ALBANY SDAT

A Sustainable Capital
for the 21st Century

A Sustainable Design
Assessment Team Report

Albany, New York
August 6–8, 2007

AIA Communities by Design

ENVISION. CREATE. SUSTAIN.

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**Albany, New York
August 6–8, 2007**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Albany, N.Y., has remarkable assets:

- Great location

- Beautiful natural setting along the Hudson River

- Great urban fabric, with historic architecture

- Albany Plans B&W

- Strong, distinctive neighborhoods

- State capital

- Major university center

- Healthy regional economy

- Active, concerned citizenry

But everybody we talked to felt that Albany is not making the most of its assets. Why?

It's about making connections.

There are many plans: North Albany, South End, Arbor Hill, Midtown. These are good plans, but the connections are missing. How do they relate to the rest of the city and to an overall vision for Albany's future?

Many important initiatives are going on, but we sense that people don't always plan or carry out those initiatives together. People and institutions are going off in different directions—inside city government and between city government and the school district, the state, the universities, the hospitals, and so on.

The central question that Albany's leaders must answer is this: How can people make better connections, complement each other's efforts, and make the most of their resources and energy?

Albany's leaders must think about what it means to become a sustainable city in the long term—a city that offers economic opportunities and a good quality of life to its citizens, who in turn can share the community with each other and live in harmony with the natural environment.

Getting there will require a long-term strategy, not quick fixes. It will require making connections

- Between every level of government and the universities, hospitals, businesses, and community organizations that have a role to play in the city's future

- Between government and citizens

- Between citizens of different races, ethnic groups, and economic levels

- Between pedestrians, bicyclists, public-transportation users, and drivers.

- Between young and old

- Between the city and its natural environment

We hope that this report will be a first step in that direction.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2007, Albany, N.Y., submitted a proposal to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for a Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) to assist the city and its citizens in addressing key issues facing the community. The issues included addressing the vacant properties in many of the city's neighborhoods, building a more sustainable transportation system, better stewardship of the city's open spaces, promoting energy efficiency, and more. All of these were framed in the context of the city's plans to embark on a process to develop a new comprehensive plan for the community.

The AIA accepted the proposal and, after a preliminary visit by a small group in April, the SDAT members arrived in Albany on August 6. For three days, the team members, working closely with local officials, community leaders, technical experts, and citizens, studied the community and its concerns. During those three days, the team came to understand the issues and used its expertise to frame a wide range of recommendations, which were presented to the community in a public meeting on August 8.

This report is a more detailed version of the findings and recommendations that were presented to the community on August 8, 2007. After a brief overview of the SDAT program and process, and a short discussion of Albany and the issues it is facing, the report covers

- Market context

- Downtown strategies

- Neighborhood strategies

- Environment and open space

- Transportation

- Institutional relationships

- Planning for the future

A closing section offers some thoughts on how the community can best move forward to address the range of issues and recommendations covered in the report.

What Is the SDAT Program?

The SDAT program is an interdisciplinary community assistance program that focuses on principles of sustainability. Launched in 2005, the program represents an exciting new chapter in the AIA's history of supporting communities with volunteer design expertise.

The SDAT program is modeled on the AIA's Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program. While the R/UDAT program provides communities with specific design solutions, the SDAT program provides broad assessments to help frame future policies or design solutions in the context of sustainability and helps communities plan the first steps of implementation. The SDAT program is based on an understanding of design as a process that

- Is integrative, holistic, and visual

- Is central to achieving a sustainable relationship among humans, the natural environment, and the place

- Gives three-dimensional form to a culture and a place

- Achieves balance between culture, environment, and economic systems

The SDAT program is grounded in the AIA design assistance team values, which call for a multidisciplinary approach, objectivity of the participating team members, and broad public participation.

Why Is the SDAT Program Valuable?

Many communities are immobilized by conflicting agendas, politics, personalities, or even the overabundance of opportunity. Many communities have not yet taken stock of their current practices and policies within a sustainability framework, while others have identified issues of concern but desire assistance in developing a plan of action to increase sustainability. The SDAT process ensures that alternative solutions receive a fair hearing and that options are weighed impartially. The SDAT process

- Informs the community of opportunities and encourages them to act to protect local and regional resources

- Helps the community understand the structure of the place at various scales and contexts—from regional resources to the neighborhood scale

- Explores and articulates the larger contexts and interactions of ecological, sociological, economic, and physical systems

- Visualizes potential futures

- Recognizes and describes the qualities of a place by preserving the best elements of the past, addressing the needs of the present, and planning for the needs of future generations

- Identifies and describes choices and consequences

- Connects plans and actions

- Advances the principles of quality sustainable communities

- Helps the community define the roles of various stakeholders

- Develops a roadmap for the implementation of more sustainable policies and practices

The key to SDAT success is diversity and participation; the process involves multiple disciplines and multiple stakeholders. The SDAT process includes not only the expert team but also government agencies and officials, private businesses, schools and students, community members, and other parties as appropriate.

Who Are the Key Participants in the SDAT Process?

SDATs bring a team of respected professionals, selected on the basis of their experience with the specific issues facing the community, to work with community decision makers to help them develop a vision and framework for a sustainable future. Team members volunteer their time to be a member of the SDAT. To ensure their objectivity, they agree to refrain from taking paid work for three years from the date of completion of the SDAT project. A distinct team is assembled for each project based on the project's unique features. The team consists of a leader, five to seven members, and a staff person from AIA Communities by Design.

The professional stature of the SDAT members, their independence, and the pro bono nature of their work generate community respect and enthusiasm for the SDAT process, which in turn encourages the participation of community stakeholders. The passion and creativity that are unleashed by a top-notch multidisciplinary team of professionals working collaboratively can produce extraordinary results.

Local Steering Committee

The steering committee is the SDAT project's key organizing group. It is responsible for assembling local and regional information, organizing the preliminary meeting and SDAT visit, and generating local media coverage during the entire project. After the SDAT visits, the steering committee typically evolves into a group that is dedicated to implementing the SDAT recommendations.

Local Technical Committee

The local technical committee is the SDAT project's technical support group, including local design professionals, environmental professionals, economists, and others whose skills and experience parallel those of the SDAT members and who bring with them detailed knowledge of local conditions, issues, and information resources. Their presence magnifies the effectiveness of the team.

Citizens

In the end, the citizens of the community are the critical players, both for their insights and observations during the team visit and for their support for the new directions that emerge from the SDAT process.

On behalf of the Albany SDAT and the AIA, it is hoped that this report will be a useful guide to the Albany community as it charts its future for the coming years and for coming generations.

ALBANY TODAY

History

Albany, N.Y., is the fourth oldest city in the United States and the oldest city in the northeast. Located on a steep hill at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers, its first European visitor was Henry Hudson in 1609. It soon became a trading post and, soon thereafter, a Dutch village. In 1664, it was taken by the English and renamed Albany. It received its first charter as a city in 1686.

The state legislature began to meet in Albany in 1777, and in 1797 it became the permanent capital of New York State. During the 19th century, first with the construction of the Erie Canal and then with the development of the railroads, Albany became a major center of transportation, craftsmanship, and industry. By 1900, Albany had a population of 94,151. The city's population continued to grow until 1950, when it peaked at 134,995, only to drop by 2000 to 95,658, or almost exactly the population of 100 earlier.

From an industrial and transportation hub, Albany was gradually transformed during the 20th century into a center of government and major institutions. The grandiose Capitol was completed in 1899 at a cost of $25 million, and from that point on, the state government steadily grew in size and scope. Between 1965 and 1978, the state built the Empire State Plaza at a reputed cost of $1.7 billion, perhaps the most expensive state-government building project ever undertaken in the United States. Today the state of New York employs more than 30,000 people in Albany County. Albany has also become a major center of higher education and an emerging high-technology center. In addition to the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany, major universities include the College of St. Rose and the Sage Colleges.

Demographics

Albany today presents a mixed picture. It shares many of the characteristics of other older and smaller industrial cities but has fared better than many, thanks to its governmental and institutional economic base. The following section further discusses key economic trends in Albany. The city is still substantially less affluent than the national average, with a median household income in 2000 of $30,041 and 17 percent of its households in poverty.

The city contains 45,288 housing units, of which more than 10 percent were vacant in

2000. In contrast to most American communities, Albany is predominately a city of renters, with only 38 percent of its units owner-occupied in 2000, compared with 64 percent nationally. The great majority of the city's housing stock is 25 or more years old, and nearly half predates 1940. While this gives the city much of its historic quality and architectural distinctiveness, it also creates significant difficulties of maintenance and greater need for rehabilitation.

Current and Future Needs

As the city embarks on the preparation of its first comprehensive plan, it faces a complex mix of problems and opportunities. Many of those opportunities grow from its rich historic and architectural legacy downtown and in the city's neighborhoods, in a built environment and network of open spaces put in place more than 100 years ago.

Others have to do with the economic opportunities created by the city's role as a center of government, health care, higher education, and (gradually emerging) technology. At the same time, much of the city's legacy has been degraded by neglect and abandonment, while important natural resources are endangered. The city is divided economically and racially, with continuing problems of poverty, crime, and substandard housing.

The question is how Albany, as is the case for many other small American cities, can build a future that takes full advantage of its historical legacy and current opportunities and not only responds to the immediate needs and crises but also addresses the increasingly critical long-term issues of environmental sustainability. As the world moves into an era in which energy resources are in ever-increasing demand and in which climate change and global warming are no longer a threat but a reality, cities can no longer afford the luxury of *not* planning their future. As Albany moves forward, we hope that this report may help it to chart its future.

