ALBANY 2030

The City of Albany Comprehensive Plan

DRAFT

ALBANY 2030

your city. your future.

THE VISION OF ALBANY IN 2030

Albany in 2030 has built on its history and diverse natural, cultural, institutional, and human resources to become a global model for sustainable revitalization and urban livability. The city promotes a balanced approach to economic opportunity, social equity, and environmental quality that is locally driven, encourages citizen involvement and investment, and benefits all residents.

THE VISION COMPONENTS

1. Safe, Livable Neighborhoods

Every neighborhood in Albany is a desirable place to live because of its walkable streets, historic architecture, range of housing choices, mixed-use neighborhood centers, quality schools, parks and recreation facilities, and easy access to Downtown Albany and other job centers.

2. Model Educational System

Albany nurtures its most valuable resources, its children, by promoting excellence in education at all levels. The City's institutions of higher education are valued resources and partners in initiatives to expand economic opportunities, enhance work force skills, and promote lifelong learning.

3. Vibrant Urban Center

As the capital of New York and a destination for work, play, and tourism, Albany is the region's primary center of government, education, health care, employment, and the arts. Downtown Albany is a vibrant mix of business, residential, educational, cultural, and entertainment uses connected to the Hudson River waterfront.

4. Multi-Modal Transportation Hub

Albany's neighborhoods and centers are connected to each other and to the rest of the region by an extensive, efficient, and safe network of complete streets, mass transit, bikeways, trails, and sidewalks.

5. Green City

Albany is a model of community health and sustainability in its planning, restorative development, and conservation of energy, water, and natural resources.

6. Prosperous Economy

The city is a pillar of the regional and global economies, providing good employment opportunities for all residents with a focus on green jobs and technology.

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*Appendices are included for reference and not ratified by the Common Council adoption process

CHAPTER 1.0

1.0 Introduction

1.1 WHY A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

Albany, New York's state capital, is a historic city located on the west bank of the Hudson River about 150 miles north of New York City. First settled by the Dutch in 1614, Albany is the one of the oldest surviving settlements of the original thirteen colonies and the longest continuously chartered city in the United States (since 1686). The City's deep history and heritage is reflected in its spectacular natural setting on the Hudson River, historic building stock, major institutions, downtown (the region's prime activity center), and the attachment of its residents to their neighborhoods.

The City of Albany has chosen a key juncture in its 400-year history to prepare its first ever comprehensive plan, given the accelerating rate of transition and change in the 21st century. Looking forward 20 years and beyond, the plan provides the opportunity to set a new direction for a sustainable, prosperous future. To fully appreciate the significance of Albany 2030 for the City and its residents, it is useful to consider the basic purposes of a comprehensive plan:

1. A Comprehensive Plan is an expression of citizens' values, aspirations, and shared vision of the future.

Just as one would not begin a journey without first identifying a destination, the process of developing the Albany 2030 Plan began with citizens articulating in numerous meetings and workshops the kind of place they would like Albany to become. The resulting Vision Statement (Chapter 2) defines citizens' expectations and directions for Albany by the year 2030, sets the mandate for the strategies and actions detailed in this Comprehensive Plan document, and provides the benchmark to measure implementation progress.

2. A Comprehensive Plan sets a citywide framework to define how all of the City's plans, initiatives, investments, etc. fit together.

Albany has prepared many plans over the years for different areas within the City (e.g., neighborhoods and corridors) and topical concerns (e.g., transportation improvements and economic development). City leaders regularly make decisions on capital investments and programs without the benefit of a comprehensive "lens" through which to evaluate broader, citywide implications. The Albany 2030 Plan provides the overall framework to ensure that all of these plans, programs, and investments are aligned to support a common direction for Albany's future.

View of Downtown Albany from the north.

3. A Comprehensive Plan is a guide for the management of change.

If the vision for Albany's future is to be realized, the Albany 2030 Plan must positively and deliberately influence how the City changes over time. To do so, the Plan must be actively used to guide how priorities are established, decisions are made, and actions are taken to advance Albany towards the vision. While city government will take a leadership role in this effort, the Plan calls on citizens, civic organizations, major public and private institutions, other levels of government, and businesses to coordinate efforts with a spirit of partnership and shared sense of direction.

4. A Comprehensive Plan is the foundation and reference point for policy and decision-making.

The "meat" of the Albany 2030 Plan is contained in Chapter 3, which defines specific policy directives (goals, strategies, and actions) for the functional components of the Plan. The Albany 2030 Plan takes a systems approach designed to leverage the interrelationships and synergies between these components (community form, economy, transportation, etc.) to achieve the Albany of the future envisioned by citizens. Integration of the goals, strategies, and actions into day-to-day decision-making, ongoing management and operations, and long-range planning by city government and its partners will be critical to the success of the Albany 2030 Plan.

