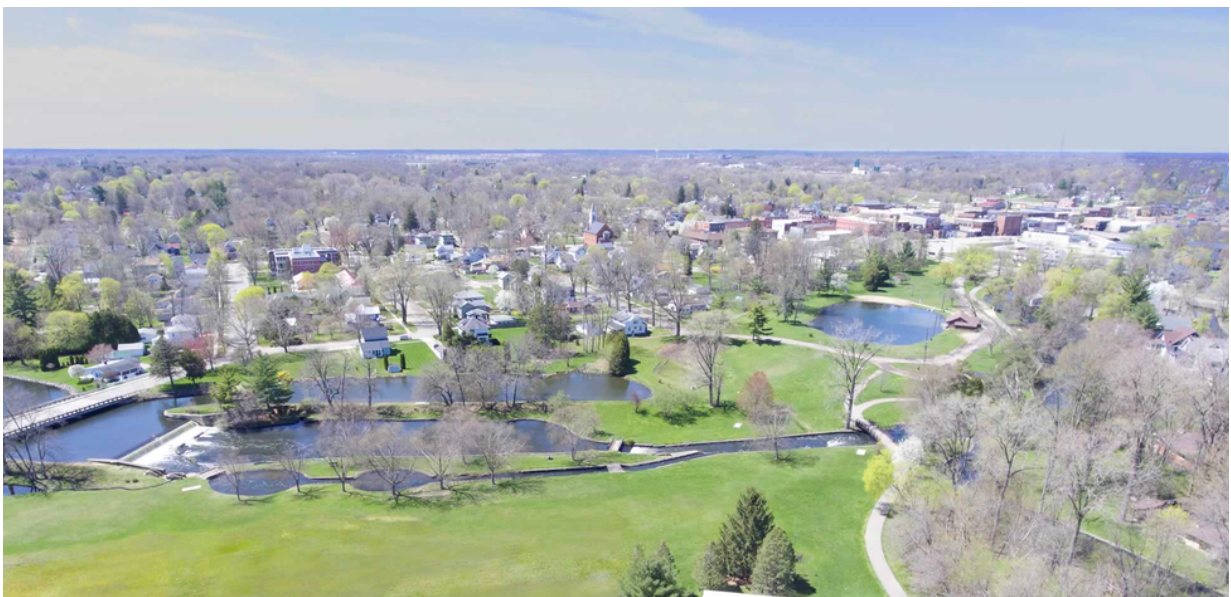
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Thank you for the input of key stakeholders, community representatives, and partner organizations and the work to identify economic opportunities and solutions to overcome challenges in the Albion community. We appreciate your participation and dedication to Albion and in excelling our community forward.*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Economic development requires a community to be successful; engagement of multiple stakeholders to execute a successful project or develop a long-term strategic vision for growth. It requires agile planning and a comprehensive approach to implement solutions that make Albion a more attractive place to live, work and play.

The world was rocked in 2020 by a pandemic that halted most of the progress to a near standstill, while leaders dedicated immense resources and time to respond to the challenges that hit economies all over the world. The last two years has demonstrated the resiliency of communities in responding to unprecedented challenges.

In 2017, the Albion EDC implemented the first Economic Development Strategic Plan. Since that time, the City and economic development partners have been busy with implementing a wide range of programs and initiatives focused on business development and success and has made substantial progress on the goals prioritized within that plan:

- Stabilization of Downtown Albion – 6 Redevelopments Completed, \$15.4 million, leveraging \$2.9 million in financial incentives (The Ludington Center, Courtyard by Marriott, Peabody Block, Brick Street Lofts, Albion Malleable Brewing Company)
- \$6 million Reconstruction & Rebricking of M-99 (Superior Street)
- 3 Façade Improvements Completed
- New Housing Developments; Pre-Development for 2 Large Housing Projects
- Demolition of Blighted Properties - Pre-Development for Infill Housing Options
- Launching a Workforce Taskforce with Skill Gap and Child Care Sub-committees
- Manufacturing Expansions – Sinclair Design & Engineering, Knauf Insulation, Minerals Technology, Trident Greenwell, & Consumers Energy Albion Tool Hub
- Implementing Entrepreneurship Assistance Program – Dream.Build.Rise Albion
- 21 New Businesses Opened in the Downtown and on Major Corridors

Building on these successes and responding to a changing environment, we have created the City's next five-year Economic Development Strategy Plan. The 2022-2026 Economic Development Strategic Plan summarizes 5 months of economic research, stakeholder input and dives deeper into the goals and objectives set in the 2022 City of Albion Comprehensive Plan.