MARKET CONTEXT

Market Background

Despite significant investment and development challenges in a number of Albany's neighborhoods, New York State's capital can build on a reasonably strong economic and employment foundation, largely the result of the strong institutional presence in the capital region (state government, colleges and universities, and medical centers). **Graph 1** below illustrates the unemployment rates of Albany residents compared with residents of New York State as a whole (excluding New York City) between 1990 and 2006.
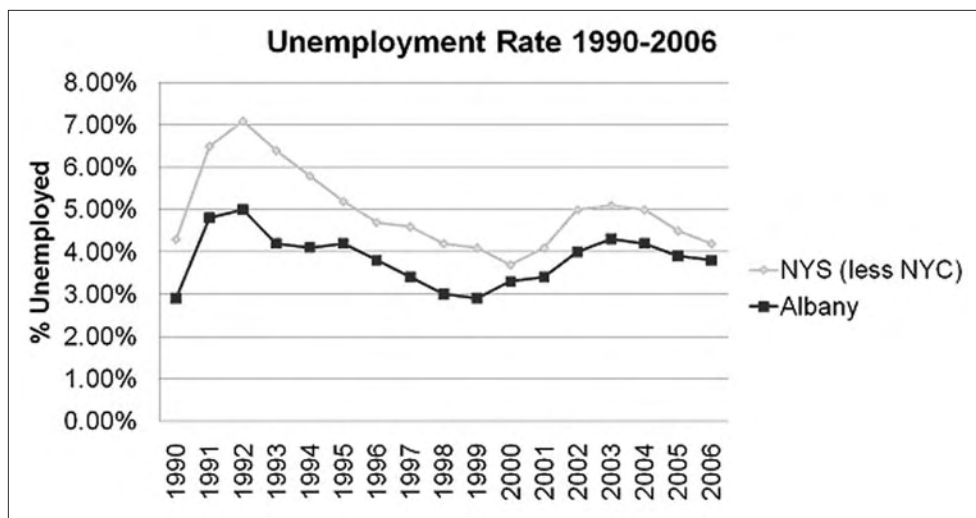
Graph 1. Source: State of New York Department of Labor

Between 1990 and 2006, Albany residents enjoyed significantly lower rates of unemployment than the general New York State population. Most dramatically, during the recession in the early 1990s, while unemployment climbed dramatically throughout the state, the city's unemployment rate remained relatively modest. This long-term stability is of significant value to potential investors during this period of national housing and credit market unease.

The regional economy, while not ex panding as rapidly as the fastest-growing markets in the Northeast or New England, has steadily generated jobs since 1990. **Graph 2** shows the growth in nonfarm jobs in the Albany Metropolitan Area between 1990 and 2007.
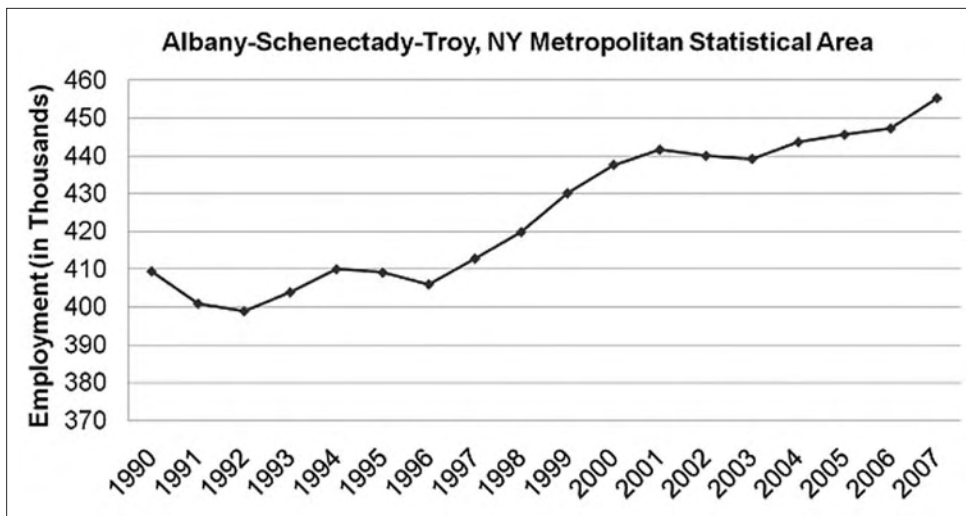
Graph 2. Source: New York State Department of Labor

Albany's economic base is significantly stronger than that of other metropolitan areas in upstate New York. Yet, Albany is not without economic challenges that must be considered during formulation of policies and strategies.

While an estimated 65,000 nonresident workers commute to Albany from surrounding cities and towns on a typical weekday, this group, as a whole, is not necessarily a natural target market for the city. First, the traffic challenges in other cities and regions of similar size do not create the same barriers to commuting from the suburbs that exist elsewhere. **Graph 3** below shows the mean travel time to work for Albany residents compared with the region, state, and nation as a whole.
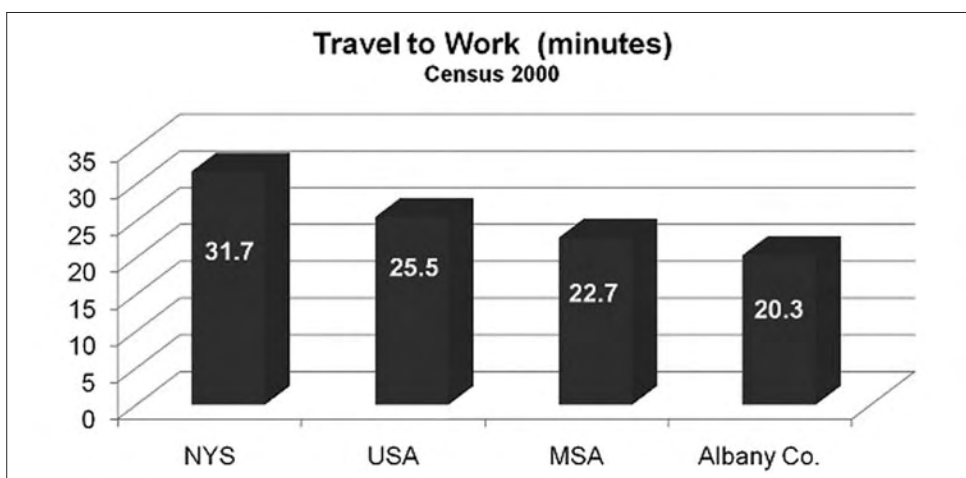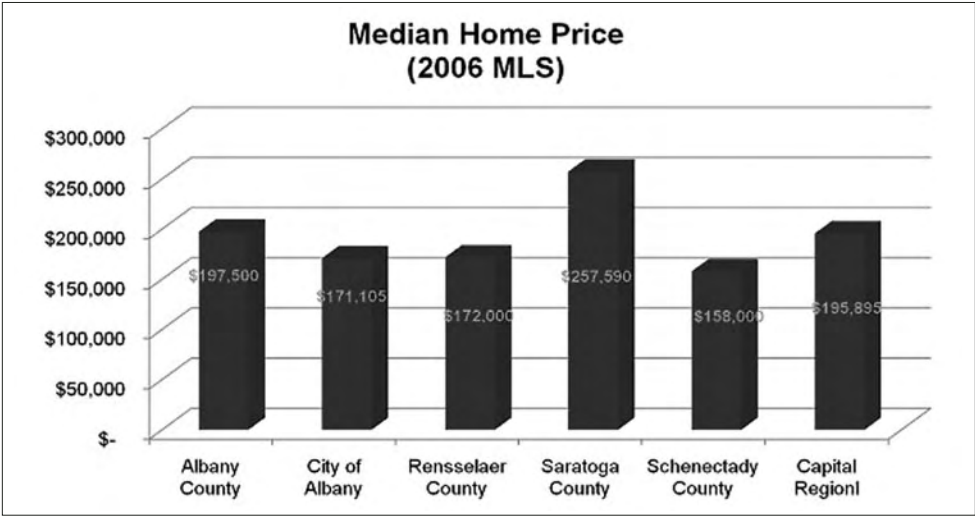

Graph 3. Source: U.S. Census 2000

A typical Albany County commuter who works outside the home spends 20.3 minutes to travel to work, but the average commuting time in the state as a whole is more than 50 percent longer. Indeed, travel times in the Albany region are well below the national average. As a result, the impact of commuting time on residential-location decisions is much less significant in Albany than in most metropolitan areas.

Another critical factor influencing suburban vs. urban housing decisions among workers in Albany is the negligible cost differential between housing in Albany and the capital region as a whole. While the reasonably strong housing prices in the Albany in relation to surrounding communities reflect a strong housing market, that the relative afford-ability of suburban homes compared to city homes is a significant factor in the decision-making process for families who may desire a larger lot, a newer home with the latest amenities, or better-performing schools. **Graph 4** below shows the median home price in Albany (based upon Multiple Listing Services sales in 2006) in comparison to the county and surrounding areas.

The 2006 median home price of $171,100 in the city of Albany was only 15 percent lower than in the county as a whole ($197,500) and within $25,000 of the regional median ($196,000). The gap has been closing over the past six years, as the city's housing values have grown faster between 2000 and 2006 than in any other area shown in **Graph 4** except for Saratoga County. The fact that the median home price in the city as a whole is so close to that of the rest of the region indicates that further development or rehabilita-tion of the city's housing stock, to be successful, may have to be carefully targeted to specific buyer groups.

Median Home Price (2006 MLS)

	Albany County	City of Albany	Rensselaer County	Saratoga County	Schenectady County	Capital Regionl
Value	$197,500	$171,105	$172,000	$257,590	$158,000	$195,895

Graph 4. Source: Capital Region Board of Realtors

Another concern about housing in Albany regards the city's bifurcated market, in which house values and demand are significantly higher from Midtown west than in the eastern neighborhoods except for Capitol Hill. House values in areas such as the South End, West Hill, Arbor Hill, and North Albany are all significantly below the citywide average, reflecting lack of demand and widespread disinvestment. A critical challenge facing the city is not so much to strengthen the housing market citywide as to create a viable market within the city's disinvested neighborhoods.

Market Context Conclusions

To summarize, several market factors or trends can inform development and redevelopment policies and initiatives, including the following:

- Regional employment stability and modest growth creates a sound foundation for further residential and commercial investment in the city.

- While the basic underlying regional market dynamics are favorable for investment, the relative ease of access to the suburbs for Albany workers (in terms of travel time and cost) means that the city must focus on creating a community that will attract lifestyle owners and renters rather than focusing on convenience as a major asset. These principal assets will draw lifestyle-oriented buyers and renters:

    - The city's great historic housing stock

    - Urban fabric and retail

    - Benefits to a sustainable environment

- Given the growth and significant size of the Albany market (and assuming confirmation by a detailed city housing-market study and strategy), this targeted group of buyers and renters likely can create the momentum necessary for the city to realize significant new investment in its housing inventory.

- The city has a particularly difficult but critical challenge facing it in terms of building the market in the eastern neighborhoods around downtown Albany, The historic character of many of these areas, however, represents a potential asset for revitalization and redevelopment.

- As a result of the market opportunities, the city would be well positioned to direct resources to reinforcing the urban/historic fabric of city, including the urban retail sector, and to make an enhanced effort to raise the "sustainability bar" in the city.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIES

Background

Downtown Albany has been an important regional center ever since being established as a trading center early in the 17th century. With the city playing a major role as a transportation and manufacturing center during the 19th and early 20th centuries, downtown became a hub of economic activity—activity that left its legacy in the magnificent commercial buildings lining its streets. The rest of the 20th century was, in many ways, less kind. Although state government grew, downtown retail activity declined. Historic blocks were lost to urban renewal, and the construction of the interstate highway system cut downtown off from the Hudson River as well as from the South End.

