

Summing Up



What is Albion Policy Outreach Day?

Albion Policy Outreach Day (or “APO Day” for short) was an event coordinated by the Albion Economic Development Corporation (AEDC), the Greater Albion Chamber of Commerce, the City of Albion, Albion College, and other community stakeholders to formally engage with Albion’s state legislators and state agencies regarding important projects, needs, and initiatives in Albion. The event on March 14th was intended to be a kick off to strengthen our lines of communication with the state to ensure that Albion’s voice is heard in Lansing and to open more doors of opportunity for Albion.

Attendees:

Mayor Garrett Brown	Councilperson Marcola Lawler, 4 th Precinct	Gregg Strand, Calhoun County Trailway Alliance
Amy Deprez, AEDC President/CEO	Sheryl Mitchell, City Manager	Mike Wallace, Albion College Chief Collaboration Officer & Managing Partner
Councilperson Andrew French, 6 th Precinct	Danielle Nelson, AEDC Project Manager	Eric Worley, Greater Albion Chamber of Commerce President

APO Day was a great success.

Some of Albion’s leaders had critical conversations with people and agencies in Lansing that can make a difference in Albion. These key conversations revolved around fixing Superior Street, funding workforce development programs, expanding public transportation, attracting employers to Albion, improving Albion’s housing options, supporting downtown redevelopment, and supporting the City and County’s outdoor recreation initiatives.

Now that Albion is a **Rising Tide** community, it will focus the state agencies’ attentions on Albion for finding innovative solutions to its challenges. Though the Project Rising Tide does not necessarily allocate any funds to Albion, it makes Albion a priority for state grants and programs and gives us a “hotline” to the state agencies. With this great opportunity in front of Albion, it is important for the Chamber, the AEDC, the City, and others to continue to bring ideas to the table, advocate for Albion’s needs, and create further opportunities for partnership.

The meetings that were held in Lansing highlighted the community’s major achievements and how community members are working together to continue Albion’s forward momentum. Albion Policy Outreach should not be viewed as a one-time event. It is an ongoing process involving continuous strategic planning and relationship-building.

Legislative Meetings

Attendees met with Representative Dr. John Bizon, Senator Mike Nofs, and the chiefs of staff for Senators Marty Knollenberg and Darwin Booher. Albion’s representatives, Rep. Bizon and Sen. Nofs, offered their continued support and assistance for grants, state programs, and fixing Superior Street. Sens. Knollenberg and Booher were supportive of Albion’s efforts and were interested in learning more about how city had sparked investment and redevelopment. Albion’s representatives, Rep. Bizon and Sen. Nofs, offered their continued support and assistance for grants, state programs, and fixing Superior Street. We expressed the community’s gratitude to them for advocating for Albion’s needs and supporting its grant applications, especially past Department of Natural Resources grants. The meeting with Rep. Bizon included three MDOT representatives, who talk about finding creative solutions, such as wayfinding signage, to help our downtown businesses survive another construction season. Sen. Nofs offered his assistance in connecting Albion’s representatives and key organizations and staff to those at the state level that can assist with things like child care, transportation, housing, and other workforce-related needs.

State Agency Meetings

Albion's leaders met with MSHDA, MEDC, MDNR, MDARD, TED, TIA, and MDEQ in the afternoon to discuss Albion's successes and determine where the city still needs assistance for challenges like housing and workforce development. Now that Albion is a Rising Tide Community, state agencies will have staff dedicated to coming up with creative solutions and programs to address Albion's needs. This meeting was a great opportunity to give them insight into what has already been done in the city and where Albion is going.

How did we ask our legislators to support Albion?

- Albion-Marshall Connector – Until the county-wide transportation system is in place (feasibility study is currently underway and implementation is two to three years away), Albion leaders asked legislators to support a \$160,000 appropriation (\$40,000 per year for four years) to ensure access to medical care and jobs continues to be available and expands.
- Opportunity Zone Designation – Support the nomination of all four of Albion's Census Tracts as Opportunity Zones. An Opportunity Zone is an area that will be targeted for investment through incentives for large corporations created by a carve-out in the 2018 federal tax overhaul bill.
- Community Ventures – This is a state program that is currently available in only four Michigan cities but could include more in the future. It includes job retention services, employer grants, hard skills training post-employment, and soft skills training. Leaders asked legislators to support Albion in joining the program.
- Big Albion Plan – This summer, the Albion Reinvestment Corporation, with community support, will apply for Community Revitalization Program funds and Targeted Redevelopment Area designation through the Michigan Strategic Fund. We asked our legislators to support this effort, which will lead to the transformation of over 20 buildings in downtown Albion into business-ready first floor spaces and mixed-income upstairs apartments.
- Development funds for trailhead acquisition – Asked for vocal support for the development of outdoor recreation amenities on a 65-acre Calhoun County land acquisition just south of Albion. This park would be maintained by Calhoun County. Albion is located at the hub of three major trail networks – the North Country National Scenic Trail, the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail, and the Iron Bell Trail.

Albion Alumni Brainstorming/Reception

Albion Policy Outreach Day is not a single event. It is an ongoing conversation with legislators (both within and outside of our district), Albionites working in Lansing, Albion College alumni in Lansing, and the thinkers and doers that have sway in the state policy arena sympathetic to Albion's success. This reception, held by Albion College, provided an opportunity for idea-sharing, making key connections, and telling Albion's story to a broader audience.

Main Takeaways

It is important that Albion continues to foster strong relationships with its elected representatives and representatives from neighboring districts. Albion is the “squeaky wheel that gets the grease” and it should continue to apply for funding and programs, as well as continually communicate with its elected representatives.

Following Up

- Albion's elected officials should have conversations with those running for state office about how they will represent Albion's interests.
- Continue conversations with legislators and MDOT about Superior St.
- Begin developing “asks” for next year's major policy outreach event.