

# PLACE PLANS

A COMMUNITY COLLABORATION



**michigan municipal league**  
better communities. better michigan.

# PlacePlans

## A COMMUNITY COLLABORATION



*Visioning meetings bring the community together to share their thoughts and ideas.*

**A**t its core, placemaking is an economic development strategy that offers a new way to define and design our communities for the people who live in them. Research shows that a city's prosperity and future growth are linked to the quality of human experience it provides. Placemaking is a common-sense response to decades of urban policy and planning that favored rigid uniformity, top-down decision-making, and overbearing codes and zoning that sap entrepreneurial spirit and make it all but impossible to create the type of places that connect people to each other and to their community.

In short, it is a way to make Michigan a place where people want to live, both now and for generations to come.

According to a 2014 University of Michigan survey of elected city leaders, more than one-third of the state's cities have utilized placemaking as a development strategy—solid proof that local government leaders are indeed walking the placemaking talk.

But they can't do it alone. Michigan's placemaking culture depends on connection and collaboration: social entrepreneurs partnering with business people, arts activists working with city officials, philanthropic organizations spearheading civic engagement projects. It is all about moving the center of gravity out of city hall and into the hands of citizens.

Many great programs are now available to help do just that.

PlacePlans provides the technical know-how to bring those dynamic forces together in a way that identifies a community's unique place-based assets, with the tools and strategies to best leverage them into truly transformative placemaking projects. The PlacePlans team helps direct investments where they would have the biggest impact, while engaging key community members to build consensus and momentum. It helps a community get started, then hands the baton over to professional consultants and community partners to carry it to completion.

PlacePlans is a joint effort between Michigan State University and the Michigan Municipal League, funded by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) through the State of Michigan's MPlace initiative ([mplace.org](http://mplace.org)). But it cannot succeed

without the hands-on support and involvement of community foundations, fraternal organizations, and other charitable groups with the resources and relationships to take those plans from roadmap to reality.

## HOW IT WORKS

The PlacePlans process is working right now, in communities just like yours. In 2015, Allegan will break ground on the next phase of a downtown riverfront redevelopment that is literally turning the city's face in a new direction, thanks to a \$250,000 Core Communities grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Another MEDC grant will provide \$200,000 to kick-start Cadillac's new Heritage Plaza, destined to become the vibrant hub of a revitalized city center.

To be selected, both cities had to show their project goals could actually be achieved. It's one thing to imagine the possibilities. It's quite another to turn those possibilities into a practical reality. Funding from outside the local government is crucial to implementation. Allegan and Cadillac showed support from a wide circle of community allies including fraternal organizations, area businesses, and local nonprofit groups.

Community partners also provide volunteers, raise awareness, and bring the social glue and energy that can mobilize a placemaking movement. Their enthusiastic letters of support and pledges of commitment were a vital ingredient in bringing PlacePlans to Allegan and Cadillac.



*The PlacePlans process generates ideas for inviting public spaces.*

# Downtown Allegan

## RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT



*Walking paths and green space are among the features that anchor the riverfront concept.*

In late 2012, Allegan became one of the first communities chosen to participate in the PlacePlans pilot program. The small city along the Kalamazoo River in southwest Michigan has about 5,000 people and a manufacturing-based economy. Experts from the MSU School of Planning, Design and Construction joined staff from the Michigan Municipal League and the

City of Allegan to engage community members in developing a new vision for the underused downtown riverfront.

Over the next six months, a series of public meetings and one-on-one interviews with key organizational leaders gradually grew into a PlacePlans concept to reimagine downtown Allegan.

**THE OBJECTIVES:** enhance the city's natural beauty, capitalize on historic districts, jump-start economic development, and maximize the potential of regional events.

**THE SHARED VISION:** an animated and colorful riverfront with an eclectic mix of sidewalk cafes, shops, and apartments; improved lighting to make the entire downtown more welcoming

at night; and a green landscape with active public spaces surrounding the water's edge.

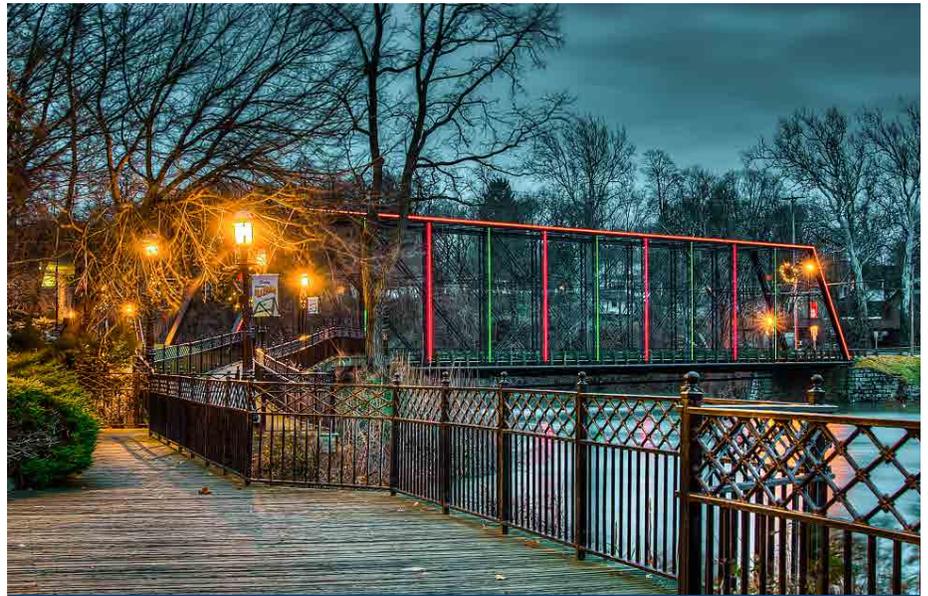
Allegan committed significant city dollars and manpower, and set the table for success with the right policies and priorities. But the task of redeveloping the riverfront as the city's greatest physical, economic, and cultural asset required a public coalition far beyond the doors of city hall: it also included an active Downtown Development Authority, committed local business owners and Chamber of Commerce, Allegan County Community Foundation, and a virtual army of fraternal organizations, all focused on regional economic success.



