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2018

# ANNUAL REPORT

DISCOVER  
**ALBANY**





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## 2018 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### *Executive Committee*


**Michael Gulotty**, *Chair*, Vista Host  
**Todd Reichelt**, *Vice -Chair*, Prestige Hospitality  
**Robin Jackson**, *Treasurer*, Albany Marriott

**Mark Bardack**, *Ed Lewi Associates*  
**Leola Edelin**, *Renaissance Albany*  
**Doug McClaine**, *Albany Capital Center*  
**Jill Delaney**, *President/CEO*, Discover Albany

### *Directors*

**Carm Basile**, *Capital District Transportation Authority*  
**Mark Benson**, *University at Albany*  
**Melissa Carrier**, *Total Events, LLC*  
**Sonya del Peral**, *Esq. Nine Pin Ciderworks, LLC*  
**Tyler Desmond**, *Desmond Hotel and Conference Center*  
**Mohamed Hemmid**, *Hampton Inn & Suites, Downtown*  
**Michael Hoffman**, *Turf Hotels*  
**Jeff Mirel**, *Rosenblum Companies*  
**Kim Partridge**, *Empire State Plaza Convention Center/OGS*  
**Christine Quinn**, *Albany County Executive's Office*  
**Kathleen Van De Loo**, *Association Development Group*  
**Tim Vennard**, *Mazzone Hospitality, LLC*

### *Ex-Officio*

**Anthony Capece**, *Central Avenue Business Improvement District*  
**Mark Eagan**, *Capital Region Chamber*  
**Joseph LaCivita**, *Colonie Economic Development*  
**Paula Mahan**, *Colonie Town Supervisor*  
**Daniel McCoy**, *Albany County Executive*  
**Sarah Reginelli**, *Capitalize Albany Corporation*  
**Hon. Kathy Sheehan**, *Mayor - City of Albany*  
**Georgette Steffens**, *Downtown Albany Business Improvement District* 





## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



2018 was a year of firsts here at Discover Albany. It was our first full year with our new brand, Discover Albany, and it was the first full year of operations for our beautiful new convention center, the Albany Capital Center. It was also the first time the bureau has welcomed a new President in 25 years.

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to fill the big shoes Michele Vennard left behind when she retired. I am impressed by all that she accomplished over the course of her career here at the bureau. She has been a passionate advocate for Albany, and her career was filled with incredible accomplishments on behalf of this destination. Thanks to a carefully considered succession plan, which Michele helped shape, I was able to get up to speed quickly, keeping the bureau running smoothly and continuing to serve your needs.

In its first full year of operation, the Albany Capital Center brought new business to Albany County. Connected walkways allowed us to cater to larger groups. We have signed events that will utilize the entire Capital Complex – four venues in all. Fueled by these successes, our sales team continues to go after new and exciting business. Our sales and marketing team are collaborating in new ways and seeing exciting results! This year Discover Albany helped land Synchronized Skating, NYSUT, PEF and the inaugural Aurora Games.


Discover Albany has done a tremendous amount of outreach within the community, leading to a number of dynamic new mutually beneficial partnership agreements, including the Albany Empire, UAlbany Athletics Department, Crossgates, CDTA, the Albany Capital Complex, Albany Parking Authority, and Bull Moose Club. Through these partnerships, Discover Albany is

able to help market these partners, and in turn, create a more cohesive picture of Albany for our visitors.

Discover Albany also helped develop several new tourism products this year, based on experiences that we know our visitors want. We helped launch the Historic Downtown Albany Food Tour, Capital City Cycle Tours, and Upstate Kayak Rentals' Albany rental hub. These economic development efforts are a great role for our bureau because they allow us to use our tourism expertise to develop new business for Albany.

In 2015, Discover Albany contracted with the City of Albany to implement their Cultural Heritage and Tourism (CHAT) strategic plan. Over the last three years, Discover Albany has spearheaded cultural tourism efforts and marshalled historic sites to collaborate around collective programming. The CHAT effort has yielded impressive results. Sites reported marked increases in attendance and success in reaching brand new audiences. In September, we hosted a well-attended Cultural Heritage and Tourism Summit to present our accomplishments to partners and stakeholders. With the approval of the group, we are renewing our contract with the City of Albany for another three-year term, making Discover Albany the official cultural heritage tourism partner for Albany.