5. A Comprehensive Plan is Albany's "to do" list.

The Albany 2030 Plan's influence on Albany's future will be a product of the motivating power of its shared vision and the effectiveness of actions taken to turn the vision into reality. The vision will be realized through steady progress made by adhering to a well-defined game plan that sets priorities for effective, short and long-term actions, as well as a process to monitor progress and adapt to changing circumstances. Chapter 4 of the Plan lays out a comprehensive program for action to produce tangible results in achieving the Albany 2030 Vision.

1.2 PLANNING CONTEXT

In accordance with New York State planning law regarding comprehensive planning, the Albany 2030 Plan addresses the City of Albany as a political jurisdiction. However, Albany is part of larger regions defined by natural and economic influences. The City is located in the Lower Hudson River Watershed, which makes up about 40% of the Hudson/Mohawk River Basin, one of the largest drainage areas on the eastern seaboard

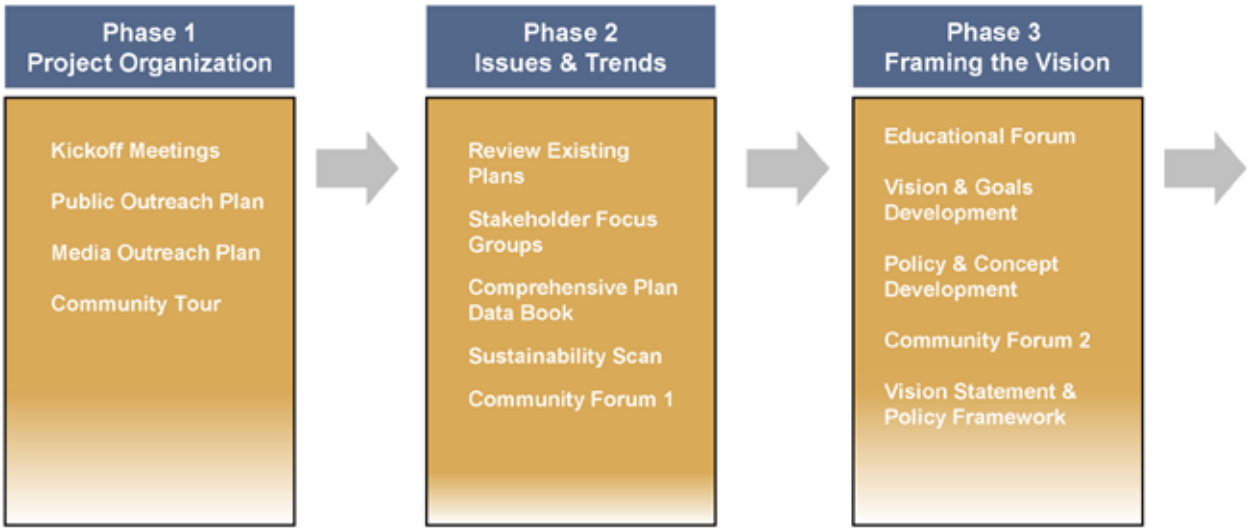
of the United States. From the economic perspective, Albany is located in the heart of New York's Capital Region, which encompasses Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady Counties. The Capital Region is in turn part of New York's Tech Valley, which stretches from the Canadian border near Montreal to just north of New York City.

The technology sector is a major contributor to the Capital Region economy, spurred by investments such as the NanoTech Complex at the University at Albany and the semiconductor fabrication plant under construction by Global Foundries in Saratoga County. Albany is the largest of the Capital Region's cities (followed by Schenectady, Troy, and Saratoga Springs), and it is the region's major center for state government, higher education, arts and culture, and health care. It is strategically located overlooking the Hudson Valley midway up the Tech Valley from New York City. According to the Tech Valley Chamber Coalition, the "Tech Valley offers rewarding career and business prospects, world-class educational and research facilities, and a fantastic quality of life" as a place to "Live, Work, and Play" (www.techvalley.org).

The challenge and the opportunity for the City of Albany is to leverage its position within these dynamic regions, along with intrinsic assets such as its natural setting, historic building stock, and the spirit of its people, to reverse the national trend of urban disinvestment over the past few decades and increase quality of life and economic opportunity for residents. Despite this national trend, Albany has been successful in attracting more than $6.5 billion in investment over the last two decades, indicating the strength of Albany's market and the commitment of local stakeholders. Albany can build from this significant investment by striving to achieve the community's vision and goals set forth in Albany 2030. Regional cooperation among municipalities and agencies (e.g., the Capital District Transportation Authority, Capital District Transportation Committee, the Center for Economic Growth and Capital District Regional Planning Commission) and participation by Albany in regional initiatives are key to continuing this investment and achievng the goals outlined in the Vision Statement and are the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan's strategies and actions.

While Albany 2030 is the first comprehensive plan in the City's history, numerous neighborhood, district, corridor, and topical plans (e.g., for economic development or transportation improvements) have been prepared over the years. Examples include the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan (July 2003), Midtown Colleges and University Plan Report (2005), Park South Urban Renewal Plan (2006), Capital South Plan (2007), Capitalize Albany (1996-2007), Albany SDAT: A Sustainable Capital for the 21st Century (2007), the Albany Bicycle Master Plan (2010), and the Education District Enhancement Study (2011). In accordance with the second major comprehensive plan purpose described above in Section 1.1, the Albany 2030 goals, strategies, and actions incorporate and align directions set by these and other plans and initiatives.

