



Investing in the Next Generation Blair County



Strategies and
Resources for
Sustained
Economic Growth

2023 - 2028

Think Big - Do Great Things: Advancing the Next Generation Blair County

What will Blair County be like for future generations? Thomas Friedman, the author of *The World is Flat*, posed this question - “Are you a community with more memories than dreams, or more dreams than memories?” Do we react only to short term needs or are we preparing for a generation who has yet to be born? There is no doubt that we should make no small plans. We need to think big. Dream bold. Plan forward. And make it happen.

The Altoona Blair County Development Corporation (ABCD) is working to ensure that Blair County is among the best places in world to live, work and thrive; a community where talented people with diverse backgrounds, cultures, family structures and experiences want to live, work, invest, celebrate, and create new opportunities for future generations to come.

Blair County continues to change; that change is being driven by global market shifts. Continuous advances in technology, public policy, consumer tastes, business shapes and styles demand that communities regularly take stock in their assets and value propositions. We must do so in-order to stay relevant and compete for future investment.

ABCD’s current strategic planning initiative identified and reinforced 5 key operational pillars for the organization. They are: 1) Core Services; 2) Entrepreneurship; 3) Housing and Place Based Investment; 4) Adaptive Reuse and Infill; and 5) Communications, Engagement and Outreach. The goal was to ensure that appropriate resources and attention is given to the right projects and activities. While new opportunities were identified, a central theme that connected them all was the need to attract and retain talent – people - to our region.

Attracting and retaining talent remains our number one economic development priority. That really has always been the case. Behind every “targeted industry” or “corporate relocation” are people. People who make decisions about where to live and work for a variety of complex reasons.

While net new job opportunities are being created in Blair County, ongoing retirements and pandemic impacts are driving the greatest demand for jobs. Recent studies into the emerging hybrid workforce and mobility trends tells us that most of the people needed to fill these positions will likely come into Blair County from outside the region bringing new-ideas, points-of-view, family structures and expectations. That is both the challenge and opportunity for economic development.

Mountain communities like ours are in high demand. Future generations are increasingly choosing places that fit their lifestyle often ahead of a job. Technology coupled with post-pandemic hybrid work models has enabled anyone to access global markets from their home or office at the touch of a button. If they have the skill set, employers of all types and sizes will work to accommodate.

We must ensure that we have the best broadband, housing, and quality-built environment that help people become rooted or re-rooted here.

The following outlines ABCD’s strategic plan. It is based on 5 key operational-pillars and reflects the current needs, challenges, and opportunities unique to Blair County. ***Investment and resources into ABCD are directed towards these key pillars and their associated activities enabling Blair County to achieve our goals. Let’s think big.***

The Altoona Blair County Development Corporation Strategic Plan

Core

Vision: Our region will be a thriving community of people who prosper and enjoy where they live.

Mission: The Altoona Blair County Development Corporation works as a catalyst for comprehensive economic, community, and workforce development to enhance the quality of life and sustainability of the environment in Blair County.

Method: The Altoona Blair County Development Corporation achieves its Mission and Vision by facilitating the retention, attraction, and creation of new investment and wealth through direct program administration, project development and through collaborative partnerships.

Goals

A) Community, Economic and Workforce Development

B) Enhance Quality of Life

C) Sustainability of the Environment

Pillars

#1) Core Services

#2) Entrepreneurial and Small Business Development

#3) Housing and Place-Based Investment

#4) Adaptive Reuse and Infill

#5) Communications, Engagement and Outreach

Outcomes

Wealth Creation: Increasing personal and household income, changes in targeted sector payroll, new business starts

Enhanced Property Values: Growing tax base, improving physical conditions and diversity of options (housing & corporate), market rate, market driven

Increased Educational Attainment: Increasing percentage of degree earners, technical proficiency, vocational development

Diverse Industry Sectors & Employment Opportunities: Balanced and growing industry presence, lower unemployment, diverse skill set demand

Increased Production & Output: New capital investment, product output, global market reach

Improved Resident Health - Active Lifestyles: Recreational engagement, health indicators, special events programming, asset promotion

ALTOONA-BLAIR COUNTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION VISION, MISSION, METHOD, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Vision
Our region will be a thriving community of people who prosper and enjoy where they live.