Downtown Albany, along with the hospitals and universities, remains the city's economic engine. The concentration of state government along with other firms, agencies, and associations in and around downtown creates a level of activity and a volume of downtown employment that offer a critical mass for growth and redevelopment. Despite its losses, few small-city downtowns have such a superb collection of historic buildings, clustered in a rich, pedestrian-oriented fabric. While there are vacant and underutilized buildings throughout the area, there are also centers of economic vitality. The recent evidence of downtown growth, reflected in new office buildings, restaurants, and hotels, demonstrates the area's underlying vitality. Commercial areas such as Pearl Street and Lark Street are emerging to fill distinctive niches within the regional economy. Albany's task is to build on that vitality to maximize the value of the city's downtown not only for the city as a whole but also for the entire capital region.

Residential Development

The single most important element in building a stronger downtown is creating a greater residential base. Cities across the United States have discovered that, as the nation's working and shopping patterns have changed, downtowns can no longer sustain a high level of vitality (particularly in smaller cities) based on a daytime population, whether of shoppers or workers. By creating a critical mass of residents, downtowns can build a sustainable base of economic activity that will draw a growing amount of the region's eating, entertainment, and shopping spending. Moreover, as the base of downtown residents grows, the services that will support further residential development—supermarkets, child care facilities, and the like—will follow. The city

should initiate an aggressive strategy to promote downtown residential development, including the following elements:

- **Extend tax incentives**. The city has begun to offer tax incentives for adaptive reuse of downtown buildings as residential buildings. It should extend those incentives to new residential construction as the starting point for a comprehensive downtown residential strategy.

- **Clarify and streamline regulatory processes**. In addition to tax incentives, the city should ensure that zoning regulations, building standards, permitting and inspection systems, and so on are as flexible, straightforward, and expeditious as possible. The city should consider creating a downtown "ombudsman" position to facilitate the review and approval of downtown projects.

- **Set design and density standards**. The city should develop clear standards for the type and density of downtown housing, generally following the principle that (1) within the core downtown area, densities should be high, with five-story (or higher) development encouraged, and (2) to the south, west, and north of the core, densities should be lower, with the typical unit a townhouse or row house, consistent with the city's historic vernacular. The city should not shy away from appropriately designed Modern architecture downtown, as the mix of styles will add to an already rich urban environment.

- **Balance rental housing and homeownership downtown**. Realistically, as the market begins to establish itself, many of the first high-density developments in the core are likely to be rental housing. The city should recognize this but lay the groundwork for a growing percentage of owner-occupied housing. Townhouses, however, should be predominately owner-occupied.

- **Market downtown living**. As residential developments begin to come on line, the city, in partnership with downtown Albany and other stakeholders, should initiate an ongoing campaign to market downtown living to the thousands of young professionals and not-so-young empty nesters who live in the region and work either downtown or in institutions, such as the hospitals and universities, that are easily accessible from downtown.

Retail Development

Albany's downtown already has a strong base of retail and service activity, which can be further developed and enhanced as the city's residential development strategy emerges. In doing so, it is important to concentrate resources in key locations or "hubs," where they can have the greatest impact, rather than scattering them around the area.

The two critical hubs for downtown growth, in our judgment, are the Pearl Street restaurant and entertainment area in the downtown core and the Lark Street retail and service area, immediately west of Empire State Plaza, with its funky mix of shops, services, restaurants, and nightspots. The city should work with the Downtown Albany Business Improvement District (BID) and the Lark Street BID as well as other inter-

ested parties to identify specific steps that the city can take to strengthen the variety and quality of retail and services in these two hubs. These steps might include financial or tax incentives, regulatory changes, or improved parking facilities.

The Convention Center

The city and state are moving forward on development of a major convention center in southeastern downtown Albany, an area generally bounded by Broadway, State, South Pearl, and Madison streets.

The decision has been made, so any discussion of the merits of the project would be redundant. The key issue at this point, from the SDAT's standpoint, is to establish the design criteria that will ensure that the convention center becomes, to the extent feasible, an asset to the downtown and the adjacent South End neighborhood. To this end, we recommend the following:

- The convention center must be designed with strong street linkages, particularly to South Pearl Street and Broadway, to encourage greater pedestrian use of those streets and stronger connections between the downtown and South End.

- The convention center must be designed with particular sensitivity to the South End neighborhood so that it works to overcome, instead of accentuating, the Chinese Wall effect already created by the highway and increases the linkage between South End and downtown.

- Historic buildings on the site should be retained and incorporated into the overall design scheme for the convention center

- The development of the convention center should be seen as an opportunity to increase the connection between downtown Albany and the Hudson River. A possible model might be the Adriaen's Landing development in Hartford.

- Interior food-service facilities should be minimized both to encourage greater street-level activity within and around the convention center and to better use existing and planned nonconvention facilities.

- The convention center should be a green building, using state-of-the-art sustainable design and technology and designed to meet LEED gold or platinum standards.

- The city should consider incorporating a multimodal transportation hub in the vicinity of the convention center.

Downtown and the Hudson River

One of the greatest losses during the highway-building era of the mid-20th century was the construction of Interstate 787, which broke the connection between downtown Albany and the Hudson River. Today, although a number of modest steps to restore that connection have been taken (with the construction of Corning Preserve and the pedestrian bridge over the highway), the disconnect remains palpable. The obstacles to regaining the connection are great. I-787 is a major part of the regional highway network, and any major change would be difficult and long-term.

This is a complex area, for which the SDAT hesitates to recommend specific steps. We feel strongly, however, that the reconnection of the city to the river—in view of its importance to the region's quality of life—should be a major long-term goal not only of the city but also of the county and state governments. While incremental steps are valuable, this issue calls for a bold strategy, whether it involves the reconfiguration of I-787 or some other creative approach.

Above all, the downtown plans and projects must be grounded in two fundamental principles. First, the historic fabric of downtown—reflected in its streetscapes, its buildings, and, ultimately, its relationship to the Hudson River—is the area's greatest asset, which will make the city's aspirations for the area possible. To the extent that fabric is lost or compromised through poor planning and development decisions, that loss will translate directly into fewer opportunities for economic development, jobs, and revenues. Solid and sensitive land-use regulations, design guidelines, and plan reviews—whether for the convention center or for a single small building—are critical to any downtown strategy.

Second, the future of downtown cannot be seen in isolation. It is linked to the city's future in general and to the future of the surrounding, now-depressed inner neighborhoods in particular. The following section addresses the issues affecting those neighborhoods.
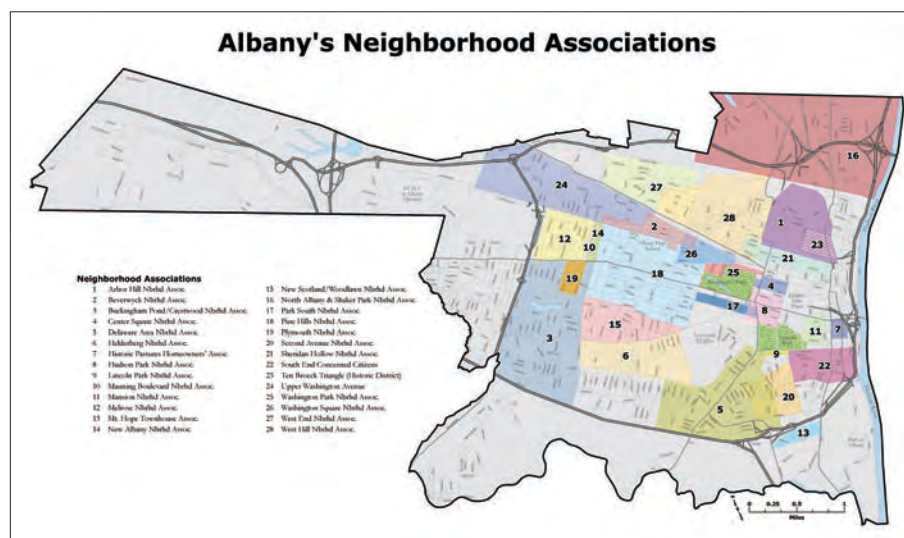
NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGIES

Background

Albany is a city of many neighborhoods, ranging from gracious, well-maintained neighborhoods of beautiful homes on tree-lined streets to others in which abandoned properties, vacant lots, and substandard houses are pervasive. While the city has a responsibility to all of its neighborhoods, Albany's inner neighborhoods—the areas along the city's eastern border forming a ring around downtown which include North Albany, Arbor Hill, West Hill, and the South End—are particularly problematic and particularly critical for the city's future.

These neighborhoods today are seen as more of a problem than an opportunity, with widespread deterioration and abandonment, low levels of homeownership, and high levels of crime and poverty. Revitalized, these areas can become an opportunity to create economically integrated, walkable, neighborhoods with easy access to downtown jobs and activity. Achieving that goal will not only strengthen those neighborhoods but also will strengthen downtown and the entire city.

Two central themes are critical to the future of these neighborhoods. The first theme is building the housing market in these areas. The second, which is a key to the first, is systematically addressing the problem of abandoned properties which blocks a stronger housing market from coming into

Albany's Neighborhood Associations

being. **Table 1** on the following page illustrates some key housing market characteristics for these neighborhoods, compared to the city as a whole.

The statistics in **Table 1** point out some serious problems. Prices in these neighborhoods are much lower than in the city as a whole, while these neighborhoods are seeing far more absentee buying than buying by owner-occupants. Those seeking to own their own homes there are largely low-income people—with lower income than existing homeowners in the same neighborhood—and disproportionately likely to have financed

CHARACTERISTICS OF 1- TO 4-FAMILY HOUSE MORTGAGES AND BORROWERS IN 2005 IN ALBANY

|	North Albany	Arbor Hill	West Hill			South End		City of Albany
Census Tract	1	2	6	7	8	25	26	
Owner-occupant purchase mortgages per 1,000 units	25	10	15	14	9	14	40	35
Average mortgage amount	$84,500	$77,900	$80,300	$75,200	$76,000	$89,600	$78,800	$112,900
Median income of homebuyers	$33,000	$44,500	$39,000	$38,000	$42,000	$66,000	$41,000	$60,000
Ratio of homebuyer to homeowner income	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.9	1.0	2.3	0.9	1.0
% of buyers who are low income (<80% AMI)	89%	61%	58%	57%	55%	33%	72%	38%
Absentee buyers as % of all buyers	33%	62%	81%	67%	74%	50%	33%	34%
Subprime loans as % of all home purchase loans*	25%	33%	28%	38%	31%	46%	39%	18%

*2004 data

Table 1. Source: Home Mortgage Disclosure Act

their purchases with risky subprime loans. All of these factors reflect weak market conditions and future risks. All of the areas exhibit a "market gap"—that is, market sales prices well below the cost to build a new unit or rehabilitate a vacant shell.

