



redevelopment ready  
communities®

# Report of Findings

City of Albion

August 2016

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MICHIGAN ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) is a certification program supporting community revitalization and the attraction and retention of businesses, entrepreneurs and talent throughout Michigan. RRC promotes communities to be development ready and competitive in today's economy by actively engaging stakeholders and proactively planning for the future—making them more attractive for projects that create places where people want to live, work and invest.

To become formally engaged in the RRC program, communities must complete the RRC self-evaluation and a community representative must attend all six best practice trainings when offered. The governing body must also pass a resolution of intent, outlining the value the community sees in participating in the program. A representative from city staff attended trainings in July and August of 2015. The city submitted completed self-evaluations and the Albion City Council passed a resolution of intent to participate in the program in September 2015.

Developed by experts in the public and private sector, the best practices are the standard to achieve certification

and designed to create a predictable experience for investors, businesses and residents working within a community. Communities must demonstrate that all best practice criteria have been met to receive RRC certification.




Our evaluation encourages Albion to reach further in order to receive RRC certification by utilizing strengths such as stakeholder support and involvement and an updated and user-friendly website. In a time when businesses can locate anywhere in the world, a community that is dedicated to a proactive approach for revitalization and straightforward procedures will stand out. While a spirit for redevelopment exists, the city needs to adopt a new comprehensive plan, amend the zoning ordinance to ensure regulations support the vision of the master plan, and coordinate with partners to develop and implement an economic development strategy and marketing strategy to promote the city to residents, visitors and investors. The RRC certification is a statement to the private sector that Albion's development process is streamlined, predictable and user-friendly and these steps will help ensure the city's competitiveness and secure RRC certification.

The basic assessment tool for evaluation is the RRC best practices. These six standards were developed in conjunction with public and private sector experts and address key elements of community and economic development. A community must demonstrate that all of the RRC best practice components have been met to become RRC certified. Once received, certification is valid for three years.

Measurement of a community to the best practices is completed through the RRC team's research, observation and interviews, as well as the consulting advice and technical expertise of the RRC advisory council. The team analyzes a community's development materials, including, but not limited to: the master plan;

redevelopment strategy; capital improvements plan; budget; public participation plan; zoning regulations; development procedures; applications; economic development strategy; marketing strategies; and website. Researchers observe the meetings of the community's governing body, planning commission, zoning board of appeals and other committees as applicable. In confidential interviews, the team also records the input of local business owners and developers who have worked with the community.

A community's degree of attainment for each best practice criteria is visually represented in this report by the following:

	Green indicates the best practice component is currently being met by the community.
	Yellow indicates some of the best practice component may be in place, but additional action is required.
	Red indicates the best practice component is not present or outdated.

This report represents the findings of the evaluation of the city of Albion's redevelopment processes and practices. All questions should be directed to the RRC team at [RRC@michigan.org](mailto:RRC@michigan.org).

## Best Practice 1.1—The plans

Best Practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how the redevelopment vision is embedded in the master plan, downtown plan and capital improvements plan. The master plan sets expectations for those involved in new development and redevelopment, giving the public some degree of certainty about their vision for the future, while assisting the city in achieving its stated goals. Local plans can provide key stakeholders with a roadmap for navigating the redevelopment process in the context of market realities and community goals.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA), Public Act 33 of 2008, requires that the planning commission approve a master plan as a guide for development and review the plan at least once every five years after adoption. The master plan should serve as a roadmap and foundation for future decision making, as well as the official policy guide for community development. Albion's master plan was adopted by city council in 2000. An updated master plan must be adopted, and should contain elements outlined in Best Practice 1.1, including: strategies for priority redevelopment areas, land use and infrastructure including complete streets, a zoning plan, and recommendations for implementation including goals, actions, timelines and responsible parties. Where appropriate, the goals and objectives in the new master plan should align with those in the recently adopted 2016–2020 "Parks and Recreation Master Plan." Progress on the master plan should be reported annually to the city council, and the full plan should be made accessible online. Work has already begun to update the plan by engaging the community to formulate a community visioning statement.

