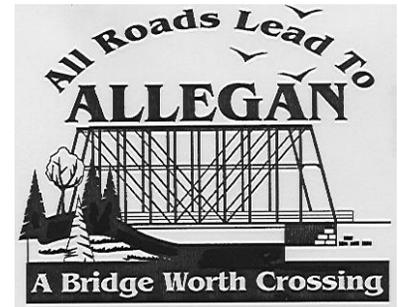




City of Allegan
DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC PLAN
June, 2004



City of Allegan Downtown Strategic Plan June, 2004

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Introduction

Downtown Allegan evokes such images as the historic commercial district, the boardwalk along the Kalamazoo River, the Griswold Auditorium or the Regent Theater. These are among downtown Allegan's finest assets. However, the actual district served by the Downtown Development Authority, (DDA) encompasses much more. Included in the district are The Village Market grocery store, Jaycee Park, the abandoned historic Mill District, and a small commercial strip on Marshall Street. An attractive older neighborhood lies just to the west of the DDA district within walking distance to the downtown.



All of these areas were included during the evaluation of the downtown for its function and character. During this visual assessment, specific physical problems were identified. Concurrently, an in-depth process to gain input from residents, business owners and community members was conducted. Together, the community priorities and the physical analysis led to the formation of a framework plan, a physical plan that outlines the preferred future development pattern in the downtown.



This document serves as a development guidebook by which decisions affecting the downtown commercial area can be evaluated. Although the elements and actions described in this plan have individual value, the *combined* impact of these individual items is significant. The purpose of this plan is to address development which will occur in downtown Allegan in the next ten to fifteen years, what the nature of that development should be, and in what manner the City and the DDA can promote such development. This plan therefore, establishes actions which the City can take in order to improve the existing conditions in the district and promote desired development.



The layout of this document reflects the process taken to develop the plan. Following is a list of major components of the plan:

- ▶ Review of existing plans
- ▶ Visual assessment of downtown
- ▶ Community input process, including:
 1. Stakeholder interviews
 2. Visioning workshops (2)
 3. Questionnaire
- ▶ Framework plan development
- ▶ Physical Plan Recommendations
- ▶ Implementation Strategy

Section One

REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS

A successful future downtown plan depends upon an in-depth understanding of existing community plans that affect the district. Therefore, the following plans were reviewed and summarized for their impact and relevance to the DDA District:

- ▶ Allegan Master Plan, 1963, as amended December 1993
- ▶ Allegan DDA Development Plan, 1991, as amended 1996
- ▶ Allegan DDA Tax Increment Financing Plan, 1991, as amended 1996
- ▶ Allegan Downtown Redevelopment Plan, August 1993
- ▶ Allegan Zoning Ordinance, November 1993
- ▶ Second Story Reuse Strategy, 1994
- ▶ City of Allegan: A Community Profile Report, 2002
- ▶ Community Visioning Sessions, February 2003

The Redevelopment Plan's calculations for commercial parking requirements are excessive

Included below is an analysis of the previous Downtown Redevelopment Plan on two key issues for the downtown: traffic and parking.

Traffic Analysis

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan includes a cursory overview of 24-hour traffic volumes, accidents, and traffic flow. It states that, "traffic volumes are relatively low and can likely be accommodated on one lane in each direction. Accidents are highest on Marshall and Cedar Streets, both State roads." Detailed analyses were not conducted, such as traffic movements during peak periods at intersections and highway capacity analysis. Therefore, it would be difficult to propose specific circulation alternatives with certainty. However, two proposals are advanced, both of which include one-way streets.

Parking Analysis

The parking analysis includes a broad inventory, in four zones, of gross building area, measured for building footprints, and broken out for four uses (commercial, public, residential, and industry). Zone A includes most of the CBD Zoning District. Commercial space is not analyzed for retail, office, service, nor upper floors.

The Redevelopment Plan's calculations for commercial parking requirements are excessive and based upon standards for exclusive, not shared, parking in commercial strip environments. Parking standards vary in their application to different commercial environments. *Shared parking* facilities can accommodate more parking demand (per same gross floor area and same sales activity) than exclusive parking facilities. Such is the case with downtown Allegan, where shared parking requires fewer parking spaces than exclusive parking.

“The remedy for any deficient parking areas is to better manage existing parking, rather than increase the parking supply.”

The Urban Land Institute(ULI) has consistently reduced, since its 1965 study, *Parking Requirements for Shopping Centers*, commercial parking demand standards for commercial uses. In 1965, ULI's shopping center industry standard was 5.5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable area (GLA). ULI reduced the ratio to 5.0 in 1977 “as a valid national maximum for planning regional shopping centers”; further reduced the ratio to slightly less than 5.0 in 1982 (and even less for smaller shopping centers), then reduced it again in 1999: 4.5 for centers over 600,000 SF, 4.0-4.5 for centers between 400,000 and 600,000 SF, and 4.0 for centers between 25,000-400,000 SF. Further, it is important to note that this reduced standard for commercial parking demand applies to larger shopping center environments, although it is often applied to stand-alone strip commercial environments with exclusive parking facilities, as well.

Since the parking facilities in Downtown Allegan are shared between multiple uses, it is appropriate to use an even lower parking demand standard than that which is recommended by the ULI. Downtowns have shared parking facilities that serve mixed uses (i.e., retail, service, office and residential), and are characterized by lower gross sales activity (and lower gross rents) per square foot than in regional malls. For example, in downtown Allegan by reducing the commercial demand standard from 5.0 spaces per GLA to a more appropriate ratio of 3.0, the peak hour parking “deficiency” is greatly reduced from 320 spaces to only 20 spaces. It should be noted that the only way to definitively determine the parking demand for downtown Allegan is by measuring actual parking behavior as part of a parking demand study. For example, a significant amount of vacant ground floor space and/or marginal sales activity, in downtown Allegan, would further reduce its actual parking demand.

John Edwards, a traffic engineer and published expert on the subject of parking in small downtowns, relates that many of his downtown parking occupancy surveys, in dozens of small towns, show a peak demand averaging 2.5 spaces per thousand square feet. He goes on to say that the typical remedy for any deficient parking areas is better managing existing parking areas, rather than increasing the parking supply.

Invariably, struggling or declining downtowns can be identified by their excessive off-street parking, deficient proportion of public (i.e., shared) parking, lack of on-street parking in front of stores, and general lack of buildings and retail space. It is typical, in downtown customer surveys, for customers to rank downtown's top problems as *variety of stores* and *selection of merchandise*, well ahead of parking supply. There are significant *opportunity costs* for excessive or underutilized parking areas, where additional buildings could be built. New buildings on underutilized space would contribute a variety of economic benefits, such as additional property value, more businesses, more retail sales and jobs, more residences, and increased local tax revenue for additional capital improvements.

Even though the Redevelopment Plan's analysis shows a 320 parking space deficit for the CBD, the Plan's recommendations to address this deficiency, overwhelmingly are for improved utilization and management of *existing* parking spaces.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The following is a list of major ideas coming from each of the reviewed plans that relate to the DDA District.

City Master Plan

- ▶ Emphasis on improving *appearance* in CBD: greenery, aesthetics, building facades.
- ▶ Future land use plan for CBD is larger than CBD zoning district.

DDA Development and Tax Increment Financing Plans

- ▶ Emphasis on aesthetics and streetscape.
- ▶ Recent focus on programs that support *retail* development.
- ▶ TIF annual revenue: \$172,600 (2004)

Downtown Redevelopment Plan

- ▶ Purpose: improve parking, downtown entries, linkages, building facades.
- ▶ Land use analysis: lack of linkages, poor street configurations, perceived parking problems.
- ▶ Traffic analysis: high accident rates on state roads.
- ▶ Parking analysis: although peak hour shortages are projected, remedies are primarily for improved utilization and management of *existing* parking spaces. The stated parking requirements are excessive: reducing the requirement, from 5 to 3 spaces per 1000 SF, results in reduction in the peak period “deficiency” from 320 to 20 parking spaces. Likely remedies are not increased supply, but improve distribution and management. It is noted that at least some downtown stakeholders perceive a parking supply shortage. The only way to resolve this question is to perform a parking demand study. The stated preference for increased on-street diagonal parking would, indeed, add significant benefits for retail activity, as curbside parking provides maximum customer convenience and maximum sales activity.
- ▶ Redevelopment plan focused on physical streetscape design, building treatments, costs and funding sources.

City Zoning Ordinance for C-1 (Central Business District) Zone

- ▶ Permitted uses include auto-related uses, e.g., gas stations, auto dealers, auto repair shops.
- ▶ Upper floor residences require Special Use permits.
- ▶ There are no building placement requirements for setbacks and lot coverage in C-1, although maximum building height is 50 feet. In the Public/Governmental Land District, there is a lot coverage maximum of 30%.
- ▶ Two historic overlay districts overlap with the CBD zone, and two additional historic overlay districts are adjacent to the CBD.
- ▶ Off-Street Parking Requirements range from 4.5 spaces per 1000 SF for retail to 16.7 spaces for sit-down restaurants, all of which are excessive for a downtown environment of shared parking and mixed uses. However, there is a “community parking option”, which has been instituted for most of the CBD zone, in which new uses are exempt, subject to site plan review, from the off-street parking requirement.

There are significant *opportunity costs* for excessive or under-utilized parking areas, where additional buildings could be built.

Other City Ordinances

Business Signs: Signage allowances for businesses are generous: in the C-1 (CBD) district, six sign types are permitted (ground pole, wall/flat, projecting, marquee, roof, and portable), and each business is permitted to have one of each sign type. Illuminated signs, such as neon, are permitted, though the number of colors are restricted to two.

- ▶ *Outdoor Seating:* An Outdoor Sidewalk Cafe License is available through the City of Allegan offices.
- ▶ *Sidewalk Displays:* not addressed in zoning ordinance, nor in Chapter 25 on streets and sidewalks.

Second Story Reuse Strategy

This study examined strategies and costs to convert 50,000 square feet of vacant upper floor space and to develop a building facility for a new major retailer of 15,000 square feet. Spaces were identified, conceptual plans were drawn, and costs were estimated, including for a parking structure and physical connections.

Community Profile

- ▶ The U.S. Census shows City of Allegan household income at \$39,539, which is somewhat lower than all nearby townships, as well as Allegan County (\$45,815) and Michigan (\$44,667).
- ▶ Most (55%) homes are valued between \$50,000 - \$99,999, and rents are relatively modest when compared with household income.
- ▶ The work force in Allegan City tends to be more production and services, as compared with the county and state.
- ▶ Conclusions related to downtown Allegan include: needed improvements to nearby neighborhoods; the anticipated loss of County offices presents an opportunity for private investment; natural amenities, such as the river, will prove very important for future development; many downtown property owners have found the use of upper stories to be difficult; the community has seen nearby suburban commercial strip development patterns along M-89 on both east and west sides of the city.

Each of these plans has informed this plan. Recommendations to amend existing plans or proposals for additional studies on particular issues are outlined in the Implementation Strategies section of this report.

Previous Plans

Section Two

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Stakeholder interviews were conducted during February 12th and 13th, 2003. A series of questions was prepared to guide the interview process and to ensure that similar topics were discussed among stakeholders. Stakeholders included long-term downtown business owners, new and prospective business owners, and county and school officials. Following is a summary of responses to questions posed to stakeholders.

What is your image of the district?

Although many community stakeholders identified the downtown with positive images, such as "quaint", having "historic charm" and "authentic", many recognize that the downtown is not meeting its full potential.

Allegan's downtown has much to offer: the beautiful riverfront setting, the boardwalk along the river, and a safe, small-town atmosphere. Several public venues provide opportunities for entertainment and community events. Stakeholders identified all of these as positive aspects of the downtown district. One stakeholder referred to Allegan as the "jewel of southwest Michigan." At the same time, however, stakeholders want to see a better image for the future.

Some key issues that concern stakeholders included the use of the riverfront, the condition of rear facades of businesses in the district, and the lack of adequate entertainment pursuits for young adults. For example, one stakeholder interviewed, said "this is a great place for families, but not for a person in their early twenties. After 5 PM the downtown is very quiet, with few businesses staying open late." This is one way that the downtown is not living up to its full potential.

Most visitors to the downtown use parking lots behind buildings. As a result, the rear façade of a building establishes the first impression. Many rear facades do not present a good image, according to some stakeholders. Many noted that they would like to see physical improvements to rear facades, especially to those buildings along the river.

Overall, many want to see the river better incorporated into the downtown. One person used the example of the east side village market. The fact that the parking lot is adjacent to the river presents a negative image. One person questioned why the backs of buildings are facing the river, suggesting that businesses should be better connected to the river, both visually and physically.

Some stakeholders also commented on administrative aspects of the "running" of downtown. While one person stated that City Hall has done a good job with reinvestment in the downtown, another stated that the DDA is "jaded and resistant to change."

One stakeholder noted that office uses occupying first floor space is an indicator of a struggling downtown.

What is your image of adjacent corridors?

Most of those interviewed said that corridors adjacent to the district do not visually connect with the downtown, and therefore don't lead visitors into the downtown. Truck traffic, especially along M-40, is a problem noted by many. Furthermore, the "confusing one-way streets" and "lack of directional signage" were also noted as problems that could deter visitors from coming downtown.

