



Prepared by
Tom Bliss,
Kelly Gentrup

Southeast Nebraska Development District (SEND D)



Mission Statement

To advance economic growth in the Ashland area through the attraction of new businesses, retention of existing businesses, and promotion of the area by providing support for commerce, industry, and housing that enables development and enhances the community region.

2021 AAEDC Board of Directors

Rob Bundy: President - At Large Member

Rod Reisen: Chamber of Commerce Representative

Nolan Welch: Treasurer - At Large Member

Chuck Niemeyer: City of Ashland Representative

Jason Libal: Ashland-Greenwood School Representative

Dave Lutton: Saunders County Representative

Thomas Judds: At Large Member

Tim O'Brien: At Large Member

Thanks to **Jessica Quady** with the City of Ashland and **Caleb Fjone** with AAEDC/SENDD for their assistance.



Process

Strategy and Process

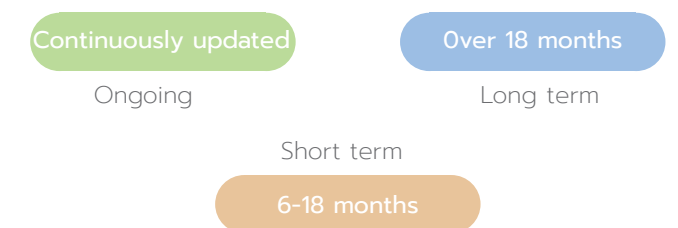
On March 22, 2021, the Ashland Area Economic Development Corporation (AAEDC) held a meeting to update the existing 2018-2019 Action Plan. AAEDC worked in conjunction with Tom Bliss at Southeast Nebraska Development District (SEND) to complete the plan. The strategic planning session was focused on a series of questions that encouraged engagement of the board. The action plan is broken up into four (4) goal statements with items supporting the goal. The addition of a new executive director fulfilled goal statement four (4) from the 2018-2019 Action Plan, which has enabled AAEDC to focus more on commercial development, marketing and advocacy, housing development, and the organizational structure.

The goals in the 2018-2019 Action Plan are still relevant to the mission of AAEDC, but the 2021 Plan will focus the efforts of the body more effectively. The 2021-2023 Plan will give the board and executive director a blueprint to follow in the coming years.

Prior to the meeting, questions were sent to the participants to begin the engagement process. These questions were designed to have

the board members and city staff think about strategy rather than an operational plan. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing was encouraged, which allowed the AAEDC Board and city staff to participate either in-person or online.

Understanding the number of changes occurring in Ashland and AAEDC, this is a three (3) year plan. Tasks are divided into three categories: Ongoing, Short-term, and Long-term. These categories are color-coded as follows:



Unlike the 2018-2019 Action Plan, it is suggested that these activities are shared responsibilities between AAEDC Board Members and the AAEDC Executive Director. As needed, it is strongly encouraged that partner organizations are identified and utilized. This may help conserve the organization's limited resources.

Commercial Development and Capital Investment

goal one

A strong, diverse local economy is the backbone of a livable, growing community. Strong, vibrant communities encourage local enterprise that serves the needs of residents and promotes stable employment.

Inventory Existing Commercial Properties

Create and maintain a database of existing and available commercial properties, i.e. location, contacts, costs, etc.

Populate and maintain Location One (LOIS) with commercial sites and buildings

Research city, county, state and federal funding opportunities to build an economic development toolkit

Maintain relationships with property owners

Work with the city and property owners to identify parcels for commercial development

Maintain Ashland’s vibrant downtown business district

Develop a locally-controlled funding pool for commercial property development

Develop a process to prioritize high-growth sites and put options to purchase these locations

Increase opportunities for business grown on Highways 6 and 66 corridors

Work through the City Truck Bypass Committee (CTBC) to improve availability of commercial properties to the west of Ashland

Improve Awareness of AAEDC’s role with Commercial Development and Capital Investment

Routinely meet with lenders, chamber of commerce, city staff, local business organizations, and key stakeholders to promote new business development and determine local market’s needs (survey)

Business, Retention, and Expansion – Create a BRE calendar and appropriate materials (min. 2/quarter)

Work with regional economic development groups to develop programs that will benefit the Ashland area

Complete Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) Leadership Certification application

Educate AAEDC staff and Ashland City Council on various economic development resources (ongoing)

Establish public forums or workshops on economic development for local businesses and stakeholders

Increase the local tax base (property and sales)

Local Support for Ashland-area businesses

Identify partners (economic developers, local, regional, and state economic development organizations) to assist with development activities

Provide technical support to small businesses

Maintain relevant demographic data to support local economic development efforts, this data should also be incorporated into LOIS

Create various locally-controlled funds and technical assistance programs to support start-ups and expanding businesses

Identify strengths of the Ashland area and build specific programs to support these, i.e. downtown destination, parks, etc.

Develop business succession planning activities

Improve access to capital for new and existing businesses by identifying potential funding gaps and work to fill these with new or additional resources

Pursue gap development financing programs

Create a program to support commercial property owners to improve/maintain their sites

Create a shared workspace

Business Recruitment

Work with Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) and Nebraska Economic Developers Association (NEDA) to identify and participate in relevant marketing trips

Research city, county, state and federal funding opportunities to build economic development incentives

Create and maintain Request for Information (RFI) packets for site selectors

Continue working with Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) to generate site leads (information from RFI can be included with this)

Purchase CRM (Customer Relations Management) software to manage project leads

Create and update a site selection guide (ongoing)

Integrate LOIS into AAEDC and City of Ashland's website

Maintain relevant demographic data to support local economic development efforts, this data should also be incorporated into LOIS

Generate a target market analysis

Consider becoming Economic Development Certified Community (EDCC)

Recruit one new business annually

Create and provide local incentives, i.e. reduced costs and infrastructure, land, etc.