I am very excited about the future of Discover Albany and look forward working with all of you in 2019 and beyond!

**Jill Delaney, President/CEO**  
Discover Albany 





## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Welcome 2019! It was an amazing 2018 for the Discover Albany team, Albany County's official Destination Management Organization.

Last year, I spoke of the stewardship that would be necessary as we searched for a new President/CEO for this organization. I emphasized the care and diligence necessary to transition the mantle of leadership from Michele Vennard, our heralded leader of the last two decades, to a brand-new President/CEO.

With the assistance of a diverse search committee and the community, we selected Jill Delaney to serve as our new leader.

With unfailing guidance from Ms. Vennard, Jill took up her role in early June and immediately embraced it. Learning the breadth of our community and organization is a tall task, and Ms. Delaney worked intensely to keep the staff moving forward – all the while figuring out the litany of details and nuance necessary to operate our CVB.

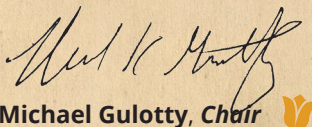
It is with great confidence that I report that Discover Albany is continuing to serve Albany County's tourism interests, tourism assets, partners, hoteliers, and citizens, and that Ms. Delaney is already positioning our organization to stay competitive long into the future.

None of this success would have been possible without the incredible efforts of the staff. The staff's earnestness, without falter, speaks loudly to the foundation of TRUST that was built at Discover Albany by the current and past boards, as well as the fierce commitment President Delaney has shown on all fronts.

### HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF 2018 THAT WE ALL CAN BE PROUD OF ACCOMPLISHING:

- Visitor A2D program has now graduated over 200 champions
- We renamed the hospitality grant program to honor our leader of 25 years, now the Michele L. Vennard Hospitality Grant Program. This year, the grant program provided over \$40,000 to support tourism projects.
- We raised awareness of the Discover Albany brand, enhancing our presence on social media and digital advertising. As a result, we increased our followers by 24% over the previous year, and increased post engagement by 108% over 2017.
- We committed to making Albany.org ADA compliant, meeting WCAG 2.0 standards.
- Our new president has been embraced by community leaders, which speaks to the fact that our community now understands that Tourism IS a vital component of our County's economy.

In summary, the stewardship needed to ease Discover Albany's transition was successfully delivered – by all of you. I want to express special thanks to the Honorable County Executive Dan McCoy and Honorable Mayor Kathy Sheehan whose support and guidance provided the foundation we so critically needed. This stability enabled Discover Albany to put all our focus on serving this community, and serving it well.



Michael Gulotty, Chair







## HOSPITALITY EXCELLENCE AWARD

### 2019 PROFESSOR ANTHONY STRIANESE HOSPITALITY EXCELLENCE AWARD, "THE TOBY"

Albany's Hospitality Industry is an essential component of the Capital Region's economic vitality. The Professor Anthony Strianese Hospitality Excellence Award is the only honor developed solely to recognize excellence in travel and tourism and represents the best of Albany's hospitality culture. There are hospitality professionals around the world who were positively influenced by Professor Strianese and his 40-year career in hospitality so naming the award for Toby is a great honor to his memory.

#### 2018 Recipient:



*It is a proud moment for our staff to earn this award! From the beginning, the award has recognized successful hospitality leaders and businesses that contribute to the Albany Region and we are thrilled to be in such good company. In keeping with the educational excellence that its namesake, Anthony Strianese practiced, we have worked to train and educate our staff to "do the right thing" for our clients, said Eric Smith, President of CMI AV.*

*CMI AV is a New York State based company with over thirty five people employed in Albany, another forty employees throughout the state and five employees in our newest office in Washington DC. Our clients include many New York State Associations, Professional Trade, Business and Corporate organizations as well as several Hotels, Convention Centers and other meeting facilities. We also travel with most of our clients throughout North America, providing audiovisual services and technical personnel for their meetings and events. Our equipment inventory is one of the largest in New York State, however, as this award signifies, our people are our biggest asset and their excellent customer service has helped us grow into the company we are today.*







