



Discover Albany Visitor Center Relocation Project

The Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau, dba Discover Albany, will relocate its offices and Visitor Center to Union Station (Kiernan Plaza), which is owned and operated by Redburn. The new space will enable Discover Albany to have more space for updated exhibits, visitor services, programming space and a gift shop.

Funding Needs

- Signage: Wayfinding and branding
- Consultants: Architectural consultants, Exhibit Designers, and Fabricators
- Programming space with technology for public engagement, seating and flex space for access by partners.

Proposed Tentative Budget

<u>Expenditure Category</u>	<u>ARPA Funding</u>	<u>DA Funding</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Interior Signage</u>	<u>\$7,000</u>	<u>\$7,000</u>	<u>\$14,000</u>
<u>Exterior Signage</u>	-	-	<u>TBD</u>
<u>Exhibit Design, development and installation</u>	<u>151,000</u>	<u>151,000</u>	<u>\$302,000</u>
<u>Visitor Center fit Design and Build (fixtures, chargers, lighting, displays, etc.</u>	<u>50,000</u>	<u>50,000</u>	<u>\$100,000</u>
<u>Programming Space design, furnishings, welcome area and hospitality features and tech fit up.</u>	<u>\$92,000</u>	<u>\$42,000</u>	<u>\$134,000</u>
-	-	-	-
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$300,000</u>	<u>\$250,000*</u>	<u>\$550,000</u>

****Beyond the above, Discover Albany will furnish the professional offices for twelve full-time staff***



Current Importance of Visitor Centers

In 2020, multiple physical Visitor Centers across the country shuttered their doors for good. Destination Marketing Organizations and Tourism Promotion Agencies experimented with smaller mobile visitor centers, digital kiosks, and AI supported technical assistance.

Discover Albany attended the Destinations International Convention in July 2024 and participated in the full-day Visitor Services Summit, which shared the current best practices for Visitor Centers.

The resounding message: Despite the 2020 digital pivots, it is now more important than ever to have a physical visitor center. Visitor Centers are essential. However, they can no longer be stagnant spaces with stale brochures and generic gift shop merchandise. The visitor center needs to be a point of pride for locals. Visitor Centers are a community space. It should reflect the destination's history, celebrate its present, and look ahead to its future.

The option for Discover Albany to relocate to the historic Union Station provides the opportunity for the County to invest in a visitor center that the community can celebrate.

Vision for Discover Albany Visitor Center

The funding provided by Albany County's ARPA grant will allow Discover Albany to engage the services of Architectural consultants, Exhibit Designers, and Fabricators to create an innovative Albany County Visitor Center appropriate to the historic Union Station space.

- Create a welcoming space for a visitor to begin their Albany adventure, featuring Exhibits to:
 - Celebrate Albany History
 - Showcase innovation in Albany County with Emphasis on Transportation (leaning into the location in a former train station). This includes the Erie Canal, Train and air travel, and other modes of transportation.
- Paul Schrodt models will be available in the lobby. Priority will be given to the 1865 Beverwyck model. The models are currently located at the Quackenbush Square Visitor Center. These are delicate and need to be professionally relocated.
- Flexible moving interpretive panels, which can better examine Albany's innovations – everything from Perforated Toilet Paper, Albany Ale, to the Erie Canal and modern-day technology.
- If space and funding allow, potential to interpret Native American and Dutch history.
- Family Friendly Mini-Attraction:
 - Owney the Postal Dog as our mascot (a historic pup from Albany who rode the trains and is featured in the Smithsonian)
- Public Programming in collaboration with community organizations, including Albany Public Library and Wildwood.
- Visitor Center by day, community space by night. Union Station tenants include Albany Center Gallery and the Downtown BID, who have previously partnered with Discover Albany on public programs.
- Build out a Flex Space for public programming, Film and Sports Commission use, community programming, etc. This replaces space lost when the City of Albany abruptly closed our education and programming space in 2020.



Visitor Amenities

- Charging Stations
- WiFi
- Seating and Tables to plan your Albany Adventure
- Gift Shop with Albany County themed items
- Selfie Station: Current seating “nook” will be reimagined as seats on a train. Original artwork will create a window.
- Brochures and maps. A brochure rack will be available after Visitor Center hours.

Albany County Tourism Promotion

Visitors will experience a teaser of the attractions and amenities available throughout Albany County, leaving the space feeling inspired and confident that their visit will be unforgettable.

The Visitor Center will market the destination in the following ways:

- Brochures: Modern visitor centers are moving away from large, overwhelming brochure racks. A smaller, more focused brochure rack with Albany County attractions, maps, and amenities will be available in the lobby outside our normal operating hours. A QR code with our app will also be made available.
- Partner Wall: Broadview left a digital wall and the equipment to maintain it. This digital wall will become the “Partner Wall”, where we will showcase exhibits, events, and other unique experiences with rotating images.

Content Creation

Discover Albany will collaborate with representatives from the County to ensure the content represented in the Visitor Center is reflective of the mission, brand, and ideals we want visitors to take with them as they explore the county.

Discover Albany hosts quarterly cultural heritage and tourism meetings. These meetings include local county heritage sites, local artists, playwrights and performers. We will solicit feedback from this group. Their input will allow a diversity of voices that reflect the diversity of the County.

We will include input from local historians, including the Albany County historian, to ensure content is accurate.

The stories shared at the Visitor Center must be a point of pride for all Albany County.

- Large interactive Screen Alternative: If unable to do the interactive model, we wish for this to be removed entirely to have more walkable space for visitors and staff
- Backwall screen: We wish to use this screen as a partner screen to advertise events, exhibits, and programming



Summary

Discover Albany Plans to take a modern, innovative approach to a new Visitor Center, choosing an attractive location and co-locating with partner organizations. The corporate offices of Discover Albany will also relocate to Union Station, on the 2nd floor, which will include the Flex Space outlined above that will allow for public programming, partner use, film location planning, sports rights holder meetings, and other activities that Discover Albany perform to drive economic growth to Albany County.

Attachments: Signage Pricing; Exhibit Estimates; Furnishings and fixtures