Albion is a community on the cusp of revitalization with robust projects leading the way, join us on the journey of Advancing Albion.

Sincerely,



Amy Deprez, President & CEO



# INTRODUCTION

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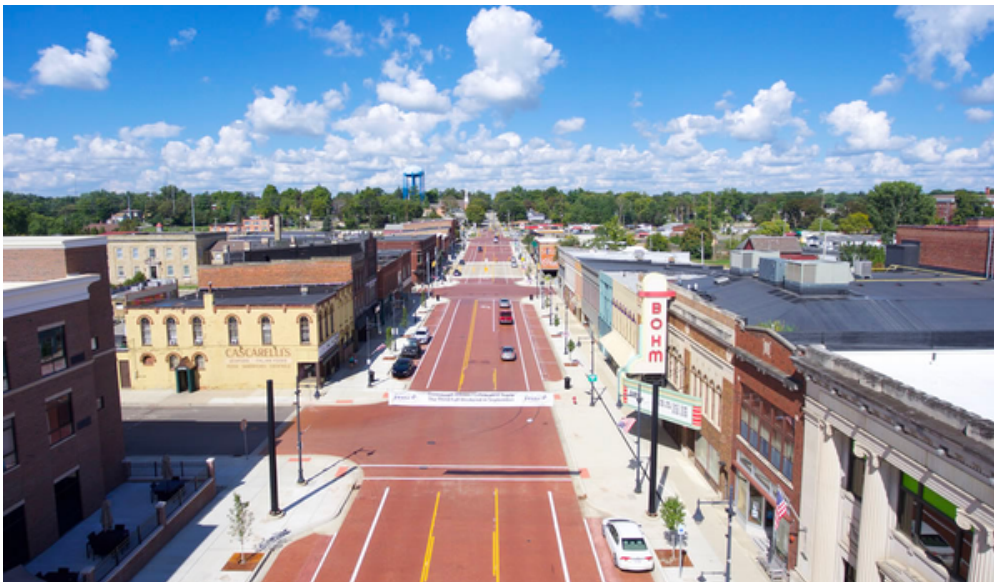
Strategic planning is a critical and necessary component of organizational success. It provides structure, process, and direction; more appropriately it provides a roadmap to drive decision making, for daily staffing and resource commitments to longer term decisions. The plan acts as a compass and clearly communicates the vision of Albion and the direction of growth the community is pursuing.

In the late 1880's, Albion became known as the birthplace of Mother's Day, after the Albion Methodist church began celebrating the tradition of mothers. In the 19th century, the manufacturing base gave Albion the reputation of a factory town, built on the success of the automotive industry. In the 21st century, Albion's culture is changing to that of a college town whose residents have a strong interest in technology and sustainability issues. Albion is full of history, culture and arts, while being inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community through embracing diversity and a shared vision for the future.

The 5-year Strategic Plan builds off successes and guides the City's economic and community development efforts over the next five years while maintaining the spirit of the city's commitment to innovation and inclusiveness. The 2022 City of Albion Comprehensive Plan was being constructed at the same time and the processes were shared to ensure a cross-collection of input and research guided the development of the economic and community development strategic planning process.

The goals of stabilization, housing, jobs, and corridors carried over to the updated plan, with objectives that fostered business growth in a way that enhances community vitality; shape the place, talent and resources that influence business creation, expansion, retention, and attraction while maintaining alignment with our values to be a livable, inclusive, resilient and sustainable community.

We acknowledge the many stakeholders and partners that offered input and shared objectives that support the overall economic and community development for Albion. It is without a doubt a team activity and the successes are shared amongst all for a brighter Albion.