## HOSPITALITY GRANTS

### HOSPITALITY GRANTS

Discover Albany announced \$43,500 in funding for the latest round of Hospitality Grant recipients with a presentation ceremony at the SEFCU Arena. This year the grant was renamed *The Michele L. Vennard Hospitality Grant Program of the Albany County Convention and Visitor's Bureau Fund, a fund of the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region* in honor of retiring bureau president, Michele Vennard.

The grant fund, which is managed by the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region (CFGCR), supports programs that aid in building and sustaining Albany County tourism destinations, attractions, events, and tourism-related activities. The grants encourage collaboration between nonprofit organizations, community groups, and hospitality businesses to further extend the economic impact of tourism and business.

Over the course of the past five years, the Michele L. Vennard Hospitality Grant Program has awarded \$303,500 to organizations that create programs and tourist-attracting events in our community. 🍏



### 2018 GRANT RECIPIENTS

Albany Center  
Galleries, Inc.

Albany Institute of  
History and Art

Albany Symphony  
Orchestra, Inc.

American Volkssport  
Association, Inc.

Carey Institute for Global  
Good, Inc.

Friends of Pruyn House

Historic Cherry Hill

International Center of  
the Capital Region, Inc.

Lake George Opera  
Festival Association, Inc.

Old Songs, Inc.

Palace Performing  
Arts Center, Inc.

Park Playhouse, Inc.

Pine Hollow Arboretum

Sage Colleges





## ALBANY AMBASSADORS

Discover Albany is proud to announce the addition of 13 Albany Ambassadors in 2018. Albany Ambassadors are local volunteer meeting planners who have embraced the bureau's "Host it Here" slogan and were instrumental in bringing meeting, convention and event business "home" to Albany. Once again, our corps of Ambassadors represent a wide-ranging variety of events, which brought 3,555 delegates, filling more than 3,762 hotel room nights with estimated direct spending of \$2.5 million.

**Ms. Laurie Bargstedt**, *New York State Association for Continuing and Community Education (NYACCE)*

**Mr. Jim Bopp**, *New York Mortgage Bankers Association (NYMBA)*

**Mr. Harold Burke**, *Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New York*

**Mr. Doug Burns**, *National Atmospheric Deposition Program (NADP)*

**Ms. Lisa Cooper**, *MMC, New York State Town Clerks Association (NYSTCA)*

**Ms. Candace Corsaro**, *New York District Kiwanis International*

**Ms. Katrina Fioenza**, *New York Association of SkillsUSA*

**Ms. Denisha Goodman**, *LCSW-R, New York State Corrections and Youth Services Association (NY CAYSA)*

**Ms. Susan A. Haag**, *RMC/MMC, New York State Town Clerks Association (NYSTCA)*

**Ms. Jennifer Jerussi**, *College Student Personnel Association of New York State (CSPA NYS)*

**Ms. Judy Keating**, *America Mensa Society/Mensa of Northeastern New York*

**Mr. Patrick Mansfield**, *New York State Elks Association*

**Ms. Gretchen Oliver**, *New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYS TESOL)* 





## STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Discover Albany continues to use Strategic Initiatives as our guide to success. Progress is reported to the Board six times per year and staff continually keep the initiatives “top of mind” in their work. What follows is a synopsis of key programs and developments that transpired throughout the year.