PLANNING PROCESS — STAGE ONE

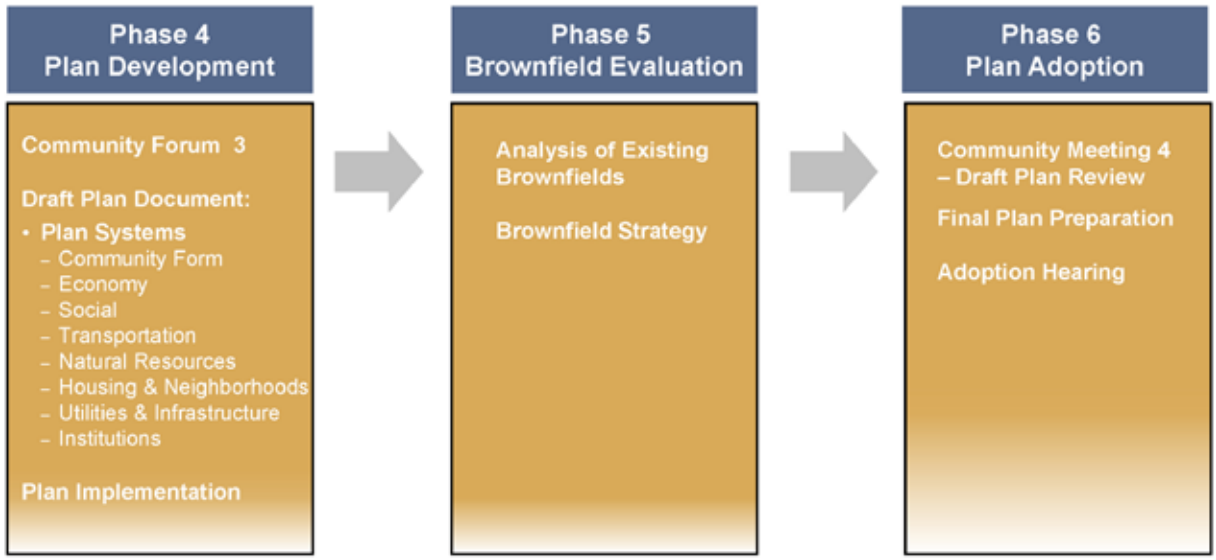


As recent citywide plans, the SDAT report and Capitalize Albany are particularly germane to the Albany 2030 Plan. The SDAT report presents the work of a Sustainable Design Assessment Team sponsored by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) to assist the City and its citizens in addressing key issues facing Albany, framed to inform subsequent development of a comprehensive plan for the City. Recommendations such as addressing the vacant properties in many of the city's neighborhoods, building a more sustainable transportation system, achieving better stewardship of the City's open spaces, and promoting energy efficiency are reflected in the Albany 2030 strategies and actions. Prepared by 49 community stakeholders, the latest report of Capitalize Albany is an economic development strategy that builds on the successes of the original, an economic revitalization vision and strategy prepared in 1996. It addresses opportunities and challenges in three focus areas: Development, Neighborhood Revitalization, and Education. As with the SDAT report, Recapitalize Albany recommendations are integrated throughout the Comprehensive Plan.

1.3 PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

The process of preparing the first comprehensive plan in Albany's 400-year history began in September 2009. Prior to initiation of the process, a Comprehensive Plan Board consisting of citizens, department heads, business owners and stakeholders was appointed by Common Council to provide direction for development of the plan and to make recommendations regarding its adoption. The process consisted of two stages, Community Assessment and Visioning and development of the full Albany 2030 Plan:

PLANNING PROCESS — STAGE TWO



1. Stage One – Community Assessment and Visioning: This stage of the planning process consisted of three phases. In the first phase, city staff worked with the consultant team to finalize the work program, schedule, and means to engage members of the public and representatives of key stakeholder organizations (governmental agencies, neighborhood groups, environmental and economic development interests, etc.) in the process.

   In the second phase, key issues and trends related to Albany's population, economy, and environment were identified through data collection and analysis, review of existing plans and studies, and interviews with a broad range of community stakeholders. These issues and trends are documented in the Comprehensive Plan Data Book and the Sustainability Scan.

   The third phase of the process involved extensive community outreach to engage thousands of citizens in articulating a vision for Albany's future. This outreach included two series of community forums (three meetings each in different parts of the City); an interactive Albany 2030 website; house parties (at which residents gathered with their friends and neighbors to generate ideas about Albany's future); "stoop" surveys (engaging residents in their own neighborhoods to discuss issues and complete written surveys), and other means of soliciting input. The results provided the basis for preparing an overarching Vision Statement for Albany in the year 2030 (presented in Chapter 2) and an initial set of policy directions to set the framework for development of the full comprehensive plan in Stage 2.