# COMMUNITY PROFILE



Latitude 42.2431° N  
Longitude 84.7530° W

8,340 Estimate Population  
from 2019  
7,700 Estimated Population from  
2020



Education:  
9 Colleges Within 40 Miles  
K- 12 Attend  
Marshall Public School District

Average Median Income is  
\$34,467

Households (2019)  
2,812



Railroad:  
Amtrak's Wolverine Line  
& Norfolk Southern

59.1% - White  
28.7% - African American  
6.0% - Hispanic  
6.2% - Other



53% - Female  
46% - Male

31 - Average Age



Employment Status 2019  
Employed - 51.4%  
Unemployed - 4.7%  
Not in Labor Force - 43.9%

High School Degree or Higher  
88.3%

Median Earnings  
\$32,234 men  
\$32,475 women



# INFLUENCING FACTORS

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## Community Strengths

The City of Albion is strategically and conveniently located just off of Interstate 94 mid-way between Chicago and Detroit, 15 minutes from Jackson, MI and 30 minutes from Battle Creek, MI. Albion is home to an Amtrak depot/station which is located in the heart of the historic downtown and offers daily service to Chicago and Detroit.

Albion is a Redevelopment Ready Certified community, granting access to resources and funding opportunities to revitalize the community. The downtown has already experienced several redevelopment projects that have reduced the risk associated with historical redevelopment and created a welcoming community for new redevelopment. These projects include the historic renovation of the Bohm Theatre and Bohm II, a boutique 40 seat venue for private viewing or events; the newly developed Courtyard by Marriott snuggled up against Superior Street; Albion College development of The Ludington Center; private development of the oldest brick building in Albion into 4 luxury apartments and the Foundry Bakehouse and most recently Brick Street Lofts, offering commercial space and 8 new loft style apartments. New businesses have opened offering craft bean-to-bar chocolates (Yellow Bird Chocolate Shop), award winning brews and burgers (Albion Malleable Brewing Company), a downtown bodega grocery store (Superior Street Mercantile), plus so many more.

Music, art and culture is everywhere from a coffee shop to a brewery to the live stage at the Bohm Theatre, Albion is alive with entertainment options that will entice all ages to sit back and enjoy. Walk the Beat Music Festival, Blues at the Bohm and Festival of the Forks draws in people from surrounding communities. Outside concerts at Swingin' at the Shell, located at Victory Park, features free family-friendly musical entertainment for all ages and groups. In Albion you do not have to look far to experience the wonder of the arts and the rich, diverse culture of the community.



## Strengths continued



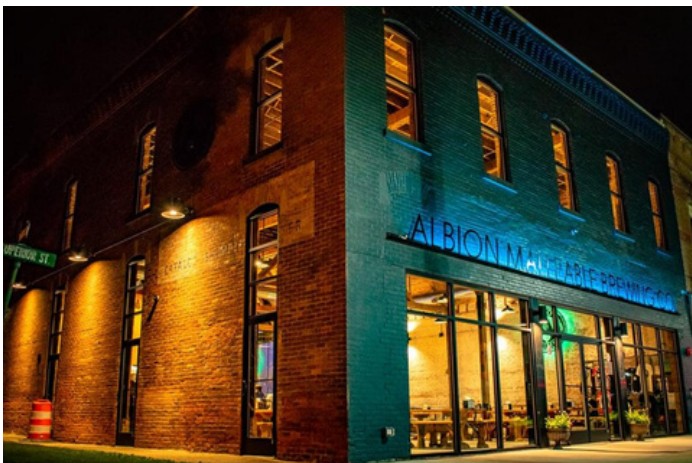
Albion is fortunate to have a non-profit organization, Albion Reinvestment Corporation (ARC), dedicated to downtown redevelopment and partnering with the City to bring about a transformational redevelopment project that will result in 50+ new loft apartments and 20+ commercial spaces that will be ready for entrepreneurs and small businesses to be successful. ARC has spent the last several years acquiring properties that puts them in a unique position to help transform the blocks between Cass and Erie Street. This redevelopment is slated to start construction in late 2022.



Albion has seen our senior population migrate from the City to find communities that have the resources for them to age in place. Albion has a dedicated group of committed individuals working steadily to rectify this phenomenon and has made significant progress toward the goal of making Albion a community where seniors can comfortably age-in-place. This initiative is indicative of Albion's dedicated population, willing and eager to participate in developing the Albion of tomorrow by serving in civic engagement positions, volunteering, participation at town halls and being available to help share the Albion they love with others.