### Initiative One

**Enhance the awareness, appreciation and support of Discover Albany and Albany's visitor economy.**

#### DEVELOP A COMPELLING MESSAGE

- Discover Albany was awarded \$50,000 in digital marketing services from Advance Media NY to launch new digital consumer campaigns aimed at families and millennials.
- Working with regional partners we launched a Road Trip campaign on VisitUSA.com.
- Developed a robust consumer print and online marketing campaign resulting in increased visitors to Albany.org website for trip planning advice.
- Responded to 19,837 requests for visitor guides. Distributed additional 68,643 visitor guides in and out of market.
- Developed “Tastes and Traditions,” food tourism programming. Over 40 historic sites and businesses participated, creating 117 special events and programs related to food and food tourism.
- Created 3 new visitor itineraries, bringing total to 6 itineraries. Itineraries are distributed at 18 sites across the Capital Region.
- Completed second year of the Albany Visitor Journey A2D program. Graduated 212 Visitor Champions to date. Hosted four Champion events; utilized Champions as Discover Albany brand ambassadors; and launched the Visitor Champion Attraction Pass and the monthly Champions Corner newsletter to continue Champion engagement.



#### A2D: “SHOW GUESTS EVERYTHING ALBANY HAS TO OFFER”

“I truly enjoyed the A2D training- it was interesting, fun and informative! With a growing tourism industry, it's so important to be able to show guests everything that Albany has to offer. This training gave useful tips on how to do just that!”

— Greta Graydon,  
Part-Owner, *The Olde English Pub & Pantry*



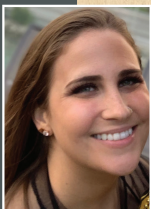




## "WE ALWAYS FEEL SUPPORTED..."

"Discover Albany has made the City Beer Hall feel like a truly valued Downtown Albany establishment. We always feel supported and feel that Discover Albany loves to recommend us and feature us. We appreciate the invitations to monthly DOS meetings, as it's a great way to learn more about what's going on and meet likeminded individuals. We also really benefit from the informative emails letting us know of events in the downtown area; these heads up are crucial to our ability to deliver great service to our patrons!"

— Jessa Arnold, *Director of Events, The City Beer Hall*



- Partnered with Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless to make A2D the official training program for Albany Ambassadors. Albany Ambassadors are homeless or recently homeless individuals who will be employed to serve as visitor greeters at Palace Theatre, Capital Repertory Theatre, and Park Playhouse. The A2D program will help equip them to welcome visitors and answer questions.
- Attended Travel Media Showcase in Niagara and TBEX North America in the Finger Lakes to meet with journalists about media coverage.
- Hosted 7 journalist FAM Tours, introducing travel writers to Albany and local businesses to earn additional media.

## DEVELOP ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES TO QUANTIFY IMPACT

- Created conversion goals on website. In December alone, we completed 1,966 goals.
- Continued email marketing campaigns aimed at Consumers, Meeting Planners, and Group Tour Operators. We sent 222K emails to 31,000 recipients, with average open rate of 13%.
- Conducted a summer visitor survey for the third consecutive year to better understand who customers are and their travel choices.

## ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS WITH COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS LEADERS

- Discover Albany recruited three new tourism businesses to Albany County: Taste of Troy Food Tours, Capital City Cycle Tours, and Upstate Kayak Rentals. These businesses built new "routes" in Albany, to service Albany tourists.







- Partnership Manager established ground-breaking partnerships with several entities. New agreements with the Albany Empire, Bull Moose Club, CDTA, CoLab, Crossgates, and University at Albany Athletics will extend the bureau's reach and offer creative new opportunities for collaboration.
- Discover Albany recruited 27 new partners in 2018, up 21% from the previous year. Delivered 33 trainings for partners, including new and existing partners.
- Working with Partners, Discover Albany created a "Made in Albany" box that can serve as a welcome gift or client appreciation gift. These boxes are a new stream of revenue, and more importantly, they are allowing us to promote local manufacturers and artisans to visitors.
- Hosted 10 Director of Sales meetings reaching an average of 35 Partners at each, to share and present pertinent information.
- Hosted a strategy meeting for Synchronized Ice Skating, which paved the way for a successful bid for January 2020.
- Developed a Cultural Heritage and Tourism Partnership Results Report to highlight 2016-2018 Strategic Plan accomplishments. Hosted a Roundtable attended by 50 heritage partners to plan for 2019-2021 program.
- Hospitality Gives Back – developed a giveback program in 2018 that helped our community.
- Attended the ESSAE trade show in Saratoga with 12 Discover Albany Partners continuing the outreach for our most important market segment.
- Hosted Advance Media Launch Party that attracted 90 guests and elected officials.