[1] The consultant team was led by Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC (WRT) with PlaceMatters (community engagement), Eng-Wong Taub and Associates (transportation), and Economic Stewardship (economics).

2. Stage Two – The Comprehensive Plan: The full Albany 2030 Plan establishes the specific steps to be taken to "change course" by influencing current conditions and trends to achieve the future Albany envisioned by citizens. Stage Two began with a third community forum series, during which citizens reviewed the Vision Statement and policy directions developed in Stage One and identified community priorities for action. City staff and consultants then worked with the Comprehensive Plan Board to translate the community input into:

   - **Strategies and actions** for each of the eight plan components (conceived as interrelated "systems" rather than separate "elements" as is typical of the traditional comprehensive plan);
   - **Projects** synthesized from the system strategies and actions into a short, intermediate, and long-term program for action to implement the Plan; and
   - A **plan monitoring** process to measure progress in implementing and evaluating the Albany 2030 Plan over time.

In addition, Stage Two included an evaluation of existing brownfield areas within Albany, identification of potential brownfield redevelopment sites, and incorporation of a brownfield redevelopment strategy into the Albany 2030 Plan strategies, actions, and implementation projects (see Section 1.5 below).

1.4 PUBLIC OUTREACH

Begun in 2009, the Albany 2030 process was designed to engage all members of the Albany community and regional partners in developing a vision for the city's future. Over a two-year period, the City solicited public input on existing issues within the city and the community's aspirations for its short- and long-term futures. Guided by a Comprehensive Plan Board that consisted of a cross-section of community representatives, the Albany 2030 process ensured that the comprehensive plan is a truly collaborative product that reflects innovative planning strategies fitted to Albany's unique environment and the concerns and values of its community.

Broad and meaningful community engagement is critical to the success of the Albany 2030 plan and a primary goal of the Albany 2030 plan process. To achieve this goal, the City and the plan consultant team developed a detailed framework to guide public outreach. This framework identified a range of ways to go beyond mere plan advertising and involve the community in an interactive, iterative process. All public meetings, focus group interviews, and outreach strategies included the following primary objectives:

- Build understanding of the project and credibility for the process.
- Provide numerous and varied opportunities for public participation and input.
- Understand the needs and interests of the City's diverse constituency.
- Show a clear connection between input and outcomes.

To achieve these objectives, the City developed an innovative outreach and community engagement approach designed to maximize citizen involvement and to maintain interest and enthusiasm throughout the planning process.

Albany 2030 - A Model Outreach Approach

Effective community outreach involves a multitude of techniques to promote the plan and engage Albany's diverse constituents who have different interests, time commitments, mobility needs, and technological capabilities. The Albany 2030 outreach process involved a variety of techniques designed to solicit ideas and aspirations for Albany's future while keeping the process transparent, inclusive, accessible, and fun:

- Branding and Promotion

Branding and promotion is an often overlooked, but extremely important task in the comprehensive planning process. To initiate and capture interest in the comprehensive plan, an identifiable brand was established for the project, including a project logo, a consistent color scheme, and an enthusiastic message.

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your city. your future.

In addition, a continual and diverse promotional campaign was developed to maintain community excitement and involvement throughout the planning process, including:

- More than 10,000 fun, eye-catching, and engaging fliers/posters circulated throughout the City at atypical locations, including bars, gas stations, bus shelters, buses, senior living centers – fliers were also sent home with school children.
- Opportunities for text-messaging and social media input at promotional events and public forums.
- Public Service Announcements on a variety of local radio stations.
- Links from local websites.
- Stories in local media.
- Presentations to local civic and business groups.
- Listserv announcements to more than 1,000 people.

Principles of the Albany 2030 Public Participation Plan

- Open to All
- Community Engagement
- Transparency
- Enthusiastic & Vibrant
- Engaging Underrepresented Groups
- Fun

- Community Forums

The City and consultant team held three community forum series to provide the opportunity for Albany's citizens to openly discuss their concerns, values and aspirations, and priorities for Albany's future. Each community forum included a series of meetings located in three strategically accessible locations in the City and at different days and times to maximize participation.

The first community forum meeting series was designed to define areas of consensus on the important issues facing the City. The meeting began with a summary presentation of the findings of the data trends analysis and stakeholder interviews to set the context for facilitated citizen discourse. The citizen participants were then asked to organize into facilitated breakout groups to discuss and build consensus on Albany's strengths, weaknesses, and vision for the future. Keypad polling allowed participants to prioritize the issues by voting on the top five strengths, weaknesses, and vision ideas and receive real-time results.

Community Forum 2 was conducted for the purpose of obtaining public input on the Vision Statement and to build consensus on priorities for goals and objectives based on the vision components. The Vision Statement and vision components, described in more detail in Chapter 2, provide the basis for formulating a set of objectives that were used to develop the policy framework and direct priorities for action in the implementation phase of the Comprehensive Plan. Participants in Community Forum 2 used keypad polling to vote on the degree to which they agreed with the Vision Statement and vision components. Participants were then asked to organize into facilitated breakout groups based

on each of the five vision components and generate goals for that component. Each group then picked their top three goals and submitted them to the technology group for computerized processing.