Albany must build a strategy to create economically integrated communities in these neighborhoods, encouraging homeownership and both retaining and attracting middle-and upper-income households without displacing existing residents. This is a difficult but achievable goal. Specific elements that should be included in this strategy are outlined in the box below.

Because this report cannot address all of these elements in detail, we will concentrate on the critical issue of abandoned properties, with brief comments on incentives, target marketing, and the importance of incorporating an equitable revitalization strategy to ensure that successful revitalization does not inadvertently displace lower-income residents of these neighborhoods.
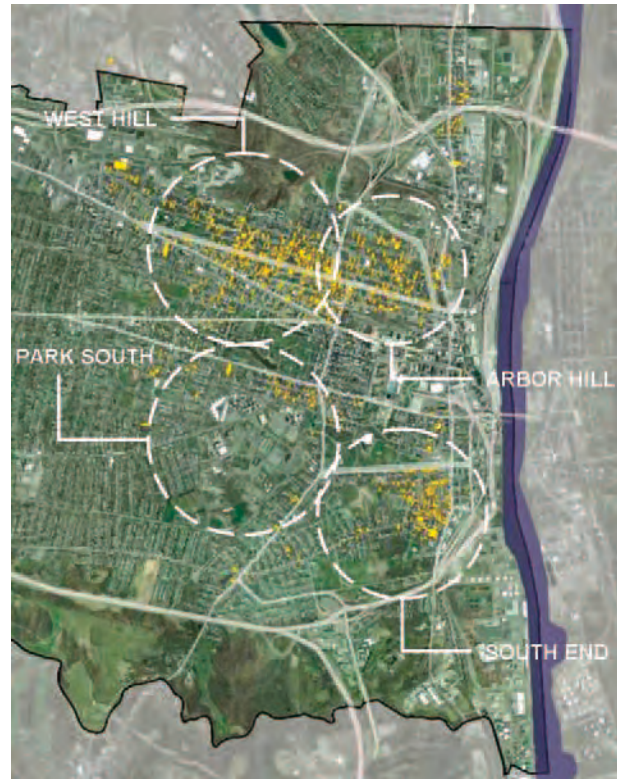
KEY NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGY ELEMENTS

1. Implement a coordinated, multifaceted abandoned-property strategy, including creation of a land bank in partnership with the housing authority and county

2. Prioritize preservation and reuse of existing buildings

3. Maximize historic assets

4. Provide incentives for rehabilitation of vacant buildings for home ownership

5. Market the target neighborhoods

6. Maintain and enhance community policing strategies

7. Build the human capital of neighborhood residents to foster equitable revitalization

Moving Forward on an Abandoned-Property Strategy

The need for an abandoned-or vacant-property strategy is clear: Vacant properties blight a community—creating health and safety hazards, devaluing neighboring properties, and imposing excess costs on local government. Their presence acts as a barrier to efforts to strengthen markets or neighborhoods. At the same time, they represent a valuable resource for future revitalization through reuse and rehabilitation.

In framing a strategy, two principles should be paramount. First, owners should be required to bear their share of the costs that they impose on the community through their actions or inaction.

Second, the city should aggressively pursue strategies that promote reuse and rehabilitation of vacant properties, pressing owners to improve their properties wherever possible and, where not possible, stepping in aggressively to gain control of properties and create the conditions for their reuse. To implement such a strategy, the city must take the critical steps outlined below.

Step 1: Hold Owners Accountable

The city of Albany has two ordinances on the books: the Maintenance of Vacant Buildings Ordinance (Ch. 133-64 through 78) and the Vacant Building Registry Ordinance (Ch.133-78.1 through 78.7). Both of these ordinances are basically sound, although the Maintenance of Vacant Buildings Ordinance should be amended to make standards clearer and more specific (such as mandatory standards for boarding) and to require owners to provide liability insurance.

The Vacant Building Registry Ordinance should be amended to provide for graduated fees (the longer the building remains vacant, the higher the fee) and for charging city costs for inspections, police calls,

fire calls, and other municipal expenditures arising from the condition of the building. The current fee of $200 per property, even if it were rigorously collected, would cover barely a fraction of the costs incurred by the city as a result of these buildings.

More important than amending these ordinances, however, is enforcing them. The evidence is compelling that the city is not doing so consistently. The condition of many vacant buildings is clearly not as required by the maintenance ordinance, and few (if any) vacant building plans are on file in the vacant building registry. The first step is for the city to begin aggressively enforcing these ordinances so that owners are held accountable for their properties and their effects on the surrounding buildings and residents. To that end, the city has established a Vacant Buildings Court to address the enforcement of the ordinance and registry.

By enforcing its ordinances, the city will begin to motivate owners to improve their properties. At that point, however, the city must actively engage with the owners to support their efforts. Many owners lack the know-how or the resources to bring their properties back into reuse, and they will need either technical or financial help to do so. The city must do what it can within its means to assist owners who are willing to take responsibility for their properties.

Step 2: Gain Control of Abandoned Properties

While holding owners accountable, the city must move aggressively to gain control of those properties where the owners are not taking responsibility for their properties. To that end, the city should begin by creating a land bank for vacant and abandoned properties in partnership with the Albany Housing Authority and Albany County.

Such a land bank can be established within city government, presumably within the Department of Development and Planning, or it can be established as a separate agency or authority. Both approaches have been used elsewhere with success. The purpose of the land bank is to create a central vehicle through which the city can take control of properties, maintain them while it holds them, demolish or stabilize them as may be necessary, and develop plans for their reuse.

Having created the land-bank mechanism, in whatever form, the city and county must then restructure the property-tax foreclosure process to ensure that *all* vacant properties taken through tax foreclosure go into the land bank. The attractions to the city of the current system (under which the county pays the city the uncollected taxes when it takes title to a tax-delinquent property) are easy to understand. In the long run, however, the city suffers more from its inability to plan for the future of these properties

and implement effective strategies for their reuse than it gains from the cash in hand. Moreover, since the county has made a substantial financial outlay in taking these properties, it is understandably more eager to recoup its costs than to focus on long-term revitalization. We recognize that this system cannot be reversed overnight, but if the city is ever to get a handle on its vacant properties, the current system must be reviewed and renegotiated.

In addition to taking title to tax-foreclosed properties, the city should encourage donations and bargain sales of vacant properties to the land bank. Experience in other cities has shown that many owners, particularly if faced with strict enforcement of maintenance and registration ordinances or if badly behind on their taxes, will donate their properties rather than wait for tax foreclosure. The city gains the property faster, when it is still in better condition, while the owner gets to write off the value of the property on his or her income tax.

Step 3: Provide Incentives for the Rehabilitation and Reuse of Vacant Properties

Once the city has created the systems that will both motivate owners to take responsibility for their properties, and generate a steady flow of vacant properties into the land bank, it must have a strategy for their reuse. The strategy needs to be a multifaceted one. While it can include additional subsidized or income-targeted housing, it should be driven by the availability of funding for subsidized housing development. It should be explicitly designed to foster increased homeownership and greater economic diversity within the target neighborhoods.

The SDAT recommends a program of incentives for middle-income families to buy vacant houses in the target neighborhoods and rehabilitate them for owner-occupancy. Specifically, at least $5 million should be provided for this purpose. (Possible sources for these funds, and other funds needed for the strategy will be discussed below). With an average incentive of $25,000 to $30,000 per property, the program will result in restoration of 150 to 200 properties to productive owner-occupancy—improving property values in their vicinity, stabilizing neighborhoods, and increasing the municipal tax base. If the city floats a general-obligation bond issue to fund this program, assuming each house will pay an average of $2,500 in property taxes, the program will result in more annual revenue than the cost of paying for the bond issue. The program should be guided by the following principles:

- Base the amount of individual incentives on what is needed to fill the "market gap": the gap between the cost of acquisition and rehabilitation and the post-rehab market value of the house

- Provide the funds as a "soft" loan that would gradually be forgiven the longer the family receiving the funds remained as an owner-occupant of the house

- Make families of all income levels eligible, with preference to families able to put their own money into the house and/or obtain conventional financing for the balance

- Leverage the city incentive wherever feasible, using state historic rehabilitation tax credits, short-term tax exemptions, and, where appropriate, CDBG and/or HOME funds

- Target the city incentive to designated areas for the greatest potential impact

- The incentive program should include initial small grants (up to $3,000) to assist buyers with home inspections and preparation of architectural plans

By working with its state legislative delegation and with other cities throughout the state, Albany should explore pushing for state legislation to give it stronger tools to deal with abandoned properties, similar to those enacted in other states including Indiana, New Jersey, and Ohio. These might include changes to the Tax Increment Financing and tax-foreclosure laws, and new statutes addressing such matters as vacant property receivership and "spot blight" eminent domain.

Financing

There is no question that, in the short run, an aggressive abandoned-property strategy will cost a substantial amount of money. Albany, like every older city, has limited financial resources. It must bear two critical facts in mind, however: (1) In the long run, the strategy is likely to return more to the city than it will cost, and (2) The cost of living with hundreds of abandoned properties (in terms of fires, police calls, inspections, and lost property values, as is currently happening) is likely to be far more than the city may realize.

In addition to local funds, which may include annual appropriations, general obligation, and revenue debt, the city should explore both currently available and potential state resources. The city should determine whether the use of the historic rehabilitation tax credit is feasible in any of the target neighborhoods as well as whether tax increment financing, despite the limitations of New York state law, is worth pursuing. Moreover, a strategy of the sort described above seems highly appropriate for an application for assistance under the Restore NY Communities Initiative.

Finally, as the state capital, the city could explore the possibility of a special appropriation or other targeted assistance from the State of New York for this purpose. The revitalization of the neighborhoods surrounding the State Capitol is not merely a matter of local interest but also of statewide importance.

Marketing

Cities have long marketed themselves to visitors and conventions and tried to attract companies to industrial parks and office buildings. In recent years, it has become clear that cities also need to market themselves—and their neighborhoods—to prospective residents, particularly homebuyers. These include not only people moving from outside but also people within the city whose incomes are rising and have the option of staying in Albany or moving to the surrounding suburbs.

Albany must follow the lead of efforts such as Baltimore's Live Baltimore Home Center and develop a targeted marketing strategy for the city in general, for downtown, and for the targeted neighborhoods close to downtown Albany. The marketing strategy should identify target markets—by age, demographics, employment, and other factors—to whom to market specific neighborhoods as well as downtown living and develop a multifaceted strategy to reach the marketing targets through a variety of means and media.

Equitable Revitalization

Finally, it is always necessary to keep the interests and concerns of the people who live in the city's targeted neighborhoods today firmly in mind. The purpose of neighborhood revitalization is not to drive out lower-income residents but to create economically diverse neighborhoods that offer opportunities for people of all income levels and backgrounds.

