

A Complete Revision of the Comprehensive Plan for Albert Lea, Minnesota
Draft 15 August 2007

V i s i o n

invent: *to produce (as something useful) for the first time through the use of the imagination or of ingenious thinking and experiment*

topography: *an accurate and detailed description of a place, including land surface configuration, both man-made and natural; the lay of the land*

When veterans returned home following their service in WWII and found no jobs available, the Albert Lea community formed a group that created the first industrial park and put the veterans to work. When mothers joined the workforce, the need for daycare resulted in the Albert Lea community forming the nation's first public childcare center. After the loss of Farmland Industries in the fire, the people of Albert Lea united in a process aimed at finding common ground as a community, and eventually, began working with a renewed sense of dedication to creating a better place. Even early in the history of Albert Lea—whether with forethought or simply through serendipity, a lake was created from a large slough. When faced with a problem, the people of Albert Lea seem always to find a way to respond creatively, to produce something useful and lasting through their imagination, ingenuity, and commitment. And they have left us with a small Midwestern town nestled into a landscape of lakes and fields, close neighborhoods, and a downtown on a prominent hill. More important, perhaps, they have impressed upon us an attitude of hope and resilience, and a desire to wrest real solutions from the challenges we face.

But what has been left for us cannot be enough. We are not simply the caretakers of what past generations have left for us. We have to assume for ourselves that same sense of invention that has been passed to us, so that we, too, share in our community's legacy.

We think about Albert Lea in ways that support a sense of invention. We recognize that this community cannot be defined by a line on a map, and that its corporate limits are only a political boundary. We understand that it is more important that *the sense of community* be defined, with Albert Lea being “the land between the lakes”—an area that encompasses the town, businesses, homes, schools, and churches... and perhaps most important, the lakes, waterways, and rolling terrain—the topography—that connect them.

But it's that sense of invention, more than anything else that holds us together as a community. It allows us to think differently about our future, and frame directions that we could not achieve alone. It forces us to investigate, to think in new ways, and to act upon the common ground we share. In applying our sense of invention, we envision...

...an Albert Lea that emphasizes the experiences people have, a place where we are reminded of the beauty of the built and natural environment whether we move about by car, on a bicycle, on foot, or in a boat. When we build, we recognize history, preserving worthy structures for the future, and crafting new ones so that they, too, might someday become worthy of attention. When parts become worn, we seek to replace them with new pieces that restore vibrancy, bring needed activity, and are better for Albert Lea than what they replace.

...a place that is connected... as neighborhoods, districts, corridors, and special features are linked in ways that encourage mobility but are balanced by the experience of the place. But more important, it is a place that is connected to the land, so that our lakes are protected—or even enhanced—

for the benefit of future generations, for the benefit of nature. We recognize that our health as a community is inextricably connected to the health of our lakes.

...a good place to do business, where this community maintains its strength as a regional center of economic activity, particularly for those wishing to invest in new small and medium-sized businesses. While the proximity of the interstates is an opportunity, we will not define ourselves by freeways—we know our place is more than its interstates, so we invite people to explore. We seek quality economic prospects based on Albert Lea’s intrinsic resources and character, based on their “fit” to our community, and by their potential for lending new energy to the broader community.

...a community that tells its stories through arts, community activities, and the design of its buildings and public spaces, with places that bring people together in a time when modern life tends more to pull us apart. We seek partnerships to shape cultural and recreational activities, in venues that include parks, streets, and wild and preserved places, inviting participation from residents and visitors, former residents and new ones, people of all ages and backgrounds. We see Albert Lea as a place that is particular in its orientation to families, and we see it as a setting that creates good neighbors.

Albert Miller Lea, a topographer with the United States Dragoons, traversed Freeborn County in 1835, marking Fox Lake on his charts. Within twenty years, the first settler arrived on the shores of the lake, now named Albert Lea Lake, establishing a settlement where an opportunity for water power could be found between the lake and a large upstream slough. The dam that created power impounded water that would ultimately form a new lake. Whether it happened by plan or chance, Fountain Lake is today a point of pride for the Albert Lea community. Now, as the community defines itself by the way it lays on the land, it seems all the more fitting that its name is taken from the topographer who first marked out the land between the lakes.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the direction of the proposed Vision (above), which would guide the updated Comprehensive Plan, and give us any specific comments regarding the Vision below:

Agree Neutral Disagree

(Please write your comments below)

Please send your comments via email to albertlea@hkgi.com or by regular mail to Brad Scheib, HKGi, 123 North Third Street, Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55401-1659.