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.
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 (SENDD) 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:

- Continuous updated
- Ongoing
- Over 18 months
- Short term
- 6-18 months
- Long term

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.
## 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inventory Existing Commercial Properties</th>
<th>Improve Awareness of AAEDC’s role with Commercial Development and Capital Investment</th>
<th>Local Support for Ashland-area businesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create and maintain a database of existing and available commercial properties, i.e. location, contacts, costs, etc.</td>
<td>Develop a locally-controlled funding pool for commercial property development</td>
<td>Create various locally-controlled funds and technical assistance programs to support start-ups and expanding businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Populate and maintain Location One (LOIS) with commercial sites and buildings</td>
<td>Develop a process to prioritize high-growth sites and put options to purchase these locations</td>
<td>Identify strengths of the Ashland area and build specific programs to support these, i.e. downtown destination, parks, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research city, county, state and federal funding opportunities to build an economic development toolkit</td>
<td>Increase opportunities for business grown on Highways 6 and 66 corridors</td>
<td>Develop business succession planning activities</td>
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<td>Maintain relationships with property owners</td>
<td>Work through the City Truck Bypass Committee (CTBCC) to improve availability of commercial properties to the west of Ashland</td>
<td>Create a shared workspace</td>
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<td>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)</td>
<td>Complete Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) Leadership Certification application</td>
<td>Improve access to capital for new and existing businesses by identifying potential funding gaps and work to fill these with new or additional resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business, Retention, and Expansion – Create a BRE calendar and appropriate materials (min. 2/quarter)</td>
<td>Educate AAEDC staff and Ashland City Council on various economic development resources (ongoing)</td>
<td>Pursue gap development financing programs</td>
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<td>Work with regional economic development groups to develop programs that will benefit the Ashland area</td>
<td>Establish public forums or workshops on economic development for local businesses and stakeholders</td>
<td>Create a program to support commercial property owners to improve/maintain their sites</td>
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<td>Identify partners (economic developers, local, regional, and state economic development organizations) to assist with development activities</td>
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<td>Create a shared workspace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide technical support to small businesses</td>
<td>Maintain relevant demographic data to support local economic development efforts, this data should also be incorporated into LOIS</td>
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<td>Work with city and property owners to identify parcels for commercial development</td>
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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
- Improve access to affordable, reliable, and quality 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.
- Develop resources to purchase and market a site compatible with an industrial/business park
**Marketing and Advocacy**

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 AEDC 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 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.

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.

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.

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.