Existing affordable housing should be preserved while additional affordable housing consistent with the overall revitalization strategy should be provided. The Albany Housing Authority is building housing that is attractive, of good quality, and compatible with the development of mixed-income neighborhoods of choice. The city should develop programs to support homeowners, ensuring that their properties meet code standards and that, to the extent possible, they are not forced out of their homes by subprime foreclosures or other pressures. Ongoing efforts should be made to build the incomes and wealth of residents in the targeted neighborhoods as well as to encourage those residents with rising incomes to stay in their neighborhoods rather than leave them for other areas.

ENVIRONMENT AND OPEN SPACE

Background

The city of Albany has an outstanding collection of open spaces, remarkable in their diversity within a relatively small area. These include grand urban parks such as Washington Park and Lincoln Park, the semi-wild Tivoli preserve, the hardscape of downtown's Empire State Plaza, Corning Preserve along the Hudson riverfront, and the Pine Bush ecosystem, as well as many smaller parks, stream corridors, and plazas. All of these represent a valuable environmental as well as quality-of-life heritage that must be not only maintained but also enhanced and better interconnected.

Among the open-space issues that emerged during the SDAT visit, the team observed these common threads:

- Concern over current and future encroachment into the Pine Bush Preserve and connections of Pine Bush to Albany in the form of multiple modes of transportation

- Programmed uses at key open spaces such as Washington Park, Empire State Plaza, Corning Preserve, and Tivoli Park

- Connection of Corning Preserve to the new convention center

- Connection of Tivoli Park with Patroon Creek and Mohawk Trail

- The opportunity to connect open-space areas in the southern part of the city to create an "emerald necklace"

- Greater pedestrian access and inclusivity for existing open-space uses

- Adoption of universal-design principles for future park and open-space facilities

- Renewable-energy considerations

The issue of pedestrian connections is particularly important. As the city of Albany has grown, many people are less connected to its open spaces, not only because of the greater distances created by sprawl but also due to the growing reconfiguration of the region around automobile travel over the years. This is reflected in different ways:

- Traffic signal times do not allow people to cross streets comfortably.

- Major streets need more bike lanes, and other streets need traffic-calming measures.

- Streetscape systems have poorly defined pedestrian zones.

- Highways have blocked people from open spaces—for example, areas in the southern portion of the city such as Normanskill Farm, Albany Municipal Golf Course, and the cemetery.

- Security issues in the city's parks and open spaces have arisen.

We will try to address many of these issues below, beginning with the broad issue of the city's overall environmental policy.

Energy and Environmental Policy

Over and above how specific open spaces are treated, a sustainable city should have an overall approach to its environment, reflected in policies and programs that govern public construction, public education in matters such as recycling and energy efficiency, transportation, and more. In signing the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, Mayor Gerald D. Jennings committed the city of Albany to an ambitious body of environmental goals (see box, below). These can represent a powerful agenda for the city as it moves toward a sustainable future.

With respect to building (both new construction and improvement to existing buildings), the state of New York broadly supports such policies and programs through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) programs, including its Energy $mart℠ Loan Fund program.

Through Energy $mart, home or multifamily-building owners may qualify for inter-est-rate reductions on loans from participating lenders for energy-efficiency improve-ments, new-construction energy measures, and renewable technologies. For building owners and developers, NYSERDA offers technical assistance during the predesign and design phases to determine energy-efficiency measures that maximize energy sav-ings and facilities. It also offers guidance on green products and materials selection and technical assistance in obtaining certification from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™.

FROM THE U.S. MAYORS CLIMATE PROTECTION AGREEMENT

We will strive to meet or exceed Kyoto Protocol targets for reducing global warming pollution by taking actions in our own operations and communities such as:

1. Inventory global warming emissions in City operations and in the community, set reduction targets, and create an action plan

2. Adopt and enforce land-use policies that reduce sprawl, preserve open space, and create compact, walkable urban communities

3. Promote transportation options such as bicycle trails, commute trip reduction programs, incentives for car pooling, and public transit

4. Increase the use of clean, alternative energy by, for example, investing in "green tags," advocating for the development of renewable energy resources, recovering landfill methane for energy production, and supporting the use of waste-to-energy technology

5. Make energy efficiency a priority through building code improvements, retrofitting city facilities with energy-efficient lighting, and urging employees to conserve energy and save money

6. Purchase only Energy Star equipment and appliances for City use

7. Practice and promote sustainable building practices using the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program or a similar system

8. Increase the average fuel efficiency of municipal fleet vehicles, reduce the number of vehicles, launch an employee education program including anti-idling messages, and convert diesel vehicles to bio-diesel

9. Evaluate opportunities to increase pump efficiency in water and wastewater systems; recover wastewater treatment methane for energy production

(continued, next page)

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10. Increase recycling rates in City operations and in the community

11. Maintain healthy urban forests; promote tree planting to increase shading and to absorb CO2

12. Help educate the public, schools, other jurisdictions, professional associations, business, and industry about reducing global warming pollution

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The state of New York also offers green building guidelines for state executive-branch agencies, departments, public benefit corporations, and authorities through Executive Order 111. In addition, the state offers state green-building tax credits and commissioning—a systematic quality assurance process to check the performance of building systems efficiency.

The city should embrace the opportunities offered by the state programs and create an overall strategy for green building and energy efficiency, including the following elements:

- Partnering with the state to aggressively market resources and opportunities for greater energy efficiency in existing city buildings, both residential and commercial

- Developing green building guidelines for all future construction or substantial rehabilitation projects in the city

- Developing a plan for reducing energy use by the city of Albany, including retrofitting existing municipal facilities for greater energy efficiency and sustainability

- Developing a plan to increase recycling, both as an economic strategy and as a means of reducing the waste stream

Plans for a sustainable city must engage a far wider public, young and old, than just public officials, environmental professionals, and developers. Broad public outreach begins with efforts as small as engaging residents in maintaining and better using the parks and open spaces in their neighborhoods and as large as environmental education in the schools and innovative new programs through which community residents can contribute to a better local environment.

In the long run, a sustainability strategy is more than good environmental stewardship. Greater energy efficiency will increasingly affect the city's economic bottom line, with respect to both overall economic development and municipal budgetary outlays.

The Future of the Pine Bush

This 3,000-acre inland pine barren ecosystem is located in the western suburban out-reach of Albany, north of I-90. The area is home to a unique diversity of animals and plants, including 20 rare species and two rare natural communities, including the federally endangered Karner Blue Butterfly. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, a public agency created in 1988, manages the preserve, including maintenance, security, programming, and related activities. The commission has prepared a management plan that aims to preserve and restore pine-brush habitat and restore wildlife connections previously fragmented by development. Over the years, however, landfill operations and large-scale commercial development have affected the area.

The Pine Bush is currently the subject of a heated controversy arising from proposals by the city of Albany to expand its almost fully-used landfill, which is within part of the Pine Bush ecosystem. While overwhelming fiscal pressures drive this action, the city should consider the potential environmental impacts.

As the SDAT understands, the city receives revenues from other municipalities and the state government to use the city's landfill, representing some $13 million per year or roughly 10 percent of the city's budget. If the city could not continue to accept regional solid waste and created a new landfill elsewhere in the region, the city would not only lose the revenues from other jurisdictions but would also be forced to expend additional revenues to dispose of its own solid waste.

The SDAT believes that every possible effort should be made to avoid expanding the landfill while mitigating the fiscal impact on the city. These efforts might include the following:

• Investigating measures to reduce the waste stream, including greater use of recycling

• Investigating measures to expand capacity within the existing landfill

• Investigating alternative means of waste disposal

• Investigating changes in state law or policy regarding waste disposal

Washington Park

Given a location that serves many citizens, its natural park character, arboretum-like qualities, and long history, Washington Park is one of Albany's most valuable assets. It is important to use this asset most effectively to benefit the full range of citizens and visitors. Citizens have requested improvements, including closing streets on weekends, creation of a dog area, and security improvements. The SDAT recommends that the city consider

- Closing the park to vehicles for all or part of the weekend, except for emergency vehicles and possibly limited use for people with disabilities (hours and specific roads to be determined through a public process)

- Designating a well-defined and programmed area for dog owners in or near the park

- Installing more security lighting (of historically appropriate design) along major pedestrian routes through the park

- Increasing park event programming, particularly during evening hours

Whatever the city does, it should make no physical changes to Washington Park without careful planning and development by fully-qualified landscape architects to ensure that the changes are consistent with the character of this park.

Empire State Plaza

The Empire State Plaza, a monumental facility built between 1965 and 1978, covers 98 acres and contains 10 buildings with 11,000 workers. More than 80 percent of the area is a massive open space, including a nearly two-acre reflecting pool and hardscaped areas interspersed with landscape pockets. The facility, in its monumentality, formality, and separation from the city's street grid, is an archetypal legacy of "visionary" architectural and urban planning ideas of the 1960s.

Today, it is widely seen as out of human scale and out of keeping with contemporary standards of environmental sustainability. While the city of Albany has little or no role in decisions about the future of Empire State Plaza (a state facility), it may be able to informally influence future decisions by state government. Specifically, the SDAT suggests the following:

- The state should consider reconfiguring the space to add vertical elements, such as trees or sculpture, that break up the large horizontal expanses of pavement. It may be appropriate to view the space as a series of outdoor "rooms."

- More activities should take place, including a variety of smaller-scale activities during the daytime as well as the evening.

- Link the plaza more effectively to the surrounding street grid, recognizing the grade difference, through ramps, stairs, and other visible forms of connection.

- Make the plaza a more environmentally sustainable setting in these ways:

1. Replace current pavers with permeable pavers on a phased basis or alter the current pavement to allow greater water infiltration into an appropriate sub-base; use the collected water to irrigate plant beds

2. Replace some paved areas with rain gardens to allow water collection areas

3. Use solar power to power light fixtures and irrigation controllers

4. Use collected rain water to power the waterfall at the perimeter wall

5. Use organic fertilizers to reduce the amount of chemicals used on lawns

6. Begin a phased plan to implement recycled materials as replacements for current site furnishings, such as recycled wood for benches.

The plaza could become a model of a sustainable landscape, which could then be communicated to the public through interpretive signage on the site.

Connecting Corning Preserve

Albany has begun to reconnect the city with its riverfront, including construction of the pedestrian bridge over I-787 and creation of Corning Preserve, with its 1,000-person amphitheater, visitor center, floating boat docks, and multiuse paths. Corning Preserve serves as the centerpiece of a riverfront greenway, offering unique venues and recreational opportunities. The city also plans to redevelop areas north and south of the amphitheater as themed destinations and is exploring the possibility of a harbor/marina north of the park. Plans for the south include a living history site, reflecting the city's rich heritage. The current and future uses of Albany's riverfront, furthermore, must be linked to future plans for the convention center..