The third round of community forums focused on prioritizing investment types and conducting a mock budget allocation exercise to ascertain community preferences for development and investment in Albany based on the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan systems. The first exercise included keypad polling on the preferences for various investment types within five categories:

- Neighborhood Investment
- Multi-Modal Transportation Hub
- Neighborhood Commercial Centers
- Regional Centers
- Greenways and Open Space

Participants mapped their top three preferred locations for investment in each category, and these locations were mapped electronically using Google Maps. The second exercise allowed participants to allocate $100 dollars into each of the eight plan systems,

House Parties

For each of the three Community Forums, the City and consultant team created "House Party" materials that mimicked the exercises conducted in the Forums. These "do-it-yourself" versions of the forums provided intimate gatherings held by residents in their homes, allowing for informal discussion among neighbors.

The House Party materials were available at each forum and on the Albany 2030 website. These materials were also used at some of the small group meetings hosted by the City that were held outside the forums.

entering the amounts into a shared spreadsheet. The average allocation for each system was quickly calculated using keypad polling. Participant groups were then assigned one system and given the average amount allocated to that system to allocate among the sub-system components. The outcomes of the third round of Forums were a prioritization of types of investment and prioritization with relative dollar amounts for each of the comprehensive plan systems.

A brief overview of the Community Forum results is included at the end of this section. More detailed public outreach results are included in Appendix B.

- Interactive Website and Social Media

While reaching out to constituents of all ages, abilities, and interests is a key component of the public engagement plan, the City recognizes the importance of incorporating contemporary social media and web technology to capture the interest and participation of young professionals and anyone else who relies on access to instant communication. Incorporation of web technology and social media include the following features:

  – The Albany 2030 Interactive Website

The Albany 2030 interactive website provides a comprehensive resource for outreach, feedback, and information sharing. The site has three main areas: Learn, Share, and Participate. The Learn section of the website includes an About section with information about the Albany 2030 process, the consultant team, the Comprehensive Plan Board members, and about comprehensive planning in general. The Participate section includes a calendar and information on all events, commenting on events, a section to

sign up for email updates as well as RSS and SMS feeds [emails (RSS) and text messages (SMS) that are sent when updates to the site are made]. The Share section of the site includes the Citizen Journal, which allows users to upload photos, text, and video describing their opinions about Albany, strengths and challenges, and examples of what they envision for the future. The Share section also includes Online Surveys to provide a quick way of entering feedback during each participation round following the Community Forum themes.

City Staff have been trained on the use of the website content management system so that the City can continue to use the Albany2030.org site for future projects and events.

Albany 2030 and Social Media

Facebook – Roughly 500 "Likes"

Twitter – Over 280 Followers

LinkedIn – Over 50 Members

– Facebook, Twitter, Linked In

The City set up fully interactive social media sites for the Albany 2030 plan, including a Facebook page, Twitter account, and LinkedIn group to allow for immediate feedback and to keep a constant open line of communication. The three social media have been used regularly to announce events, send reminders, and launch discussions, allowing the City and consultant team to take the community's temperature on current issues and Albany 2030 topics.

- Creative Outreach Techniques

To engage citizens with limited access to computer technology and those who do not normally participate in formal meetings, additional outreach techniques were employed, including reaching out to familiar places and venues, such as neighborhood events and festivals, churches, schools, and stoop surveys. Examples of innovative outreach techniques used to maximize community participation and provide a wider platform for discussing Albany 2030 topics include:

– Stakeholder Roundtables

These were held at the beginning and toward the completion of the planning process to engage "experts" with various interests and knowledge of the Albany community to set the project on the right course. Over 100 community representatives, including leaders in banking/lending, real estate development, social services, housing, economic development, education, etc., participated in the discussions.

– Micro-meetings

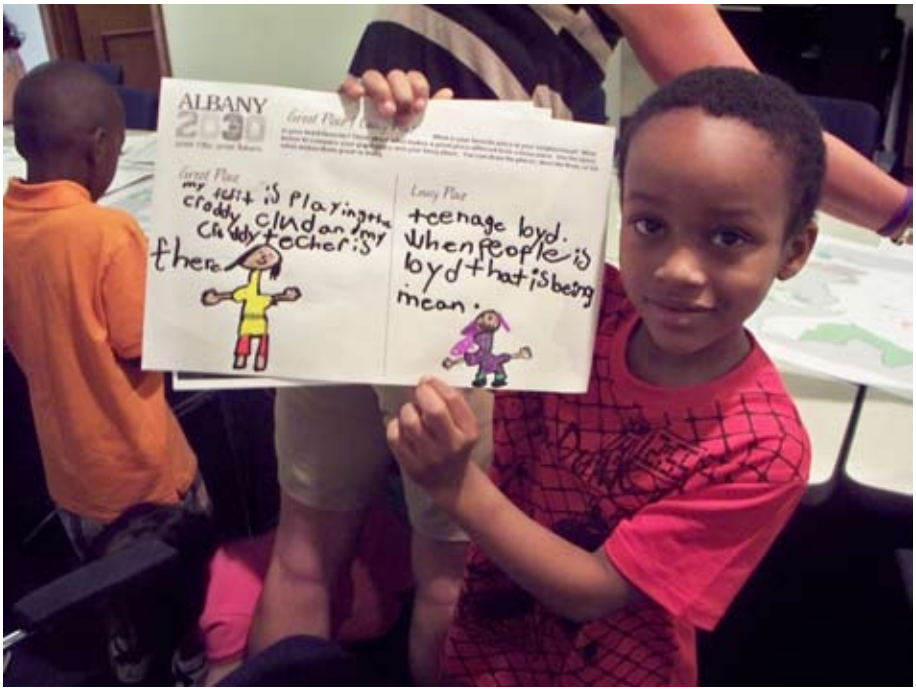
Dozens of micro-meetings, or scaled-down versions of the Community Forums, were conducted by the City and consultant team to reach targeted groups who have limited access to centralized public meetings. Specifically, the City held meetings with the City Rescue Mission to hear from the homeless population, a first grade class to engage school children, and assisted living facilities to reach out to seniors.

