



# OVERVIEW



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*Photo by Brian Nerland*

All photos from the Live. Work. Play. Instagram account, I Love Anchorage.

## INTRODUCTION

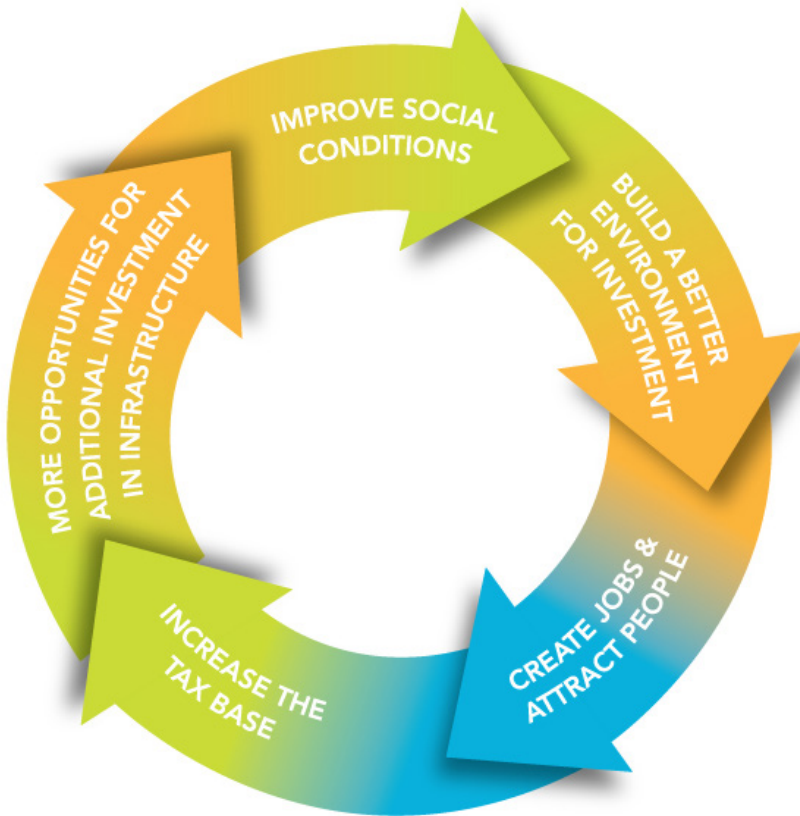
### THE ANCHORAGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (AEDC) HAS A BOLD VISION: TO MAKE ANCHORAGE THE #1 CITY IN AMERICA.

The rationale for such a vision goes beyond the traditional economic development model and responds to a shift in paradigm – people are no longer going where the jobs are, instead people are going to places they want to live and jobs are following.

The AEDC Board of Directors recognized this in 2010, and has since built a robust alliance of business, community and government partners. These groups come together for the Live. Work. Play. (LWP) initiative. The LWP vision adopted by the AEDC Board in 2010, over the years has shown increasing success and continues to draw community wide support. The vision is for Anchorage to become the # 1 city in America to Live, Work and Play by 2025.



Photo by Anchorage Press Staff



The strategy adopted by AEDC to achieve the LWP vision is aimed at spurring economic development by creating a vibrant community, represented here with the “Virtuous Cycle” graphic.

## A WHOLE NEW JOURNEY

In March 2010, the AEDC Board of Directors adopted a compelling new vision: Anchorage would be the #1 city in America in which to live, work and play by 2025. Anchorage's LWP initiative was formally founded to address the continuing need to diversify and improve the city's economy and overall quality of life.



Photo by Carolina Stacey

Board member Mike Prozeralik, of KPB Architects, proposed the idea of making Anchorage the top place to live in America. He had based his proposal on the simple fact that he loved the city he called home. Living in Anchorage provided a satisfaction that permeated all aspects of his life, from personal to professional to recreational. To him, it was "the place." Anchorage already possessed a unique and compelling draw for the rest of the country and even

**He challenged the group to discover the community's DNA and then build on the city's inherent strengths.**

the world. This appeal could be leveraged to encourage more and more people to call Anchorage home.