Calhoun County has created a Transit Authority for Countywide Transit to connect Battle Creek, Marshall, Homer and Albion. The Authority is currently working through the cost-benefit analysis necessary to move this initiative forward. Countywide transit will offer residents throughout the county employment opportunities while giving residents the flexibility to choose to use public transit versus owning a vehicle.

Albion is home to an industrial park that is 85% full and has prioritized creating shovel ready sites that continue to attract new industrial and business developments in the future. Work continues on creating a second industrial park on land formerly in Sheridan Township, now deeded to the City of Albion through a 425 Agreement.



**Albion Malleable Brewing Company**



**Superior Street Mercantile**



**The Bohm Theatre**





## Current Challenges

The City of Albion continues to rebound from challenges that beleaguered many manufacturing based small towns in the post-industrial age. These challenges are not unrecognized and are being considered in the continuous planning for the City's future.

Albion's manufacturing base was closely linked to the automotive industry. The challenges the automotive industry faced in the past several decades directly lead to the closures of several major foundries and employers in the community. This, in-turn, lead to a decline in population as residents moved to be closer to employment opportunities. It also lead to a decline in city revenues from a loss of tax base. Without these revenues some of the City's infrastructure was neglected allowing the City, at the time, to focus on higher priority initiatives. As an example, some of Albion's roads are in need of reconstruction or repair – not unlike many other small Michigan communities.

Public transportation remains a current challenge. However with the countywide system in the planning phase, this challenge should be met and resolved in the near future.

While the population has declined since the post-industrial challenges faced by City, census data has shown that the decline has leveled off. It is acknowledged that the 2020 Census occurred during the global pandemic and may not accurately reflect the actual population count.

The Housing stock in the City tends to be older which may require new or existing owner investment. The older housing stock may not offer the options that are attractive to younger generations and may not be conducive to the older populations which prevents them from remaining in the City.

Quality of life items, like restaurants, grocery, and other services, are also limited which can impact the attraction and retention of residents to the city. These limited options often means people will drive to neighboring communities for more diverse selection of services that better suit their wants.

Census data has shown that the City of Albion has experienced a lower than average labor participation rate – meaning that only part of the employable population is gainfully employed or actively seeking work.



Albion has long identified the limited medical options as a weakness, since the local hospital closed in 2002. In 2019, Oaklawn Express Care opened in the Munger Building, on the campus of Albion College offering primary and express care for college students and residents. However, the staffing of the urgent care facility has been a challenge due to the global pandemic. This has lead to a decrease in operating hours which has caused some residents to seek medical care in neighboring communities.