– Speed Planning

An additional event using a networking mixer format was used to engage young professionals in the planning process. The "Speed Planning" event was based on the "speed dating" concept and allowed participants to have conversations at tables on various topics for about 10 minutes, then move on to the next table. The participants never met with the same group twice. This event, which had 21 attendees, allowed young professionals to meet and have conversations, but also quickly introduced Albany 2030 topics and allowed for input.

– Stoop Surveys

The most effective method employed for engaging hard-to-reach popoulations, i.e., low-income, minority neighborhoods, was the "Stoop Survey" approach. Comprehensive Plan Board members conducted the stoop surveys, which involved walking around underrepresented neighborhoods with paper surveys with a modified version of some of the Community Forum questions. The board members surveyed citizens that they encountered on their front stoops or on the sidewalk and used the quick, five minute informal survey to get input on the comprehensive plan issues, ideas, and process. Over 164 citizens were surveyed using this method, which met with support from the citizens and appreciation that they were proactively involved in the process.



- Continuing Outreach

The City did not stop the community engagement process with up-front input. A variety of methods are being used throughout the planning process to obtain continual validation of the Albany 2030 vision, including:

– Walk-Shops: used to show how a plan progresses to implementation and to ask participants to submit ideal/not-ideal examples of priorities/projects highlighted in the Plan; YouTube is used to post the Albany 2030 walk-shop routes.

– Community Drop-Ins: on-site opportunities at community hubs like grocery stores, libraries, bus stops, etc. to provide input on sections of the Plan.

– Online Surveys: additional online surveys posted on the Albany 2030 website to provide a platform for plan reaction and feedback.

– Community Group Meetings: participation in neighborhood meetings to gain feedback on the comprehensive plan.

– Final Town Hall Forum: final centralized public meeting for input on the full comprehensive plan.

Overview of Public Participation Outcomes

Specific results for the exercises and questions raised through the various public outreach techniques used for the Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan thus far are included in Appendix B. The following figures provide a brief overview and snapshot from four of the outreach methods (community forums, supplemental community meetings, stoop surveys, speed planning) of how many people responded and who was represented in the community engagement process.

- Community Forums and Supplemental Meetings

690 Total Participants

Demographic	% of Total Participants	2000 Census % of Population
African American	28%	28.1%
Hispanic	2%	5.6%
Asian	1%	3.3%
White	57%	63.1%
Mixed / Other	7%	5.2%
Not Answered	5%	
Age 0 - 19	5%	26%
Age 20 - 34	27%	29.1%
Age 35 - 54	38%	24.7%
Age 55 +	29%	20.1%

- Stoop Surveys

164 Total Participants

Demographic	% of Total Participants	2000 Census % of Population
African American	59%	28.1%
Hispanic	2%	5.6%
Asian	0%	3.3%
White	18%	63.1%
Mixed / Other	8%	5.2%
Not Answered	11%	
Age 15-19	8%	9.2%
Age 20-34	28%	29.1%
Age 35-54	18%	24.7%
Age 55+	17%	20.1%
Not Answered	29%	

- Speed Planning

21 Total Participants

Demographic	% of Total Participants	2000 Census % of Population
African American	0%	28.1%
Hispanic	5%	5.6%
Asian	0%	3.3%
White	81%	63.1%
Mixed / Other	14%	5.2%
Age 15-19	0%	9.2%
Age 20-34	52%	29.1%
Age 35-54	43%	24.7%
Age 55+	5%	20.1%
Age 55+	17%	20.1%
Not Answered	29%	

As indicated in the above tables, the snapshot results of the public outreach events show that the Albany 2030 process has representative participation comparable to the demographic composition of the City of Albany population as a whole. The extensive community outreach process used for the Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan can be viewed as a model approach for inclusive and transparent community engagement.