## **"THE HERITAGE PARTNERS INITIATIVE WITH DISCOVER ALBANY HELPS US INCREASE OUR VISIBILITY AND IMPACT..."**

"The Heritage Partners initiative with Discover Albany helps us increase our visibility and impact through joint program and marketing initiatives. We appreciate that Discovery Albany encourages heritage program partners to set the agenda, and fosters cross-pollination of ideas, while also taking a proactive stance in connecting organizations with useful resources. Although we are a relatively small organization in the community, with Discover Albany we know that we are a valued member of the heritage and tourism community."

— Johanna Batman,  
*Executive Director,  
Shaker Heritage Society*







**"PINE HOLLOW HAS INDEED EXPERIENCED INCREASED VISITATION TO THE GROUNDS AND WEBSITE THANKS TO OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH DISCOVER ALBANY.."**



"Discover Albany has assisted The Pine Hollow Arboretum with becoming more visible in the community and has facilitated many wonderful introductions with potential partnering organizations and businesses. PHA has indeed experienced increased visitation to the grounds website thanks to our partnership with Discover Albany."

— Lauren Axford,  
Executive Director,  
Pine Hollow Arboretum

## USE MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE DISCOVER ALBANY VISIBILITY

- Launched Digital Asset Management system in partnership with Barberstock to organize and distribute photo and video assets to media and partners.
- Prepared 54 media releases, hosted 1 press conference, and did 21 media interviews. We also hosted 7 journalists, who we brought to 23 different businesses and attractions. Because of these successful efforts, we were able to secure 96 articles, valued at an estimated \$178,000, a 43% increase over 2017.
- Invested in print and digital advertising campaigns in 3 monthly trade magazines (*Meetings Today*, *Smart Meetings*, and *Small Market Meetings*) and 8 national consumer publications (including *Better Homes & Gardens*, *All Recipes*, *Rachel Ray Every Day*, *AAA World*, and *AARP Magazine*.)
- Launched geofencing display ad campaign, targeting 50+ popular New York State destinations to build awareness of Albany assets.
- Targeted consumers looking for New York State content as part of TripAdvisor ad campaign.
- Developed new video series that focuses on Albany's four seasons of fun. Highlighted 11 businesses and attractions. Distributed through Facebook video campaigns and YouTube pre-roll.
- CRM / Extranet portal training was provided to all new partners and continues to be a vital component of Partner services. 🍂








## Initiative Two

**Lead the destination in new visitation and the ultimate success of the Albany Capital Center**

### DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN TO OUTLINE DESTINATION GOALS

- Hosted 3 neighborhood hotel general manager meetings to listen and discuss opportunities in the areas of selling and social media strategies.
- Developed a Wolf Road working group to encourage cooperative programming and to identify issues that will be critical to success of the corridor.
- Participation in bi-weekly Capital Complex meetings to coordinate sales effort for the Destination, across four buildings.

### INCREASE NEW VISITATION TO ALBANY COUNTY

- Discover Albany serviced 224 meetings and events this year.
- This year, Film Albany fielded 185 inquiries from film companies, investigating Albany as a movie location.
- *The Punisher* series filmed in Albany July 16-21. While onsite, the crew used 939 sleeping rooms, as well as services from local restaurants and equipment. Altogether, the series spent an estimated \$125,000 per day in Albany County.
- 54 sales site tours were conducted throughout the year.
- Developed and hosted Downtown Albany and Haunted History walking tours with close to 100 participants.
- In 2018, the total number of partners referrals was 663 partners to 124 clients. 



### "ALBANY HAD EVERYTHING WE NEEDED..."

"The 2018 Kyle Petty Charity Ride Across America is headquartered in Portland, ME and Albany, NY was the perfect overnight stop as we made our way south to North Carolina. Albany had everything we needed – great hotels and it was easily accessible from our ride route. Discover Albany went over and beyond to meet our needs...and really worked to make the KPCRAA stop in Albany a huge success."