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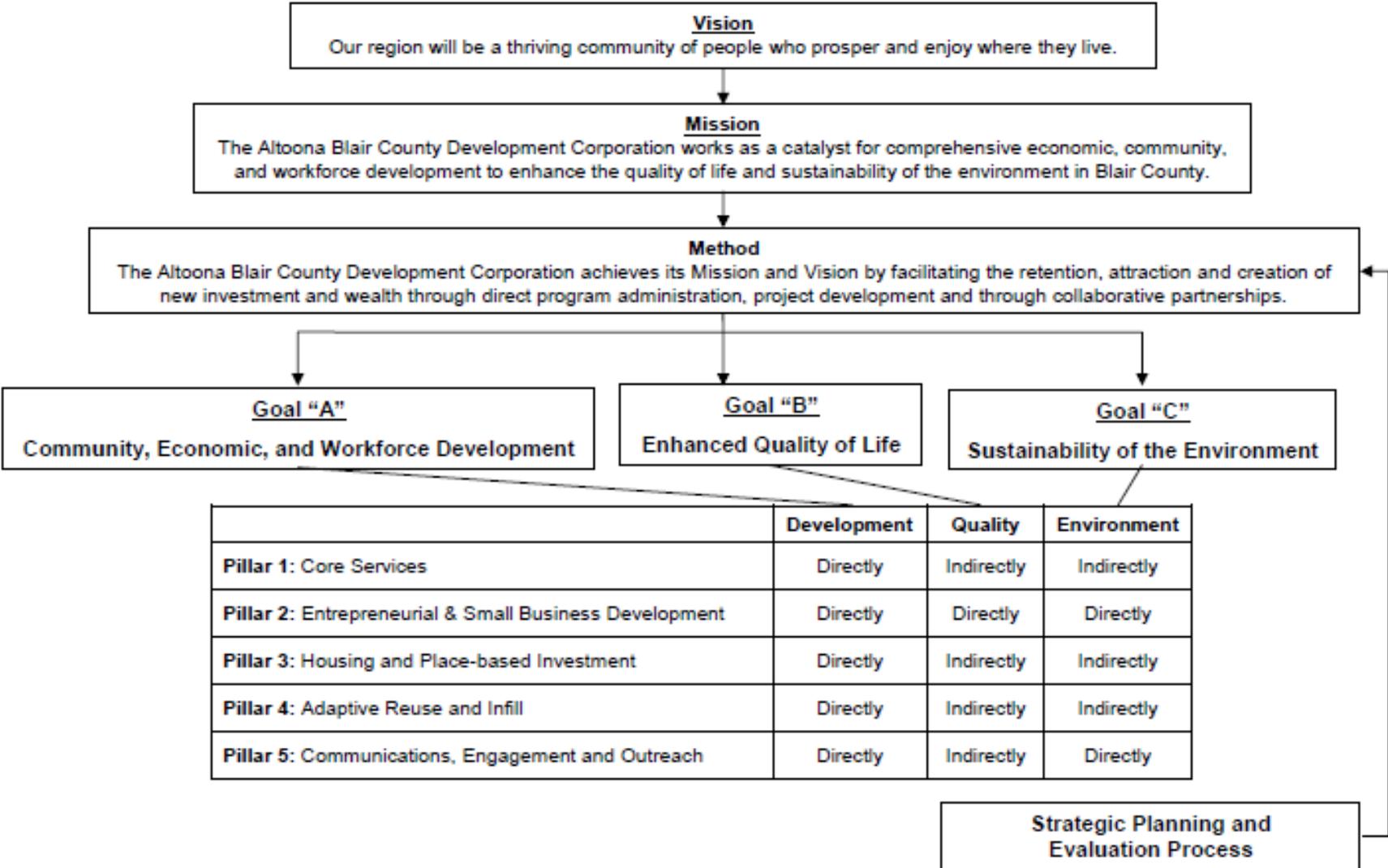
Goal "A"
Community, Economic, and Workforce Development

