



Certification Report

City of Allegan
September 2014

Table of contents

Executive summary	3
Methodology	4
Best practice findings	
1.1 — The plans.....	5
1.2 — Public participation	7
2.1 — Zoning regulations	8
3.1 — Site plan review policy	9
3.2 — Site plan review procedures	11
4.1 — Training for elected officials, board members and staff	13
4.2 — Recruitment and orientation	14
5.1 — Redevelopment Ready Sites®	15
6.1 — Economic development strategy.....	17
6.2 — Marketing and promotion	18
Conclusion.....	19

Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) is a certification program supporting community revitalization and the attraction and retention of businesses, entrepreneurs and talent throughout Michigan. RRC promotes communities to be development ready and competitive in today's economy by actively engaging stakeholders and proactively planning for the future—making them more attractive for projects that create places where people want to live, work and invest.

In March 2014, Allegan became the eighth community to receive a report of findings after being evaluated under the statewide RRC program. The report identified several areas the city needed to address prior to receiving RRC certification. While the report of findings outlined recommended actions to meet each best practice criteria, the city could choose its own path of alternate strategies as long as the required criteria was accomplished.

Allegan is committed to the RRC Best Practices and has taken the necessary steps to ensure the city's long term competitiveness. Over the last nine months, the city, led by manager Robert Hillard, has worked diligently to bring their policies, procedures and plans up to date and in line with the RRC best practice criteria. Allegan has adopted a six-year capital improvements plan, providing a link between planning and budgeting for capital projects.

The city created a public participation plan, identifying affected stakeholders and their unique communication needs. Allegan established a clear, streamlined process for reviewing site plans, ensuring consistency for all reviews for both internal staff and contracted consultants. The city has also prioritized, packaged and proactively marketed a prime redevelopment site, garnering interest for future revitalization opportunities in the heart of downtown Allegan.

As one of the first certified Redevelopment Ready Communities, the city should be proud of the hard work, achievements and transformations that have taken place. Allegan has positioned itself to strengthen local quality of life in difficult economic times. Achieving RRC certification is a statement to the private sector that the city has a vision for the future and the development process is streamlined, predictable and user-friendly. It is important to acknowledge that the work does not end here. Moving forward, Allegan should build upon its successes by continuing to engage the public, strategically updating their master plan and capital improvements plan, proactively marketing prime redevelopment opportunities and implementing economic development and marketing strategies. RRC certification is effective for three years, provided the certification requirements are maintained throughout that time period.

“The Redevelopment Ready Communities program allowed the city to step back and see how we are viewed from outside the community. It further provided valuable insight into our training needs, not only to the elected officials but to our appointed officials. As a result, I believe because of the Redevelopment Ready Communities program we have a solid development team which can address the needs of Allegan and prospective development well into the future.”




—Robert Hillard,
Allegan City Manager

The basic assessment tool for evaluation is the RRC Best Practices. These six standards were developed in conjunction with public and private sector experts and address key elements of community and economic development. A community must demonstrate all of the RRC Best Practice components have been met to become RRC certified. Once received, certification is valid for three years.

Measurement of a community to the best practices is completed through the RRC team's research, observation and interviews, as well as the consulting advice and technical expertise of the RRC Advisory Council. The team analyzes a community's development materials, including, but not limited to: the master plan;

redevelopment strategy; capital improvements plan; budget; public participation plan; zoning regulations; development procedures; applications; economic development strategy; marketing strategies; and website. Researchers observe the meetings of the community's governing body, planning commission, zoning board of appeals and other committees as applicable. In confidential interviews, the team also records the input of local business owners and developers who have worked with the community.

A community's degree of attainment for each best practice criteria is visually represented in this report by the following:

	Green indicates the best practice component is currently being met by the community.
	Yellow indicates some of the best practice component may be in place, but additional action is required.
	Red indicates the best practice component is not present or outdated.

This report represents the final findings of the evaluation of the city of Allegan's redevelopment processes and practices. All questions should be directed to the RRC team at RRC@michigan.org.

Best Practice 1.1—The plans

Best Practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how the redevelopment vision is embedded in the master plan, capital improvements plan, downtown development plan and corridor plan. To comply with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008 and meet Best Practice 1.1 criteria, the city of Allegan needed to adopt a capital improvements plan (CIP). A comprehensive CIP is an essential tool for the planning and development of the social, physical and economic wellbeing of a community. Allegan's city manager worked with several city departments, the planning commission and city council to develop a six-year CIP. The planning commission held a public hearing and recommended adoption of the plan by the city council. Allegan's city council reviewed and adopted the 2014–2020 capital improvements plan in June 2014. The CIP document

provides an overview of the process used to develop the CIP, including project evaluation criteria, financing options for proposed projects and plans used for reference and is readily available on the city's website. The CIP will be used as a tool to implement the master plan and provides a link between planning and budgeting for capital projects. Planning for future investment is not only a best practice for redevelopment readiness, but a CIP encourages project coordination internally and externally and assists with implementing the community vision established during the master planning process. The CIP can also influence and encourage future growth in Allegan, as public infrastructure projects identified in the CIP can be coordinated with proposed development projects to leverage private investment.