— Morgan Petty, Kyle Petty  
Charity Ride Across America



### "TREMENDOUS SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE..."

"Discover Albany has worked side by side with us for many, many years, promoting Crossgates as one of the top attractions in Albany. But most recently, with the addition of our new dual-branded Tru & Homewood Suites by Hilton Hotel, they were able to help us grow our outreach in the hospitality industry, in addition to continuing to promote the retail, entertainment and dining here at our center. They have been a tremendous source of knowledge for us."

— Jennifer Smith, Director  
of Marketing, Crossgates



## 2018 BY THE NUMBERS

# Sales Activity Report

Total 2018 Leads: 200  
Total 2018 Lead Attendance: 149,517  
Total 2018 Room Nights: 74,270

## Bookings

Total 2018 Bookings: 88  
YTD Attendance: 55,209  
YTD Room Nights: 126,730

## Operations Metrics

ALBANY VISITORS CENTER  
YTD ATTENDANCE: 11,342  
INCLUDING 4,330 STUDENTS

GIFT SHOP NET INCOME: \$4,284  
PROGRAM NET INCOME: \$14,175

AIRPORT INFORMATION CENTER  
GUEST SERVICED: 85,345

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE
2017	749	608	880	1058	1400	1325
2018	586	607	860	808	1714	1146
	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
2017	1877	1435	868	1543	927	439
2018	1620	866	773	1348	582	432
2017 TOTALS:						13,109
2018 TOTALS:						11,342

## Marketing Metrics

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Discover Albany maintains robust presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. In 2018, we delivered 3.6M impressions across platforms. We gained 27,546 followers, a 24% increase from 2017. We also generated 84,453 engagements, up 108% from 2017, showing that our destination is attracting more interest.

### WEBSITE UPDATES CONTINUE

Discover Albany completed search engine optimization for our new Albany.org website, launched a digital asset management system, and signed with AudioEye to make our website ADA compliant. In 2018, we saw 315,400 unique visitors, up 11% from 2017. In December, we established conversion goals on the website, including requesting visitor guides, viewing hotel special offers, and newsletter sign-ups. In **just a month**, we completed 1,966 goals.

### Unique website visitors

315,400

### Total pageviews

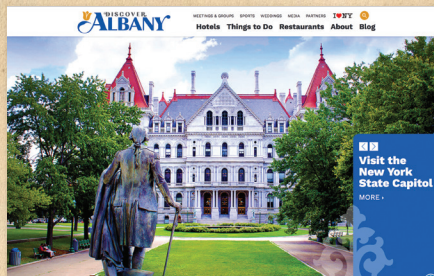
833,896

### Website Traffic

Organic	Other
229,826	85,544

### Top Traffic Sources

Organic Search	229,826
Direct	47,381
Referral	18,865
Social	13,424
Paid	8,153







# FINANCIAL REPORT

## 2018 Financial Report

### CONDENSED BALANCE SHEET (AS OF 12/31/18, UNAUDITED)

#### Assets

Cash & Receivables	\$ 1,589,526
Receivables	\$ 82,494
Property & Equipment	\$ 67,902
Other	\$ 385,053
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,124,975</b>

#### Liabilities

Accounts Payable	\$ 83,202
Other	\$ 79,768
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 162,970</b>

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets** **\$2,287,945**

## 2019 BUDGET

#### INCOME

	2019 Budget	2018 (unaudited)
Earned Income	116,000	98,859
Fees for Services	1,693,678	1,663,378
Grants	124,000	124,618
Investment	26,000	-18,141
Other	1,250	2,670
<b>Total Income:</b>	<b>\$1,960,928</b>	<b>\$1,871,384</b>


#### EXPENSES

	2019 Budget	2018 (unaudited)
Admin Expenses	429,126	370,309
Marketing	350,635	285,554
Other	40,900	103,036
Personnel	1,140,267	1,025,237
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$ 1,960,928</b>	<b>\$1,784,136</b>



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## *The Organization/Mission*

Discover Albany strengthens the awareness of Albany County as a convention and visitor destination, attracting individuals, families, and businesses from around the world to increase revenue and stimulate economic development and growth for the community. 

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