Creating safe, livable, mixed-use, and mixed-income neighborhoods emerged from the Albany 2030 visioning process as the top community priority. The physical character of Albany’s neighborhoods is largely defined by their housing stock, which are also critical to the well-being of residents. The age of the housing stock contributes to the City’s walkable, historic urban fabric but poses issues regarding building condition and adaptability to contemporary lifestyles and market demand. Moreover, the quality of Albany’s neighborhoods varies from stable to needing reinvestment as measured by vacancy rate, poverty status, and homeownership rate.

Due to its history and development pattern, Albany has an eclectic mix of housing options from historic row houses and bungalows to modern split levels and colonials.
3.6 Housing and Neighborhoods

See Map 11 for a map of Albany’s neighborhoods.

Key housing and neighborhood system components include housing diversity and choice, neighborhood identity, and neighborhood services.

**HOUSING DIVERSITY AND CHOICE**

Retaining current and attracting new residents to Albany depends on the availability of quality housing choices that meets the needs of residents at different income levels and at different stages in their lifecycles. A diverse housing stock will allow residents to continue to live in Albany as their needs change and will also make the City more competitive in the regional housing market.

**Goals:**

Provide a range of decent, affordable housing choices, densities, ownership opportunities, and price ranges to accommodate the housing needs of existing and new residents.

Maintain the supply of quality affordable housing while encouraging mixed-income neighborhoods.

**Strategies and Actions:**

- HDC-1 Improve the balance between rentals and owner-occupied homes.
- HDC-2 Use zoning as a tool to incentivize a diverse housing stock.
- HDC-3 Provide and maintain intergenerational/life-cycle housing options.
- HDC-4 Develop creative financing tools to encourage mixed-income housing.
- HDC-5 Develop a marketing strategy to promote the City’s neighborhoods.
- HDC-6 Use zoning to incentivize the development of affordable housing.
- HDC-7 Encourage mixed-income housing options throughout the City.
- HDC-8 Promote quality affordable housing through design guidelines.
- HDC-9 Use building and zoning code enforcement to improve housing quality.
- HDC-10 Ensure adequate provisions for homelessness prevention, transition and housing.
- HDC-11 Increase resilience of housing stock to the impacts of climate change.

**Housing and Neighborhoods Key Issues**

- About 50% of total housing units were built before 1940, indicating an aging housing stock but also a strong historic fabric.
- Housing vacancy in Albany increased by 12% from 1990-2000. The City had the highest ratio of vacant units compared to both the region and the state.
- More than half of Albany’s housing is renter occupied, in part due to a large student population.
- In 2000, median monthly housing costs were less than 30% of household income, making Albany a relatively affordable place to live.
- The cost to rehabilitate older buildings and bring them up to code can be prohibitive.
Map 11 Albany’s Neighborhoods
HDC-1 Strategy: Improve the balance between rentals and owner-occupied homes. (Interrelated Strategies: Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-2, HDC-3, HDC-4, HDC-7)

**Actions:**

a. Partner with local employers and institutions to create incentives to encourage employees and renters to purchase homes in targeted neighborhoods.

b. Utilize CDBG program funding and partner with banks or community housing organizations to sponsor mortgage assistance programs (e.g., targeted to low-income households) for potential homebuyers.

c. Develop rehabilitation assistance programs and incentives to promote re-establishment of homeowner occupied housing.

d. Ensure that neighborhoods provide a diverse mix of housing opportunities for both renters and homeowners.

HDC-2 Strategy: Use zoning and regulations as a tool to incentivize a diverse housing stock and mixed-income neighborhoods. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form LU-1, LU-2; Economy INV-1, INV-2; Social AC-7; Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-6, HDC-7)

**Actions:**

a. Adopt zoning and other development regulations (e.g., inclusionary zoning, density bonuses, streamlined development review) to maintain and increase housing diversity, promote mixed-income neighborhoods, and make home ownership more affordable by reducing development costs.

b. Promote increased mixed-use housing in downtown, through zoning regulations and incentives, to sustain weekend and evening pedestrian activity and encourage evening hours for retailers.

c. Identify and remove barriers to aging in place.

