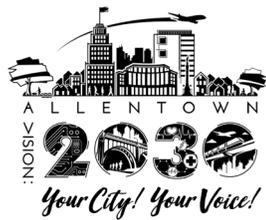


# Allentown Vision 2030

Comprehensive &  
Economic Development Plan

Final Report- November 2019





# Allentown Vision 2030

**Comprehensive &  
Economic Development Plan**

Final Report- November 2019



## CITY OF ALLENTOWN

Comprehensive and Economic  
Development Plan

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**Managing Director** Joseph Mc Mahon

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Puertorrican Culture  
Preservation

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Allentown Vision 2030 team would like to thank City of Allentown staff, our public, private, nonprofit, and institutional partners, the generous hosts of our Community Collaboration Meetings - the East Side Youth Center, South Mountain Middle School, JCC of the Lehigh Valley, and St. Luke's Sacred Heart Campus - and the participants of the Allentown Vision 2030 Community Ambassador Program for your support and participation in the Allentown Vision 2030 plan development process.

Finally, we would not have the Allentown Vision 2030 Plan without the incredible participation of our Allentown community - residents, workers, youth, and all those who engaged with the plan development process through meetings, at the Community Engagement Hub, our community survey, and the many other events held throughout the planning process. Thank you for your time, your participation, your ideas and sharing your VOICE to create a shared vision and plan for the future of Allentown!

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**Our community will work together to achieve inclusive and equitable growth anchored by strong education, safe and accessible housing, and workforce opportunities to ensure a thriving future for all.**





We are so excited to share the Allentown Vision 2030 Comprehensive and Economic Development Plan – a 10-year vision for guiding inclusive and equitable growth in our city. The Allentown Vision 2030 Plan was developed alongside the community. Thousands of Allentown community members shared their voice to create the Vision 2030 Plan. The result of the hard work and collaboration is a bold but realistic set of goals and recommendations focused on inclusive economic development, safe and affordable housing, welcoming neighborhoods, accessible and connected transportation, and a healthy community.

Allentown is at an important juncture – we have seen our population grow significantly over the past 10 years and experienced the revitalization of our downtown. With the momentum poised to continue, we look to our future with a commitment to inclusive and equitable growth and opportunity for all Allentonians. Allentown Vision 2030 is a plan for the entire city – all our neighborhoods, our diverse communities, and partners have a role to play in making the Plan a reality.

The City of Allentown will use the Vision 2030 Plan as our guiding framework over the next 10 years. The Plan provides a coordinated and collaborative approach for City Departments and Bureaus, our public, private, nonprofit, and institutional partners to work together on Plan implementation. Partnerships are critical to the success of Allentown Vision 2030 and are the foundation of the Plan. We are committed to cultivating our existing partnerships and exploring new and innovative ways to work together as we implement Allentown Vision 2030.

The City is committed to transparency and accountability – we will provide a yearly Allentown Vision 2030 Report Card to show our progress on the Plan's actions and outline where we are headed next. The Vision 2030 Comprehensive Plan is ambitious, but collectively as a city we have room to expand opportunities for all Allentonians through the implementation of the Plan.

Allentown Vision 2030 is a community-led plan. We are incredibly thankful for the engagement of our many community members who attend Community Collaboration Meetings, participated in focus groups, took the Community Survey, and stopped by the Community Engagement Hub to help create the Allentown Vision 2030 recommendations. We look forward to working alongside you as we implement Allentown Vision 2030, together. Allentown Vision 2030 is Your City, Your Voice, Your Plan!

Thank you,

Ray O'Connell  
Mayor

# INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, Allentown has reflected the larger trends of the U.S. economy. A town carved out of the original Penn purchase, Allentown transitioned from a small farming village into an industrial hub for silk, automotive products, breweries, and later, the first transistor radio and modern electronics. In the 1970s, its industrial dominance began to fade as factories consolidated. Today, the community reflects the country's change to a knowledge economy. Healthcare and office jobs are emerging as key sectors in the economy and many workers are employed by the logistics industry, which is bolstered by internet commerce.

Shifts in the economy have caused changes in Allentown's population as well. With the rise of industrialization in the 19th century, large numbers of German and Irish immigrants arrived to the area. The shrinking of major industries in the 1970s caused the city's population to decline. However, since 2000, a new wave of immigrants has moved into the city, which has contributed to Allentown becoming the third most populous city in Pennsylvania.