The city should continue to implement its riverfront plan both north and south of Corning Preserve, reflecting historic land uses as well as future economic opportunities and recreational uses. As we have already noted, the plan needs to be integrated with the planning for the new convention center, which should incorporate pedestrian connections to the waterfront. In the long run, the city should explore reconfiguration of I-787 to reduce the extent to which it acts as a barrier to riverfront use and access and to add land for open-space use along the river.

Connecting the Tivoli Preserve to Patroon Creek and the Mohawk Trail

The 80-acre Tivoli Preserve has had problems over the years, although efforts are underway to clean it up and make it more useable for outdoor education. The city has been working on activities in the preserve with Inner City Outings, an organization that provides hands-on interaction with nature to low-income, inner-city youth. Meanwhile, the Arbor Hill Environmental Justice Corporation is working closely with the W. Haywood Burns Environmental Education Center to identify and eliminate pollution sources into the Patroon Creek watershed and Tivoli Lake. In addition, the city is developing a mitigation plan for the preserve that will improve the water quality of Tivoli Pond and the Hudson River. At the same time, the preserve is widely considered to be unsafe.

Tivoli could be a vital community asset as a park hub on the Patroon Creek Greenway while preserving its natural character and the educational opportunities it offers. Before highway and railroad construction, Patroon Creek was part of a larger watershed, which has since become fragmented. Locally, the Patroon Greenway Trail could create a connection between the Tivoli Preserve in Arbor Hill and the Pine Bush Preserve. Additional greenway connections could be made to the Corning Preserve, the Harriman Office Campus, SUNY at Albany, and the Nanotech/Sematech Research center. Regionally, this trail could potentially link the Hudson River to the Erie Canal Trail in Schenectady and, in turn, could become a connector for a new regional loop trail system with the existing 42-mile Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail.

The city and its partners should develop a master plan for the Tivoli Preserve for long-term use as an outdoor environmental preserve classroom, including a strategy for ongoing maintenance that engages residents in the preserve's future. This should be the first step in a larger plan to integrate the preserve with the Patroon Greenway and expand the greenway as a recreational, nonmotorized transportation corridor.

TRANSPORTATION

Background

Transportation systems in the city and county of Albany, and the capital region as a whole, are typical of many similar regions throughout the United States. Transportation tends to focus on the private automobile, with most trips, whether for commuting or other purposes, taking place in single-occupancy vehicles (SOVs). Between 1970 and 1990, according to data assembled by the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), SOV commuting increased by 86 percent, while carpooling declined by 32 percent. Commuting by transit and walking also declined, by 16 percent and 24 percent, respectively. This reflects not only changes in personal behavior during this period but also the increasing suburbanization of employment in the capital region. This travel pattern has significant environmental effects, particularly with respect to fuel consumption, air quality, and the land-use impacts of large amounts of space devoted to parking.

The situation is not entirely bleak. The CDTC, which is the regional transportation planning agency, has begun to pursue a variety of sustainability initiatives, while the Capital District Transportation Authority has shown energy and leadership, including an extensive paratransit system for people with disabilities and plans for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service. At the same time, however, large numbers of city and area residents still lack effective access to public transportation.

As we noted earlier, however, the low density and dispersion of employment within the region has led to a situation where journey-to-work times are relatively low and congestion manageable for SOV commuters. This reality may slow down the process of moving to a more sustainable system. A counterweight to this is the fact that an unusually large percentage (62 percent) of Albany residents work in the city. These people have short travel distances to work and could potentially be lured from their automobiles.

Building a sustainable transportation system, not just for the city but also for the region, is a critical step in building a sustainable community. This section touches upon some of the specific areas that should be addressed in the process of pursuing that goal.

Public Transit

Although 35,000 people use CDTA buses on the average weekday, they represent only a small percentage of trips within the capital region. The SDAT heard these and other criticisms of bus service:

- Large numbers of residents lack effective access to bus service.

- Service is not frequent, reliable, or comfortable enough.

- The system lacks amenities such as clearly-marked bus shelters and stops with adequate information.

- The system is not well advertised or marketed.

- The lack of a central bus terminal impedes use of the system.

- Crosstown routes are inadequate.

A review of the system map suggests that the system is extensive relative to cities of similar characteristics. While the network is principally a radial one, linking the region to downtown Albany, there are some crosstown links, particularly east of Allen Street. Service frequency varies widely, however, depending on the route and time of day—from 10-minute intervals during rush hours on some lines to 1-hour intervals on others.

While many of the criticisms are valid, we must acknowledge the constraints on a public-transit system in a relatively low-density area with dispersed population and job centers. CDTA may be constrained in its ability to increase the overall volume of bus activity, but it can take some important steps to enhance the quality of service:

- Transit amenities, such as stops and shelters with good information, should be added. Systems that alert riders to the amount of time before the next bus add predictability and raise user comfort levels.

- Xpress bus and shuttle service should be expanded.

- A network of regional commuter services—carpooling, vanpooling, park/ride, rides home, and so on—should be designed, implemented, and strongly marketed.

- The BRT line along Central Avenue should be aggressively pursued and should use to the extent feasible the full range of available BRT technology.

- The city should better market and inform the public about the system.

- The city should consider creating an intermodal transit hub in downtown Albany that would link local bus lines with Greyhound service and provide shuttle service to downtown destinations and the Amtrak station. It could coordinate design of this hub with plans for the new convention center.

- The city, state, and CDTA should explore whether any corridors within the city, or links between the city and key destinations outside the city, would be appropriate for light rail service.

- The city should enact a transit-oriented development (TOD) zoning designation around major BRT stations to promote the density and mixed use required for a successful urban transit node.

The city should actively support the CDTA BRT plans for Central Avenue, including making any reasonable changes with respect to removing on-street parking and changes to traffic patterns. The BRT system, if properly designed and implemented, could significantly enhance the Central Avenue corridor, which would translate into increased property values and development opportunities. The city should not allow itself to miss this opportunity.

Parking

A corollary of the SOV travel pattern is the large amount of space devoted to parking in the city, including an estimated 22,000 spaces (both on-street and off-street) in the downtown area. For all of the large amount of downtown space devoted to parking, conflicts over parking persist, particularly between state employees and residents of neighborhoods near downtown. For each person who believes there is too *much* parking, there is someone who believes there is too *little*.

Any systematic effort to address city parking issues requires a variety of partners at the table. These include the Albany Parking Authority and the Downtown Albany BID, but above all, the city must engage the state government, which is critical both as a provider of parking but even more as the single largest generator of parking demand in the city, if not the region. To this end, the city should

- In partnership with the state, comprehensively assess its current and future parking needs, existing parking facilities, and future options

- Continue to explore with the state a resolution to the conflicts between state employees and neighborhood residents over neighborhood parking spaces

- Explore creation of park/ride lots in conjunction with enhanced commuter-oriented transit services

- Consider incentives for property owners to redevelop downtown surface lots for mixed-use development that incorporates structured parking. These could include steps to increase the cost structure of operating surface parking as well as affirmative incentives to redevelop lots.

Vehicular, Pedestrian, and Bicycle Circulation

Albany is a car-dominated city. Even with respect to car movement, however, the system is not optimized. In particular, traffic signals seem to be poorly coordinated and arguably excessive in some areas. More important, the city's circulation system fails to allow for maximizing either pedestrian or bicycle travel.

The critical step is not a specific action but a way of thinking. While it is important for the city to improve vehicular traffic movement wherever possible in ways that are consistent with pedestrian and bicycle use, it is more important to create a system in which all modes of transportation receive equal weight and are integrated into a single network. Whenever the city contemplates any traffic, circulation, or roadway improvement, it must ask, "How can this improvement simultaneously improve pedestrian and bicycle travel?" The SDAT suggests that the city do the following:

- With CDTC's support, develop a plan to maximize pedestrian and bicycle use, not only for recreational purposes but also for journeys to work. Most people who both live and work inside the city still use SOVs to get to and from work.

- Provide bike lanes on major roads wherever feasible as well as "share the road" signage and education in other locations

Bicycle parking

- Provide bike racks and storage facilities at key destinations, including park-and-ride facilities, major employment centers, and other strategic downtown locations

- Provide clearly marked pedestrian crossings at important intersections, reconfigure traffic-signal timings, and provide "walk/don't walk" signals where feasible

- Initiate an public-education and enforcement campaign about the provisions of New York state law giving the right of way to pedestrians

- Ensure that pedestrian circulation systems—including sidewalks, intersections, and trails—comply fully with standards and requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Finally, as the city develops a sustainable, multimodal transportation and circulation system, it should reexamine its land-use regulations and development priorities in light of the opportunities that transportation improvements will create—in particular, new BRT corridors and a new multimodal transportation hub downtown. Land use and transportation are intimately interwoven, and neither should be planned without close reference to the other.

INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Background

While it is true to some extent everywhere, it is particularly true in Albany that the decisions made by its key institutions—state government, universities, and medical centers—are critical to the future of the city. Those decisions, the investments made by those institutions, and how those decisions and investments work together with each other and with the city's plans and strategies, will dictate much of the city's future course. These institutions complicate the decision-making process and create many day-to-day problems for the city (for example, parking, student housing, and conflicts with neighborhood concerns), but above all, they represent a range of resources and opportunities for the city's future that few cities Albany's size can aspire to.

Using those resources to their greatest advantage and realizing these opportunities will require making connections—both physical and institutional—between the city, its institutional partners, and its neighbors. If Albany is to move toward a sustainable future, one of its critical tasks in the years to come is to forge deep, ongoing partnerships between the city and its key institutions. These partnerships will allow shared action on a wide range of matters—as modest as a neighborhood conflict over the use of a single building and as vast as the long-term plans for the redevelopment and reuse of the Harriman campus. That undertaking, which requires the cooperation of many partners, represents perhaps the greatest future economic development opportunity available to the city of Albany.

The state government is the single most important partner—the 800-pound gorilla in the city of Albany. In a host of areas, the city's ability to act is either constrained or all but eliminated by the overwhelming presence and authority of state government. At the same time, it is critical for the state to recognize that the future of Albany—and its emergence as a sustainable, economically strong city—is critically important to the state as a whole. The state must become the city's lead partner in revitalization and growth, willing to both (a) allocate resources to foster critical development priorities and to (b) work in a partnership relationship with the city, the county, and other

key stakeholders to identify those priorities and the best way in which they can be addressed. With a new administration in the statehouse that has already demonstrated a commitment to the economic development of upstate New York, we believe that a real opportunity for such a partnership may exist.