Opinion about the character of the corridors themselves differed among those interviewed. One stakeholder said the "M-40 corridor is viable and well-kept," and that development was generally going in a good direction there. However, others characterized the adjacent corridors as "strip areas" with fast food restaurants and chain stores that are "not attractive and have nothing to lead people downtown." Several were concerned that these areas draw shoppers away from the downtown. Another said the corridors don't effect their downtown business at all.

Assess the vitality of the business district.

Stakeholders painted a picture of a downtown as a place with some successful businesses, but that is currently "struggling" to maintain its vitality. Stakeholders noted specific businesses, including *Something Sweet*, *CJ's Ice Cream Parlor* and the *Perrigo* outlet as examples of successful businesses in town. In addition, many saw the barber shops, bookstores, jewelry stores and banks as successful and adding to the vitality of the district. However, the loss of some retail stores, such as a clothier, two drugstores and a shoe store were also noted. Stakeholder saw this as a sign of some decline. One stakeholder noted that office uses occupying first floor space is an indicator of a struggling downtown. Another suggested that the downtown is struggling because it can't compete with the nearby "big box" retail such as K-Mart and Wal-Mart stores.

Many would like to see the store hours of downtown business expand to attract people to the downtown on Friday and Saturday evenings, especially. "We need a high end restaurant" noted one stakeholder. Another pointed out the lack of kids in the downtown because their isn't enough for them to do.

Public Involvement

What types of land use changes would you like to see downtown?

Land use changes that stakeholders would like to see range from relocating specific uses to improved transportation and parking in the downtown. Relocating the Perrigo maintenance building to the industrial park was a suggestion made by one stakeholder. Generally, stakeholders would like to see greater use of upper stories in existing buildings downtown. Stakeholders suggested high-end residential or office uses in 2nd stories, freeing up the street level for more retail use. One stakeholder suggested an ordinance to restrict 1st floor use to retail only. This same stakeholder suggested an ordinance to restrict chain stores in the downtown.

Stakeholders outlined their concerns with parking in the downtown, especially the conflict between parking availability to business patrons and business employees. One stakeholder suggested designating a lot for downtown employees. A related issue is the need for a greater range of transportation, including taxi and bus service in and around the downtown.

Stakeholders identified specific land uses they would like to see in the downtown including a new marina, a microbrewery, a farmer's market, and a canoe and kayak docking station.

Other physical improvements which stakeholders indicated they would like to see in the downtown include making the street more pedestrian-oriented, adding flowers to the Iron Bridge, and creating internal connections between shops, "so people don't shy away from visiting downtown during inclement weather."

What changes would you like to see along the adjacent corridors?

Generally, stakeholder would like to see the adjacent corridors become more definable gateways into the downtown. Some images that stakeholder used when describing what they would like these gateways to be include: a "park-like atmosphere", a "grand boulevard on Marshall Street", "lush landscaping" and "better signage."

One stakeholder identified the need to preserve the historic homes in the corridors surrounding the downtown, and suggested an incentive program to preserve the historical residential heritage on Marshall Street. Stakeholders would like to see more design and development controls in these corridors as well.

Stakeholders would like to see the adjacent corridors become better gateways into the downtown.

“The backbone [of the community] is the locally-owned businesses.”

Stakeholder

What types of new businesses would you like to see?

When asked what types of new businesses they would like to see, stakeholders had the following recommendations:

- ▶ A microbrewery
- ▶ More antiques stores
- ▶ Specialty food stores
- ▶ A grocery store
- ▶ Niche clothing stores and other hometown stores
- ▶ Fabric and sewing stores
- ▶ New restaurants
- ▶ A hotel

One stakeholder cautioned the DDA against developing the downtown as another Saugatuck which caters solely to tourists.

What do you see are the problems or barriers to redevelopment?

Stakeholders had much insight into the potential barriers to positive development in the downtown, ranging from administrative issues to physical constraints. The following are comments related to administrative issues:

- ▶ “Few incentives or encouragement exist to help new businesses”
- ▶ “Lack of foresight and investment capital available”
- ▶ “The site plan approval process is difficult. Not everyone is getting equal treatment.”
- ▶ “Business owners who sit on multiple boards. Real-estate deals resemble ‘insider trading,’ making it difficult to break in as a new business owner.”
- ▶ “The Historic District Commission can be difficult to deal with.”
- ▶ “The Tax disparity that exists between The Township and The City is a disincentive to running a business downtown”
- ▶ “The ‘owner-occupied’ requirement is a hindrance.”
- ▶ “The ordinances banning skateboarding, biking and roller-blading downtown keeps young people away, which is a negative.”
- ▶ “Codes need updating, and a clearer understanding is needed of how codes are interpreted.”
- ▶ “The DDA is not proactive. Downtown merchants don’t think outside the box.”

The County Courthouse and Jail present one physical barrier to positive development downtown, according to stakeholders. Not enough space is available for new businesses with the county facility taking up a relatively large block downtown. Other physical barriers identified by stakeholders include the lack of public restrooms, poor directional signage and lack of adequate parking. The one-way street configuration was also noted as a physical barrier to downtown development.

Public Involvement

COMMUNITY VISIONING

Residents, business owners, community members and city officials interested in voicing their ideas about downtown Allegan came to participate in the downtown visioning process. Two workshops were held at the Griswold Theater: one on February 12th, and another on February 13th 2003. Each session followed a similar format, incorporating a series of small-group discussions and exercises to identify issues and elicit ideas.

During the workshops, participants identified opportunities and issues concerning the downtown. Topics included transportation and economic development, maintaining “small town” character, and the image of downtown. Participants recorded their ideas and voted for those most important to them, thereby establishing priorities. Lastly, each small group shared their results with the entire audience. Although many varied ideas came from the sessions, many commonalities also arose. Presented here, organized around the brainstorming exercises, is a summary of the highest priority ideas and most common themes.

Exercise One: Understanding the Present

Participants felt proud about Allegan’s downtown because of the following:

- ▶ “Quaintness”
- ▶ “Historic charm”
- ▶ “Sense of security”
- ▶ “Architecture”
- ▶ “Preservationist attitude, yet progressive”
- ▶ “Sense of familiarity and connection”
- ▶ “Friendly atmosphere”
- ▶ “Riverfront”
- ▶ “Excellent event space: Griswold, Regent Theater, Community Center”

Participants were sorry to see the following things in the downtown:

- ▶ “Lack of signage makes it difficult to find the downtown”
- ▶ “Lack of choice in restaurants and variety in retail”
- ▶ “Vacant second-story space”
- ▶ “Too many office uses on 1st floors”
- ▶ “Traffic patterns”
- ▶ “Poor gateways to downtown”
- ▶ “Undefined and lack of parking”
- ▶ “Façades (including rear façades)”
- ▶ “Competition, not cooperation among merchants”

The “Visioning Process”

Exercise 1: Understanding the Present

While in small groups, participants were asked to brainstorm the things they feel most proud and most sorry to see in downtown Allegan. Afterward, each person was asked to vote on the two most important positive issues and the two most important negative issues that were identified in each group.



Exercise 2: Events, Developments and Trends

Participants were asked to think about events, development and trends which they are aware of, that influence the community. This part of the workshop helped focus the group on specific topics and gave the session grounding in reality.



Exercise Two: Events, Developments, and Trends

During this exercise, participants shared their concerns about issues and trends facing the future of Allegan’s downtown. Discussion was focused around major topics including economic development, transportation, maintaining small town character, and image and promotion of the downtown.

Economic Development:

Though many participants think that downtown development is going in the right direction, they also outlined specific issues and suggested improvements. Participants noted that some buildings are underutilized, with many office and service uses occupying first floor space where retail would be ideal. Many would like to see residential uses downtown, especially as second-story lofts in existing buildings. Many groups identified the problem with having the county jail occupying key space in the downtown.

Suggestions for improvements that came from various groups included an expanded farmer’s market downtown, a more interesting pedestrian environment, and longer business hours to draw more people downtown. Development of the Mill District was noted often as a great development opportunity. One group suggested using the City of Rockford as a guide for development. Participants expressed the desire for the city to find a balance of keeping the “locally-owned”, “small-town” feel while attracting more visitors and new residents.

Transportation:

Generally, participants would like to see a greater emphasis on other forms of transportation in the downtown. The lack of bike racks discourage people from bicycling to downtown. Participants want to see the downtown be more pedestrian-oriented. Furthermore, the lack of a bus system, it was noted, means added traffic and parking pressure for downtown to supply. One group noted that parking on Water Street is dangerous.

Several groups identified the downtown street configuration as a key transportation concern. One group stated that, “one-way streets are confusing and the lack of signage means visitors can’t find the downtown.” This issue has broader impact that just a traffic concern, if it is not accessible, visitors may avoid the downtown.

Public Involvement

Maintaining small town character:

Participants want Allegan to maintain its "small town character". To do so, they suggested a number of solutions, many of which were physical and aesthetic improvements. Some suggestions, however, had to do with local ownership. One group stated that the, "backbone [of the community] is the locally-owned businesses." Others noted that businesses should cater to residents more than to tourists.

Some of the physical suggestions include creating a town square, improving the rear façades of buildings, connecting walkways and adding better lighting and more trees and flowers.

Image and Promotions:

The image of the downtown is affected by the entryways and gateways into the district. Many feel that these are not attractive and don't work functionally if the purpose is to bring people into the downtown. One group suggested a grand entrance on Marshall street in the form of a boulevard. Other physical improvements to promote the image of the downtown included improving waste/trash disposal sites, and limiting parking downtown.

Many groups suggested new events that would promote the downtown. One group used Jazz Festival as an example. Another suggested a community calendar to list all of the events and festivals that currently take place. They would like to see greater promotion by using banners in town and signs on major highways. This discussion brought out a disparity of opinion. It is clear that some participants want Allegan to be more of a "destination," while others want the downtown to "focus on residents" more than tourists. The way one group put it is that Allegan needs to improve its "self esteem," to be "proud to promote who and what we are."

Discussions during this exercise led participants to a greater understanding of the issues facing downtown Allegan. With this understanding, participants proceeded to the next exercise to develop future scenarios that would address these issues.



Participants worked in small groups of 4 to 6 people and brainstormed ideas for each exercise. The final exercise gave participants a chance to present their findings to the entire audience.

Exercise 3: The Preferred Future

Participants were invited to take a trip via hot air balloon over Allegan in the year 2020. Each small group was asked to describe the images they see that please them the most. Once listed, each member was asked to vote for his or her top three preferred images.



Exercise Three: Envisioning the Future

Participants were asked to imagine the downtown as they would like to see it in 10-15 years. Following is a list of the images they developed and voted for as the top priorities.

- ▶ “The Mill District is hopping!! Mixed uses – houses up, shops down; great parking; quaint historic atmosphere – successful!! ”
- ▶ “Downtown Allegan has a more historic look – cobblestone streets, art, lamps”
- ▶ “Many family gatherings are taking place in various parks and open spaces”
- ▶ “Allegan is a healthy community to walk and shop in”
- ▶ “Mahan Park is moved to the existing jail site - like a town square park”
- ▶ “Riverboats housing ice cream shops, etc. float along the river downtown”
- ▶ “A Marina and campground in Mill District”
- ▶ “Second story eateries with balconies, second story offices and more retail on ground level attracting more foot traffic.”
- ▶ “Connected boardwalk for better walkability”
- ▶ “More evening activities –additional gazebos, more films, a dancehall – more downtown nightlife!”
- ▶ “More riverfront activity – extend Mahan park and include picnic places and seating”
- ▶ “Marshall Street (and all entrances to the city) are grand boulevards”
- ▶ “Shops facing the Riverfront”
- ▶ “More weekend music and ethnic festivals”
- ▶ “People enter the city by way of the Iron Bridge ”
- ▶ “The jail is moved out of the downtown!”
- ▶ “More activities to keep the teens here (a Teen Center)”
- ▶ “People using river for activities”
- ▶ “Weekend – evening activity – all stores and restaurants open late ”
- ▶ “Sports Dome in the Mill District ”

Common Concepts

Although each group’s ideas for the future differed, many common concepts arose as a result of this exercise. These can be summed up in the following six concepts.

- ▶ Encourage Weekend & Nighttime Activity in the Downtown
- ▶ Make Better Use of The Kalamazoo River
- ▶ Develop The Mill District
- ▶ Improve Gateways to the Downtown
- ▶ Promote Greater Visual Appeal in the Downtown
- ▶ Promote Mixed-Uses and More Variety Downtown

Public Involvement

Exercise Four: Realizing the Image

Participants developed strategies to move toward their preferred future images of the downtown. Some of the key future scenarios are listed below with their associated strategies for realizing the image.