Best Practice 1.1—The plans *continued*

Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years or has a master plan update in development.	✓
		The master plan identifies a strategy for redevelopment or a redevelopment plan	✓
		The governing body has adopted a capital improvements plan.	✓
		The governing body has adopted a downtown development plan.	✓
		The governing body has adopted a corridor plan.	✓

Best Practice 1.2—Public participation

Best Practice 1.2 assesses how well the community identifies and engages its stakeholders on a continual basis. The city of Allegan is proactive in soliciting public input for projects and goes above and beyond traditional public participation practices. While the city had demonstrated that public input is a high priority, to institutionalize these efforts, the city developed a public participation plan identifying all interested and affected stakeholders and their unique communication needs. The plan was created in an effort to continue

to engage a diverse set of stakeholders and maximize community involvement in all development plans and projects. Allegan's city council supported the addition of the public participation plan to the "Municipal Policy Manual" by resolution. The city will rely on the public participation plan to assist with engaging stakeholders for future planning and development endeavors. The plan will be updated to reflect success and areas in need of improvement, leaving a strong culture of public involvement, despite municipal turnover.



Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has a public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders in land use decisions.	✓
		The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	✓
		The community shares outcomes of all public participation processes.	✓

Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates the city's zoning ordinance to determine how well it regulates for and implements the goals of the master plan. Allegan utilizes overlay zoning, identifying special provisions in addition to those in the underlying base zone. While the zoning ordinance and map were accessible on the city's website, the overlay zoning districts needed to be added to the zoning map to improve clarity. The updated zoning map is now available on Allegan's website. The city amended several sections of the zoning ordinance in an effort to meet the best practice criteria and to utilize the ordinance as a tool to shape an inviting, walkable community. By placing a high priority on creating walkable places and mixing uses, communities can reduce the separation of uses, increase the likelihood of walking and biking trips, reduce harmful emissions and increase social interaction. Allegan's complete streets ordinance promotes a network of sidewalks and pathways and safe crossing areas, but did not outline regulations to implement complete streets

concepts into development projects. The city amended the zoning ordinance to improve non-motorized safety and access throughout the city by requiring bicycle parking and storage areas and establishing connectivity requirements to existing non-motorized pathways.

Green infrastructure is essential to both environmental sustainability and the long term social and economic success of communities. Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in urban areas and Allegan requires stormwater management plans to be included with site plans. Many green infrastructure elements, such as rain gardens, planter boxes and bioswales can be integrated into parking lot designs to help mitigate the effects of stormwater runoff. The city amended the zoning ordinance to include stormwater regulations for off-street parking areas. Future benefits include urban heat island mitigation, improved aesthetics and a more walkable built environment.

Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that reflects the goals of the current master plan.	✓
		The zoning ordinance is easy to read and accessible online.	✓
		The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.	✓
		The zoning ordinance contains flexible zoning tools to encourage development and redevelopment.	✓
		The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.	✓
		The zoning ordinance includes elements for improved non-motorized transportation.	✓
		The zoning ordinance allows for flexible parking requirements.	✓
		The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure to improve storm water management, mitigate heat island effect of large paved surfaces and improve the health and appearance of the community.	✓

Best Practice 3.1—Site plan review policy

Best Practice 3.1 evaluates the city's site plan review policies, project tracking and availability of development information. The framework for Allegan's site plan review process is clearly documented in the zoning ordinance. The city streamlined the review process and reduced the instances that the city council must approve site plans, reduced the number of meetings required at the planning commission level and improved the overall transparency of the site plan review process. Minor site plan review changes are now approved administratively, simplifying the development process. Streamlined, well documented site plan policies ensure a smooth and predictable experience when working with a community.

The city has implemented an official internal process to track development proposals and projects, to assist with coordinating the phases of the process

administered by outside consultants and steps handled by the city. Allegan's city manager created a site plan/development review tracking worksheet to monitor projects through various departments and outside agencies. The city manager also led a training with the site plan review team to review the new policy and outline expectations. Tracking development projects will allow for increased transparency and efficiency, keep staff and applicants well informed, provide clarification as to the status of a project and can assist in measuring the results of the approval process. City staff finalized a flowchart illustrating the site plan review process, including expected timelines and relevant contact information. Development information is incorporated into a centralized user-friendly plans/reports and forms/applications area maintained on the city website.