Downtown is often viewed as the focal point of a community; it is an indicator of economic health and serves as a gathering place. Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs) are designed to be catalysts in the development of a community's downtown district.

Albion's downtown plan is the basis for the work of the downtown development authority. Adopted in 2001, it outlines the boundaries of the district, which centers on the intersection of Cass Street and Superior Street. The plan identifies projects in priority order, and includes estimated project costs. Examples include downtown marketing, facades and signage, parking, walkways and associated infrastructure along the Kalamazoo River, streetscape improvements, park improvements, trees and pedestrian lighting. The project list covers the timeframe of 2000–2020. To improve communication, the plan should be made available online. Portions of the current master plan incorporate a vision for the downtown, including the goal of maintaining an attractive, mixed-use central business district. An updated master plan should incorporate goals, actions, timelines and responsible parties related to a vision for the downtown. Furthermore, capital improvements planned for the downtown should coordinate with a six-year capital improvements plan.

Dwindling resources and increasing costs put pressure on local governments to make limited budgets work more efficiently. A comprehensive capital improvements plan (CIP) is an essential tool for the planning and development of the physical and economic wellbeing of a community. The CIP is a tool to implement the vision and goals identified in other plans, including the master plan and downtown plan, and provides a link between planning and budgeting for capital projects. A CIP should detail a minimum of six years of public structures and improvements, and should be reviewed annually. Projects within the CIP should be coordinated to minimize construction costs, and should also coordinate with the master plan, the parks and recreation plan, and budget. Albion does not have an adopted CIP. Once adopted, the CIP should be accessible online.

## Best Practice 1.1—The plans *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt an updated master plan in compliance with MPEA and Best Practice 1.1	18 months
	The governing body has adopted a downtown plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Post plan online	3 months
	The governing body has adopted a corridor plan.	N/A	
	The governing body has adopted a capital improvements plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt a capital improvements plan in compliance with MPEA and Best Practice 1.1	9 months

## Best Practice 1.2—Public participation

Best Practice 1.2 assesses how well a community identifies its stakeholders and engages them, not only during the master planning process, but on a continual basis. A public participation strategy is essential to formalize those efforts and outline how the public will be engaged throughout planning and development processes. Public participation aims to prevent or minimize disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become an obstacle.

Albion has used both basic and proactive methods to engage stakeholders including focus groups, workshops, on-line and in-person surveys, website postings, standing advisory committees, planning commission meetings and city council meetings. In the community visioning

strategy, which guides development of a vision statement for the updated comprehensive plan, the community engagement committee will: identify Albion's economic region, identify key stakeholders, inventory community resources, write and adopt a vision statement, incorporate the community input and vision statement into the comprehensive plan, and finally, provide an annual progress report that will help review community progress toward implementing the comprehensive plan vision. Albion should formalize the sequence of events provided in this strategy into a public participation strategy that is applicable to all planning processes, not only for the purpose of updating the comprehensive plan, but on a continual basis.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community has a public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a public participation strategy as outlined in BP 1.2	6 months
	The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	✓	
	The community shares outcomes of public participation processes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Consistently communicate the results of community engagement efforts and track the success of various outreach methods	6 months

## Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates the city's zoning ordinance and assesses how well it regulates for and implements the goals of the master plan. Zoning is a significant mechanism for achieving desired land use patterns and quality development. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA) Public Act 110 of 2006, requires that a zoning ordinance be based on a plan to help guide zoning decisions. The Act requires that the master plan contain a zoning plan, which provides explanation of how the land use categories on the future land use map relate to the districts on the zoning map. Albion's master plan was last adopted prior to the enactment of MZEA Public Act 110 of 2006, and therefore does not contain a zoning plan. Once an updated master plan has been adopted, zoning district intent statements must be reviewed to ensure they reflect master plan land use recommendations and meet RRC best practices.