Enter the Downtown at the Iron Bridge

- ▶ Create a one-way into town
- ▶ Seek approval from MDOT
- ▶ Narrow the street and add flowers
- ▶ Take out street lights

More Weekend and Evening Activity in the Downtown

- ▶ Keep stores open later and hire jazz bands
- ▶ Downtown Merchant's Association – play upon each others strengths – collaborate with each other to organize – come together to create and work together
- ▶ Sponsorships for events
- ▶ Advertisement is important
- ▶ Seek donations for events
- ▶ Films, food, dance, gazebo
- ▶ Create "event " calendars – advertise long-term plan
- ▶ Better communication i.e. general business owner newsletters
- ▶ Really tap into internet resources –search engines

Riverfront Beautification and Activity

- ▶ Educate business owners that fixing up buildings will improve business traffic
- ▶ Continue to seek funding
- ▶ Give incentives for building repairs and new businesses
- ▶ Seek boardwalk grant
- ▶ Kayak (canoe) dock
- ▶ Boat parade – organized by John Van

Development of Mill District

- ▶ Develop zoning for future use
- ▶ Acquisition of all available grants and any available funding
- ▶ Land control and acquisition
- ▶ Comprehensive study of area: zoning, flood plane, wetlands, environmental and historic issues
- ▶ Develop the plan – what we want there!!!
- ▶ Create sense of urgency to make it happen
- ▶ Financing: revolving loan - local banks (affordable), private, public, renaissance zones (tax reduced/free)
- ▶ Recruitment of business/business expansion; private interests
- ▶ Foster an entrepreneurial environment
- ▶ Build and support city infrastructure!!!
- ▶ Don't drag it out! Keep people informed! Monitor milestones! Keep it in the news! "Buzz!"
- ▶ Utilize HDC, DDA, Planning and Design guidelines

Exercise 4: Realizing the Image

Each group brainstormed strategies to move toward their "preferred futures". The discussion yielded ideas for funding improvements, including finding money from federal, state and local sources, as well as from the private sector and community fundraisers.

Present Image of Downtown:

- "Quaint"
- "Historic"
- "Charming"
- "Friendly"
- "Under-utilized"
- "Having Potential"
- "Old"

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Fifty (50) community members completed questionnaires given at the visioning sessions. The questionnaire asked respondents to describe Allegan's image at the present time, to imagine Allegan's future image, and to describe uses they would like to see in the future.

Present Image

Respondents most commonly characterized the present image of Allegan as quaint, historic, and charming. Several community members also noted Allegan's friendly atmosphere, small size, and clean ambience. With equal frequency, respondents noted that Allegan seems old and under-utilized, but has a familiar, homey quality. Some respondents, using varied terms, characterized their community as lifeless and rundown. An equal number, again using varied terms, described Alleghan as a nice place, and as a place that is trying to improve.

Future Image

Respondents most commonly imagined the future Allegan as a busy, vibrant community with charm. Several respondents noted their desire for Allegan to be a friendly, progressive place. A vision of community expansion was noted; and also the vision of a community with plenty of green space. Several respondents envisioned Allegan as an inviting "get-away" destination: a thriving community that retains its historic charm. Some respondents imagined an alive, invigorated and "cutting edge" Allegan.

Future Uses

Community members envisioned an Allegan of the future with more shopping/retail, more public events and festivals, and more entertainment. To a lesser degree, respondents noted a desire to see more eating establishments—from delis to steakhouses. Several respondents imagined Allegan as an arts and culture mecca. An equal number would like to see Mill District Development. Several respondents would like to see more second-story housing. Some respondents noted a vision of more business and more outdoor recreational opportunities, including waterfront activities.

Public Involvement

District Enhancement

Respondants were asked to rate the importance of various potential actions that could be taken to enhance the DDA District. Results are as follows:

Very Important Activities:

- ▶ Increase Variety of Goods and Services
- ▶ Recruit New Businesses
- ▶ Advertise the Downtown & Businesses
- ▶ Increase Parking Supply in Lots
- ▶ Improve Traffic Flow
- ▶ Physically Improve Buildings
- ▶ Create Events and Promotions

Somewhat Important Activities:

- ▶ Improve Quality of Merchandise
- ▶ Improve Customer Service
- ▶ Increase Parking Supply -- On Street
- ▶ Improve Cleanliness of Area
- ▶ Physically Improve Public Space
- ▶ Improve Feeling of Security
- ▶ Improve Surrounding Neighborhoods

Not Important:

- ▶ Slow Traffic Speeds

Future Image of Downtown:

- "Vibrant"
- "Busy"
- "Progressive"
- "Charming"
- "Variety"
- "Expanding"
- "Inviting"

Section Three

CHARACTER ZONES

The DDA District is not just the historic downtown, but encompasses a broader spectrum of uses and types of development. For analysis purposes, these distinct areas are classified into different “character zones” as described below and illustrated on the following page.

Core: This is the center of the business district and represents the traditional “downtown”. Land uses here include retail commercial, office, and civic uses such as the two community-owned theaters, the U.S. post office and the County Courthouse and Jail. Buildings have zero lot lines, are generally two or three stories high with parking on the street or behind the buildings. The development pattern in the core is compact and walkable.

Water Street: Although Water Street is in close proximity and has some of the characteristics of the core, it has developed in a generally different pattern. The lot depths are shallow and back up to the steep banks of the Kalamazoo River. Many of the land uses here face onto Water Street with detached buildings that are one or two stories high. Buildings here have varying set-backs and because of their shallow lot depth, parking is in small lots on the sides of buildings or in front. Building styles vary from older, brick structures to concrete block buildings and there are no street trees to give definition to the corridor.

Strip Commercial: Two strip commercial zones exist near the perimeter of the downtown. Unfortunately, because of their location these areas are the first image that greets visitors coming into the downtown. The development pattern here is typical of conventional strip commercial with long set-backs and large front parking lots. Buildings in these zones lack any of the character-defining features of the downtown. However, land uses in these strip areas consist of essential uses including a grocery store, gas station, restaurants, a laundry mat, a bank and a convenience store.

Park District: The park provides a physical connection to the Kalamazoo River and a haven from the built environment where people can rest and recharge. However, currently, the park has little connection to the downtown core and is located far enough away that it does not act as a downtown amenity.

Industrial Zones: Downtown Allegan has an active industrial zone that includes Perrigo Manufacturing plant, and an inactive industrial zone in the Mill District. A traditional component of downtowns, industrial uses provide jobs and bring employees to the downtown.

The Core:

The historic commercial district; it is compact and walkable



Water Street:

Although adjacent to the core, Water Street has developed in a different pattern, with shorter lot depth and parking on the sides or in front of buildings.



Industrial:

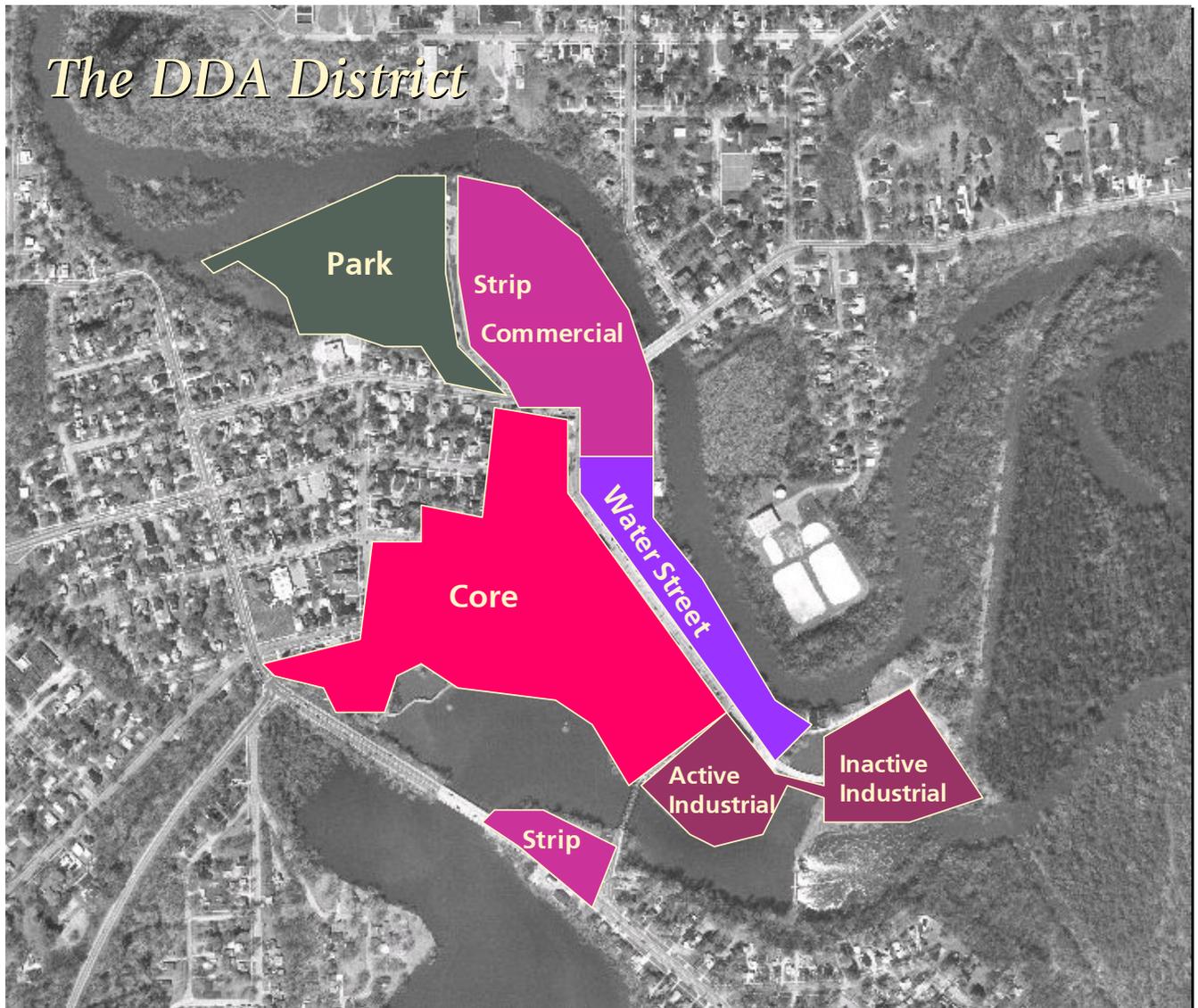
The Mill District has historic industrial buildings that could be converted to new commercial uses. Perrigo Manufacturing Plant is the "active" portion of the industrial district.



Strip Commercial

The adjacent corridors, M-222 and M-89 have developed in a conventional strip pattern. These zones have some essential uses, but their development pattern detracts from the character of the district.





DDA District Character Zones:

The DDA District is made up of five distinct zones that differ in terms of development patterns and land uses. Understanding how to draw upon the assets of each area while creating better connections between them was a key consideration for the future plan for the downtown.

Entry Points

Entrances into the district are M-222 (Monroe Street at Water Street), across the Iron Bridge, and where M-89 (Marshall Street) meets M-40 and Hubbard Street.



ASSESSING PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

Downtown Allegan has a rich array of assets including the extensive linear footage of riverfront along the Kalamazoo River, a fine collection of historic architecture, a compact downtown with close proximity to historic neighborhoods, the charm of the Iron Bridge as a gateway to the downtown, and the many public venues for entertainment.

At the same time, the downtown can improve upon these assets to develop a more successful downtown. In order to better understand where improvements could be made, an analysis of physical conditions was conducted. This analysis takes these assets into account while assessing the physical conditions of the downtown including how well the streets, parking lots and sidewalks function and work together, and the character-defining features that provide Allegan its unique identity.

Entering and Getting Around the District

Entry Points

Because downtown Allegan is not located along a major thoroughfare, but nestled between the meanders of the Kalamazoo River, getting into the downtown can be difficult. Three entry points exist: the historic bridge from M-89, Marshall Street where M-89 and M-40 converge, and Monroe Street (M-222) onto Water Street. The bridge provides an excellent sense of arrival and acts as a striking visual gateway into town. However, the strip commercial at the intersection detracts from the gateway effect. The other two entry points present functional problems because both Marshall Street and Monroe Streets are heavily traveled and have high accident rates. Monroe Street onto Water Street, especially offers little to welcome visitors into the downtown.

Directional Signs

Directional and way-finding signs are an effective method of attracting visitors to the downtown and directing them once they are there. The existing signs are not effectively servicing either purpose right now. They are small and indistinguishable; drivers traveling at 35 mph or faster may even have a hard time spotting them. A coordinated system of directional signs to guide visitors into the downtown and to public facilities and parking would improve both the function and the image of the downtown.

One-Way Streets

One-way streets make access difficult and may result in lost business for store owners.



Intersections

Intersections that meet at odd angles, such as where Hubbard, Locust and Brady come together create long walking distances for pedestrians.



Pedestrian environment

The experience for pedestrians plays a critical role in determining whether people will choose downtown over other competing shopping centers. Benches, outdoor cafes and attractive window displays all provide interest and comfort for pedestrians.



Street Patterns

Downtown Allegan's street patterns do not strictly adhere to a grid system. This would be impossible due to the presence of the river. East/West Streets meet North/South Streets at odd angles, resulting in wide intersections that are disorienting to drivers and unsafe for pedestrians. Intersections where this confusion is most notable include:

1. Locust, Hubbard & Brady Streets
2. Hubbard & Water Streets
3. Cutler & Water Streets
4. Monroe Street & Water Streets
5. Marshall & Hubbard Streets

Several streets downtown allow only one-way traffic. One-way streets create confusion and make navigating the downtown more difficult. Retail businesses are disadvantaged by a one-way system of streets because they can potentially lose 50% of their customer base. Cutler and Locust Streets are both one-way, while Hubbard and Trowbridge turn abruptly from one way to two-way. One-way streets are meant to move high volumes of traffic through an area in an efficient way. This runs counter to a successful downtown, where the goal should be to slow traffic to allow for quick stops in front of retail shops, and to facilitate pedestrian movement.