Since 2000, the population in Allentown has increased nearly 14 percent, from 106,606 in 2000 to 121,283 in 2017 (Table 1).

**Lehigh Valley City Population Growth**

Population	Allentown	Bethlehem	Easton	PA
2010 Population Estimates	118,093	74,986	26,769	12,702,857
2017 Population Estimates	121,283	75,707	27,109	12,805,537
Population Change 2010 to 2017	2.7%	1.0%	1.3%	.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Quickfacts <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/allentowncitypennsylvania>

The city is also changing demographically. In 2000, the Hispanic-identifying population was 25,970. By 2017, this number had more than doubled to 60,800 of Allentown residents identifying as Hispanic. The foreign-born population is about 17% of Allentown's population, with 20,867 residents identifying as foreign born.

Allentown's growth is unique in Pennsylvania - outside of Philadelphia and the Lehigh Valley, population growth in the state has plateaued. It is likely that the

economic forces at play in the New York City - Philadelphia metro areas will continue to impact Allentown and lead to ongoing population growth and investment.

As Allentown continues to grow and change, the 10-year comprehensive and economic development plan is an opportunity to create a framework to foster inclusive and equitable growth for a prosperous and vibrant future for all Allentonians. The development of Allentown Vision 2030 - our city's 10-year plan to guide growth and development - engaged thousands of community members who shared their voices and ideas to shape the future of Allentown.

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

Elements of comprehensive plans include guidance about where and what kind of housing, shopping, offices, and industrial buildings will be built, how people will move around the city; and how services and amenities will be made available to residents.

In Allentown, the comprehensive planning process has been combined with an economic development planning process. An Economic Development Plan has a set of policies, processes and programs deployed to improve a city's quality of life, promote job creation, build community and resident wealth; and strengthen the tax base.

Decisions about how a city will develop are inherently connected to economic growth. One example is the use of large parcels of land. A community might decide to develop industry on the land because it may lead to more jobs, or it could decide to put homes in that space and provide more affordable housing. Each type of development has different impacts; a large housing development will create demand for more schools, more parking, and more utilities, while industrial development creates a need to plan how products transported in large trucks will connect with regional transportation systems, and potentially deal with noise and shift work traffic.

Allentown Vision 2030 addresses how the many systems in a city are connected and how decisions made in one area - such as development of jobs - can impact a city's

# Allentown's Vision 2030

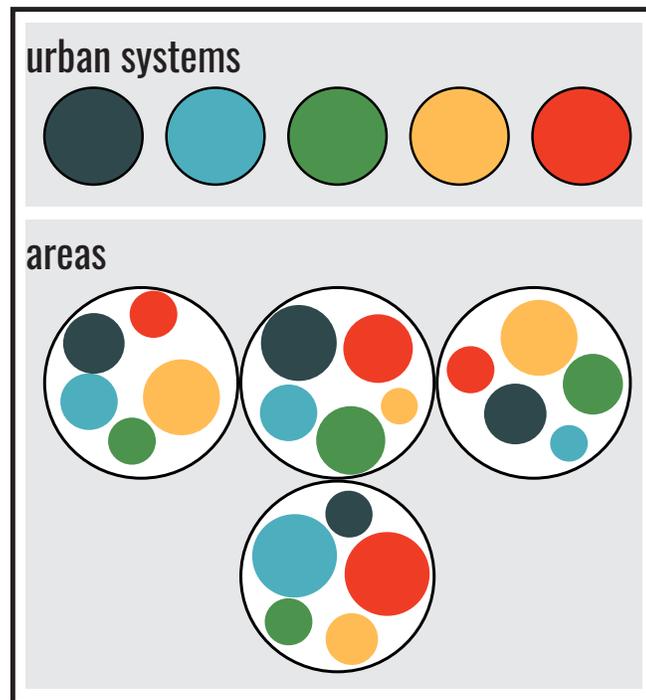
transportation system and housing market. The recommendations in Allentown Vision 2030 address the interconnected nature of city systems including economic development, housing, transportation, parks and open space, services, community health, historic preservation; and the environment. Approaching these topics as connected systems ensures Allentown Vision 2030 is taking a holistic and strategic approach to improving the quality of life for all who live, work; and play in our city.