BEST PRACTICES: MT. TABOR SENIOR HOUSING - PHILADELPHIA, PA

The Mt. Tabor Community Education and Economic Development Corporation developed an apartment building for seniors that is integrated with its larger neighborhood in Philadelphia. The neighborhood includes a mix of families, young adults, and seniors. The building is located adjacent to a church and bus routes and helps to support the revitalization of a nearby retail district. Amenities of the building include access to high-speed internet, technology education, physical fitness, and outdoor gardens.
HDC-3 Strategy: Provide and maintain intergenerational/life-cycle housing options that meet the needs of all age groups. (Interrelated Strategies: Economy INV-2; Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-2, HDC-4)

Actions:

a. Encourage diverse intergenerational housing. Diverse housing includes options for residents throughout different stages of life (e.g., students, couples, families with children, seniors) in the same neighborhood.

b. Encourage non-profit and for-profit developers to design senior housing that is integrated into the neighborhood.

c. Provide opportunities for assisted living, supportive housing and shared services where appropriate.

HDC-4 Strategy: Develop creative financing tools to encourage mixed-income housing development. (Interrelated Strategies: Economy INV-2; Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-1, HDC-7)

Actions:

a. Work with the Albany Housing Authority, other developers and housing groups to explore and create funding opportunities for mixed-income housing development.

b. Seek out public-private partnerships to develop mixed-income, energy-efficient housing.

c. Incentivize middle-class homeownership in targeted strategy areas as a means to improve economic diversity and economic stability in distressed areas.

d. Ensure that affordable housing options are provided in all City neighborhoods.

HDC-5 Strategy: Develop a marketing strategy to promote the City’s neighborhoods. (Interrelated Strategies: Economy INV-1, INV-2; Social PS-7, AC-4; Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-1, HDC-4)

Actions:

a. Create a marketing strategy that highlights the benefits of city neighborhoods, including walkability, access to downtown, historic buildings, and lower transportation costs. Work with and build off of the successful efforts of local groups.
b. Create a Residents Incentives Package as recommended in Capitalize Albany for all city neighborhoods. The Residents Incentives Package could include a resident rewards card, discounts at local businesses, mass transit discounts, information about local services and businesses, and details about local neighborhood associations.

HDC-6 Strategy: Use zoning and development regulations to incentivize the development and redevelopment of affordable housing. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form LU-1; Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-2, HDC-7)

Actions:

a. Adopt zoning and other development incentives (e.g., density bonuses, streamlined development review, reduced fees) to encourage affordable housing and mixed-income development. While Albany is relatively affordable (median monthly costs are less than 30% of median incomes), efforts should be made to ensure all neighborhoods provide housing options for low, moderate and high income individuals and families.
HDC-7 Strategy: Encourage mixed-income housing options throughout the City's neighborhoods. (Interrelated Strategies: Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-1, HDC-2, HDC-3, HDC-4)

Actions:

a. Adopt zoning and other incentives to encourage mixed-income housing (e.g., density bonuses, streamlined development review, reduced fees) throughout Albany’s neighborhoods.

b. Seek out public-private partnerships and non-profit housing developers to construct mixed-income housing on publically owned low-cost vacant parcels in the City.

HDC-8 Strategy: Promote quality affordable housing through design or land use guidelines. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form LU-1, UD-1; Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-9)

Actions:

a. Adopt design guidelines focused on scale, design, and density to ensure that housing fits in with and is sensitive to its surrounding neighborhood context while addressing the needs of the modern family.

b. Utilize energy-efficiency and renewable energy technologies in construction and rehabilitation projects as a means of increasing the long-term affordability of housing, as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

c. Work with the Albany Housing Authority, neighborhood associations, and residents to define expectations for quality affordable housing and reduce potential conflicts with proposed projects.

d. Consider identifying alternative housing types that allow increased densities, while having limited neighborhood impact.