Pedestrian Orientation

Providing for the safety and comfort of pedestrians in a downtown is not just nice, it is essential to a lively and active downtown. The more people that are downtown, the more people will come to the downtown. The experience for pedestrians plays a critical role in determining whether people will choose downtown over other competing shopping centers, whether they will enjoy being there, and whether they will keep coming back. Therefore, in addition to providing a greater degree of safety at intersections with crosswalks, the DDA can provide a greater degree of interest for pedestrians through various amenities. Benches, outdoor cafés and attractive window displays all provide interest and comfort for pedestrians. Attention to visual elements such as landscaping, lighting and public art makes a place where people want to come and spend time. Even small measures such as screening dumpsters and providing a welcoming entrance into both the front and rear of buildings makes for a more comfortable walking environment.

A safer pedestrian environment could be achieved with better crosswalks at key intersections, minimizing curb cuts for driveways and entry into parking lots, and maximizing on-street parking. On street parking provides a buffer between the sidewalk and moving traffic, creating a more comfortable environment for pedestrians.



Dumpsters that are visible need to be screened.

Parking

Parking in downtowns is best accomplished on the streets. Allegan can maximize on-street parking by converting lane widths on some downtown streets.



Parking Lots

Parking lots in the downtown lack defined boundaries and have many curbcuts.



Parking

Parking in downtowns is best accomplished on the streets. This allows customers to park in close proximity or directly in front of their destination. On street parking also serves to slow traffic through a district. Compared to other towns its size, downtown Allegan has a significant amount of on-street parking. However, much more on street parking is possible if the lane widths on some downtown streets were reconfigured.

Off street parking lots in the downtown lack well-defined boundaries and have several points of ingress and egress. This not only makes for a less comfortable pedestrian environment, but it also limits the amount of on-street parking. Because of the design of off street lots, parking seems the dominant land use on many blocks. This detracts not only from the character of the district, but also decreases the amount of tax revenue that would otherwise be generated by an occupied building on the site.

Character-Defining Features

Not only do public realm elements define the character of the district, but the architecture and facades of the private realm do too. These character-defining features were analyzed to determine where improvement could be made to enhance the character of the district.

Architecture

The architecture of buildings in the downtown lend as much to the character of the district as do the streets and sidewalks. Overall the downtown core has a well-kept image, with older buildings establishing a historic look. Although the architecture is from different time periods, the common use of traditional materials, such as brick or stone, and an emphasis on details gives a sense of unity to the downtown.

Some buildings in the core area and many in the other zones break from this unity and detract from the overall character of the DDA District. Buildings that are constructed of concrete or metal siding, or that were made of traditional materials and covered over with less durable materials fall into this category. Some examples of these are shown on the following page.

Building Facades and Storefront Signs

Facades and storefront signs combine to create the character of a street front. They can draw people in by having active, occupied storefronts with merchandise in the window, an awning or a recessed entryway, or an interesting sign. The next page shows some positive examples of façades and storefront signs that create a positive impression. On the other hand, façades with little detail, lacking a lively storefront sign, or having empty storefronts detract from the downtown image.

Architectural Character

Many positive examples of architecture exist in the downtown and give the core its identifiable character. However, other examples exist of buildings that do not contribute to, but detract from this overall character.



Facades & Storefront Signs

Should be lively and draw people in. Allegan has both positive and negative examples of facades and storefront signs.



Rear and Side Walls

Treatment on the backs and sides of buildings can make a big difference in overall appearance and image of the district.



Downtown Assessment

Rear facades and Side Walls

Due to the layout of downtown Allegan, rear and side walls of many buildings are very visible. The row of buildings along Hubbard Street, for example backs up to the riverfront, which is exposed to Marshall Street and provides the most visible image of the downtown. For this reason, upkeep of rear facades and sidewalls are just as important as front facades. Furthermore, patrons often park behind a building and access a store from the back; this is another reason why rear facades are visually significant. Some examples of poorly maintained side or rear walls exist in the district, however, most present a well cared for image. However, many could provide more visual interest. A blank wall, with no windows can become visual dead space. The Regent Theater has mitigated this with a mural on its rear facade that abuts a central parking lot downtown.

Public Art

Murals and other forms of public art can enliven downtown space considerably. Allegan, with its location near art schools is well placed to bring in more public art that would create an identifiable and unique image for the downtown.

Landscaping, Lighting and Street Furniture

It is obvious that much attention has been given to landscaping in the public realm of the downtown core. During the spring and summer, hanging baskets of colorful flowers adorn the light posts on the riverwalk. Landscaping is also thought of in seasonal terms: even in the winter months evergreen trees in pots line the downtown streets, decorated with local volunteer help. A common language of landscaping, lighting and street furniture is needed, however, to create a better sense of cohesion to the district.

Street trees and pedestrian-level lighting work together to define vertical space along a street. This vertical plane gives definition to a street, creates character, provides shade and light when needed, and generally makes for a more comfortable pedestrian environment. Many streets within the core area are lined with street trees. Those that are not, Water Street, for example, seem to lack a critical element to a complete "downtown." Many of the street trees in the downtown have been severely pruned resulting in misshapen bowls and diminishing the quality of the canopy.

Pedestrian lighting is virtually absent from the district except along the riverwalk near Renaissance Park and at the Amphitheater.

Each of these character-defining features as well as the function of the downtown streets is addressed in the recommendations section.

Street Trees and Lighting

Most lighting in the district is cobra-style and not pedestrian-scaled. Street trees are vitally important in a downtown, as they provide a more comfortable pedestrian environment. Some trees in the district have been severely pruned, like the example below.



Section Four

FRAMEWORK PLAN

The Downtown Framework Plan blends together functional and aesthetic improvements while suggesting areas for redevelopment. The plan seeks to bring a greater cohesion to the district by physically connecting all areas within the district and uniting them visually through the inclusion of streetscape elements. The framework plan recognizes downtown Allegan's unique setting along the Kalamazoo River and seeks to capitalize on and enhance this natural asset.

Facilitating Better Function in the District

To be successful, downtown streets, sidewalks and parking systems must work together to provide a place where cars and people can safely share space, where shoppers can easily access their destination and where employees can park and walk to work. The Framework Plan takes these into account by recommending two-way vehicle travel, additional on-street parking, and controlled access to surface parking lots, pedestrian-oriented intersections, and a linked pedestrian trail. A coordinated system of way-finding signs is recommended to direct people to their destinations.

Creating Visual Cohesion in the District

Drawing upon the existing character-defining features of the district, such as the original architecture, the intimate feel of the core, and the attractive riverfront boardwalk, the DDA can implement measures to better unify the district as a whole. This includes guidelines for new building construction, rehabilitation of existing structures, signs, and facades in the private realm. Going hand-in-hand with these improvements are recommendations for the public realm of streetscape elements, landscaping and public art.

Redevelopment Opportunities

Lastly, the Framework plan identifies redevelopment opportunities for commercial uses, residential uses and civic uses. Six areas of focus are identified as follows:

- ▶ County Facility Site
- ▶ Targeted **in-fill** development for mixed-uses
- ▶ Adaptive re-use of buildings in the **Mill District**
- ▶ New **riverfront residential**
- ▶ Commercial redevelopment at **gateways**
- ▶ **Conversion** of existing buildings

Each of the above concepts is described in further detail in the following section.

PHYSICAL PLAN IMPROVEMENTS

Entry Points

Creating gateways into the downtown could have a great impact on the success of the downtown. Gateways attract visitors and give a feel that one is entering someplace special. This can best be accomplished through quality redevelopment in key areas, especially along Marshall Street where it intersects with Bridge Street, and at Monroe Street where Water Street comes in. Redevelopment of buildings with traditional styles that draw from the original downtown architecture would lend more cohesion to the district as a whole. Other gateway features include landscaping and welcome signs directing visitors into the downtown.

Way-finding Signs

A well-designed sign program provides information and direction in a consistent format to enable visitors to move around without confusion. Consistent welcome, directional, identification, information and regulation signs can be part of the way-finding program. Developing a comprehensive way-finding system will reduce the stress of customers and especially visitors orienting themselves in an unfamiliar location and will leave a favorable impression of their overall experience. Signs should function as a complete system to promote preferred traffic patterns and eliminate confusion.

Welcome: Establish consistent signs at entrances to downtown (i.e., at Marshall Street and Hubbard; at Marshall Street and Bridge Street; and at Monroe Street and Water Street). Replace the existing sign on Marshall Street at Hubbard.

Directional: Identify important destinations within the downtown and show access routes to these, (i.e., "to Renaissance Park", "to Jaycee Park", "to The Allegan Public Library", "to The Griswold Auditorium", and "to The Allegan Area Community Center").

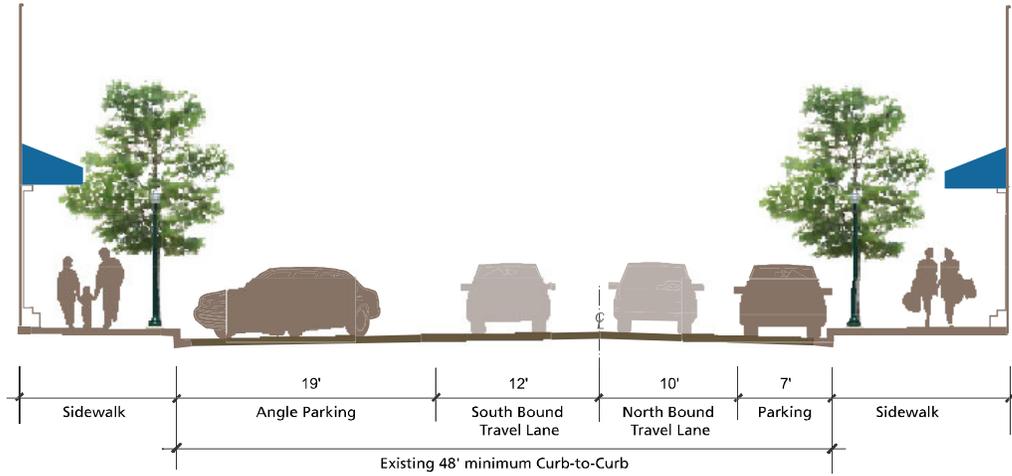
Identification: Indicate destination or function, (i.e., includes identification of all above destinations, and public parking).

Information: Instruct or provide for the display of information, (i.e., stop, yield, do not enter, reserved parking, one hour parking, no left or right turn, etc.).

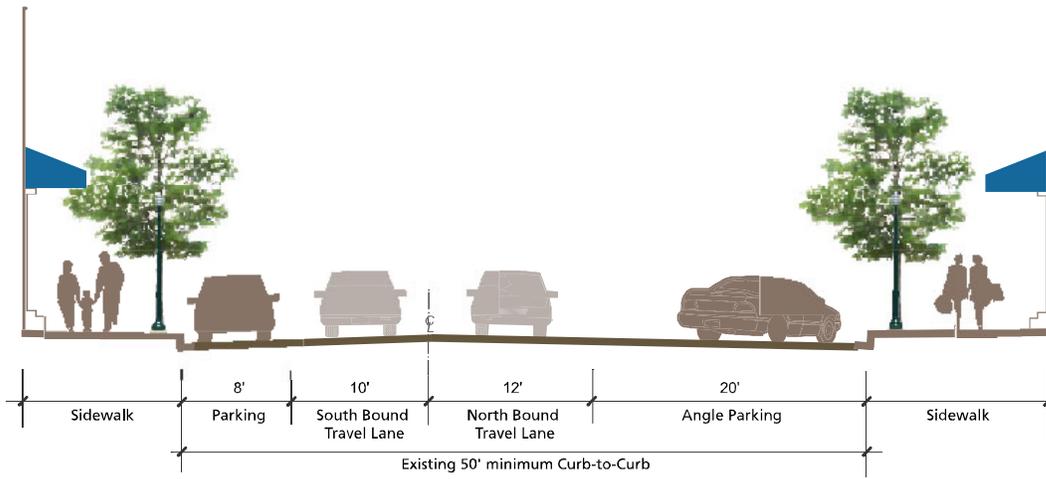
In addition to the above sign program for the downtown, signs directing drivers to Allegan should be placed on major highways, such as I-94 and U.S. 31. This will need to be coordinated through both the Michigan and U.S. Departments of Transportation.



A downtown with attractive, consistent signs demonstrates a sense of pride in the community and creates a positive, unified image as shown in the images above from Dexter, Michigan.



Locust Street between Trowbridge & Hubbard
 converted from one-way to two-way



Water Street between Trowbridge & Hubbard

Street Configuration

A major element to the downtown master plan is the reconfiguration of one-way streets in the downtown. By allowing two-way traffic and maximizing on-street parking, downtown will function more successfully. The diagrams shown on the following pages illustrate the recommended changes. Each of these conversions was designed to maintain the existing curb-to-curb dimension of the street. Recommended conversions can be implemented with little change to the existing infrastructure aside from re-striping and resigning.