To be the #1 city in America was a powerful vision that resonated with the entire Board of Directors. It had what Bill Dann, AEDC Board member and business strategy consultant, termed as "gulp factor" – a challenging quality that came with anxiety at going public with the idea and anticipation for the potential success of the idea. The Board embraced Prozeralik's idea immediately and unanimously, directing Popp and his team to develop a set of measures that would objectively gauge progress and attainment of the vision.

In July 2010, AEDC hosted Joel Kotkin, noted demographer and author of *The Next Hundred Million*,

as the keynote speaker for its annual 3-Year Economic Outlook luncheon. In front of an audience of over 1,000 community and business leaders, Kotkin challenged Anchorage to find its own pathway to prosperity. He challenged the group to discover the community's DNA and then build on the

city's inherent strengths. His research indicated future generations would be seeking what Anchorage had in abundance and what other communities lacked – namely, land, clean air and water and access to nature at its best.

Following Mr. Kotkin's presentation, the AEDC Executive Committee and Board of Directors reasoned that if they could make our community the best place to Live, Work and Play, then Anchorage would attract talent that would innovate, start new ventures and thus grow our economy. Popp and the Board also deemed it imperative that the undertaking involve collaboration with the community at every level.



## A WHOLE NEW JOURNEY

A LWP Steering Committee comprised of AEDC Board and community members was appointed and later given wide latitude and authority by the AEDC Board to lead the effort. The community members were from business, nonprofit and government organizations. Additionally, the initiative was divided into Live, Work and Play categories, and a sub-committee was established for each of the categories.

### Why do you live here? Why would you leave?

An essential question remained: How to define Anchorage's DNA? Springboarding off of the initial conversation with

Kotkin, it was decided that residents would be surveyed with two questions: "Why do you live here?" and "Why would you leave?" In February 2011, AEDC undertook such a community survey. The LWP sub-committees received input from 700 survey responses. Each sub-committee analyzed the survey results and drafted aspirational Narratives of what Anchorage would be like if it were to be the #1 place in America to Live, Work and Play. The three Narratives were completed by early May and merged into a single overall Narrative in June.



Photo by Bernie Kale



Photo by Charity Blanchett

Meanwhile, at the Executive Committee's direction, AEDC staff researched metrics and proposed that Anchorage should compare itself with the largest cities in each of the 49 states and the District of Columbia. The Board determined that the metrics should be objective and quantifiable; qualitative metrics were deemed too subjective and too expensive to maintain over a 15-year timeframe. Also, the metrics needed to consist of something other cities were simultaneously measuring. It was decided that for the sake of monitoring trends, the metrics would still provide the best yardsticks for determining whether Anchorage was progressing toward the desired vision.

Ultimately, staff developed over 30 LWP metrics, mainly derived from sources such as the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Census Bureau, that included data relating to education, safety, housing, employment, recreation and diversity. The AEDC Board formally adopted the overall Narrative and metrics in July 2011.

After the metrics and Narrative were officially approved and published on October 11, 2011, the first results of LWP's research were unveiled in January of the following year. The initial data on the metrics showed Anchorage ranking as the number 10 city in which to Live, number 1 in which to Work and number 9 in which to Play nationally. With AEDC's sights set on making Anchorage the #1 city to Live, Work and Play, the data showed that the effort was starting from a strong foundation.

## KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM

In April 2013, the three sub-committees (Live, Work and Play) were invited to participate in a summit along with the Steering Committee and AEDC staff. The key objective was to reinvigorate the initiative and re-engage the supporters. Before a dedicated AEDC staff was appointed, the committees had not met or interacted for several months.

At the summit, the original set of metrics, final Narrative and Memorandum of Understanding were presented. The three groups were asked to review the metrics for their respective area of the vision and to a) commit to metrics for which the individual committee members, in connection with their organization, would take responsibility and b) commit to a session to plan their work to improve metrics performance and achieve the vision.

Responding to the three groups' input from the summit, the LWP Steering Committee shifted the strategy to selecting "Areas of Focus," and reiterated the AEDC policy that the metrics were only indicators of momentum and success, as opposed to targeted achievements or strategies. The LWP sub-committees were transformed into what were called the Areas of Focus (AoF) teams through the following process.