While the universities and the medical center may not be as overwhelming a presence as state government, collectively and separately they represent an economic engine for the city—as well as an educational, cultural and human service resource—of similar weight. Moreover, while state government building decisions tend to affect largely the downtown area, the universities and hospitals are distributed around the city, so their decisions affect many neighborhoods and communities.

While the recommendations listed below offer a series of specific steps, they are all animated by a single principle: The city, state, and major institutions must begin to work more effectively with one another. We believe that it is the city that is in the best position to bring the parties together and begin the process of building the necessary partnerships.

Recommendations

- Create neighborhood-level forums to address institution-neighborhood impact issues in a joint fashion between the institutions, the city, and the affected neighborhoods

- Establish a joint planning process between the state and the city, and between the city and its major institutions, to coordinate their growth and development activities with the city's strategies for revitalization and sustainability

- Enlist the city's major institutions as a partner in the city's strategy to market itself as a good place to live, including offering incentives to state, university, and hospital employees to live in the city and in key target neighborhoods

- Tap the planning, scientific, information-technology, and other university resources to support the city's sustainability and revitalization strategies

- Obtain a firm commitment from the state and the University at Albany to a long-term strategy to transform the Harriman campus into a strong multipurpose center combining research and technology with commercial, residential, and other development, integrated with the university campus and the community

In building these critical partnerships, it is important not to lose track of the many other important stakeholders in the city: private business, BIDs, residents' and neighborhood organizations, and more. Although each may play a smaller role than do the major institutions, each should have a seat at the table.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE: TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS FOR ALBANY

Background

In the preceding sections of this report, the SDAT addressed many of the specific issues and problems that Albany faces—including downtown and neighborhood revitalization, open space, and transportation—and offered specific suggestions for each. These are not discrete issues, however, but parts of a larger whole. That larger whole deals with how Albany moves forward from where it is today to where it will be 10 or 20 years from now and whether it will actively grapple with and try to mold its future or let its future overtake it.

The central vehicle by which the city can put the pieces together, and try to mold its future, is the municipal comprehensive plan. As Albany embarks on a process to define and then frame a new comprehensive plan for the city, it must not only ask a series of specific questions but must also have a framework, or an approach, to asking those questions. In this section, the SDAT will lay out some of the key elements that should go into that framework.

Many different elements go into enhancing a community and establishing its identity, both for its inhabitants and for outside observers. A community with a clear identity is distinctive. This identity is communicated through its urban form, the layout of its streets, the design of its buildings, the connections between its public and open spaces, and the preservation of its historical assets. From a physical perspective,

Sustainability planning requires designing systems and thinking how they relate to all elements of a community Combining

PHYSICAL + PUBLIC POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Albany boasts remarkable assets, including its great location, its natural setting along the Hudson River, its historic sites and districts, a carefully crafted scale and rich urban fabric, strong distinctive neighborhoods, and tree-lined streets and sidewalks. Even as it enjoys these essential qualities, however, it reflects broader demographic and economic changes taking place across the region and the nation.

Although Albany has suffered (along with other American cities) from disinvestment, the dominance of the automobile, the competition from the suburbs and more, it has many strengths as it looks to the future—in downtown, in its many healthy neighborhoods, in its engaged citizens, and in its strong, vibrant institutions. After many years of losing jobs, population, and business activity, the city has the opportunity to grow its tax base, enhance its role as the central seat of government and the economic engine of the region, and attract new residents and visitors. The city also has the opportunity to make sure this potential growth enhances Albany's long-term quality of life. To do so, it must plan for its future by overcoming the barriers to development and redevelopment opportunities, building key institutional relationships, replacing aging infrastructure, and providing financial incentives to induce downtown business and housing in Albany.

The city of Albany is initiating its first comprehensive planning process, designed to create the underlying document to guide and enable public policies and development initiatives for years to come. In effect, this process will enable the city and its residents to create a blueprint for the future of the city. As Albany proceeds to articulate and define choices about redevelopment and potential new development, the planning process can serve a powerful role in developing consensus around sustainable development directions and establish an overall vision and policy framework for the city as a whole. As discussed during the SDAT workshops, a successful Albany will need to respond to the following key questions, among many others:

• How do we provide adequate housing for our existing (and growing) population and still preserve open space?

• How do we preserve our natural resources and open spaces and link them to our neighborhoods and our residents' lives?

• How do we encourage new businesses to locate in Albany so we can promote livable wages and job growth while maximizing access to public transit?

• How can we maximize our use of local resources, yet ensure that people have access to affordable basic goods?

• How do we increase density of population but maintain the character and scale of our unique neighborhoods?

- How can we revitalize those neighborhoods that have not shared in the city's economic growth while preserving affordable housing for those in need?

- How can we welcome new development and make sure that it meets our long-term goals and contributes to a lively urban center and a sustainable city?

- How can we address our vision of environmental sustainability in ways that enhance the city's economic development and quality of life?

- How can we effectuate in Albany the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement signed by Mayor Jennings along with hundreds of other American mayors?

By planning ahead, the city is saying, "We want to choose both good jobs and a clean environment. We want to preserve the neighborhoods that make the city a home and accommodate new growth. We want all of our citizens to participate and to play a critical role in the decisions affecting our future." The ability to do so is the essence of becoming a sustainable city—to ensure that Albany can meet its current needs without compromising either its values or the lives and health of future generations.

As the city develops its comprehensive plan, it should look at the following key ingredients to help shape a successful outcome.

City Hall Is the Center!

City government, its offices, and agencies play a critical role in the implementation of any plan. Albany has embarked on a new chapter in its evolution, one that speaks to change in its population, its land-uses, and its opportunities for future growth and development. Preparing a strong plan is only part of the battle. The real battle is turning the goals envisioned in the plan into reality.

Whether or not a plan is implemented depends on many things. The SDAT is well aware of the administrative and departmental constraints the city must address to be perceived as a dependable partner in the eyes of many parts of the community. People do not look to the city simply to provide basic services such as life safety or trash collection; they expect that government will also be their primary champion for change and for enhancing the overall quality of life in the city.

A number of key elements must be incorporated into the plan to help ensure that its vision for the future of Albany becomes a reality:

- Funding. Take existing and potential resources carefully into account, including specific budgeting and departmental structures and staff time considerations.

- Public involvement. Engage the largest possible number of stakeholders, build consensus between all constituencies, and get decision makers, both in the public and private sector institutions as well as the public, working together and committed to future possibilities.

- Regulatory. Translate a general sustainability vision to specific policy and program changes, including revisions to the city's zoning code, building codes, vacant property and other relevant ordinances.

- Short-term action. Incorporate specific, feasible action steps into each long-term goal set forth in the plan in order to focus activity and provide short-term results to sustain energy and commitment.

- Timeframe. Update the plan regularly by monitoring implementation steps and the role of key players continually to make the plan effective over time.

Sustainable Neighborhood and Downtown Development

A sustainable Albany depends on making its existing neighborhoods stronger and well connected to downtown and all parts of the city. Albany's 28 neighborhoods are the key building blocks of the city. Healthy neighborhoods are critical to a long-term revitalization strategy by which the city can

> "What is good for the residents of Albany's neighborhoods is good for the vitality, well-being, and growth of the entire community."
>
> *Council of Albany Neighborhood Associations*

reclaim and reestablish community values and identity—strengthening aesthetic character and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes while also integrating residents' daily needs with civic, recreational, and educational opportunities. As neighborhood initiatives are developed, care must be taken to avoid the assumption that a single strategy can apply to all, instead framing unique strategies for each neighborhood to preserve each area's unique opportunities and characteristics.

Over the past years, many excellent plans have been prepared in Albany addressing neighborhoods and downtown revitalization at various scales: broad areas within the city, individual neighborhoods, or even block by block. The community perceives these plans as having lofty goals but little connection to specific and enforceable policies and programs. They often appear to have been shelved, and recent city planning debates rarely refer to them. Many are also perceived as containing good directions but not being followed. These plans have not been adequately used, and it should be a priority to incorporate these documents into city planning debates.

To enhance Albany's downtown and neighborhoods as healthy, sustainable places to live, work, learn, and play, the city should consider the initiatives described below as part of an overall sustainability strategy.

Concentrate Redevelopment within the Existing Urban Fabric through Infill

The city should concentrate on revitalization and reuse of properties within its existing urban fabric instead of through new greenfield development or large-scale demolition and redevelopment. Through an infill development strategy that allows building on vacant lots, the redevelopment of underused lots, and the rehabilitation or expansion of existing buildings, the city can begin a critical mass of improvements in downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods that make a visible difference while retaining the existing—and generally strong—urban fabric. With resources likely to be limited relative to the need, the city must make strategic choices in its investment of discretionary resources to support redevelopment and revitalization, selecting those that will yield the best and most desired results rather than scattering limited resources inefficiently and ineffectively.

Target Adaptive Reuse and Rehabilitation of Existing Buildings

Albany has "good bones" in the physical fabric of its buildings and neighborhoods. Working within this framework, the city should foster revitalization strategies that specifically target older buildings no longer viable for their historic uses for adaptive reuse or rehabilitation to maintain and protect the city's rich architectural heritage. Many buildings in downtown Albany and close-in neighborhoods fit this purpose. Examples might include the use of buildings such as schools, churches, and pre-war office buildings for new uses such as housing or retail mixed-use development. To this end, the inventory of historic sites should be expanded and updated so that buildings that have been neglected or abandoned for many years are not torn down but instead considered for restoration and adaptive use. Short-and long-term strategies advocating the preservation of its heritage buildings will serve the city well in the future.

Foster Integrated Development Strategies

Planning strategies should be designed to lead to complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, workplaces, schools, parks, and civic facilities. Neighborhood planning must focus on key integrated strategies:

- **Fix the basics**. Make sure that infrastructure, streets, schools, transportation access, and open-space connections are sound and address key issues such as vacant and abandoned properties.

- **Build on assets**. Set priorities for investment around each neighborhood's distinctive assets, whether they be housing stock, connections to downtown and vital centers, key institutions and amenities, or commercial corridors and hubs.

c **Integrate investments**. Every neighborhood investment should be connected to, and support, each other. If a new school is being constructed, it creates opportunities to create open space, to add value to existing or proposed housing developments, and much more. Housing, schools, open space, and shopping should be seen as complementing and reinforcing one another.

Focus on Physical Connections, Assets, and Transformative
Opportunities for Change

Making the connections and finding the most appropriate opportunities for downtown and each of Albany's neighborhoods will require mapping and analysis tools designed to spot the interrelationships between patterns of disinvestment, on the one hand, and valuable assets, resources, and opportunity areas, on the other, that can be linked physically to identify priority areas for investment. Such analyses may identify particular target areas that offer unique opportunities for revitalization.