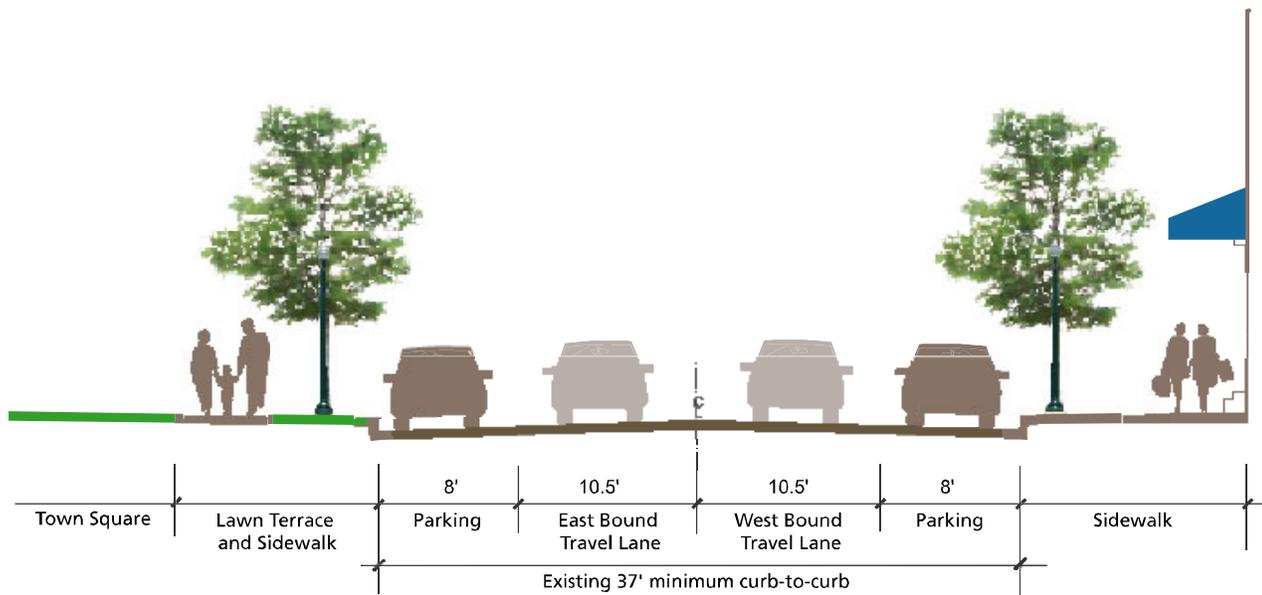
Locust Street between Trowbridge and Hubbard

Locust is the only street that will require modifications to the existing infrastructure. Here, the existing bump-outs will need to be shortened in order to provide enough room for parallel parking on one side of the street. The result will be two-way traffic as opposed to the one-way lanes that only move traffic northbound. In order to make this happen, angle parking on one side of the street will need to be changed to parallel parking. Angle parking is recommended to remain on the west side of the street where a more concentrated group of retail shops exist. The conversion of angle parking to parallel parking on the east side of the street allows for two-way traffic and sufficient room for the angle parked car to back out of a parking space. This will result in a small number of on-street parking spots lost in the conversion; however, this is offset by the overall gain in on street parking for the entire district.

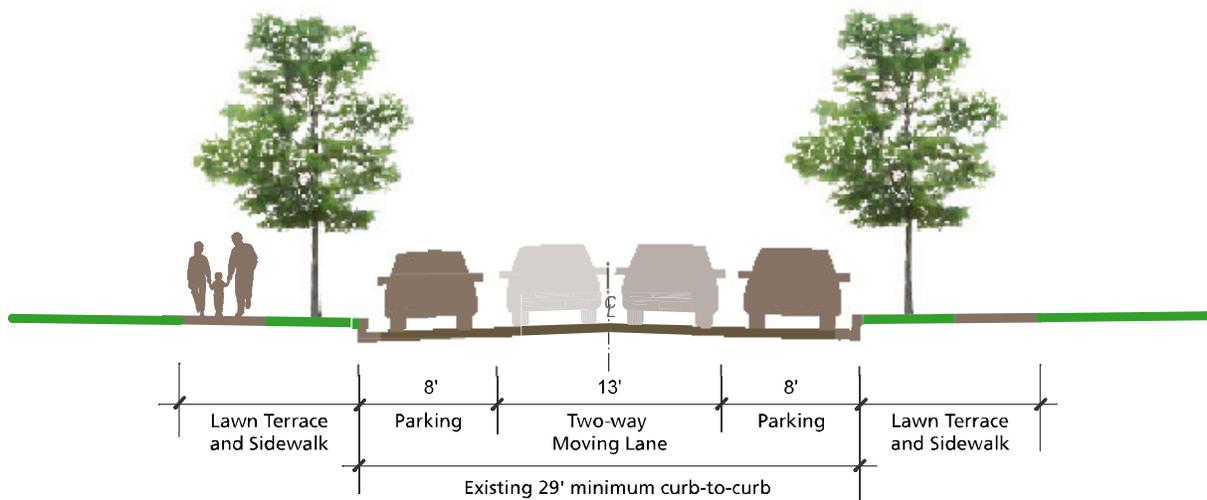
Water Street between Trowbridge and Hubbard

Water Street currently has very little on-street parking. Some attempt has been made to allow angle parking on the east side and parallel parking on the west side, however the number of curb-cuts along Water Street results in fewer spots than is possible if some of the curb-cuts were eliminated. The recommended configuration reflects this change to allow for additional parallel parking on the west side of the street and additional angle parking on the east side of the street.

Also recommended along Water Street is the introduction of street trees and pedestrian lighting. This will provide a visual tie-in of this emerging entertainment district to the downtown core.



Trowbridge Street between Chestnut & Walnut
converted from one-way to two-way



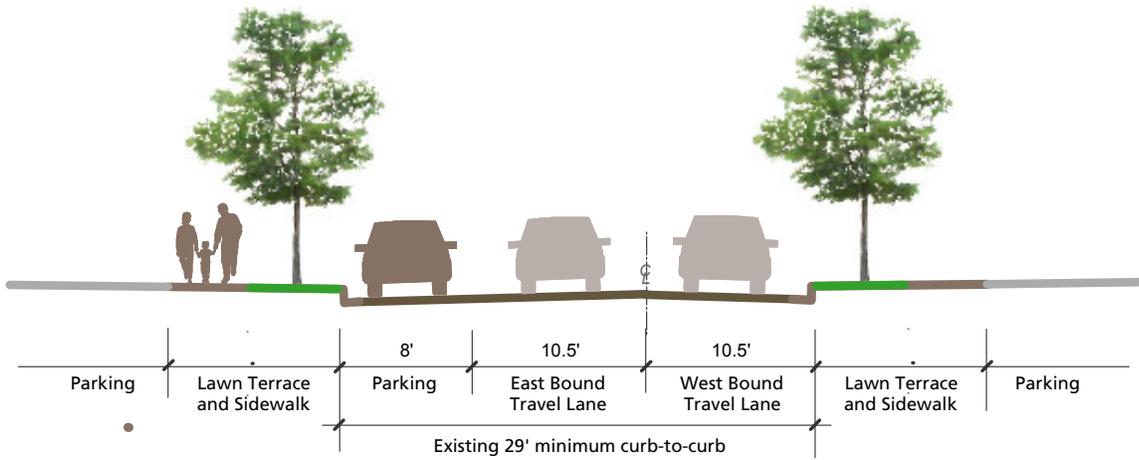
Trowbridge Street between Walnut & Cedar
converted from one-way to two-way yield street

Trowbridge Street between Chestnut and Walnut Streets

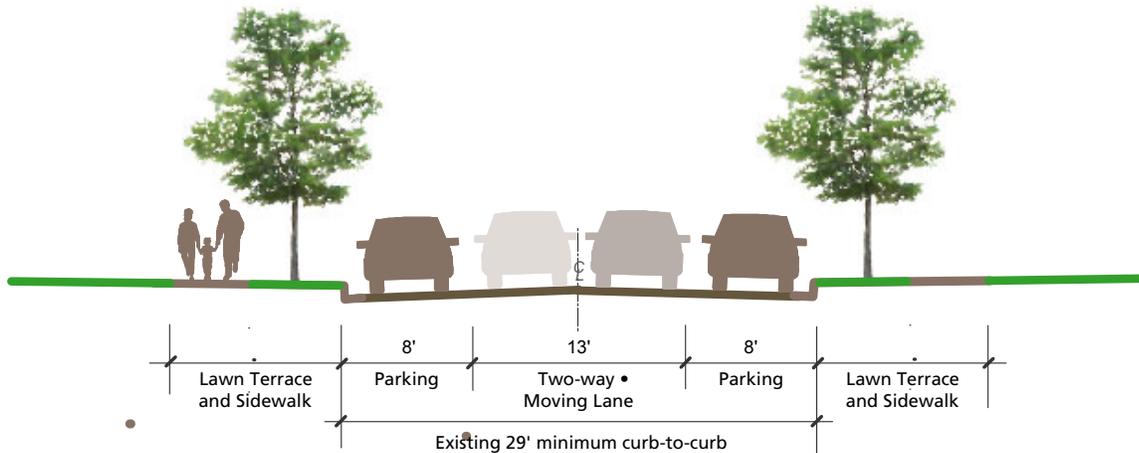
Trowbridge is a commercial street that is currently one-way only. The recommended configuration here will allow for two way travel by reducing the lane widths to 10 1/2 feet, and to provide parallel parking on both sides of the street. No changes to infrastructure will need to occur in order to achieve this configuration. The benefit is to allow traffic to move into the downtown as opposed to out of the downtown. Additionally, the narrowing of lanes will require traffic to move slower along this street and create a better pedestrian environment.

Trowbridge between Walnut and Cedar

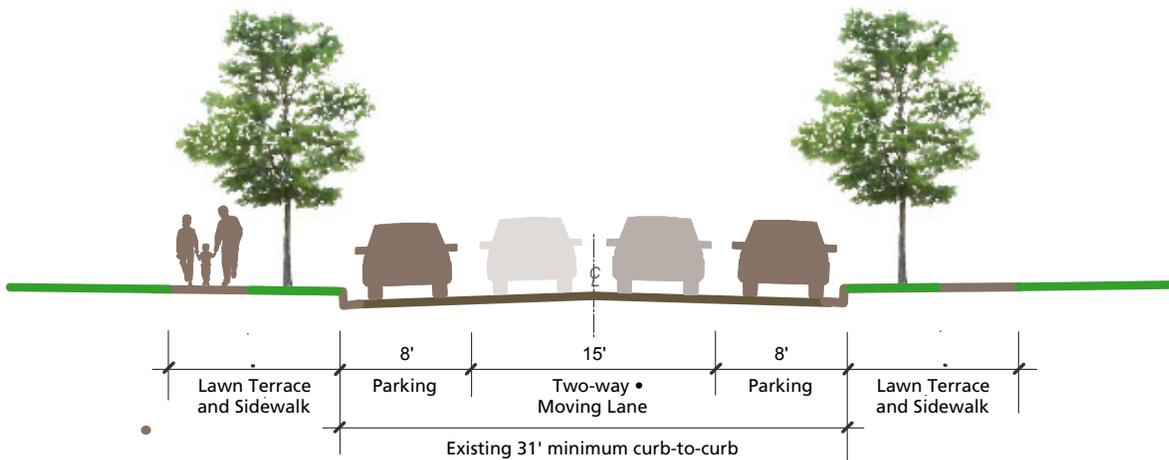
Here Trowbridge has residential and other non-commercial uses. Currently, the configuration allows only one-way traffic, which is detrimental to residents along that street. In order to allow two-way traffic, a yield street is recommended. A yield street provides one wide travel lane (in this case 13') for motorists coming in both directions. This design assumes that one motorist will yield the right-of-way to another on-coming car. Traditionally, most neighborhoods were designed with yield streets. This configuration continues to be explicitly endorsed by the AASHTO Greenbook, the official guidebook for roadway engineering. The benefits of a yield street in a residential neighborhood are the provision of on street parking on both sides of the street and the calming effect on moving traffic.



Cutler Street between Water & Chestnut
converted from one-way to two-way street



Cutler Street between Chestnut & Walnut
converted from one-way to two-way yield street



Cutler Street between Walnut & Cedar
converted from one-way to two-way yield street

Cutler Street between Chestnut and Cedar Streets

This section of Cutler Street is outside the DDA District boundaries, but as a residential street, impacts the function of the district. Currently, the street is fairly wide for a residential street and has parking only on one side. The recommended modifications for Cutler include the conversion from a one-way street to a two-way yield street with parking on both sides. A slightly wider dimension for the travel lane is recommended for the portion between Walnut and Cedar Streets (15') than for the section between Chestnut and Walnut Streets (13'). This is because the existing curb-to-curb dimension is slightly wider here. Again, maintaining the existing curb-to-curb dimension reduces the cost of such a conversion dramatically since no infrastructure changes are necessary, only re-striping is necessary.

Cutler Street between Water and Chestnut Streets

Two public lots can be accessed from this section of Cutler Street, however traffic is only allowed to move in one direction. This current configuration impedes access to these surface lots. However, this section can be converted to two-way traffic with relative ease, while maintaining the existing parallel parking lane on the north side of the street. Making this conversion will only require re-striping of the lanes and no major infrastructure changes.

Parking

The table at right shows the on-street parking space totals for each street in the district and the additional spaces the downtown could capture as outlined in the Framework Plan.

On-Street Parking

	Current # of spaces	Additional spaces	Loss of spaces
Water St.	77	17	
Bridge St.	9	9	
Brady St.	41	6	
Hubbard St.	91	12	
Trowbridge St.	69	14	
Chestnut St.	29	5	
Locust St.	44		11
Cutler St.	0	19	
Walnut St.	20	2	
Totals:	380	84	11 *
Net Gain	73		

** due to switching parallel parking for angle parking on one side of Locust*

The image at right shows an example of an entry point into a row of commercial buildings from an off-street parking lot.