HDC-9 Strategy: Use building and zoning code enforcement to improve housing quality and reduce building neglect. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form LU-3, UD-1; Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-8)

Actions:

a. Prioritize and target key vacant and abandoned properties for mixed-income housing redevelopment.

b. Modernize data systems, including utilizing mobile reporting technology, and integrate interactive opportunities for public access to digital information.

BEST PRACTICES: COMMUNITY GARDENS

Communities across the country are realizing the benefits of increasing access to local food and reducing vacant land and buildings. In Chicago, IL, City Council created a nonprofit entity to own, lease, manage, or hold easements for small open spaces for maintenance by neighborhood groups, including tax delinquent parcels. Other cities such as Cleveland, OH established an urban garden zoning district to appropriately locate and protect urban gardens.

BEST PRACTICES: ECO-DENSITY

In 2008, Vancouver, BC City Council adopted the EcoDensity Charter, committing the City to support housing affordability and livability in all city planning decisions. Priority actions under this program include requiring applications for new rezoning to meet a minimum LEED™ Silver rating, or similar equivalency in green design; requiring applications for new rezoning on large sites to provide a range of types and tenures; and removal of existing zoning or related barriers to green building approaches and affordable housing options (e.g., secondary suites in high density housing).

http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/ecocity/
c. Continue and expand the efforts of the Block by Block code enforcement initiative that systematically and proactively addresses code issues at the neighborhood/individual property scale and includes the assessment and improvement of streetscape amenities and infrastructure.

HDC-10 Ensure adequate provisions for homelessness prevention, transition and housing (Interrelated Strategies: Social SS-1, SS-2, SS-5, SS-7)

**Actions:**

a. Work with existing homeless assistance organizations to partner and share resources.

b. Identify gaps in service that are not being met through existing homeless assistance organizations.

c. Study the effectiveness of preventative programs, including housing subsidies, supportive services (substance abuse, mental health, etc.) coupled with permanent housing, legal support for evictions, and identifying and overcoming barriers to permanent housing.

d. Consider developing a housing and homelessness strategy that includes the following elements:
   - Identify homeless demographics and the root causes of homelessness in Albany.

Events, like this Arbor Hill Block Party sponsored by the Housing Authority and the City, create a sense of community and connection to local institutions.

**BEST PRACTICES: SCHOOL-CENTERED COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION**

Good schools will attract families to a neighborhood while poorly performing schools perpetuate the cycle of disinvestment. In Philadelphia, PA, the University of Pennsylvania worked with the school district to build a new public elementary school, supported by a neighborhood strategy that included housing loans, anti-crime, and business and economic development programs. The school quickly became one of the best performing public schools in the City and property values in the neighborhood have increased significantly. The student body is economically and racially diverse.

1. Reconnecting schools and neighborhoods [http://www.practitioner-resources.org/](http://www.practitioner-resources.org/)
• Evaluate existing programs and identify overlaps and gaps
• Identify proven strategies for homeless prevention, permanent housing solutions, temporary assistance, and continuing services

HDC-11 Strategy: Increase resilience of housing stock to impacts of climate change. (Interrelated Strategies: Housing and Neighborhoods HDC-8, HDC-9; Utilities and Infrastructure EN-4)

Actions:

a. Investigate the potential benefits of forming mutual insurance pools to spread the risk of climate change.

b. Develop a vulnerability assessment to identify areas most prone to the impacts of climate change.

c. Consider adopting a Residential Energy Conservation Ordinance (RECO) that improves housing affordability and reduces environmental impacts by setting baseline energy efficiency requirements for existing rental housing.

NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

Albany’s neighborhoods play a key role in the city’s quality of life, preservation of historic and cultural resources, residential and commercial property values, and overall investment in the City.

Goal:

Maintain distinct, safe, quality neighborhoods that preserve and enhance the natural beauty, historic/architectural character, and cultural diversity of Albany.

Strategies and Actions:

NI-1 Target blighting influences.

NI-2 Use zoning and development regulations as a tool for investment.

NI-3 Leverage institutional anchors to build neighborhood identity.