1.5 SYSTEMS APPROACH

Following the direction set by enabling legislation in New York and other states, traditional comprehensive plans are typically organized into separate elements that address discrete planning topics (land use, transportation, economic development, etc.). This approach tends to consider issues and develop solutions in isolation, as opposed to accounting for interrelationships between elements or capitalizing on the synergies that can be created by working across elements. Systems thinking is a fundamentally different approach that focuses on how constituent parts (such as the comprehensive plan elements) interact with other parts to produce the behavior of a system as a whole. While commonly used by businesses and other organizations to achieve outcomes such as reduced waste and increased profits, systems thinking has rarely been applied to cities, in part because of their complexity. However, the basic notions of systems thinking are well suited to comprehensive planning, both to overcome the limitations of the "silo" approach of discrete plan elements and to help decision-makers prioritize strategies and actions for implementation based on effectiveness in influencing system behavior in the desired direction, or in other words, leveraging limited resources to accomplish more with less.

A system is a set of elements or parts that is coherently organized and interconnected in a pattern or structure that produces a characteristic set of behaviors, often referred to as its "function" or "purpose."

Donella Meadows, Thinking in Systems: A Primer

The Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan uses a systems approach to develop the overarching direction set by citizens (expressed in the Vision Statement) into strategies and actions for eight plan systems (Chapter 3) and priorities for implementation (Chapter 4). This approach begins with three guiding concepts:

- The City of Albany is a system that operates within a hierarchy of systems at larger (region, state, national, globe) and smaller (neighborhood, site) scales.
- The components of the Comprehensive Plan are interdependent systems that are defined by their functions, comprised of related subsystems, and interact at different scales, influencing how Albany performs as a system.
- Plan strategies, actions, and implementation projects should be designed to optimize and align the performance of the systems in achieving the Albany 2030 Vision.

Five **system principles** were developed to inform development of the full Comprehensive Plan in Stage Two of the planning process. These principles are:

1. Target **interconnections (overlaps and leverage points)** between components to influence system behavior in the desired direction.
2. Build **feedback loops** that generate momentum for positive change.
3. Increase system **resilience**.
4. Create **synergies** between **different levels** of the system hierarchy.
5. Use an **adaptive management** process to implement the Comprehensive Plan.

1. Target interconnections (overlaps and leverage points) between components to influence the system behavior in the desired direction.

Overlaps are interrelationships between different plan systems (e.g., community form and transportation strategies that promote compact, walkable development and alternatives to auto use). However, merely addressing overlaps is not sufficient to bring about the deeper systemic change needed to change Albany's trajectory towards the Vision Statement. A **leverage point** is a place where intervention can most effectively bring about change throughout the system. In Albany, the leverage points relate to four "keys" to achieving the 2030 Vision. These keys were developed by analyzing and synthesizing input received from the public and community stakeholders, as well as data on existing

Leverage Point – a place where intervention can most effectively bring about change throughout the system, i.e., a strategy or action which promotes the highest level of systemic change.

conditions and trends, to identify what must be accomplished to bring about the deeper systemic changes needed if the Albany citizens envision in the year 2030 is to be realized:

- Improve Albany's image in the region and beyond in concert with improving quality of life for residents
- Increase the fiscal capacity of the City
- Facilitate and mobilize private investment within Albany
- Establish Albany's reputation and leadership as a Green Community

Overlaps and leverage points were a primary mechanism used to identify priorities for comprehensive plan implementation (presented in Chapter 4).

2. Build feedback loops that generate momentum for positive change.

A feedback loop is a circular (as opposed to linear) pathway of cause and effect in which an effect triggered by the behavior of a system returns to its cause and generates either more or less of the same effect. A negative (or regulating) feedback loop maintains the behavior of the system within a certain range over time, for example: how a thermostat controls a heater to keep the indoor temperature within a comfortable range during cold weather. A positive (or reinforcing) feedback loop tends to amplify system behavior or change in a certain direction (i.e., a "snowball" effect). For example, scientists project that global climate change could trigger positive feedback loops in nature that amplify warming trends and impacts such as sea level rise.

The feedback loop principle can be applied in comprehensive plan strategies and actions that maintain the stability of valued system components such as strong neighborhoods (negative feedback loops) or create change by counteracting entrenched patterns of resistance with the system (positive feedback loops). An example of the latter is the use of public "seed" investment to attract private investment to a targeted revitalization area, in turn generating momentum for additional private investment.

3. Increase system resilience.

A hallmark of successful communities, resilience is the ability to recover from or adapt to disturbance or change. For example, a community that controls development in flood-prone areas and establishes emergency management procedures (e.g., safe evacuation routes) in anticipation of natural disasters will suffer less damage and recover more quickly than one that does not should a hurricane or other such disaster strike. Characteristics of resilient communities include diversity, reliance on local resources, "tight" feedback loops (i.e., monitor to prevent crossing a threshold or "tipping point" that trig-

[2] Adapted from Brian Walker and David Salt, Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World, Island Press, 2006, pp. 145-148

gers undesirable positive feedback loop), capacity to respond effectively to change, and innovation[2]. Examples of plan strategies to increase resilience include:

- Improving the mix of industries, jobs, and worker skill levels (diversity)
- Reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels through energy conservation and development of renewable sources (reliance on local resources)

4. Create synergies between different levels of the system hierarchy.

Related directly to the first guiding concept above, this principle calls for connecting different system levels in order to produce greater benefits than would be achieved if a single level were addressed in isolation. One example is trail or transit development that connects to a regional transportation system, thus attracting more users and providing greater mobility for residents than if the trails or routes were confined to city limits. Another is creating connections among different levels of government (local, regional, and state) in order to build capacity for implementation.