Physical Plan

Parking

In addition to converting several downtown streets to add on-street parking, the Framework Plan calls for reducing curb cuts and controlling ingress and egress of surface parking lots. Minimizing the number of curb cuts helps to maximize the number of on-street parking spaces. For example, Hubbard Street between Chestnut and Locust Street currently has only 2 on-street parking spaces on the north side of the street due to the number of curb cuts leading into and out of the adjacent off-street parking lot. If ingress into and egress out of the parking lot were more limited and better defined, an additional seven parallel parking spaces could be created. Water Street is another example, where currently only 2 parallel parking spaces exist in front of the off-street parking lot between Trowbridge and Hubbard Streets. If entry were limited to the existing access points from Hubbard and Trowbridge Streets and eliminated on Water Street, an additional 10 parallel parking spaces could be created along Water Street.

Another factor that may reduce the amount of off-street parking is the proposed in-fill development in portions of surface parking lots. These recommendations are discussed in more depth under the Redevelopment Section later on in this report. However, it is important to stress here the benefit, both visually and economically to replacing a limited amount of surface parking with new commercial buildings. Not only would these proposed buildings fill visual voids and strengthen the street edge, but they would also bring additional tax revenue that parking would not.



Limiting the number of curb cuts into parking lots will create a better-organized parking system and a better pedestrian environment, and will allow for additional on-street parking spaces.

Crosswalks

Primary and Secondary pedestrian crossing in the district can incorporate better crosswalk markings and differentiated paving material as shown in the examples at right.

Photos courtesy of:
Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center,
www.pedbikeimages.org



Trail System Signs

A looped trail system through the district could be established with signs that orient visitors, such as along the Philadelphia Tow Path, shown at right.



Pedestrian Orientation

Allegan can take advantage of a compact downtown to develop a safe and active pedestrian environment. As illustrated on the Framework Plan, the downtown core fits within a ¼ mile radius. As a result, a person could walk from the center at Locust and Hubbard Streets, and access any destination within the core in 5 minutes or less. However, to make the walk safer and more interesting, improvements to the sidewalks, streets, and intersections are recommended. These include crosswalks at intersections, mid-block pedestrian crossings, fewer curb cuts, and better pedestrian connections.

The plan calls for a hierarchy of intersection improvements: Primary pedestrian crossings to include a greater degree of pedestrian elements than secondary crossings. Primary pedestrian crossings are as follows:

- ▶ Locust and Hubbard Streets
- ▶ Hubbard and Chestnut
- ▶ Trowbridge and Chestnut, and
- ▶ Trowbridge and Locust

In addition to bump outs and crosswalk signs, crosswalks with differentiated paving material should be used to warn drivers to yield to pedestrians. The only primary pedestrian crossing that should also include a crosswalk signal is at the Locust/ Hubbard/ Brady intersection, because this intersection also has a traffic light.

All secondary pedestrian crossings should incorporate continental (or ladder-style) pavement markings and crosswalk signs. Secondary pedestrian crossings are as follows:

- ▶ Cutler and Water Street
- ▶ Water Street and Hubbard Street
- ▶ State and Water Street

Mid-block intersections are recommended along Hubbard Street between Chestnut and Locust as well as between Locust and Water Streets. A third mid-block intersection is planned on Water Street between Trowbridge and Hubbard Streets. These are located to provide easy pedestrian access from parking lots to commercial buildings across the street. These crosswalks should be marked with continental, or ladder-style pavement markings and signed.

Creating better pedestrian connections involves linking the existing boardwalks on the perimeter of the district together to create one linked path system that follows the river and skirts the downtown. The plan takes this a step further and recommends a looped trail system that takes users into the downtown core as well. To achieve this, the sidewalk along Chestnut Street would need to be signed as part of the looped connection. In addition, Chestnut Street should be signed as a bike route and connector to the citywide loop trail system. The result would be a connection through the downtown from Jaycee Park, to the proposed Town Square and finally to the existing trail at Renaissance Park. Developing this physical pedestrian connection will also serve to provide more cohesion among the different zones within the DDA District.

The proposed changes to the street, sidewalk and parking systems seek to make the downtown more functional and ultimately more successful. As a corollary to this goal, the following recommendations seek to bring greater visual appeal and unity to the district.

Storefront Signs

Projecting Signs can be a positive addition to the downtown.



Rear and Side Wall Signs

Rear and side wall signs create a positive impression if done well. At right are two examples from locations in the district.



A Comfortable Environment

A comfortable environment can be created for pedestrians accessing buildings from the back. The example at right is successful because of the pathway, the awning and the orienting sign.



Unifying Visual Elements

Guidelines for the private realm and improvements to the public realm can bring a greater sense of unity to the district as a whole. These recommended changes will begin to visually tie in Water Street, the Mill District, Jaycee Park and the commercial strip areas with the downtown core. In doing so the district will reflect a greater sense of cohesion, so that upon entering people know they have “arrived”.

Architecture

Traditional downtown buildings work together to create a continuous edge along the street. Each individual building facade is unique, in and of itself, yet it works in harmony with other facades to create an appealing overall effect. The variety of the materials, ornament, and architectural styles of the individual facades, when presented in a consistent way, reinforce each other and make the streetscape a visually interesting and exciting place. In order to encourage this consistency with variety, a set of building and sign guidelines is recommended. Architectural guidelines should allow for variety while encouraging the use of unifying materials, such as brick, stone or other traditional materials. At the same time architectural details can be required to be compatible with existing buildings in the downtown core.

The recommendations listed on the following page provide a foundation for developing a set of building and sign guidelines for rehabilitation of existing structures as well as for new structures.

Facades and Storefront Signs

Design guidelines can also be used to encourage attractive facades and lively storefront signs. Some positive examples already exist in the downtown core, however many facades have been covered up with temporary materials. Furthermore, because the downtown has many office uses on the ground floor, little attention is paid to lively window fronts and storefront signs. As the DDA recruits more retail use on the ground floor, they can encourage retail owners to improve storefronts. Guidelines for signs can include a variety of types while maintaining the visual integrity of the traditional core. For example, projecting signs can attract attention without being obtrusive as shown in the photographic examples.

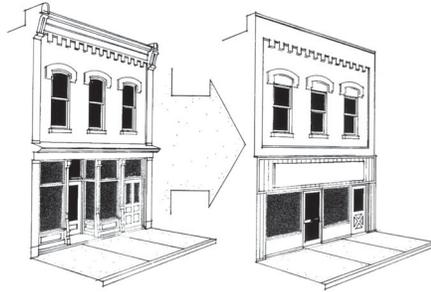
Rear Facades and Side Walls

Guidelines should extend to rear facades and sidewalls as well. As discussed in the *Downtown Assessment*, many buildings in the downtown have exposure on all sides. With this in mind, the DDA can require upkeep, while also encouraging such features as windows, murals or painted advertisements on rear and side walls of buildings. Lighting, awnings, landscaping and walkways at rear entrances will greatly improve the comfort of those accessing a building from the back. Furthermore, because of its location on the waterfront, the rear of Hubbard Street could incorporate outdoor cafes and special pedestrian seating areas.

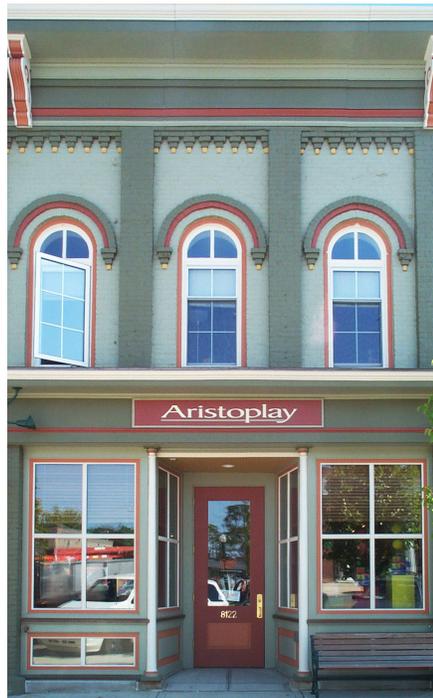
In order to stimulate improvements in the private realm, implementing improvements in the public realm is important. Recommendations include introducing more public art, creating a common language of street furniture and lighting in the district, and using landscaping for functional and aesthetic purposes.

Facade rehabilitation

Includes restoring original windows, front glass, and architectural details.



The evolution of Facades from original architecture to modification.



Design and Building Guidelines for Rehabilitating Existing Structures and Developing New Structures in the Downtown:

- ▶ Rehabilitate or design facades to keep with the original architecture of buildings.
- ▶ Maintain the continuity of facades throughout the block. Do not recess the buildings or otherwise change the plane of the facades.
- ▶ Maintain the original palette of building materials refrain from adding too many new materials.
- ▶ Maintain the original masonry wall of the facade at both the upper story and street level.
- ▶ Maintain the size and shape of the original facade openings: the storefront opening and the upper story windows. Do not fill-in or reduce the size of the original openings.
- ▶ New windows should fit the size and shape of their original openings. Maintain or construct large storefront windows. Original storefront windows usually begin at 18" to 24" above the sidewalk and extend to the underside of the second floor.
- ▶ Maintain and draw from architectural detail elements such as storefront cornice bands, stone details, window hoods, brackets, and woodwork. Keep the size of signs modest and locate them at the storefront cornice line. Signs should not obscure other elements of the facade. A well designed and maintained building is as much of an advertisement for a business as the sign itself.
- ▶ Provide a traditional awning at the storefront. Awnings should fit within the storefront opening and should be traditional in size and shape. Avoid unusually shaped awnings, awnings that are too large, that hide portions of the facade, back lighted awnings, and awnings that have excessive signage. An awning is not a sign and should not substitute for one.
- ▶ Paint colors should visually relate building elements to each other, as well as, individual facades to each other. The colors chosen for any facade should relate to the neighboring facades and to the blockscape as a whole. The placement of colors should be based on the existing hierarchy of detail.

Street Furniture

A common language of street furniture, including benches, trash receptacles, bicycle racks and lighting would bring a greater sense of cohesion to the district.



Public Art

Introducing public art is one way to create a unique identity for downtown Allegan. Downtown Allegan can become known for its attention to civic art, something that is unusual for a town its size. Each addition of public art must be well executed and contribute to the overall image of the downtown. Painted murals, in particular can look amateurish if not well done and detract from the quality of historic buildings. For this reason, the City should rely on its Arts Director to monitor quality.

Landscaping, Lighting and Street Furniture

Other elements in the public realm that can contribute to an overall character definition in the district include landscaping, lighting, and street furniture.

Street furniture is both functional and aesthetic — a bench provides a welcome rest point for a shopper, but also adds to the visual language of the district. The following elements can be included in the family of street furniture.

Benches: Locate benches along the river boardwalk and within the core district. Moveable chairs are appropriate in outdoor cafes and at entrances to shops.

Trash receptacles: Trash receptacles should be located at intersecting walks, adjacent to benches and seat walls and at the edge of outdoor courtyards.

Lighting: Lighting in the DDA district should be pedestrian-scaled and relate to the character of downtown architecture.

Bicycle Racks: In addition to being an efficient security measure for bike owners, bicycle racks eliminate the visual clutter caused by haphazard bicycle parking. Locate racks at all entrances to the commercial district, at the Allegan Public Library, at the proposed Town Square, at the Regent Theater, at Renaissance Park, and at the ends of the boardwalk.

Seasonal Decorations: Although, it is obvious that downtown Allegan does pay attention to season decorations, this could be extended throughout the DDA district. Hang banners and flower baskets from metal brackets on light poles to provide seasonal interest. Cedar bough, ribbons and lights wrapped around light poles add interest in the winter holiday months.

Nothing provides definition to a downtown street better than street trees. Street trees define vertical space, provide shade, and make the district more amenable to walking. Incorporating street trees along Water Street, portions of Marshall Street and Monroe Street will help visually tie-in these streets with the rest of the district. Using a variety of species will ensure against widespread loss by disease. Finely textured trees will shade the sidewalk yet still allow views of storefront facades. Furthermore, street trees

Landscaping

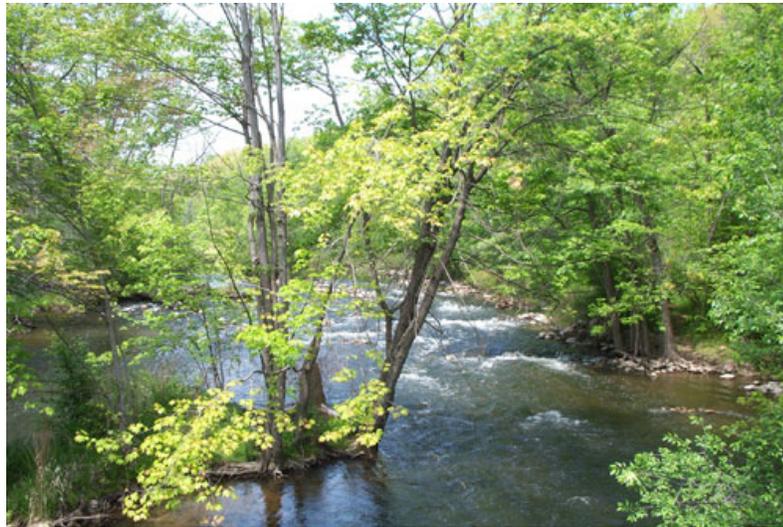
can be used for functional purposes, such as screening parking in conjunction with a low wall, such as in the example at right.