Goal "B"
Enhanced Quality of Life

Goal "C"
Sustainability of the Environment

	Development	Quality	Environment
Pillar 1: Core Services	Directly	Indirectly	Indirectly
Pillar 2: Entrepreneurial & Small Business Development	Directly	Directly	Directly
Pillar 3: Housing and Place-based Investment	Directly	Indirectly	Indirectly
Pillar 4: Adaptive Reuse and Infill	Directly	Indirectly	Indirectly
Pillar 5: Communications, Engagement and Outreach	Directly	Indirectly	Directly

Strategic Planning and Evaluation Process



Pillar 1: Core Services

“Core Services” refers to activities related to ABCD’s managed finance programs, site/building development, technical assistance, and ABCD owned property management services. For the past several decades, Altoona Blair County Development (ABCD) Corporation has facilitated on average 35 business expansion projects annually. That has represented more than \$50 million in capital investment and \$30 million in program funding each year and more than 150 new jobs and 450 retained.

ABCD has served as the lead developer and owner of 8 business parks, an office and industrial building, and has managed and/or created several revolving low interest loan funds. As a certified development corporation, ABCD has managed state and federal loan, grant and tax credit programs to support a wide variety of development activities to include building and land acquisition, building renovations, equipment purchasing and façade improvement.

As an economic development organization, the more businesses use ABCD’s programs, the more business there will be. How? All fees and interest generated through these programs go right back into ABCD to help other businesses grow and market the community for new investment. When businesses and banks partner with us, you are helping to reinvest in your community.

Core Service Objectives:

- ▶ Promote the use and benefit of economic development financing programs to end users
- ▶ Maintain and increase the funding levels and deployment of internally managed revolving loan funds
- ▶ Ensure a positive user experience through flexible, fair and equitable financing program guidelines and processes for all ABCD managed or facilitated programs

- ▶ Identify and develop additional ABCD owned and managed buildings, sites and tenant space opportunities
- ▶ Inventory and market all viable sites and buildings to regional/national businesses/investors
- ▶ Encourage the development of additional speculative office and modern manufacturing buildings/space to market to prospective tenants
- ▶ Lead and participate in existing business retention site visits, identify business needs, and work to address them
- ▶ Conduct data research and policy analysis to identify key business and demographic trends, targeted market opportunities and other data driven components for economic development
- ▶ Ensure the existence of quality core infrastructure components such as road access, rail freight assistance, water/sewer and broadband communications

Pillar 2: Entrepreneurship

“Entrepreneurship” refers to all ABCD activities related to the start-up and advancement of new business ventures. Blair County is a community of entrepreneurs. Forty-one Blair County born businesses employ more than 9,000 local-residents. Since 2006, more than \$450 million of capital investment in our community has resulted from these businesses. They have created more than 2,500 jobs. More than 2,000 Blair County businesses employ less than 20 people. Together they account for 9,300 employees and more than \$240 million in annual payroll. There is no better way to fuel and sustain an economy than by creating an environment and community culture that encourages and enables entrepreneurs to launch new endeavors and succeed.