5. Use an adaptive management process to implement the Comprehensive Plan.

Adaptive management is an iterative process of improving management practices and decision-making by learning from the outcomes of previous practices and decisions. This approach is well suited to dealing with the uncertainty of change by tracking the performance of key system attributes over time and adjusting practices, decisions, and actions accordingly. For the Comprehensive Plan, this means using a monitoring program comprised of benchmarks and indicators to assess progress in implementing the plan. The results will provide a systematic basis for making needed "corrections" to action programs as implementation moves forward.

1.6 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANNING INITIATIVES

While Albany 2030 is the City's first comprehensive planning process, the City has undertaken and implemented numerous neighborhood and topical planning initiatives. Rather than override or duplicate these efforts, the Albany 2030 plan draws themes and recommendations from these plans into a broader citywide context. The City's previous plans have been reviewed and incorporated into the goals, actions, strategies and projects listed throughout the Albany 2030 plan.

Development of the comprehensive plan has been coordinated with two concurrent planning initiatives by the City of Albany:

- Brownfield Opportunity Areas Pre-Nomination Study
- Climate Action and Adaptation Plan

[3] A brownfield is an industrial or commercial property that is abandoned or underused and suffers from "real or perceived" environmental contamination from its former use.

As summarized below, these planning initiatives are consistent with the vision and goals for the City's future established by the Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan. They set more specific direction for action related to strategies, actions, and implementation projects contained in the Plan. More information on these initiatives is provided in the appendices.

Brownfield Opportunity Areas Pre-Nomination Study

Administered by the NYS Department of State, the Brownfields Opportunity Program (BOA) is designed to help communities foster redevelopment by returning dormant and blighted land into productive and catalytic uses while restoring environmental quality[3]. The BOA program takes a comprehensive, area-wide approach to revitalization through brownfield development (as opposed to focusing on individual properties). It encompasses three steps:

1. Step One: A Pre-Nomination Study involves the selection of a potential redevelopment area for further study based on an initial reconnaissance of brownfield sites and other pertinent conditions within an area.
2. Step Two: The Nomination Study is the second step of the BOA process. This step involves a more intensive study of a potential brownfield redevelopment area (or areas) identified in Step One, including: inventory and evaluation of data and trends affecting the area's redevelopment potential; economic and market analysis; identification of strategic sites for redevelopment; and formulation of recommendations to move redevelopment of the strategic sites forward within the framework of a Master Plan.
3. Step Three: The final step of the BOA program is to develop an Implementation Strategy identifying the specific actions to be taken to implement the Master Plan recommendations for redevelopment of the strategic sites.

As an older city Albany has a number of potential brownfield sites. Redevelopment of these sites can have a catalytic effect in Albany's revitalization by generating momentum and mobilizing private investment (one of the four keys to achieving the Albany 2030 Vision). Preparation of a BOA Pre-Nomination Study (Step One) for the entire city has been integrated into the Albany 2030 planning process. This study identifies clusters of

brownfield and underutilized lands that can be advanced through subsequent steps of the BOA process. The plan system chapters incorporate strategies to promote brownfield redevelopment, thus setting the framework for more detailed analysis of smaller geographic areas within the City and identification of strategic sites in a future BOA Nomination Study.

Climate Action and Adaptation Plan

In 2007, the world's foremost authority on climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), declared that the "warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level" and that "human influence is very likely the leading cause of global warming."

The Mayor's Office of Energy and Sustainability was established in 2010 to coordinate actions to mitigate Albany's effects on climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions in municipal government operations and the City as a whole. In addition, the City is developing strategies to adapt to the anticipated effects of climate change. In upstate New York, these effects are projected to include increased average temperatures, precipitation, and frequency and severity of storms. Specific actions being taken include:

- Compiling a greenhouse gas inventory for Albany (documenting energy use and greenhouse gas emissions from municipal government, transportation and residential, commercial and industrial sectors)
- Conducting comprehensive energy audits and undertaking energy-related improvements to improve the energy efficiency of municipal buildings and facilities
- Setting a target for reducing the city's greenhouse gas emissions
- Developing a climate action and adaptation plan

Beginning with the citizen-driven Vision Statement, many of the components of the Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan are designed with energy and sustainability in mind. Initiatives such as building a multimodal transportation center, creating walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods, and revitalizing Albany's downtown all have potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create a more sustainable city. Comprehensive Plan development has been closely coordinated with development of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.