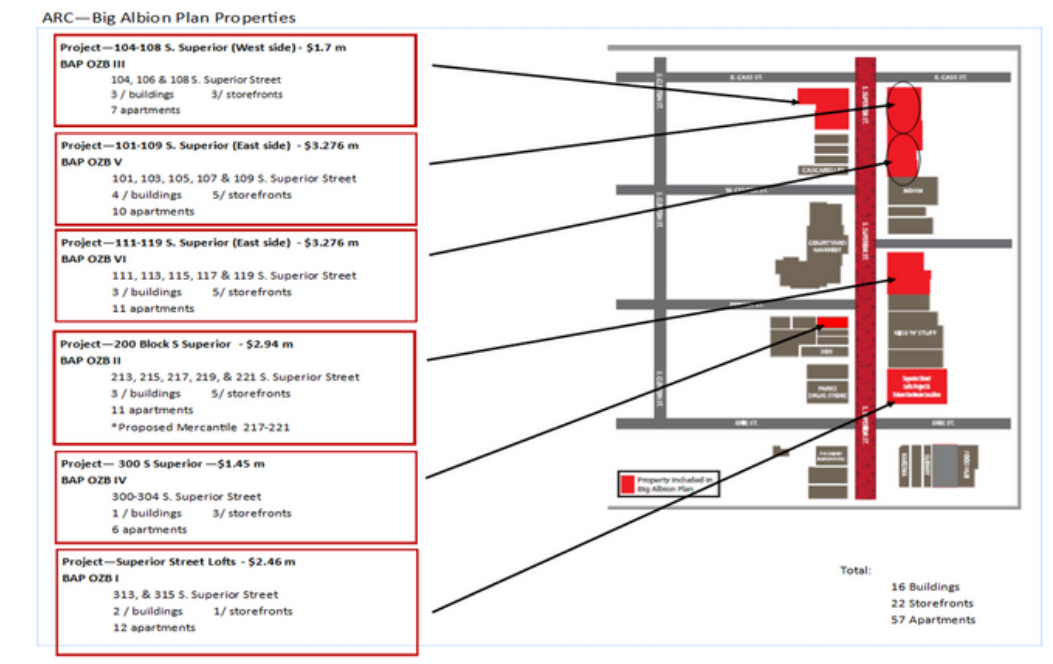
# Opportunities for Growth

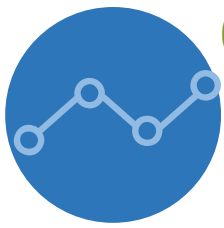
The City of Albion is on the cusp of transformational redevelopment projects that will breathe new life into the core of the community. Strategic opportunities are abundant.

The City of Albion has several large properties that are ideal for development of commercial, mixed-use, industrial, and residential projects. Brownfield sites have been prioritized for creating shovel ready sites. The City's Redevelopment Ready Certification (RRC) offers developers a seamless interaction with City departments and a community eager to work with interested parties.

Downtown Albion has experienced several early redevelopment projects that set the stage for current projects. The historic renovation of the Bohm Theatre, which offers live music as well as first run movies, led the way. This was followed by a 5-storefront renovation into a college/community meeting center (The Ludington Center); the newly constructed Courtyard by Marriott; historic renovation of the oldest brick building in Albion (Peabody Building) into high-end loft apartments and a 1st floor bakery/deli; addition of an award-winning brewery (Albion Malleable Brewing Company); and a 4-building mix-use development that opened in 2021 (Brick Street Lofts).

Albion Reinvestment Corporation (ARC), a public non-profit organization, will undertake a large transformational redevelopment project consisting of 6 individual projects that will transform 21 commercial spaces, and create 50+ loft style apartments in a concentrated area of Superior Street between Cass Street and Erie Street. Revenue from the residential units will allow ARC to partner with entrepreneurs by offering commercial space at below market rates. This will provide small businesses with a pathway to success in the rehabilitated white-boxed spaces. Housing options are returning to downtown Albion. With the currently planned projects, significant options will become available which will breathe new life into the downtown.





## Opportunities continued

The Albion Industrial Park (AIP) is home to a diverse mix of manufacturers and shovel ready sites for new development. The AIP is home to Team One Plastics, Georgia Pacific, Consumers Energy, Trident Greenwell, Sinclair Design and Engineering and many more.

The City of Albion is alive with music, arts and culture. Not to be ignored are the natural features that make Albion so unique and attractive – like the Kalamazoo river that runs through the downtown; the North Country National Scenic Trail, the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail and the Iron Belle Trail all converging in Albion offering unparalleled access to non-motorized trails; the 65-acre trail-head park; and an abundance of local parks featuring playgrounds for all ages and live music throughout the community.

The City of Albion is undertaking a Corridor Improvement plan project that will allow Albion to be more opportunistic in regional strategy and encourage neighboring communities to strategically support the plan. Neighborhood stabilization is a goal for the community, intending to strategically approve Neighborhood Enterprise Zones (NEZ) to encourage owner occupied residential investment and attract new development opportunities.

Albion is home to Albion College, a high-ranking Midwestern Liberal Arts institution, and Kellogg Community College, with the Eastern Academic Center strategically located just outside the Albion City limits. Marshall Public School District operates within Albion offering the community kindergarten through post-secondary education with AP courses, dual enrollment, and early access to college programs. The strong alumni base of Albion College is leveraged for development opportunities. The network of educational partners collaborate and compliment through programming and resources.

Entrepreneurship is flourishing with interested residents or attraction opportunities, and customized technical assistance for marginalized individuals.

As the country emerges from the global pandemic, in-person and/or onsite employees may be a concept of the past as more and more companies adopt remote work environments. Employees no longer need to live in the high-cost areas where their employers were based. Instead they may reside in any community that fits the needs of the family. Albion is well situated to promote a remote working environment. A countywide broadband initiative will support anticipated population growth for the remote worker. While housing stock may be older it is affordable. LendEDU ranked Albion at the 16th best city for first time home buyers in the State of Michigan. The community offers beautiful, affordable historic homes and a wide selection of rental properties. The majority of these are within walking distance of the downtown district.