Zoning is an essential tool for shaping inviting, walkable communities. It plays a key role in implementing the vision in the master plan, can encourage desired development and ensure predictability for developers. Albion's zoning ordinance is not available on the city website but is available electronically upon request. The ordinance does not allow for mixed use by right, which typically occurs in the central business district. Full utilization of downtown buildings, including second or third floors for possible residential use is outlined in the intent statement of the B-2 Central Business District. However, conversion of existing space on the second or third floors for new residential use is subject to special use approval.

Form-based zoning elements can assist in achieving goals outlined in a master plan, particularly those goals that focus on the type of place the community wants to create. Form-based zoning addresses the relationship between the building facades and the public realm, assuring form and scale that is appropriate, rather than only distinctions in land-use types. Placemaking elements can also implement community goals. These elements enhance the common ground where people gather—from housing, squares, streets and plazas to parks, green spaces and waterfronts. Albion's zoning ordinance allows for restaurants and taverns to serve patrons outdoors or in an open-front building with a special use permit. Outdoor and sidewalk cafes are allowed by administrative permit through the planning department. Additional placemaking elements should be considered for inclusion in the zoning ordinance, where

appropriate. Land use regulations should also provide appropriate regulations for preservation of sensitive historic and environmental features. Albion's sign ordinance, Chapter 64 of the city code, provides for the preservation, maintenance and reconstruction of non-conforming signs of a historic nature, with planning commission approval. Section 64-17 outlines specific criteria that must be met, some of which includes: sign installation prior to 1950, association with a historic event or person, or that the sign contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of a neighborhood. Given Albion's extensive history as described in the city master plan and the cities' proximity to the north/south branch Kalamazoo River, additional regulations should be considered to ensure protection of sensitive historic and environmental features in the community.

Communities can encourage desired development types and implement the community vision through the incorporation of flexible zoning tools. The process for special use permits is described in Article II, Division 5 of the zoning ordinance, as are the general standards that a special use must comply with. Land uses requiring special use review are listed within each zoning district, along with some additional standards for specific special uses. Applications for special use permits are sent to the zoning administrator, must contain the elements listed in subsection 3, and are reviewed and approved by the planning commission. In the M-1 Light Industrial District, the ordinance allows for office, experimental laboratory, pharmaceuticals and wholesale and retail sales as permitted uses. Allowing for a variety of housing options, helps meet the communities' goals of inclusivity, walkability and economic development. Albion's zoning ordinance does allow for residential above non-residential in the B-2 Central Business District, but with a special use permit. Additional non-traditional housing options for Albion to explore include: accessory dwelling units, attached single family units, live/work, and others.

Communities can also implement a variety of master plan goals through provision of non-motorized transportation and flexible parking standards. Chapter 74 of the city code prescribes specifications for sidewalk construction and provides for the discretion of the public works department director to compel the construction of new sidewalk and repair of existing sidewalk, which could create inconsistencies in completion of a sidewalk network. Within the zoning ordinance, site plans must contain a



## Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations *continued*

pedestrian circulation system which is as insulated as possible from the vehicular circulation system, and the arrangement of new public or common ways must respect the current pattern of existing streets and pathways in the area. B-2 zoning district parking regulations allow for utilization of municipal lots for off-street parking and/or loading when adequate space is not available to meet ordinance requirements, subject to the approval of the zoning administrator and chief of police.

Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in developed areas. Street trees and parking lot landscaping can help mitigate the impact of the heat island effect and enhance the appearance of a community. While Division 9 of the zoning ordinance does require parking lot landscaping, additional standards regarding stormwater

discharge, green infrastructure and street trees should be considered for possible inclusion in the next zoning ordinance update.