Entrepreneurship Objectives:

- ▶ Participate in the Start-up Alleghenies initiative and other cooperative regional programs that help to identify viable entrepreneurial ventures and accelerate their start-up
- ▶ Connect with and leverage existing Blair-born businesses and ensure continuity of next generation leadership
- ▶ Engage with the Sheetz Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence and St. Francis University (Curry Innovation Center) to expand the pipeline of student and faculty led start-up opportunities across all disciplines
- ▶ Create nimble office, co-working and other unique “landing pad” environments for young start-ups at various points of their operational continuum
- ▶ Ensure the availability of seed and venture capital sources and engage local investors to contribute time, money and knowledge to mentor and invest in start-up opportunities unique to Blair County
- ▶ Share success stories of all Blair-born businesses through social media and other communication platforms

Pillar 3: Housing and Place-Based Investment

“Housing and Place-Based Investment” refers to ABCD activities which encourage and enable the development of new housing, civic spaces, recreational venues, active transportation infrastructure, transit connectivity and other amenities which improve the way people experience Blair County.

Successful economic development strategies must encompass all aspects of a community’s asset base. That includes traditional infrastructure assets such as land, buildings, housing options, transportation systems and utility infrastructure. Just as critical are its cultural venues, recreational options, events programming, and educational resources. When viewed holistically, these assets become part of the social and cultural fabric of a community and are reflected in its physical infrastructure, residents and real-estate value. Their form, function and condition, convey an immediate impression of a community. They create a “sense-of-place.” They help people form an opinion of the region’s economic health, culture and civic pride. They contribute to a community’s ability to attract business investment and new residents producing a “return on perception (ROP).”

Without quality, modern housing and place-based amenities, it can be difficult to attract the talent needed to fill the jobs available. In recent years demand for higher density urban-style living, lofts and authentic walkable neighborhoods with quality civic spaces has skyrocketed. For communities like ours to continue to compete for high valued talent, we need to ensure our community offers a good mix of market rate housing options and neighborhood experiences at several price points and styles from which they can choose.

Housing and Place-Based Investment Objectives:

- ▶ Engage directly as developer on higher risk adaptive reuse sites within the City of Altoona viable for mid-market non income restricted housing
- ▶ Encourage developers to construct more modern, higher density, market rate, mixed-use housing for both renters and buyers
- ▶ Communicate with municipalities to create planning and zoning codes which permits and incentivizes mixed-use, higher density housing developments
- ▶ Create new financing programs that provide patient capital for higher density urban development projects that targets the central business district
- ▶ Identify and help to facilitate the improvement and creation of civic spaces that enhance the safety, visual appeal, and overall quality of life for Blair County businesses and residents
- ▶ Identify and encourage the development of active transportation infrastructure such as bike and pedestrian lanes, crossing controls, dedicated paths and connectivity to the larger transit systems

Pillar 4: Adaptive Reuse and Infill

“Adaptive Reuse and Infill” refers to ABCD activities that support the renovation, repurposing or reuse of existing sites and buildings, resulting in greater economic and community impact than would have otherwise been realized. These projects have transformative economic and community effect on the buildings and neighborhoods that surround them. Our topography and public policy environment greatly limits our overall development capacity in areas not already developed. Building new business parks will be extremely difficult both from a permitting and financial feasibility perspective. If we are to expand capacity and create new spaces for businesses of all types, those spaces will most likely need to be created within developed areas of the County.

Adaptive Reuse and Infill Objectives:

- ▶ Identify, inventory and promote sites and buildings that offer viable reuse/redevelopment potential
- ▶ Encourage the development of new policy tools such as a formal “Land Bank” to enable sites and buildings to be secured and positioned for redevelopment
- ▶ Partner with the City and other municipalities to encourage the elimination of blighted sites and buildings
- ▶ Work with Penn State Altoona and UPMC Altoona to align master planning efforts that incorporate or target priority sites and buildings for reuse or redevelopment
- ▶ Encourage the development of mixed-use project outcomes when possible/applicable
- ▶ Manage and advance the “Main Street Four Point Approach” for land use and redevelopment principles as outlined below through the Greater Altoona Economic Development Corporation Advisory Board:

STRATEGY-Design: Enhancing the physical appearance of the central business district

STRATEGY - Promotion: Marketing the unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, new businesses, tourists, youth, and others

STRATEGY - Organization: Building consensus among downtown stakeholders and provide the necessary resources

STRATEGY - Economic Restructuring: Strengthening and diversifying the economic base of the central business district.