Flowers adorning the bridge could add to a sense of arrival. And hanging baskets that exist along the boardwalk and in parks should be extended into other parts of the district.



Natural Buffer

A green buffer along the Kalamazoo River is critical to maintaining the visual quality and natural integrity of the river.



Physical Plan

should be pruned appropriately to allow visibility to storefronts while still maintaining a healthy crown.

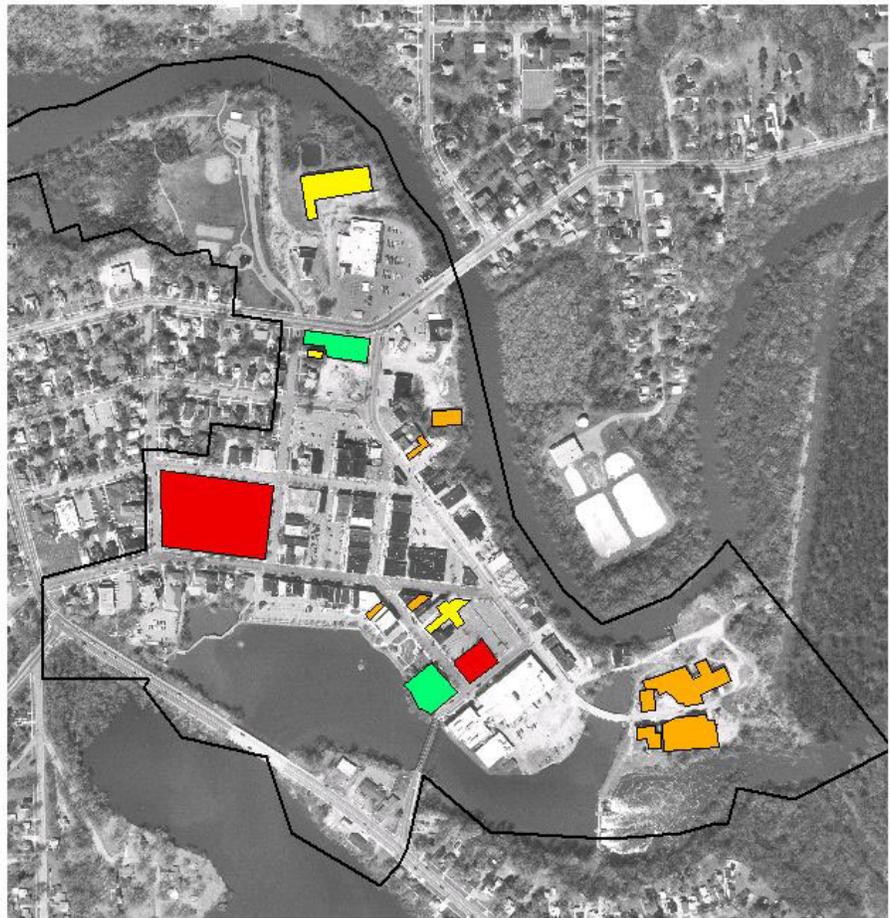
Other landscape recommendations are as follows:

- ▶ A combination of landscaping and screen walls to define boundaries of parking lots and provide greater visual appeal.
- ▶ Flowers adorning the Second Street Bridge and welcoming visitors entering the district.
- ▶ Landscape beds to identify gateways into the District.

The most critical landscape element that the city can foster, however, is the natural buffer surrounding the Kalamazoo River. Because the river edge is still naturalized as it winds through the downtown, it gives Allegan its unique sense of identity. The framework plan illustrates areas where the buffer should be enhanced and maintained. This extends even beyond the boundaries of the district into residential areas. A naturalized buffer does not need to look “weedy” or unkempt. If managed for high quality, native species, views into the river can still be captured and visual quality can be enhanced.

Redevelopment Opportunities

in the district include underutilized or vacant buildings, as well as incompatible uses in the downtown, such as the jail site.



Vacant, Underutilized, and Incompatible Land Uses

- Incompatible Use
- Underutilized
- Vacant
- Vacant Land



REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

County Facility Site

The existing County Courthouse and Jail sit at the center of a block surrounded by some of Allegan's finest architecture and civic uses, including the United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, Griswold Auditorium, Carnegie Public Library, Community Center, Allegan County Museum, and the U.S. Post Office. Because of its mass, the current County building dominates the block and the razor wire around the jail deteriorates the visual quality and blocks the surrounding buildings from view. While the future of the County facilities in downtown has been discussed for several years, several principles hold true—the downtown businesses value the employee and consumer base of the County; and any new buildings or renovations must pay particular attention that their aesthetic character compliment the current architectural character of downtown and the surrounding historic districts.

Should the County ever decide to vacate the property, the land would revert back to the City of Allegan. If such an impetus should occur, special attention is recommended to the concept of a Town Square. A Town Square is the ideal for this location, as it provides not only a symbol of pride, but also as a centerpiece with views to the surrounding buildings. In addition, the Town Square would provide a transition for the residential neighborhoods to the commercial district and a place for respite in the heart of the historic district. The Town Square could also be utilized as an additional outdoor venue for festivals and other special events.

Infill for Mixed-Use Development

In-fill development is recommended that would strengthen the street edge and provide additional retail and mixed-use opportunities. Some in-fill development is proposed for portions of surface parking lots. Though this reduces the number of available parking spaces in surface lots, this trade-off would be worth making for the additional commercial space and added revenue.

Mill District

New commercial or mixed-use development is recommended for the Mill District. Adaptive re-use of buildings with sound architecture is recommended since this area is currently in the flood plain of the Kalamazoo River.

Riverfront Residential

A limited amount of new residential development is recommended in the downtown. Not only should the DDA encourage second-story apartment lofts, it should attract new residential development along the riverfront off of Water Street. This would replace the existing uses that are vacant or non-compatible with the downtown commercial district.



The jail site and fence currently block from view some of the finest architecture in the downtown.

Converting Existing Buildings

Converting existing buildings into retail uses on the first floor and residential uses in the second-story will add to the 24-hour vitality of the DDA district and increase the sense of community.



Examples of converted upper-story residential development in downtown buildings.

Gateway Commercial

The photo example at right shows the type of architecture that is recommended at the "gateways" into the district.



Gateway Commercial

Redeveloping commercial uses that fit with the character of the downtown is crucial at the gateways into town, such as at Monroe Street and on Marshall at Bridge Street. These areas need to better reflect the character of the downtown since these are the first areas seen as one enters the district.

Conversion of Existing Buildings

Many buildings in the downtown can accommodate second-story residential uses. Downtown living is becoming increasingly popular in cities throughout the country. Reintroducing a style of living that is actually very historic can add to the 24-hour vitality of the DDA district and increase the sense of community.

First-floor uses in the DDA district should be commercial rather than office whenever possible. Borrowing from the “mall concept”, commercial uses provide more synergy with other commercial uses and result in a more active street life. Office uses, with fewer walk-in customers are better located in second-stories.

Potential Housing Market

A Market Analysis for new residential development was conducted by Zimmerman/Volk Associates in November, 2003 and its findings support the recommendations outlined above. This study stated that the the potential housing market in downtown Allegan is made up of multi-family rental (lofts/apartments) for-sale multi family (lofts/apartments, condo) and for-sale single family attached (townhouses/rowhouses, fee-simple ownership)

The target market for downtown includes a high percentage of younger singles and couples (46%) than older households made up of empty-nesters, retirees and traditional and non-traditional families.

A full copy of the Market Analysis, New Residential Development report conducted by Zimmerman/Volk Associates, Inc. can be obtained through the City of Allegan.

Section Five

ORGANIZATION

Organization is key to any successful program. The community's image of a downtown management program should be shaped by decisions about the organization on the part of the program's leadership. Decisions should include the way the program will operate, what its goals are, and how it should be presented to the community.

Strategic Planning Session

Once per year, the Downtown Development Authority board should conduct a 2-3 hour strategic planning session with its board members to review the Strategic Plan and amend the plan to reflect changes in the past year. Goals and objectives for the coming year should be discussed as well as financial planning for the organization. By-laws should also be reviewed. Annual Work Plans should be the product of each Strategic Planning session to give board members a clear implementation plan for the coming year.

Public Relations for the Organization

Communicating to the public about Downtown Development Authority activities is crucial to strengthening its image and crucial to the program's success. The DDA needs to develop a positive, accurate picture of the organization and its mission. The DDA needs to build a sense that downtown is strong and the organization is strong. The DDA can communicate with the public in several ways:

Media

Prepare press releases of all organization announcements or projects. Distribute through:

TV and Local Cable Access: Make sure the project has strong visual appeal, (building rehabs, new businesses, promotional events) also make sure that you spend time before the TV crew arrives examining the best camera angles and picking a good location for the shoot.

Newsletters: Newsletters have a high level of readership and can be both an informational and educational tool. Understand whom your reader is and where their interest lies in order to develop a newsletter that will make an impact. Keep it simple, 1-2 pages is fine. Highlight volunteers, projects, new businesses, new products, etc.

Find out what other newsletters in the community you can contribute a column to. The more information that is out there about the organization, the more credible the organization will become.

Radio: Get to know your local radio station and find out the best way to contribute information to be used in their community spotlights.

Annual Reports serve two functions: To make an accounting to the organization's constituents it serves; and to present the organization in a positive, yet accurate light for future investment (can be included in your recruitment packets) It is important to state what the program is accomplishing.

One-on-One: There is nothing better than face-to-face communication with business owners, property owners, investors and residents. It is the most appreciated and valued form of communication and will do more for your organization than any other. Board Members should share the responsibility and set-aside time to spend with each business owner on a regular basis.

Community Organizations: Take each and every opportunity to talk with groups, clubs and organizations. Their support can make the difference in your success.

Volunteer Development

“Happiness is the utilization of one’s talents along lines of excellence.” – *Aristotle*

Appreciate and award your volunteers and you will never be short of them. Many people feel a need to volunteer. The DDA can fill that need in many ways and as long as your volunteers feel like they are contributing and have a purpose, they will more than likely stay with you. Many communities reward their volunteers by recognizing their efforts through various media, holding annual volunteer recognition dinners, or creating Volunteer of the Month programs. Since Allegan does not have a full-time DDA Director, volunteerism is crucial to the program.

Memberships

The DDA/City should maintain or join memberships in organizations that can provide vital information and education regarding economic development and commercial district revitalization. Memberships in the following should continue to be maintained: Michigan Downtown and Finance Association, Michigan Economic Developers Association, National Main Street Center (Resource center for all downtown activities), and the Michigan Retailers Association. The DDA may want to consider joining the International Council of Shopping Centers to gain critical information through events and mailings.

Partnerships

Forming partnerships with other organizations (ie: Chamber of Commerce, etc.) will only help to ensure that the community meets its goals in a timely manner without duplicating efforts. Efforts are being made and should continue to build the relationships between the Arts Community, the Chamber of Commerce and any other organization that can impact the economic vitality of the community.

Amend the Downtown Development Plan and TIF Plan

Once the Downtown Strategic Plan has been adopted by the Allegan Downtown Development Authority, the Authority should begin the process to amend the Development Plan and TIF Plan. Both of these plans, which are mandated by Public Act 197 should be amended to reflect the projects and programs outlined in the Downtown Strategic Plan. This resulting action will allow the Allegan DDA to utilize tax increment financing funds toward the implementation of the downtown strategy.

Implementation Strategies

DESIGN

The physical appearance of your downtown plays a critical role in a successful revitalization program. Customers, prospects, and clients want to conduct business in an attractive and inviting environment. Design improvements to buildings and public spaces are clear signals that positive change is taking place. Residents want to move to a community with an attractive and viable downtown. Quality design improvements in a downtown district reflect the pride that property owners, tenants, and the public sector have in the history of the district and their faith in its future.

How can Downtown Allegan manage and maintain an attractive district? There are many ways to manage design improvements in your district. A coordinated program must be created to ensure that necessary changes can take place and to maintain the district for years to come.

Design Guidelines

Design assistance, through the City of Allegan Façade/Sign Grant Program should be continued. Many communities do not have access to free or low cost architectural assistance. Most building owners will need some type of design assistance to make appropriate improvements to their historic structure. The key is for the DDA to speak to the property owners *before* the work begins and offer them design assistance. The National Trust for Historic Preservation publishes a very complete set of design guidelines for historic buildings. The cost is minimal, but the value is great. Other ways to manage good design is to institute Design Standards in your City Ordinance. These standards can be voluntary or mandatory and could be as simple as adopting the National Trust Guidelines or you can hire a consultant to complete design guidelines specifically for your community.

Façade/Sign Grant Program

The City of Allegan has a Façade/Sign Grant Program in place and should be continued and evaluated annually. Design Guidelines, as mentioned above, will help to ensure that appropriate improvements are made. Examples of how to set up a low interest loan pool with your community financial institutions, and façade grant programs can be found on the National Main Street Center website at www.mainst.org. There are PDF files that can be printed right from your computer.

One-Block Façade Study: Another way to encourage and excite downtown property owners about façade improvements is to do a façade study on a one-block area. Property owners will be able to see the 'before' and 'after' of a typical historic block and it can be the impetus they need to begin the process for improvements.



Example of one-block facade study

Federal Tax Credits for Rehabilitation: The historic rehabilitation tax credit is the current tax credit available to owners of income-producing National Register properties, referred to in the Internal Revenue Code as 'certified historic structures'. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 provides a 20 percent tax credit for a substantial rehabilitation of certified historic structures and a 10 percent tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation of buildings used for nonresidential purposes and built before 1936. These tax credits can be very beneficial to a property owner and can also be used as an incentive to make improvements. The Allegan Historic District Commission is very active in these efforts and the DDA should support them as much as possible.