There are ample opportunities for residents to be involved with the city. These include public service on a city board or commission, volunteer service through one of the many non-profit organizations, active involvement in neighborhood meetings and public engagement through participation in town-hall meetings and other public engagement initiatives.

# DOWNTOWN

STABILIZE THE DOWNTOWN, ENHANCE ITS HISTORIC CHARACTER, AND SUPPORT ITS ECONOMIC GROWTH

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
Attract mixed-use development to the downtown business district that will serve the needs of the community and complement the existing business mix	AEDC	No. of downtown properties redeveloped
Attract commercial enterprise to the downtown with a mixture of existing enterprise and entrepreneurship	AEDC	No. of new commercial businesses locating in the downtown business district
Redevelop ARC Owned properties as described in the Big Albion Plan Redevelopment Project.	ARC	No. of ARC owned properties redeveloped
Albion DDA to develop and implement updated façade improvement program	DDA	No. of DDA Façade Improvements
Greater Albion Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau to enhance/grow Greater Albion Chamber network along with increasing foot-traffic to the area and developing Albion as a destination place.	GACC	Add new members to the Greater Albion Chamber network and increase engagement/participation of members, sponsors, vendors, community and visitors.

# DOWNTOWN

CONTINUED

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
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Plan for public gathering spaces that offer increased usability, accessibility and seasonality with new or existing public spaces in the Downtown Business District. Identify funding opportunities to enhance alleys, plazas and social districts.

City/DDA

Placemaking projects defined for long-term development of downtown space.

Albion College pledges to partner with City and Stakeholders to ensure a thriving, economically vibrant downtown; revitalize connecting corridors and neighborhoods; and collaborate on redevelopment efforts and transformational projects.

Albion College

College properties redeveloped and contributing as economic drivers in the community.



# HOUSING

## STRENGTHEN HOUSING MARKET AND HOUSING STOCK

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
<p>Advocate for the attraction of private and non-profit housing developers to create infill housing and the redevelopment of vacant, underutilized and brownfield sites for attainable and market rate housing options that appeal to a broad range of demographics</p>	<p>City</p>	<p>More housing options will be available to attract new residents, new tax base will be generated</p>
<p>Utilize incentives and resources to encourage developers to choose Albion and develop diverse housing options based on an updated Target Market Analysis.</p>	<p>AEDC</p>	<p>Relationships will be formed with housing developers interested in Albion projects.</p>
<p>Update Target Market Analysis</p>	<p>City</p>	<p>Updated Target Market Analysis will offer developers security in understanding the housing needs of Albion</p>
<p>Create resource packet for existing home owners to invest in their homes</p>	<p>City</p>	<p>Home owners will understand their options for investing in their property, as well as be educated as to benefits of doing so</p>

# HOUSING

## CONTINUED

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
Create Place Plans for 500 Berrien, Dalrymple, Urban Renewal and Kalamazoo River Development Site to attract housing developments	AEDC	Marketing tool will offer developers a clear understanding of what the City, its partners and residents want to see at each of the development sites
Support establishment of market rate for new construction development in Albion	AEDC/City	Albion comparable data will be available for attainable housing options
Rental Certification, define and implement, if supported	City	Quality of rental units will be enhanced where applicable
Support the efforts to secure age-in-place housing and resources to allow seniors to remain in Albion	Albion Community Foundation	New senior friendly housing will be available for Albion's aging population and to attract new residents to Albion
Advocate for attainable housing that meets the needs of the City's businesses and workforce and residents through public and private partnerships to improve overall housing stock in Albion	City, AEDC, Albion College & Albion Community Foundation	Collaborative efforts to diversify housing stock and add attainable options to attract a wide range of residents to Albion

# HOUSING

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CONTINUED

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
Research and explore the possibility of a housing development incubator, incremental development resources or a real estate investment trust	AEDC	Research will support next action items
Support the City of Albion in establishment of Neighborhood Enterprise Zones (NEZ) to encourage investment by home owners	City	NEZ zones approved