Best Practice 3.1—Site plan review policy *continued*

Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.	✓
		The zoning ordinance documents the responsibilities of the governing body, staff, ZBA, planning commission and other reviewing bodies.	✓
		The community has a method to track development projects.	✓
		The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	✓
		A "Guide to Development" is maintained online that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	✓

Best Practice 3.2—Site plan review procedures

Best Practice 3.2 evaluates the community's site plan review procedures and internal/external communication. The purpose of the site plan review process is to ensure that plans for specific types of development comply with the zoning ordinance. Site plan review procedures and timelines should be communicated in a clear and concise manner to prospective developers and business owners. City staff created an internal process document for all internal departments and outside consultants that review site plans to ensure sound internal procedures are in place and followed. A consolidated, expedited review process not only improves the quality and efficiency of government, it also provides applicants with more certainty and less risk in project planning, saving money and encouraging developers to bring jobs and investment to the region.

As part of the new process, staff encourages developers to seek input at the onset of the development process

as outlined in the internal site plan review document. Significant public opposition or concerns can slow down the review and approval of a project and ultimately cost a developer time and money. Proactive public engagement, rather than reactive public input, can encourage a smooth development process. During the initial RRC evaluation, business and developer interviews provided mixed reviews on customer service received from both city staff and contracted staff. The city created a formal customer feedback mechanism to determine the success of, or issues with, the overall development process. Allegan recently held a staff meeting to discuss the new site plan review policies and procedures and outlined expectations. This meeting will be held annually to determine if the process requires updating or if it is successful and will ensure consistency in the review process, even if there is a turnover in staff.



Best Practice 3.2—Site plan review procedures *continued*

Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has a qualified intake professional or project manager.	✓
		The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.	✓
		The community defines and offers conceptual site plan review meetings for applicants.	✓
		The community encourages a developer to seek input from neighboring residents and businesses at the onset of the application process.	✓
		The appropriate departments engage in joint site plan team reviews.	✓
		The community promptly acts on special land use, variance or rezoning requests.	✓
		The community annually reviews the successes and challenges with the site plan review procedures.	✓

Best Practice 4.1—Training for elected officials, board members, and staff

Best Practice 4.1 assesses how a community encourages training and tracks training needs for appointed and elected officials, board members and staff. Trainings provide officials and staff with an opportunity to expand their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues. While Allegan provides funding for training and encourages training for officials and staff, training attendance and needs were not formally tracked. Tracking training is a useful way to identify future training needs by documenting education received, identifying gaps and determining what training should be focused on in the future. City staff created a spreadsheet to log training information. The RRC report of findings suggested holding

an annual meeting including members of the city council, planning commission, zoning board of appeals, historic district commission, DDA and economic development commission. The city recently held a joint meeting with these groups to review Allegan's progress related to the RRC program, expectations on training, the city's recently adopted ethics policy, the statutory basis of respective boards and the recently amended zoning ordinance. The city also held a collaborative work session highlighting the Kalamazoo Riverfront development and outlining accomplishments completed to date and items to be accomplished in the future. All boards and committees related to planning and development in Allegan should continue to be included in future training sessions.

Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	✓
		The community identifies training needs of the governing body, boards, commissions and staff based on the stated goals in the redevelopment strategy.	✓
		The community encourages board and commission members to attend trainings.	✓
		The planning commission, zoning board of appeals and the governing body conducts collaborative study sessions.	✓

Best Practice 4.2—Recruitment and orientation

Best Practice 4.2 evaluates how a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed or elected officials and board members. Open seats for board and commission positions are posted on the city website and in the newspaper. Allegan has developed an online application for open positions. The city created a brief overview of the role of each board and commission related to development that is now included with the application for open positions. Allegan also adopted an ethics policy to articulate expectations for all elected and

appointed officials. Assisting newly elected officials and appointees with learning basic information about the structure and processes of government and community and economic development is vital to them playing a part in the city achieving its goals and objectives. Allegan is now providing complete orientation packets to all newly elected and appointed officials that includes bylaws and ethics policies along with planning, zoning and development information.

Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community sets expectations for boards and commission positions.	✓
		The community provides orientation packets to newly appointed and elected members.	✓

Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites®

Best Practice 5.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions and markets their priority redevelopment sites. The city has identified targeted areas for redevelopment in the master plan including downtown, the Kalamazoo riverfront bordering downtown Allegan along Hubbard Street and the North Street redevelopment area. Specific priority sites for redevelopment have been identified and a broad vision for future development has been outlined. A property information package (PIP) for the city-owned site, 155 Brady Street, has been created and includes background information potential investors can draw from to determine the development possibilities of the site. The PIP outlines a vision with clearly articulated development expectations for the site, proposing a mix of residential units and retail that is suitable for the building and adjacent properties and ties into the vision of the

master plan. While an overall vision for the site has been developed, the PIP is not so specific that prospective projects will be hindered. Financial incentives that may be available for the site are also included in the PIP.

Allegan, with the assistance of the MEDC through the RRC program, hosted a developer matchmaking event featuring 155 Brady Street and other available development opportunities. The city manager continues to provide tours to interested parties in an effort to spur redevelopment. This site is primed for new investment and is located within a community that has effective policies, efficient processes and broad community support for redevelopment. Revitalization of the site will serve as a catalyst to the surrounding area and create a more dynamic downtown environment.



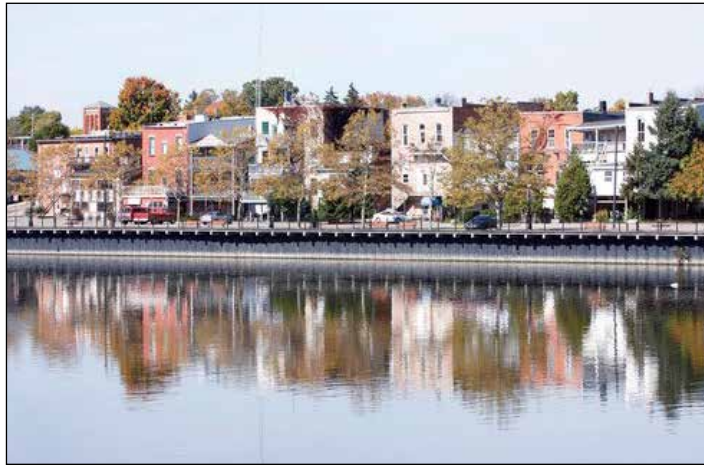
Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites® *continued*

Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community identifies and prioritizes individual redevelopment sites.	✓
		The community forms a steering committee(s) for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓
		The community gathers preliminary development research for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓
		A public visioning session is held for the prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓
		Available resources for the prioritized redevelopment sites are identified.	✓
		A “Property Information Package” for the prioritized redevelopment site(s) is assembled.	✓
		Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed.	✓

Best Practice 6.1—Economic development strategy

Best Practice 6.1 evaluates what goals and actions a community has identified to assist in strengthening its overall economic health. Economic development is the process of building strong, adaptive communities and is critical to attract jobs and new investment. Allegan maintains a strong understanding of the community's strengths and weaknesses and has created a realistic

vision and strategic direction for economic success. These strategies are an important component of the master plan and the city regularly reviews economic development goals and measurable action items. A clear vision and goals are necessary to provide a framework for strategically assessing and coordinating economic development efforts.



Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has approved an economic development strategy.	✓
		The governing body annually reviews the economic development strategy.	✓

Best Practice 6.2—Marketing and promotion

Best Practice 6.2 evaluates how the community promotes and markets itself. Community marketing and promotion can take many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that rekindles community pride and improves consumer and investor confidence. Allegan concentrates marketing activities through the city website and various

promotional events. The branding campaign for the community, Positively Allegan, engages stakeholders and actively promotes Allegan as a great place to live, work and invest. The city's website is user-friendly and has been updated to include an area where forms, applications and permits are assembled.



Initial RRC Evaluation March 2014	Final RRC Evaluation Sept 2014	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has developed a marketing strategy.	✓
		The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.	✓

Allegan has exhibited a strong commitment to improving their redevelopment readiness and worked diligently to meet the best practice criteria and achieve the Redevelopment Ready Certified Community® designation. The city has found a balance between removing unnecessary delays and hurdles, while preserving the integrity of the community's vision and goals, positioning the city for success. Allegan, as the county seat, has set an example for the region as a leader in community revitalization. Certified communities signal a proactive, business friendly environment to developers and investors. Upon certification, the MEDC will assist in marketing the community's top three Redevelopment Ready Sites® if packaged to the best practice standard. Certified communities with

solid development projects receive priority for funding at the MEDC and the Michigan State Housing and Development Authority (MSHDA). RRC certification lasts for three years, if all best practice criteria are maintained and the city will be required to submit biannual progress reports to the RRC team.

In today's competitive economy, developers and businesses can invest anywhere. Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® signal that locating a new business or growing an existing one within their municipality is straightforward. Allegan has removed barriers to development by streamlining the review process and improving customer service, to ensure they city remains a competitive and attractive community for business and talent attraction.