The Steering Committee reviewed existing community initiatives that aligned with the LWP vision and divided them into three categories:

1. Established and working well
2. Established and needing assistance
3. Not established and needed

Then, a second set of criteria were applied to filter known community efforts. Those criteria were:

- Has received community recognition,
- Connects and affects other issues,
- Partners are engaged,
- Some degree of resources have already been allocated,
- Issues/barriers would benefit from a boost of AEDC influence/support,
- Makes Anchorage special, and
- Data are available to measure progress.



## KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM

In May 2013, after applying the criteria, the Steering Committee approved the following AoFs that would form their respective teams, working towards the initiative goals under the Steering Committee's governance:

### 1. Community Safety

Quality of life in a city is tremendously influenced by how safe that city's residents feel. The Community Safety team aims to ensure that the people of Anchorage know they are safe on a daily basis, so that they may enjoy the city's many benefits. This

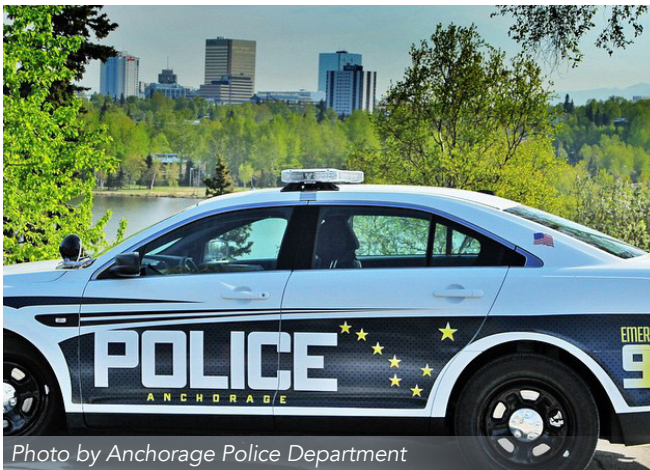


Photo by Anchorage Police Department

AoF includes a wide variety of objectives, including violence prevention, addressing issues concerning chronic inebriates in public spaces and helping the homeless community access the immediate resources they need.

### 2. Creative Placemaking

The creation of this AoF was fueled by a nationwide movement incorporating art and culture into shaping the physical, social and economic character of a place. The creative sector in Anchorage stands to be a tremendous contributor to the city's arts and culture scene. Creative Placemaking serves as a means to highlight tangible illustrations of Anchorage's identity. This involves bringing together numerous arts and culture players and helping them to develop and

promote their respective trades. This effort also focuses on forging a stronger relationship between the creative sector and businesses.

### 3. Education

It is absolutely crucial that a city have the educational offerings necessary for its next generation to succeed in a world with an ever-increasing demand for knowledge and skills. This team works to facilitate that kind of academic success in Anchorage, through support and involvement with the 90 Percent by 2020 initiative. Increasing graduation rates, monitoring academic progress, facilitating workforce readiness and properly allocating the resources needed to address educational issues are all part of this team's overall goal: to support every student's learning process so that they may thrive, from cradle to career.

### 4. Housing

The Housing team concentrates on the issues and opportunities facing Anchorage in terms of affordability, accessibility and availability of homes. There are many complex and unique aspects that make up the Anchorage housing market. The Housing team's goal is to see to it that people have a wide variety of appealing options to meet their housing needs.



Photo by Annie Cizak Pazar

## KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM



Photo by Katie Medred

### 5. Trails Initiative (formerly Big. Wild. Trails.)

Anchorage prides itself on its vast, beautiful trail system, which provides a means of recreation, relaxation and transportation for the city's residents and caters to the natural affinity so many Alaskans have for the outdoors. The Trails Initiative team works to ensure that our over 250-mile trail system remains a point of pride for the city. Additionally, this team is making efforts to improve upon existing trails to create a world-class trails offering. With so much to offer and a substantial amount of support behind it, the Trails Initiative is a very important component to the unique attraction of Anchorage.

The Trails Initiative team works to ensure that our over 250-mile trail system remains a point of pride for the city.

### 6. Workplace Well-Being

The Workplace Well-Being team interests itself in the overall health and satisfaction of Anchorage's workforce. It examines ways to further develop environments conducive to employee health – physical, emotional, financial, career, social and one's connection with their community — by incorporating input from both employers and employees to create

an optimal workplace dynamic. This team looks to a holistic approach to individual health. It is not merely about midday calisthenics; feeling connected and well taken care of by one's employer includes having resources available that support an all-encompassing focus on job satisfaction.