Clarity of ordinance rules, requirements, definitions and processes is critical to entice investment in a community, as is the ease of obtaining a copy of the ordinances themselves. Albion's zoning ordinance should be reviewed for formatting consistency, and for the addition of graphics and use matrices where appropriate. Some ordinance requirements are best portrayed through the use of visual tools. The use of a matrix would allow for easy comparison of requirements across zoning districts. Albion's zoning ordinance is available by electronic request. An updated zoning ordinance is not available online.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the master plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Once a master plan zoning plan is adopted, determine if zoning map or ordinance text changes are needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Once a master plan is adopted, review zoning district intent statements to reflect master plan land use recommendations.	24 months
	The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt zoning ordinance provisions in appropriate areas for concentrated development by right <input type="checkbox"/> Determine if needed and adopt additional regulations to protect sensitive historic and environmental features	24 months
	The zoning ordinance includes flexible tools to encourage development and redevelopment.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt zoning ordinance provisions that allow for non-traditional housing types	24 months
	The zoning ordinance includes standards to improve non-motorized transportation.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt standards to improve non-motorized transportation in the zoning ordinance	24 months
	The zoning ordinance includes flexible parking standards.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt standards to improve green infrastructure in the zoning ordinance, per Best Practice 2.1	
	The zoning ordinance is user-friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/> Add graphics, matrices or other visual tools to improve user-friendliness of the zoning ordinance	24 months

## Best Practice 3.1—Development review policy and procedures

Best Practice 3.1 evaluates the city's site plan review policies and procedures, project tracking and internal/external communications. The purpose of the site plan review process is to ensure that plans for specific types of development comply with ordinance regulations. An efficient site plan review process is integral to becoming redevelopment ready and can assist a community in attracting investment dollars. Site plan review procedures and timelines should be communicated in a clear and concise manner to prospective developers and business owners. To do this, sound internal procedures need to be in place and followed.

Albion's site plan review process is outlined in Division 8 of Article V in the zoning ordinance. The section first describes the instances in which site plan review is required. Applications for site plan review are submitted to the Department of Neighborhood Services. The detailed site plan must contain all of the information outlined in the following section. The ordinance requires the Department of Neighborhood Services and planning commission to seek the recommendations of the city inspector, city engineer, public safety chief, fire marshal, and water and sewer department prior to a final decision. To expedite the review process, the planning commission or Department of Neighborhood Services may condition approval of a site plan on conformance with the standards of another local, county or state agency. Site plans must be acted upon within 30 days of receipt by the City of Albion Department of Neighborhood Services. "Major projects" require preliminary site plan review (by the planning commission) and final site plan review (by the Department of Neighborhood Services). If the application is dependent upon the granting of variances by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), approval of the variance is necessary before final site plan approval can be granted. "Minor projects" require review and approval

by the Department of Neighborhood Services. Section 30-426 provides standards for granting site plan approval. The process for amending a site plan is explained at the end of Division 8 of Article V. Decisions of the planning commission or Department of Neighborhood Services in granting or denying approval of a final site plan may be appealed to the ZBA. Permit and process details are provided on the planning and zoning webpage of the Albion city website. The webpage provides contact information for planning, building, and code enforcement. It also describes the role of the planning and zoning office, which is to encourage and regulate property development, identify and implement goals for the community, coordinate public improvements and work toward local revitalization. Planning department staff are available to discuss a project at any time, especially prior to applying for any permits or approvals. Flowchart(s) of development processes, including timelines, would enhance communication between the city and prospective developers by visually and quickly portraying the process that is described in the text of zoning ordinance. Additionally, a tracking mechanism for projects during the development process, and during the permitting and inspections process, allows for continuity of the development review by enhancing communication amongst all parties involved.

To cut down on unexpected time delays, the city should also assist a developer in soliciting input on a proposal prior to site plan approval; this should be detailed in the public participation strategy. This assistance could be as simple as providing mailing labels to a developer of nearby homes and businesses that would be impacted by a proposed project. Feedback indicated generally positive customer service experiences throughout the development review process, including interactions with staff, boards and commissions.