NI-4 Create a partnership between neighborhood associations and institutions

NI-5 Promote the use of web-based tools for neighborhood information sharing.
NI-1 Strategy: Target blighting influences (e.g., vacant/substandard properties, brownfields) to prevent and reverse decline. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form LU-3, ARCH-2; Economy INV-1, INV-2, INV-3; Social PS-1, AC-6)

Actions:

a. Implement a strategic acquisition and land banking program to combat and reverse decline and vacancy in the City's neighborhoods in partnership with other agencies.

b. Finalize and implement the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategic Plan, including the systematic assessment of vacant properties, the creation of an acquisition fund and land banking program, and the development of strategic disposition strategies.

c. Adopt Artistic Board Up, outlined in the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategic Plan, as the standard for vacant and abandoned property board-up.

d. Address foreclosure and its barriers to transfer properties into productive residential and commercial reuse.

e. Continue the practice of escalating fines and fees, and explore escalating assessment for vacant and abandoned properties to deter speculation and encourage reuse.
NI-2 Strategy: Use zoning and development regulations as a tool to encourage and incentivize neighborhood investment. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form UD-1, ARCH-1, ARCH-2; Economy INV-1, INV-2, INV-4)

**Actions:**

a. Adopt design guidelines and incentives for adaptive reuse, redevelopment and infill development.

b. Researching best practices in cooperation with New York State, develop and pilot a Rehabilitation Building Code that allows greater flexibility in restoration or rehabilitation of existing structures to encourage reuse rather than demolition of existing structures.

c. Promote the use of historic tax credits and state and federal green building incentives to encourage rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings.

NI-3 Strategy: Build neighborhood identity, connections, and sense of community by leveraging institutional anchors. (Interrelated Strategies: Neighborhood Identity NI-4; Social CHR-3; Natural Resources OS-2; Institutions FP-3, RP-5)

**Actions:**

a. Work with community stakeholders, institutions and neighborhood organizations to encourage and enhance community activities and events (e.g. block parties, neighborhood arts and cultural festivals), promote neighborhoods, and develop community projects and incentives (e.g. homeownership programs, community parks).

b. Work with community stakeholders to encourage innovative reuse of vacant properties (e.g., urban agriculture, urban landscaping, vacant lot stabilization and community gardens).
NI-4 Strategy: Create a partnership between neighborhood associations and institutions to reduce the possible negative impacts of institutional facilities and projects on the surrounding community. (Interrelated Strategies: Neighborhood Identity NI-3; Institutions FP-3, FP-6, RP-5, NS-3)

**Actions:**

a. Encourage neighborhood-level forums to address potential plans and impacts of institutions on adjacent neighborhoods. Encourage institutions to work with the City and community stakeholders early in the project planning phase to address potential concerns.

NI-5 Strategy: Promote the use of web-based tools and social media for neighborhood information sharing. (Interrelated Strategies: Utilities and Infrastructure COM-1, COM-2; Institutions RP-6)

**Actions:**

a. Work with neighborhood associations and other neighborhood stakeholders to develop a network of social media, listservs, or other interactive web-based forums to serve as a mechanism for residents to communicate general information such as, current events or public safety concerns.

b. Expand the City of Albany’s use of social media and other interactive web-based tools for sharing information and engaging the public.

**NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES**

The quality and accessibility of neighborhood services impacts the desirability and health of a neighborhood. Neighborhood services include commercial centers, transit, schools, parks and recreation, health services, libraries, and public safety.
Map 12 Neighborhood Commercial Opportunities
Goal:
Provide access to basic neighborhood services, including commercial centers, parks, schools, transit, police protection, libraries, community centers, etc., for all neighborhoods.

Strategies and Actions:

NS-1 Enhance, promote, and strengthen neighborhood commercial centers.
NS-2 Increase transit connectivity between neighborhoods and employment centers.
NS-3 Partner with institutions to attract investment in surrounding neighborhoods.
NS-4 Locate libraries, schools, parks, and community centers close to neighborhoods.
NS-5 Focus on community policing methods.
NS-6 Address parking issues within neighborhoods.
NS-7 Increase access to healthy food options for all neighborhoods.