In addition to establishing the AoFs, AEDC decided to give the LWP Steering Committee virtually full autonomy over its internal decisions, including ways to implement the projects of each AoF. AEDC elected to provide its external influence only when legal and financial commitments were required.

In June of 2013, the AoFs began developing their own plans of action, with set targets and objectives, as per the requirement of the Steering Committee policy.

In September 2013, a new Area of Focus was added:

### 7. One Anchorage, One Economy.

The diversity of Anchorage's population is a valuable resource for continuous economic growth, a fact that more and more Anchorage businesses are beginning to acknowledge. As Anchorage's ethnic populations and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community continue to increase, the One Anchorage, One Economy team focuses on harnessing and celebrating that diversity to the fullest. This team also seeks to provide ways to acknowledge and commend businesses in their effort to create a place where people of all backgrounds and identities feel like valued members of the community.

While not an AoF, **Engage Anchorage**, became an integral participator in LWP during the same month. Engage Anchorage was formed as a means by which young professionals could gain access into the LWP movement while having a collaborative forum to communicate with fellow Engage Anchorage peers. This initiative aims at attracting and retaining Anchorage's young professionals in the workforce, who will be established leaders within the community by 2025. Engage Anchorage allows this key demographic to have voice and influence in the direction of LWP, and the future of their city.



## LESSONS LEARNED TO DATE

Since its inception, LWP has been charting unknown territory. An economic development organization undertaking community re-development has not been seen in Anchorage before. As a result, a number of valuable lessons have been learned and are summarized below:

### 1. Losing control in order to gain engagement, commitment and action

In order to garner support from a diverse group of stakeholders, it was essential for AEDC to loosen control in a cautious and organized manner. To be a truly grassroots initiative, LWP could only thrive if AEDC wasn't prescriptive with a top-down approach, while still setting clear expectations. While it is a delicate balance to sustain engagement while maintaining accountability, the servant-leader model has been effective in engaging the stakeholders and committing them to act toward the common goal.

Community partners realized that AEDC's voice could be powerful in gaining traction on their concerns, especially with the business community.

### 2. Community's view about a business organization

Prior to LWP's formation, community stakeholders didn't view AEDC as their key partner in what they were trying to accomplish. Anchorage businesses were generally perceived as disengaged from wider community issues and their support of community efforts was mainly financial.

LWP changed that perception when the AEDC Board adopted a vision for the city. Community partners realized that AEDC's voice could be powerful in gaining traction on their concerns,

especially with the business community. It also led to other business organizations, such as the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Anchorage Downtown Partnership and, very recently, the Anchorage Society for Human Resource Management, joining in to further strengthen the community's voice.

### 3. Imposing a planning methodology

Soon after the summit in 2013, AEDC developed a planning methodology that could enable all teams to progress toward the common goal and invited all LWP partners to adopt a specific planning process for tracking and reporting progress. Contrary to AEDC's expectation, the planning methodology wasn't universally adopted and questions were raised about the need for such a planning approach. The questions may have stemmed from a lack of clarity about the planning tool, a suspicion of AEDC's need to control the process or a combination of both. It took another



Photo by Kayla Schommer

## LESSONS LEARNED TO DATE



Photo by Amanda Loy

year before all AoF teams began adopting the planning tool and using it for reporting their progress. A majority of them now believe that this tool is useful for them and are pleased with the results, while a few of them are still learning to fully utilize it.

#### 4. Resource Conflict

Community re-development is resource-intensive. Building such a broad platform as LWP is bound to create tension between the partners over available resources and whether it will take them away from existing programs. AEDC has consistently communicated that LWP is not a new effort, but rather a collaborative effort to make existing initiatives stronger.

Some community partners have viewed this initiative as a pathway to connect with and seek funding support from the business community, and addressing this viewpoint has been a challenge.

LWP wasn't designed to generate funding for projects, and it is not intended to do so for the foreseeable future. Due to this, projects that require great resources can take more time to implement.