## Best Practice 3.1—Development review policy and procedures *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.	✓	
	The community has a qualified intake professional.	✓	
	The community defines and offers conceptual site plan review meetings for applicants.	✓	
	The community encourages a developer to seek input from neighboring residents and businesses at the onset of the application process.	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate policy that assists developers in seeking input into the public participation strategy	12 months
	The appropriate departments engage in joint site plan reviews.	✓	
	The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.	✓	
	The community promptly acts on development requests.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop an easy to follow flowchart of development requests that include timelines	6 months
	The community has a method to track development projects.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a formal tracking mechanism for development projects	6 months
	The community annually reviews the successes and challenges with the site plan review and approval procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a formal customer feedback mechanism; integrate changes in process where applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Hold joint site plan review team meetings, including permitting and inspections staff	6 months

## Best Practice 3.2—Guide to Development

Best Practice 3.2 evaluates the availability of the community’s development information. Land use planning and development involve a wide range of stakeholders. For the process to work effectively, everyone involved must understand roles and responsibilities. Development materials should be assembled to help citizens, developers and public officials gain a better understanding of how the process works in each community. Some of the guide to development items are available on the city of Albion website, including the fee schedule, board and commission schedules, contact information for planning and zoning staff, financial incentives through the economic

development corporation, general availability of conceptual site plan review and links to building permit requirements and applications. Information to be added includes flowcharts of the development process including timelines, the zoning ordinance and other appropriate ordinances, and planning and zoning applications (site plan review, rezoning, special use, variance). Once the additional items are gathered, they must be assembled in a cohesive way that allows for easy linkages amongst all of the components. Albion’s 2016 development fees are posted on the website under “City Services;” the fee schedule is reviewed prior to the start of each calendar year. Albion accepts credit card payment for fees.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community maintains an online guide to development that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	<input type="checkbox"/> Collect and assemble all “Guide to Development” components	6 months
	The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	✓	

## Best Practice 4.1—Recruitment and orientation

Best Practice 4.1 evaluates how a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed or elected officials. Numerous boards, commissions and committees advise city leaders on key policy decisions. Applications for board and commission openings are available on the City of Albion website. A list of current board and commission openings is also provided. The application describes the minimum requirements to serve and requests the applicant to provide their board(s) of interest, their goals in doing so and references. Within individual pages for each board and commission are descriptions of their purpose, regulatory

authority, composition of their membership, residency requirements, length of term, meeting frequency and the name and contact information for current members. Desired skill sets should be outlined as well. Once appointed, new board and committee members should be provided orientation packets that contain all relevant information as appropriate, such as board procedures or bylaws, Open Meetings Act, Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, copies of the master plan and zoning ordinance and any other pertinent information.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community sets expectations for board and commission positions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outline desired skills sets for board and commission members	3 months
	The community provides orientation packets to all appointed and elected members of development-related boards and commissions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide orientation packets to all appointed and elected members of development related boards and commissions	3 months

## Best Practice 4.2—Education and training

Best Practice 4.2 assesses how a community encourages training and tracks education needs for appointed and elected officials and staff. Trainings provide officials and staff with an opportunity to expand their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues. A tracking mechanism for logging individual training needs and attendance should be created. This can be as simple as a spreadsheet, and could include a template training report to be used in sharing information with those not in attendance. Tracking training attendance allows for easy identification of gaps in knowledge and can assist in identifying future trainings to accomplish stated goals and objectives. Collaborative work sessions, including joint trainings on development topics, allows for sharing of information amongst those boards and commissions that have a hand in the development process. The planning commission's annual report,