Photo: zintaaistars.blogspot.com

Allegan's riverfront redesign plan debuted on June 18, 2013 before a crowd of more than 160. City Manager Rob Hillard helped celebrate the event with a Clark Kent/Superman-style reveal of a T-shirt emblazoned with the logo of the city's new public relations campaign, Positively Allegan.

All the civic engagement paid off with the entire city energized for positive change. In November 2013, Allegan voters overwhelmingly approved



The Second Street Bridge is a one-lane, single-span truss bridge in Allegan that carries Second Street over the Kalamazoo River.

taking \$500,000 from the city's \$3 million sinking fund to use as grant-matching money to start up the projects. In all, nearly \$1 million in riverfront redevelopment projects will connect the central business district with the Kalamazoo River.

Today, the first visible signs of Allegan's reimagined riverfront are shining as brightly as the sparkling lights that now adorn the city's historic Second Street Bridge.

- \$90,000 in city funds to re-landscape and redesign Veterans Memorial Park
- A \$61,200 LED lighting and software package for the Second Street Bridge
- In 2015, the \$250,000 MEDC grant and matching funds will convert an underused parking area into an 11,600 square foot events plaza and stage that can accommodate an audience of 400 people. The city has also applied for a matching grant of \$81,000

from the state Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs for a sound system and stage lighting.

- Matching funds are ready and waiting for \$300,000 in grants from the state's Natural Resources Trust Fund and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to construct a handicap-accessible canoe and kayak launch.

The next phase will seek out groups willing to support projects such as public art, a clock tower, restroom facilities, and landscaping. Entrepreneurs are already looking at redeveloping riverfront buildings with a new orientation that replaces rear parking lots and loading docks with back porches facing out onto the water. One such proposal would combine three buildings into condominiums above street-level office space.

"Positively Allegan" is what can happen when people work together to support and celebrate the place they call home.

# Cadillac

## HERITAGE PLAZA



*Heritage Plaza will host many activities and events, serving as a destination for current residents and Northern Michigan visitors. The summer splash pad and winter ice rink will be keystones of Downtown Cadillac culture.*

In 2013, Cadillac joined the growing list of communities embarking on the PlacePlans process. The midsize city of 10,000 is surrounded by the forests and inland lakes of northern Lower Michigan.

**THE CONCEPT:** transform a nondescript parking lot and park into a year-round downtown destination evoking all the historical charm and sophistication that make the city

unique. The lakeside block would become a vibrant hub connecting downtown businesses and Lake Cadillac with seasonal events and attractive amenities, acting as a magnet to draw in visitors and residents alike.

**A PROMISING SIGN OF SUCCESS:** Cadillac's public and private sectors are already committed to a wide range of redevelopment activities, working in harmony toward a revitalized downtown.

**AMONG THE COMMUNITY FORCES INVOLVED FROM THE START:** the Cadillac Area Community Foundation, Cadillac Area Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Authority, Cadillac Area Visitors Bureau and The Downtown Fund, a private group. Their members are educators, business and property owners, media spokespeople, retirees, social workers, artists, city employees, and families. All are Cadillac area residents committed to activities and projects that enhance the entire community's quality of life.

After months of study and public feedback, the final design concept centered on a multi-use, multi-seasonal space for public events and gatherings. Summer will find the plaza filled with art fairs and concerts, a children's splash pad and playscape, and plenty of benches and shaded spaces to enjoy a sunny day. In the winter, an outdoor fireplace will warm the edges of a skating rink while holiday festivals light up the air.

The \$200,000 Core Communities grant will help redevelop a two-acre downtown parking facility into that inviting and exciting public space.

The reimagined plaza will also serve as the catalyst for mixed-use development expanding outward from that central core. With the help of charitable organizations and other partners, the city is building the social

network necessary to encourage that level of private investment and future economic development.

The outlook for the future is promising thanks to loyal allies like the Cadillac Area Community Foundation, Downtown Development Authority, and Rotary Club of Cadillac. All have provided generous support in the past for matching funds, and plenty of volunteer muscle to get the job done.

## BECOMING A COMMUNITY PARTNER

Once completed, a successful place-based project will continue to serve as both inspiration and education to help seed further place-based visioning. Programs like PlacePlans



Downtown Cadillac



The City Park, featuring the Kris Eggle Memorial Fountain

also act as a signal to the private sector that the community is serious about moving forward and will welcome developers and investors with open arms.

Selecting a project for this kind of strategic placemaking depends on two main criteria. Will it create more jobs and attract those highly mobile empty nesters and educated young people so vital to our future? Just as importantly, how realistic is it that the project will be implemented?

None of that can happen without the hands-on support of the public and private sector alike. Your active involvement can help determine which communities will benefit from PlacePlans and similar place-based programs and projects. The future is waiting, right in your own backyard.



The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. Through advocacy at the state and federal level, we proactively represent municipalities to help them sustain highly livable, desirable, and unique places within the state. We create and offer our members services and events that range from traditional to cutting edge, in order to help educate and inspire them to remain focused on their passion for the area they represent. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change for better communities.

February 2015