#### 5. A new challenge for the Board of Directors

When the AEDC Board adopted the ambitious goal to make Anchorage #1 through community re-development efforts, it had limited experience in this field. The Board sees a direct link between the success of the LWP initiative and its ability to make Anchorage a better location to attract investment and talent. However, the Board is still grappling with the most effective ways to engage in the elements of LWP that are growing at a rapid rate. The challenge for AEDC is to keep its Board, as well as its broader membership, fully informed and to find new ways of engaging them in an effective manner. The Board owns the vision, but some of its members are still on the journey to own the effort that will fulfill that vision.



Photo by Meg Zaletel

## KNOWN CHALLENGES BEFORE US

In 2014, AEDC staff sought feedback about the LWP initiative from a number of stakeholder groups, which, combined with internal assessments, provided a list of challenges before us. The stakeholder groups included the AEDC Board of Directors, LWP MoU signatories, AoF team members and a team of Leadership Anchorage members that undertook a review of the LWP initiative as its community project.

Below are the challenges that were highlighted:

- Provide clear, concise and sustained communication to Anchorage residents.
- Provide ease of participation and involvement with the initiative.
- Ensure the initiative has adequate resources to continue and progress toward the goals identified by all AoFs.
- Support all AoFs in reaching their goals through AEDC Board engagement.
- Maintain and increase the momentum through wider participation.
- Encourage AoFs to work with each other for better synergy, where applicable, e.g., Trails Initiative affects Housing, and vice versa.
- Sustain and increase partnerships with private, public and nonprofit sectors.
- Hold onto current partners, while reaching out to new ones to work toward the common goal.
- Increase partnerships and engagement with the city administration as the success of a number of the goals depends upon legislative/policy changes.
- AEDC has to continue to hold itself accountable and achieve the vision without being prescriptive or controlling.
- Steering Committee needs better clarity on the nature and extent of policy and structure to govern the initiative.
- New issues will continue to emerge, requiring regular check-ins with the community and fine-tuning the focus of LWP.

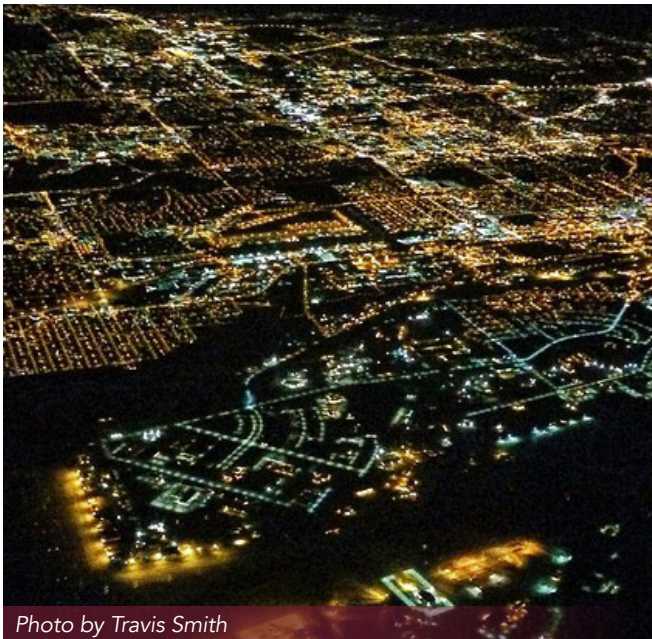


Photo by Travis Smith



Photo by Katie Schrooten

## CONCLUSION

The LWP Initiative is a fresh perspective on fostering a city's economic development through supporting community re-development efforts. As an economic development organization, AEDC has executed, managed and measured its ambitious goal of making Anchorage the best city in America. Strategic partnerships, a focused approach toward identifying and addressing the issues and a rigorous data-driven evaluation of the progress are good indicators of its likely success.

The key to ensuring that Anchorage achieves its goal by 2025, however, lies in overcoming the challenges ahead and continually seeking new opportunities to strengthen the initiative.



Photo by Aimee Chauvot



Photo by Deela Roe

## MORE INFORMATION

To find out more information about LWP, visit:  
[www.aedcweb.com/live-work-play/](http://www.aedcweb.com/live-work-play/)

To see how people in Anchorage Live, Work and Play, follow us on Instagram: [@iloveanchorage](https://www.instagram.com/iloveanchorage)

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