which is required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, could also be reviewed at these work sessions. A recent training on walkable cities was held jointly by the planning commission and Albion Economic Development Corporation to encourage city officials, board members and the public to learn about how to make Albion a walkable community. Continuing this practice of regular, collaborative trainings and work sessions builds trust and understanding between the various boards and commissions that each play a role in the development process. At a minimum, the Planning Commission, Downtown Development Authority, Economic Development Corporation and the city council should meet collaboratively at least once per year to discuss development issues and opportunities. Training attendees should also provide a recap for those not able to attend. Albion does not currently budget training dollars for elected and appointed officials and staff.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	<input type="checkbox"/> Budget for training needs of elected and appointed officials and staff	12 months
	The community identifies training needs and tracks attendance of the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a simple tracking mechanism to log training needs and attendance	6 months
	The community encourages the governing body, boards, commissions and staff to attend trainings.	<input type="checkbox"/> Implement consistent processes to consistently notify elected and appointed officials and staff about training opportunities	3 months
	The community shares information between the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> Implement consistent processes for training participants to share information with those not in attendance <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare planning commission annual report, as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act	12 months

## Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites®

Best Practice 5.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions for and markets their priority redevelopment sites. Communities must think strategically about the redevelopment of properties. Investments should be targeted in areas that have the potential for positive future development. Focusing on the redevelopment and reuse of a single property can catalyze further development around it. Restoring buildings without a community-generated vision for the surrounding area is often insufficient to generate lasting change.

The Albion Economic Development Corporation provides economic development services for the city, including business attraction, assistance and retention. Priority sites for redevelopment are listed on the Albion EDC website. The website does not include priority redevelopment sites identified by the city which are located in the downtown, including 200 West Center Street and 301 North Clinton Street. Basic information has been gathered for both the two priority downtown sites, as shown in the “Opportunity Michigan” book, and for the priority sites listed on the Albion EDC webpage.

Important in stimulating developer interest in these priority sites is the formation of a vision that is based upon input from the public, including desired development outcomes and specific development criteria. Discussion of a vision and any additional public engagement is often incorporated into other planning processes, such as a master plan update. Community champions for redevelopment of the sites have been identified, primarily being the Albion EDC. The Albion EDC website also identifies a variety of incentives available. One site must be packaged to the property information package standard, as detailed in Best Practice 5.1. A site packaged to this standard includes both the basic information, and additional applicable information as outlined in Best Practice 5.1. Once developed, the property information package should be marketed online. Partner entities, including the Downtown Development Authority and the Economic Development Corporation, should be engaged to assist in identifying negotiable resources for priority sites and to participate in the marketing of sites located in their respective areas.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community identifies and prioritizes redevelopment sites.	✓	
	The community gathers basic information for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓	
	The community has developed a vision for the priority redevelopment sites.	<input type="checkbox"/> Utilizing public input, articulate a vision for the priority redevelopment sites	18 months
	The community identifies potential resources and incentives for prioritized redevelopment sites.	<input type="checkbox"/> Verify that all negotiable resources and incentives for priority redevelopment site(s) are identified, including those offered by partner entities	3 months
	A property information package for the prioritized redevelopment site(s) is assembled.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assemble property information package, per Best Practice 5.1	6 months
	Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop and market property information package(s) online in collaboration with partner entities	8 months



## Best Practice 6.1—Economic development strategy

Best Practice 6.1 evaluates goals and actions identified by the community to assist in strengthening its overall economic health. Strategic economic development planning is critical to attract jobs and new investment in communities. Economic, employment and retail data in Albion's 2000 master plan provide a foundation for economic development efforts in the city by identifying the economic opportunities and challenges of the community. Other entities work to stimulate economic investment in the community, including the Albion Economic Development Corporation and the Albion Chamber of Commerce. The "Regional Prosperity Initiative Plan" developed through the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission provides goals and opportunities for enhancing the economic competitiveness of the regional economy, which should contain themes that should align with local economic development strategies. The "Regional Prosperity Initiative Plan" includes goals and opportunities in the areas of community development, education,

infrastructure and RPI strategies.