One such area may be the city's waterfront, where the expansion of this physical edge and the recreational opportunities it may offer can significantly enhance the city's present connection to the river. Further opportunities lie in existing and emerging special areas or districts within the city. These may include areas for arts and entertainment (e.g., the Capital Repertory Theatre, the WAMCU Performing Arts center, galleries along Lark Street and Delaware by Spectrum), promoting mixed-use development building on live/work units within existing neighborhoods, and promoting transit-oriented and mixed-use development in conjunction with the planned BRT for Central Avenue.
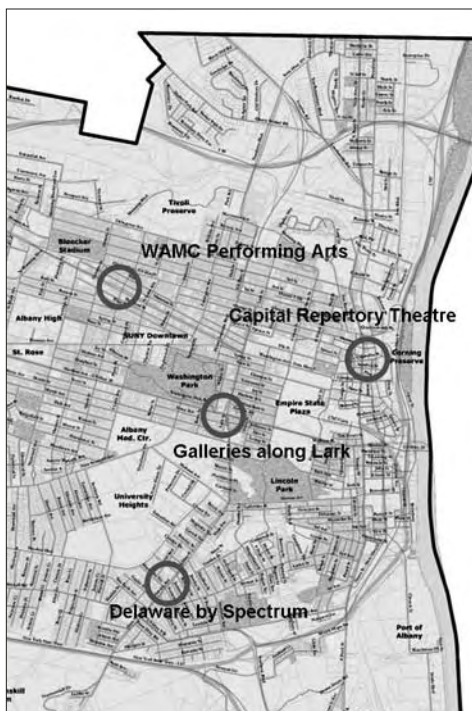
A third opportunity concerns those areas with dramatic potential for new incremental development capacity at a level capable of transforming the physical and economic conditions of the city. The most notable of these is the Harriman campus, while other long-term opportunities may include the transformation of the waterfront in conjunction with the reconfiguration of I-787.

Other Key Planning Elements

Plan on a Regional Scale

Albany plays a key regional and state role as the seat of New York state government and as the major center, despite suburban competition, of the capital region. This role and its implications for local planning and action must be recognized in the comprehensive plan. A regional planning perspective is needed to balance economic development, linkages to natural resources, growth management, transportation, and open space.

Although all levels of government are involved in these challenges, sustainability-oriented planning by nature requires regional coordination. In light of the future potential competition between Albany and its neighbors for the limited resources likely to be

available, a process of regional outreach (working, where feasible, through existing organizations such as CDTC but forging new relationships where necessary) is a critical element in a comprehensive plan to foster a sustainable community and contribute to a sustainable region.

Think Green

Sustainability demands that current architectural and building practices be substantially reconsidered. This process has already begun, and cities across the United States are promoting green building and infrastructure use of alternative energies, air-and water-quality measures, and energy and resource conservation strategies. The city must carefully assess its current policies and programs to develop regulations, guidelines, and incentives that can foster greener buildings and construction practices while also addressing energy efficiency and reduction of the waste stream within the existing community.

A sustainable energy strategy requires that the city, residents, and businesses prioritize resource use reduction, with the city as a leader in modeling sustainable practices in its municipal operations. Improvements over time should reflect the community's collective efforts toward green design and technologies, energy audits, energy performance contracting, procurement of renewable resources, and construction practices resulting in reduction of energy costs and promotion of renewable energy sources.

Design Guidelines and Design Review

The comprehensive plan must address the scope, intent, and assignment of design review authority, not only as a tool for compliance in historic districts but also as a proactive tool in planning all of the city's areas that contain a distinctive character and valued physical features. Design guidelines and an effective and responsible design review process are critical elements in implementing many of the principles—for instance, ensuring that infill development strengthens the existing neighborhood fabric. Land-use ordinances, however carefully drafted, are too blunt an instrument to ensure that new development, as well as adaptive reuse projects, complement and enhance their surroundings.

Design guidelines are particularly important in areas with a distinctive architectural character or fabric. Guidelines are important not only from an aesthetic standpoint but also from the standpoint of maintaining and enhancing the value of properties in the area. The process of developing the guidelines, therefore, should be an inclusive one, involving residents of the designated areas, professionals, and private property

owners, so that the review process is perceived as a benefit to all rather than a governmental imposition. Albany should consider developing neighborhood and district pattern books to ensure that construction and rehabilitation is consistent with the unique characteristics and typologies found throughout the city.

Code Enforcement

Limitations on the effectiveness of the city's code enforcement as a means of ensuring building quality was frequently raised during the SDAT visit. As noted earlier, it was apparent that provisions of the city ordinances dealing with vacant properties were not being fully enforced. The comprehensive plan process should address this issue, in that ultimately many of the strategies for redevelopment and revitalization may be either less effective or undermined in the absence of effective, targeted enforcement.

Code enforcement is a system that involves far more than issuing notices of violation. It involves effective follow-up, prosecution, and enforcement to abate nuisance conditions when owners fail to do so. More personnel would clearly be valuable, but other ways to make code operations more effective include these strategies:

- Using technology to increase efficiency and accountability of code enforcement staff

- Increasing staff training and education

- Mobilizing neighborhood residents through their associations to supplement city staff, such as in Atlanta's "neighborhood deputies" program.

- Creating a revolving fund for nuisance abatement actions

The comprehensive plan should explore these and other means of maintaining the quality of properties in Albany and ensuring livable standards for all the city's citizens.

Public Involvement

> "If the process is no good, it makes no difference how good the product is."
>
> *Statement made by a community member during the SDAT team visit*

Public involvement and engagement are critical to the success of any large-scale or sustained public undertaking, and this is particularly true with respect to the comprehensive plan, which by its nature should reflect a process of building a consensus of the community around a shared vision for their city. A public involvement process must not only inform the public about the process but also incorporate the public's ideas and suggestions into the process and the outcome and result in the public's active commitment to implement the ideas and directions set forth in the plan.

Albany is fortunate in that it has a large number of already-engaged citizens, as well as organizations that have a deep concern for and commitment to the city's future. Most of the city's neighborhoods have viable civic associations, and the network of those associations—the Council of Albany Neighborhood Associations (CANA)—is a great community asset. CANA, along with specific issue organizations such as the Albany Bicycling Coalition, the Historic Albany Foundation, and the Affordable Housing Partnership, should be embraced as partners in the planning process.

The SDAT recommends that the city carry out a layered approach to public involvement during the comprehensive plan process, using a number of techniques to create a common and shared vision for Albany:

- Large public meetings and community forums

- A citizen advisory committee of 13 to 30 people, carefully selected to represent the range of key community interests

- A technical advisory committee of 5 to 15 people, including environmentalists, planners, nonprofit developers, and others with specific expertise that can help inform the plan

- A major institutions committee, including key officials involved in planning and building activities from relevant state agencies, major universities, and hospitals.

- Key stakeholder meetings

- Small focus-group meetings around specific issues or geographic areas

All of these are examples of ways to include the public and key stakeholders in the process, ensure that all voices are heard, and gradually build consensus. Although this process is time-consuming, it is worth the effort because it not only creates an informed and engaged body of citizens, organizations and institutions behind the plan, but it also furthers the integration of natural resources, economic development, housing and neighborhood strategies, community development, historic preservation, and development issues into a single, holistic approach to a multifaceted endeavor.

MOVING FORWARD

The Albany SDAT recommends the following short-term goals and immediate next steps toward sustainable community development.

Downtown

- Focus on building a downtown residential community, including incentives, zoning standards, and design guidelines to encourage residential and mixed-use development

- Prioritize Pearl Street and Lark Street areas as complementary retail hubs

- Ensure that the planning and design of the Convention Center maximizes connectivity to downtown, the South End, and the Hudson River

Neighborhood Strategies

Develop a coordinated abandoned property strategy, including the following elements:

- Focus on holding owners accountable, including strengthening and enforcing existing ordinances dealing with property maintenance and abandoned properties

- Gain control of abandoned properties, including restructuring the city/county system of tax foreclosures

- Provide incentives for rehabilitation and reuse of abandoned property, including incentives for families to buy and restore properties for owner-occupancy

- Ensure that redevelopment of distressed neighborhoods is equitable and addresses both housing and economic opportunities of the neighborhoods' lower-income residents.

Environment and Open space

- Adopt a green building and energy efficiency policy, including partnering with the state to aggressively market resources and opportunities for greater energy efficiency in existing buildings in the city, developing green building guidelines for future construction, developing a plan for reducing energy use by the city of Albany, and developing a plan to increase recycling

- Further investigate alternatives to expanding the landfill in the Pine Bush

- Explore alternative plans for Washington Park, including circulation, lighting, security, and programming

- Work with the state to reconfigure the Empire State Plaza, making it more user-friendly, better linked to downtown, and more environmentally sustainable

- Expand open-space opportunities along the Hudson River, building on Corning Preserve

- Connect the Tivoli Preserve to Patroon Creek and the Mohawk Trail

Transportation

- Actively support creation of the BRT line along Central Avenue

- Explore creation of a multimodal transportation hub in downtown Albany, perhaps in conjunction with the new convention center

- Work with the state to resolve parking conflicts between neighborhoods and state employees

- Provide incentives for property owners to redevelop surface parking lots in downtown for mixed-use development that incorporates structured parking

- Develop plans to enhance use of bicycle and pedestrian travel, particularly for work journeys, including bike lanes, bike storage areas, and well-marked pedestrian crossings

Institutional Relationships

- Create neighborhood-level forums to address institution/neighborhood impact issues in a cooperative fashion

- Establish a joint planning process between the state, the city, and its major institutions to coordinate their growth and development with the city's strategies for revitalization and sustainability

- Enlist the city's major institutions as partners in the city's strategy to market itself as a good place to live

- Tap the planning, scientific, information technology, and other resources of the university to support the city's sustainability and revitalization strategies

- Obtain a firm state commitment to transform the Harriman campus into a strong, multipurpose center combining research and technology with commercial, residential, and other development, integrated with the university campus and the community

Planning for the Future

- Carry out a comprehensive planning process that focuses on redeveloping the existing fabric of the city, creating integrated strategies for revitalizing the city's neighborhoods, focusing on connections, assets, and transformative opportunities for change

- Place the city's planning efforts into a regional context, coordinating efforts with other cities, counties, and regional agencies

- Think green by building sustainability into every aspect of the plan

- Use the plan as an opportunity to develop design guidelines and a design review process to guide future development

- Address the city's need for a systematic, effective code enforcement and nuisance abatement strategy in the plan

- Above all, ensure that the process fully engages the citizens of Albany and their organizations and that the plan itself reflects their needs, their desires, and their vision of the city's future.

On behalf of the Albany SDAT and the American Institute of Architects, we hope this report will be a useful guide to the Albany community as it forges a sustainable path for the coming years and generations.