Maintenance

DDA Board members should try to be the eyes and ears for maintenance issues within the district. The DDA, along with the City should manage the design, implementation and maintenance of the district beautification projects that promote a quality image and enhance customer convenience. This may include flowers, plantings, banners, flags, wayfinding signage, entryway beautification, and parking areas.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development activities include: Market Potential Analysis; Business Retention, Expansion and Recruitment; Downtown Inventory; Financial Incentives; and Upper Story Development.

In order to create a program for retention and recruitment, the DDA must know their business district inside and out. A market and housing study was recently completed and will provide the information necessary to outline a plan of action. The DDA should also have on hand a complete inventory of each property in the district and an updated list of the mix of uses along with an updated list of available property. Once armed with the information needed, the DDA can begin planning a retention and recruitment plan based on facts.

Retention

Retention is critically important to your downtown. A healthy downtown community must be in place in order to attract additional prospective businesses. Retention first.....then you can focus on recruitment. There are several methods of business retention activities that the DDA can engage in immediately:

Maintenance: Provide a clean, safe and aesthetically pleasing environment for your business and property owners at all times.

Town Meetings: Hold quarterly or semi-annual meetings with business owners to give them a chance to make suggestions, talk about issues they are facing, and learn about what is new for the future of downtown Allegan.

One-on-One Interviews: On a regular basis, meet with business and property owners (retention visits) to find out how they are doing, if they are planning to expand or close, what they may need to increase their business, etc. This information will always keep you on top of what is happening in your district, help you prepare for changes, and help you to be proactive when the changes happen.

Educational Workshops: Consider putting together an annual calendar of workshops that will be of interest and value to your business owners. Workshops in customer service practices, window display, advertising and marketing, merchandising, upper story development, new trends in business, etc. can be subsidized by the DDA to help keep the costs down for individual businesses.

Cooperative Advertising: In order to build awareness at less cost to each business owner, the DDA should work with the media to coordinate a cooperative advertising program. The DDA may consider subsidizing the banner portion of the ad and the media can sell the rest of the advertising space to fill up one large ad that will be more visible than many small, individual ads. This can be part of an overall marketing campaign.

Marketing Campaign: An overall annual marketing campaign should be created for the district. If the DDA or City cannot afford to hire a part or full-time Marketing Director, an ad-hoc committee should be formed to create the campaign and put it into motion. Marketing the district will be discussed further in the Marketing and Promotion Section of this report.

Market Analysis: Make sure that every business owner receives and understands the market analysis information. This will arm them with the information they need to plan for future expansion, or make the necessary changes they need to respond to current and future markets. Make sure that the market analysis is updated at least every 5 years. Mini-updates can be completed sooner by using services like CACI, Claritas, etc.

Recruitment

The City and the DDA must be well prepared in order to begin a comprehensive recruitment program. Once the physical improvements are underway or completed, incentive programs are in place, existing businesses are poised and ready for the future, the City and DDA can confidently recruit new prospects to the community. Here are some tips in preparing for a comprehensive recruitment program:

Business Inventory: A data inventory of all properties within the DDA district should be updated on a regular basis so that the DDA/ City know what properties are available in the district. An overall map of the district can be helpful so that you can identify clustering opportunities and available property for sale or rent.

Develop List: A list of all desired business to be recruited should be created from the completed market analysis and updated on a regular basis. A *Business Cluster* list should also be developed so that you can begin to cluster like businesses together ie; retail, service, office.

Match Lists: Match your desired business list with available locations.

Compile Business Incentive List: A list of all services and incentives the City/DDA provides should be compiled for distribution and communicated throughout the district. Incentives can include low interest loans, grants, business assistance, and design assistance.

Build Relationships with Realtors: Meet with area realtors individually or as a group (speak at one of their monthly meetings) to inform them of your recruitment program and your willingness to share information with them. Fax available property information to area realtors on a regular basis and ask them to do the same. Share recruitment packets of information for their use.

Implementation Strategies

Create Steps to Opening a Business in Allegan booklet: It would be helpful to have the steps to open a business in Allegan outlined clearly and simply for any prospective business owner willing to open a business. This should also include any steps that may need to be taken at the County and State level.

Develop Recruitment Package: A Recruitment package should be pulled together that includes all of the above items. The packet should be professionally designed and of very high quality. Information within the packet should be able to be personalized for each prospect easily. The information should be maintained and updated on a regular basis and should include at the minimum, area brochures (work with the Chamber of Commerce), maps, lists of available properties with specific building profiles, calendar of local events, financial incentives, market analysis information, current and future revitalization projects in the district, business directory, and a list of community amenities and special features.

Summary of Recruitment Process

- ▶ Assemble Market Information
- ▶ Assemble Map of Area, Identify Retail Clusters, Potential Project Areas
- ▶ Develop Recruitment Materials
- ▶ Maintain List of Available Properties (can be posted to website)
- ▶ Distribute List to Area Realtors
- ▶ Identify and Prioritize Potential Prospects (Search within your district first)
- ▶ Match Properties with Prospects
- ▶ Approach Prospects via Direct Mail/Onsite Visits
- ▶ Follow Up

Retail Potential in Downtown Allegn

A Market Study was prepared for the City of Allegan by ZHA, Inc. and completed in January 2004. The study found that downtown Allegan has retail potential for specialty retail, eating, drinking, and entertainment establishments and these types of businesses will make Allegan a “destination.” The study also stated that downtown Allegan can expect to support between 10,000 and 15,000 additional square feet of retail space and up to 20,000 additional square feet of restaurant space. In addition, recommendations included seeking a mutually beneficial relationship with the Lakeshore communities of Douglas and Saugatuck and marketing special events to highlight the downtown and spur future investment.

A complete report can be obtained at the City of Allegan City Hall.

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Downtown Allegan can strengthen its position in the marketplace by creating an overall Marketing Program for the district. Ideally, it would be great to hire a part or full-time Marketing Director to oversee the program, but if funding is a consideration, an ad-hoc committee may be formed to take incremental steps to begin the process of marketing and building awareness for your community.

Analyze the Market: Before embarking on a marketing plan, a market analysis must be completed so that everyone understands the market area completely. You must know who your downtown customers are and who your potential customers may be. Also, take time to understand your competition. Look for strengths and weaknesses of your district and of your competitors. Each business should understand their market position and the DDA/City can help them be informed by completing the market analysis.

Create an Identity and Promote It: A consistent identity (logo, typefaces, layout design) for the district should be used in all aspects of your marketing campaign in newspaper ads, brochures, website, newsletters, etc. An Identity should be professionally created.

Evaluate Calendar of Events: In order to see where there may be lull times in your annual event year, map out a complete calendar of events for your community. What are the local shopping characteristics? Do you have events supporting those times when local shopping is typically high? What about the low times? Are there any other events in the community that downtown could tie into?

Media Relations Program: Build relationships with all media by meeting with them personally. Your program should include press releases, photos and photo opportunities, familiarization tours, and prepared background information about your community for each media entity. A downtown gift package can be assembled and sent to each contact requesting a visit to your community. Be creative! Ask about free community announcement areas in radio, cable, TV, and newspaper. Encourage your local newspaper to create a column that you contribute to regarding what is happening in downtown. Use this space to highlight future projects, new products, events, and reasons for coming downtown.

Public Relations Program: In addition to the media program, the DDA should develop a public relations program that communicates its position through speaking opportunities (clubs, organizations, chamber) brochures, newsletters, website, exhibits, and partnerships with other organizations.

Web Site: Create a web site for the DDA that can be linked to the City of Allegan and the Chamber of Commerce website. The content should include a downtown newsletter, available property listings, projects, events, as well links to downtown business owners. The website should also be professionally created and easy to navigate.

Implementation Strategies

Cross-Marketing Program: Encourage downtown businesses to market each other by sharing gift certificates, e-mailing and direct mail lists, advertising in each other's stores or advertising collectively. Make sure that every business knows the products and services of the other so that marketing each other can take place constantly and consistently. A cross-marketing program will also be an incentive to any prospective business coming in.

Responsible Marketing:

- ▶ supports the best shared community values
- ▶ builds on downtown strengths
- ▶ honors the best of the past
- ▶ serves rather than exploits customers
- ▶ prepares for the future
- ▶ communicates downtown's benefits and develops momentum for progress
- ▶ audits, monitors, and evaluates to make sure that downtown remains responsive to market needs and changing economic and cultural realities

PLAN REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistency among plans and policies is important to the smooth implementation of a strategic plan. Therefore, the following recommendations were developed to modify existing policies to fit with the goals of the downtown strategic plan. In some cases, studies are recommended for specific issues.

Retail Development

Amend CBD zoning ordinance: uses, building placement, parking, business signs, retail frontage line, etc. See below.

Conduct retail linkage assessment to identify locations of strengths and weaknesses, and to assist in targeting strategic locations for new business recruitment prospects.

Parking Study: measure parking demand so that deficiencies can be pinpointed, management strategies implemented, and core retail blocks can be bolstered.

Upper Floor Development

Amend CBD zoning ordinance.

Strengthen ground floor business activities in blocks where upper floors are vacant and underutilized.

Traffic Patterns, Linkages and Crashes

Conduct peak period intersection traffic counts and have traffic engineer apply capacity analysis. With this data, street reconfigurations may be considered for improved circulation, greater business exposure, improved safety for pedestrian movements and linkages. Wherever possible, streets should be configured for two-way traffic, no more than one lane in each direction (excepting turning lanes), and maximum on-street parking. Assess causes for high vehicular crashes on state roads (Marshall and Cedar) and make recommendations for safety improvements.

Parking

Conduct parking study to determine deficient locations, improve distribution, maximize on-street parking, maximize proportion of public (shared) parking, and improve management strategies.

Amend zoning ordinance to reduce off-street parking requirements.

Amend the C-1 (Central Business District) Zoning Ordinance

1. For permitted businesses, there is no need to list business types by SIC code; rather, any retail, service or office use should be permitted, with exceptions listed, such as auto-related uses that require vehicular access, which should be prohibited, e.g., gas stations, auto dealers, auto repair shops, auto washes, drive-through restaurants.

2. Upper floor dwellings and live-work units should be permitted uses; add ground floor attached dwellings as a special use.
3. Add all public/government buildings to the CBD zone, particularly before county offices vacate their downtown site. Government uses are already considered general office uses.

However, present zoning requirements for government land are inadequate for the type of new private development that would support downtown shopping, pedestrian links, and upper floor development.

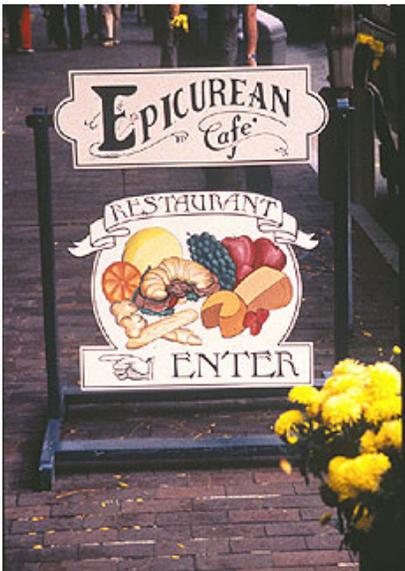
4. Consider establishing *retail frontage lines* in CBD on main shopping blocks, where maximum front yard setback is zero feet; minimum building height is two stories; parking lots cannot front the ROW; curb cuts are prohibited on the frontage line; retail/restaurant uses are preferred uses; storefronts require minimum area of transparent glass (such as 70% of façade). Encourage vertical mixed-use developments by creating zoning allowances for new proposals with retail or eatery on the ground floor, and offices and/or dwellings on upper levels.

5. Establish *minimum* lot coverage of 70% in CBD.

6. Establish *maximum* front yard setbacks in CBD of zero feet on major streets and ten feet elsewhere.

7. Establish *maximum* rear yard setbacks in CBD: twenty feet.

8. Consider elimination of off-street parking requirement in the CBD, or establish standard for *maximum* off-street parking in CBD: 3.0 for retail, 3.0 for general office, 8.0 for sit-down restaurant.



National Main Street Center Photo

Amend Other City Ordinances to improve retail shopping environment

1. *Business Signs*: reduce number of sign types allowed in C-1 from six to three: wall/flat, marquee, and projecting. Projecting signs should be encouraged, but should be reduced in maximum size and height for improved pedestrian orientation and to avoid obscuring a neighbor's sign. Icon, or object, signs should be permitted in the CBD, as well (e.g., a large hanging hammer at the hardware store).

2. *Sidewalk Displays*: in the apparent absence of city regulations (sidewalk displays are not addressed in the zoning ordinance nor in Chapter 25 of the City Ordinance governing streets and sidewalks), sidewalk displays for retailers should be encouraged to increase sidewalk activity in the downtown. Any new regulations that the

Implementation Strategies

City chooses to adopt should include permits, with little or no fee, that are approved administratively, and not by deliberative bodies (such as Planning Commission or City Council). Regulatory components should include a quality standard for display tables, the frequency allowed for displays, and allowance for a six-foot clear path for pedestrians.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The following table represents the implementation strategy recommendations, a schedule for each activity, funding recommendations if applicable, and suggested priorities for implementation.