Work with City of Ashland to improve municipal infrastructure that supports commercial and industrial recruitment needs

Consider joining Community Venture Network for business leads

Consider procuring Ady Advantage to do a site-selector ready visit

Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Survey local employers to determine local needs

Partner with the Ashland-Greenwood School District on workforce issues

Promote available job openings in the greater Ashland area and support local businesses with job fairs

Compile cost of living comparison data

Acquire labor shed study from Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL)

Utilize state resources for job training, i.e. customized training programs

Continue improving quality of life amenities, i.e. playgrounds, parks, trails, etc.

Work towards expanding, quality, affordable, and reliable broadband services

Partner with City of Ashland and greater Ashland area to advocate for infrastructure improvements

Work with City Council and city staff on capital improvement plans that benefit the City's overall economic environment, i.e. improved transportation, water, wastewater, broadband, etc.

Partner with the City to identify resources to pay for proposed improvements. This may include working with SENDD.

Improve access to affordable, reliable, and quality broadband services

Develop resources to purchase and market a site compatible with an industrial/business park

Marketing and Advocacy

goal two

A plan to grow awareness of AAEDC is an investment. Growing understanding of the organization will bring new voices to the conversation and cultivate appreciation for your efforts.

Develop a brand guide for AAEDC

Continue to enhance the AAEDC logo and flyers to keep modern and current

Redesign the logo for a fresh new look
 Determine organization color scheme and fonts to maintain brand consistency for AAEDC
 Create marketing swag with AAEDC's logo (i.e. decals, pens, welcome folders, etc.)

Create a marketing guide/plan for AAEDC and the City of Ashland (this could be done in partnership with the Ashland Chamber of Commerce as well)

Website & Social Media Presence

Maintain AAEDC website with current and relevant content and images
 Publish press releases related to economic and community development (increasing traffic to the site)
 Update social media pages with relevant news and updates (posting 2-3 times per week)
 Populating both website and social media with images showcasing what the Ashland area has to offer

Finalize a city web-based app for community residents
 Send Request for Proposal (RFP) to create an AAEDC website
 Create accounts on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to diversify ways of communicating with different demographics
 Create and develop content for a website including but not limited to (Business Incentives & Resources, Site Selection, Demographics, LOIS, Quality of Life, etc.)

Have the AAEDC website be a tool for job recruitment and membership dues (create a job portal & a login for members to go into update their profiles and pay annual dues)

Build and strengthen relationships with Economic Development Organizations (EDO) across the state and region

Maintain membership with Nebraska Economic Development Association (NEDA)
 Utilize resources from NEDA to supplement and assist AAEDC and its members
 Attend Economic Development conferences, virtual workshops & webinars (i.e. NEDA, SERN, IEDC, MAEDC, DED)
 Maintain a positive working relationship with surrounding EDOs

Executive Director becomes a NEDA member
 Meet with economic developers & resource partners to learn more about ED best practices and resources to better assist businesses and the community

Partner with surrounding EDOs and resource partners on hosting workshops in Ashland area relative to marketing, business expansion, quality of life, and/or housing
 Potentially join the Greater Omaha Chamber or Lincoln Partnership

Promote Ashland as a great place to do business, live and play

Work with the Chamber, City and tourism to promote Ashland as a great place to live, work and play
 Meet regularly with the communications committee to determine creative ways to promote Ashland and AAEDC

Develop a welcome packet for residents and new businesses with relative information about Ashland
 Create and populate a communications committee with key stakeholders

Create a video series promoting Ashland's diverse industries, quality of life, and housing opportunities
 Maintain relationships with community members and stakeholders

Structure, Membership, and Organizational

goal three

A community with a sound economic development program is likely to succeed. To ensure accountability and transparency for its membership, the AAEDC must have a thorough approach for structure and its membership.

Structure and Organization

Host annual board meetings to revisit and amend the 2021-2024 strategic plan
 Provide monthly financial documents to the board of directors (P&L, Budget, check registry, etc.); These should be made available to all investors upon request

Create an annual action plan that targets tasks identified in the 2021-2024 strategic plan and measure outcomes

Revisit bylaws to accurately reflect AAEDC’s progress

Invest in bookkeeping software to manage memberships dues and AAEDC finances

Create policies to help guide the organization while creating transparency and accountability for membership

Provide board training on fiscal responsibilities

Ensure the organization and its board members are protected with Directors and Officers insurance policy, depending on progress with other strategies, this might also include an Errors and Omissions policy

Develop board packets to distribute to new members

Develop an annual budget

Discuss possibly expanding services to include nearby communities such as Greenwood, Memphis, Wann, etc.

Hire office support staff

Increase revenue

Develop a plan to separate from SENDD (insurance, salary, paid-time-off, back office support, etc.)

Create a governance policy as it relates to the structure of the board

Craft clear fiscal and procurement policies that offer day-to-day guidance for AAEDC staff

Develop a personnel manual for AAEDC staff

Membership/Investors

Establish a monthly email or listserv and update AAEDC membership. Create a quarterly newsletter with more in-depth information on activities

Host annual board meeting to highlight yearly successes and elect new board of directors members and officers (potentially work to diversify the board to be more representative of the community)

Invoice membership annually (align with fiscal year)

Refine AAEDC’s message to better align with funders
 Grow AAEDC’s membership

Create staggered funding tiers (Bronze, Silver, Gold, Diamond) with funding levels associated with each level

Generate a mechanism to recognize/highlight members and showcase them in the quarterly newsletter

Rebuild trust with members

Consider moving from a chamber-based model (members) to an economic development organization-model (investors)

Hire a campaign consultant to increase investment

Determine an annual investment growth percentage and work to achieve this goal, i.e. two (2) percent growth annually