# JOBS

## RETAIN AND ATTRACT HIGH-LEVERAGE JOBS TO ALBION

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
Support the Workforce Taskforce as an active committee that annually accesses goals for the development of Albion's workforce and strengthens Albion's workforce network by partnering with key organizations and educational institutions	AEDC	Set annually to address existing workforce needs
Support the development of an industrial/business attraction committee to proactively attract new industry to Albion and establish a proactive business attraction strategy	AEDC	Committee established and active, proactive attraction strategy defined and new jobs, investment and companies located in Albion
Ensure a strong Business Retention and Expansion foundation that includes prioritizing relationships with existing businesses and open communication to partner on growth opportunities and industry challenges.	AEDC	Retained jobs and new investment
Facilitate and encourage a seamless, user-friendly experience for permitting, planning, zoning and review.	City	Strong customer service rating from businesses that interact with City and Partners.

# JOB

## CONTINUED

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
Foster entrepreneurship by supporting businesses that enhance the city's competitiveness by providing goods and services most desired by businesses, workforce and residents. Ensure that business development services reach all segments of the community and support the community's identified small business needs.	AEDC	No. of entrepreneurs in the Entrepreneurship Database.  No. of entrepreneurial businesses opened in Albion area
Bolster Albion's competitiveness by meaningful progress towards inclusive growth and accessibility through removal of barriers to entry for minority owned small businesses	AEDC	No. of minority small businesses assisted
Support connections with Albion College alumni and individuals/residents that graduated from the community looking to expand or start new businesses	AEDC/Albion College	No. of interested connections through alumni networks
Encourage Re-use and Redevelopment of brownfield sites by utilizing existing brownfield redevelopment assistance resources.	AEDC	No. of projects underway or completed.

# JOBS

## CONTINUED

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
Build Ready Sites - identify funding opportunities to invest in sites in an effort to have build ready sites available to attract new jobs and investment. <i>(lack of available space, lack of technology available, potential for a speculative building)</i>	AEDC	Number of funding opportunities pursued, awarded and extent of work accomplished
Define a Employment Strategy for regional growth (solar, MEGA site)	AEDC	Strategy defined
Build consensus and cooperation with implementing a branding, communication and trust infrastructure that identifies a vision and direction for the community and leverage the Albion brand to build awareness	City	Shared vision, branding and communication strategy that all parties participate in
Research the feasibility of a business incubator to accelerate attraction efforts and offer entrepreneurs with a testing mechanism for their business idea	AEDC / CITY	Decision made

# JOB

## CONTINUED

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
Expand fiber network and technology opportunities available for businesses and residents that allow for Albion to compete in attraction and retention of industry; expanding opportunities for remote workers and pursuing current and future funding opportunities	City	No. of technology options available in community
Support the City in remaining Redevelopment Ready Certified and business/resident friendly	City	RRC Certification ongoing
Individually or collaboratively, education partners will work to provide workforce, training and programmatic opportunities for the greater community; and align and synergize curriculum offerings and active programs with Albion's targeted industries to fit the goals of the community	Marshall Public Schools / Kellogg Community College / Albion College	Partnerships, programs and training opportunities available

# CORRIDORS

## STABILIZE THE CITY'S MAJOR CORRIDORS AND SUPPORT THEIR ECONOMIC GROWTH

OBJECTIVE	OWNER	METRIC
<p>Foster vibrant commercial districts and corridors to coordinate development, increase services and amenities offered, and responds to the market preferences of Albion businesses, employees and residents</p>	<p>City</p>	<p>Public placemaking projects completed, new businesses located to corridors</p>
<p>Support the research and development of a Corridor Improvement Plan that strengthens the visual and physical connections between the Downtown Commercial District, Albion College, I94 (Eaton) Business Corridor, Austin Avenue and the south entrance to the City of M99</p>	<p>City</p>	<p>Plan approved</p>
<p>Define a Regional Strategy for corridor improvement; build relationships that support the needs of Albion; promote a regional strategy that includes transit and healthcare.</p>	<p>City</p>	<p>Strategy defined</p>
<p>Foster vibrant commercial districts and corridors through attraction of businesses and developments to the major corridors</p>	<p>City</p>	<p>No. of new businesses/developments along major corridors</p>