Pillar 5: Communications, Engagement and Outreach

“Communications, Engagement and Outreach” refers to ABCD’s marketing and communication activities. This pillar captures and builds upon the activities in each of the other four and conveys Blair County’s advantages, valued programs, resources and progress by sharing success stories, testimonials and data.

- ▶ Participate in regional partnership designed to promote our regional labor shed, data, and assets that enhance the chances of attracting new outside investment into the region

Communications, Engagement and Outreach Objectives:

- ▶ Continue to market and leverage the genuine and accurate place-based brand First Frontier Blair County and ensure the brands value over time
- ▶ Leverage the region’s outdoor and destination tourism assets and cross promote as part of an overall talent attraction goal
- ▶ Partner with hospitality and event management venues to attract outside events and meetings to Blair County
- ▶ Identify businesses and individuals to serve community brand ambassadors who can provide testimonials and lend resources to help promote Blair County to external constituencies
- ▶ Support and participate in internships or other work experience programs which engage new workers into existing work place environments
- ▶ Direct new residents to key resources and services
- ▶ Develop connections and communicate with education alumni networks and other ex-pat organizations
- ▶ Heighten and promote the role of Blair County young professional organizations
- ▶ Fully develop, use and leverage social media platforms and analytics to engage, track and communicate with local and external constituencies
- ▶ Engage in local and regional planning efforts and programs
- ▶ Encourage and develop university/industry research partnerships, information sharing and formal research projects with local industry

Investing in ABCD Corporation

Over the past several decades, ABCD has served thousands of businesses providing more than \$500 million in financing and building projects. This investment has enabled local firms to start-up, expand and create new employment opportunities for Blair County residents. The economic impact of these efforts exceeds \$2 billion in both direct and indirect benefits on the local economy.

Both individuals and corporations can invest in ABCD Corporation to ensure we build upon our success and ensure a vibrant and economically sustainable economy for generations to come. Your investment helps us carry out the activities listed above and achieve are shared goals and impact.

1) The Altoona Blair County Economic Growth Fund (EGF) was established to ensure the permanent operations of ABCD, a 501(c)3 certified non-profit economic development organization. The EGF is administered through the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation (CPCF). The CPCF works to ensure all funds donated remain for local use and the purposes identified. Individuals can donate to the Altoona Blair County Economic Growth Fund by contacting Steve McKnight, ABCD President and CEO at stevem@abcdcorp.org or 814-944-6113 to schedule a consultation, or visit our website at www.abcdcorp.org/blair-county-economic-growth-fund/.

**Note: Unless otherwise advised, the Community Foundation will notify the Altoona Blair County Development Corporation of your donation and the amount.*

2) The ABCD Corporation Capital Campaign has been a central resource for “corporate” investment in ABCD. Our first Capital Investment Campaign kicked off in 1996. Since then more than \$4 million dollars have been raised to address core capital improvement projects such as land acquisition, environmental mitigation and

improvement, revolving loan funds, new building construction to include the Devorris Center for Business Development, and infrastructure improvements that enable 8 business parks to be completed in Blair County. Every dollar invested in ABCD’s Capital Campaign Fund has helped to leverage an additional \$3 in public or private sector match.

There is much more to do. Adaptive reuse of existing sites and buildings will be a priority for decades ahead. Without the adequate capacity to accommodate new economic opportunity and development, it will be difficult to attract new investment and the talent needed for future generations.

To learn more or to contribute to ABCD Corporation’s Capital Campaign Fund, please contact Stephen McKnight, ABCD President and CEO at (814) 944-6113 or email stevem@abcdcorp.org.