NS-1 Strategy: Enhance, promote, and strengthen neighborhood commercial centers by supporting small, local businesses. See Map 12 for a map of neighborhood commercial opportunities in Albany. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form LU-1; Economy INV-2, DIV-1; Institutions RP-5)

Actions:

a. Develop a “buy local” membership campaign for local business or neighborhoods (e.g., local currency, businesses provide discounts on certain days, advertising, and neighborhood festivals).

b. Partner with the BIDs, Community Loan Fund, Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce, Albany Center for Economic Success and/or Capitalize Albany Corporation to offer coordinated low-cost or free business planning services and financial incentives to local businesses and start-up companies.

c. Encourage and incentivize anchor retail and restaurant establishments to locate to established neighborhood commercial centers.

d. Create a small business liaison to help businesses navigate City and County regulations and lobby for changes.
NS-2 Strategy: Increase transit connectivity between and among city neighborhoods and employment centers. (Interrelated Strategies: Community Form LU-1, UD-1; Economy EMP-1, INV-1; Transportation MM-2, TR-2, TR-3; Utilities and Infrastructure EN-3)

Actions:

a. Work with the Capital District Transportation Authority to determine areas where improved transit connectivity is needed to serve employment growth areas.

b. Encourage Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at future/planned sites for transit improvements.

NS-3 Strategy: Partner with institutions to attract investment in surrounding neighborhoods. (Interrelated Strategies: Economy INV-4; Institutions RP-1, RP-2, Housing and Neighborhoods NI-4)

Actions:

a. Work with institutions to develop a strategy for improving investment in adjacent neighborhoods, such as financial investment in neighborhood schools, housing loans for faculty and staff, and neighborhood security.

NS-4 Strategy: Locate libraries, schools, parks, and community centers within walking distance of neighborhoods. (Interrelated Strategies: Social CHR-1, Transportation PED-1)

Actions:

a. Encourage libraries, schools, parks, and community centers to function as centers of neighborhood activity (e.g., parks used as community gathering spaces, schools and libraries used for community meetings).

b. Identify needed pedestrian and bicycle improvements (e.g., missing sidewalks, signed bike routes) to create safe routes to school.

NS-5 Strategy: Increase Neighborhood Watch programs and focus on a community policing method. (Interrelated Strategies: PS-3, PS-4)

Actions:

a. Target quality of life crimes and improve safety/perception of safety in neighborhoods (e.g., improved street lighting and reductions in the number of vacant buildings).

b. Increase neighborhood watch programs and improve communication between the police and neighborhood watch groups.
NS-6 Strategy: Address parking issues within neighborhoods. (Interrelated Strategies: Economy INV-1; Transportation VEH-2)

Actions:

a. Conduct a study of parking issues in commercial districts (e.g., spill-over traffic/congestion from Lark Street) and determine strategies to reduce impacts on neighborhoods.

b. Study impacts of new permit parking regulations in downtown Albany neighborhoods, as well as neighborhoods that may experience spillover from the permit system.

c. Ensure that the design of parking lots and structures is sensitive to neighborhood character.

NS-7 Strategy: Increase access to healthy food options for all neighborhoods. (Interrelated Strategies: Social CHR-3; Natural Resources OS-2, OS-3)

Actions:

a. Partner with organizations such as The Food Trust and Low Income Investment Fund to bring full service grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods.

b. Identify and market suitable sites for grocery stores within walking distance of neighborhoods and require pedestrian and bicycle amenities during site design (e.g., sidewalks, bike racks, parking located in garages).

c. Investigate and incentivize the development of urban, neighborhood-scale grocery stores that provide diverse food options and job opportunities.

d. Improve transit access to grocery stores and farmers markets.

e. Foster the development of community Supported Agriculture (CSA) pick-up locations, farmers markets, markets and co-ops in accessible locations throughout the City.

f. Encourage local institutions, stores and restaurants to use and offer fresh and locally-sourced produce, milk and meat.

g. Encourage the creation and expansion of community gardens accessible to all neighborhoods in the City.