An approved economic development strategy helps make a compelling business case for attracting investment and jobs. The strategy should describe a vision and goals, along with implementation steps including actions, timelines and responsible parties. The strategy should be accessible online and should connect to the master plan, capital improvements plan and any other important planning documents. Practically speaking, an approved economic development strategy can guide the day to day work of staff involved in the efforts, and can provide milestones for easy determination on an annual basis of whether established goals are being met. While data and information in a master plan are often the foundation for a strategy, a standalone economic development strategy can be prepared that outlines economic development goals and draws specific attention to economic development opportunities.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community has approved an economic development strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop an economic development strategy, in compliance with Best Practice 6.1.	18 months
	The community annually reviews the economic development strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Annually report progress made on the economic development strategy to the governing body	24 months



## Best Practice 6.2—Marketing and promotion

Best Practice 6.2 evaluates how the community promotes and markets itself. Community marketing and promotion can take many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that rekindles community pride and improves consumer and investor confidence. Marketing and branding should frame what sets a community apart from others.

Many partner entities market the Albion community to their respective audiences, including the Albion Economic Development Corporation, the Albion Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Development Authority, the Albion Community Foundation, Albion College and other regional and state partners. Coordination amongst these entities ensures that messaging and branding of the community is consistent, accurate, assists in achieving identified goals and utilizes the strengths of each entity. A marketing strategy identifies opportunities and outlines specific steps to attract businesses, consumers and real estate development to the community, and in doing so, strengthens an image for the community. The strategy should also include approaches for marketing priority redevelopment sites. Coalescing around common goals and strategies, with implementation carried out by the various partner entities, can greatly benefit the greater Albion community and the city of Albion, as marketing campaigns can assist with sharing the established community vision, values and goals articulated in city plans.

A municipal website serves multiple functions. At a basic level, it is a means to share information about public meetings, access public documents, find links to other community organizations and to obtain general

information. Beyond this, a municipal website is also a significant expression of community character and image. People that are unfamiliar with a community will often first look to a website for information and they will form important first impressions and conclusions. Visitors to a community's website need to be able to find accurate information quickly. The importance of a user-friendly website cannot be overstated.

Albion's home page is clean, organized and well-maintained with updated information about current events. The menu bar at the top includes appropriate quick links for the various website audiences (government, departments, services, community, business, and how-tos). There is style consistency throughout, such as contact names and information in blue square boxes. A search bar at the top is highly important, as many visitors to a site will use this function before ever attempting to navigate the site on their own; Albion's homepage includes this feature. The homepage also includes a variety of photos and visually appealing graphics. The city could consider incorporating these elements into other parts of the website to help break up large blocks of text. Many useful external hyperlinks are provided, including a quick link for the Albion Economic Development Authority. Links to social media pages are provided as well. To improve the website, the planning, zoning and development information should be better grouped, and additional items must be added to help the visitor fully understand the development review process. Missing guide to development documents must be uploaded to the website when complete, along with the property information package(s).

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community has developed a marketing strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a unified marketing strategy as outlined in BP 6.2	24 months
	The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.	<input type="checkbox"/> Add missing planning, zoning and development items to website as they are completed <input type="checkbox"/> Better group planning, zoning and development items on the website	18 months

The RRC program assists communities in maximizing their economic potential by embracing effective redevelopment tools and best practices. The city must find a balance between removing unnecessary delays and hurdles, while preserving the integrity of the community's vision and goals, positioning the city for success. Next steps for the city include the governing body adopting a resolution of support to proceed with

the RRC program. Staff have already attended the RRC best practice trainings and are required to submit quarterly progress reports to inform the RRC team of progress made in terms of implementing the necessary steps to meet the RRC best practices. Upon meeting all of the best practice criteria, Albion will be a certified Redevelopment Ready Community®.