## A NEW MODEL FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code (MPC) stipulates that a comprehensive plan must have the following elements:

- Statement of community development goals and objectives
- Land Use Plan
- Housing Plan
- Transportation Plan
- Community Facilities Plan
- Estimate of environmental, conservation, fiscal, economic development; and social consequences of the plan on the municipality
- Natural and Historic Resource Protection Plan

However, a plan each of these topics was a chapter would not show how a city's systems overlap. With that structure, Allentown Vision 2030 could not address the needs that emerged from the community planning process.



Allentown Vision 2030 is based on the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's "Implementable" comprehensive plan framework. The Vision 2030 Plan describes Allentown's Urban Systems and demonstrates how they could apply to city neighborhoods with Area Plans. With this framework, Allentown's Vision 2030 Comprehensive Plan creates a vision for the future and actionable steps to implement that vision.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Comprehensive Plan describes a community vision and outlines the steps needed to make the vision a reality. Comprehensive Plans make recommendations that inform leaders how to use the land to guide future growth and development. More than just a document recording past and present land use trends with a proposed course of action, a Comprehensive Plan is a way to engage and empower community members to make decisions about a shared future.

- ALLENTOWN FOR ALL
- COMMUNITY COLLABORATION
- ALLENTOWN'S HISTORY & GROWTH
- A MAP TO VISION 2030

*Results from Deck City Activity*

*Source: Community Collaboration Meeting, February 2019*



...saves  
access to

# ES, IF...

(free to elaborate)



NG

funding  
to  
somehow



## RENTER PROTECTION

write down something that you'd like to see  
in Allentown!

Add HOUSING  
INSPECTORS!!

'd like to see  
nittee  
of it  
& make  
& enforcable



## HOMEOWNERSHIP PIPELINE

## Chapter 1

# ALLENTOWN FOR ALL

Throughout Allentown Vision 2030, the mission of ‘Allentown for All’ has driven the process. Allentown for All means recognizing and respecting the sacrifices and hard work of past generations, while planning for the success of future generations. It means being a city that offers a variety of safe and secure housing options. It means having access to a high quality education. It means considering the needs of all, so that people of all ages will be able to access the services, goods, and recreation to maintain a healthy, productive lifestyle.

The planning process for Allentown Vision 2030 reflects the mission of involving all of Allentown. The Allentown for All framework is informed by the following vision statements that guide the Allentown Vision 2030 strategies and implementation:

---

ECONOMIC INCLUSIVITY

CITY AS A STEWARD

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

COMMUNITY  
EMPOWERMENT &  
COLLABORATION

---

*Students Talk About  
Planning In Allentown*

*Source: Community Bike Works*





P

City of Dallas  
Bike Works

Champion

Community Survey Results

...ackles on:  
...the City Council and the  
...community.



## 01 ECONOMIC INCLUSIVITY

In Allentown, anyone, regardless of their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, place of birth, family, background, age, race, ethnicity, or other circumstances, has full, fair, and equitable access to labor markets, financial tools, entrepreneurship, and more generally, economic opportunity.

### Community Insight:

*Allentown Vision 2030 Survey (fall 2018)*

“Reduce inequality for neighborhoods in and around the NIZ.”

“Allentown should have more affordable housing units for medium to low income residents.”

“Ensure improvements help existing residents improve their way of life, access to good education and health care.”



## 02 CITY AS A STEWARD

Allentown is a responsible steward of its citizens’ tax dollars, investing in projects that generate a return on investment through decreased social costs (e.g. health) and increased tax revenue from a more efficient use of land.

### Community Insight:

*Allentown Vision 2030 Survey (fall 2018)*

#### What infrastructure improvements are needed?

(Asked to Choose Top 3)

**70%** Improvements to Existing Streets & Roadways

**63%** Improvements Related to Traffic Flow

**61%** Pedestrian Improvements

**43%** Public Transportation Services

#### What developments do you feel Allentown needs more of?

(Asked to Choose Top 3)

**49%** Parks, entertainment, & recreation

**44%** Bike and walking friendly trails & streets

**38%** Grocery stores and shopping centers



Economic disparity exists in the Allentown community and there is a recognized need for equitable development strategies to balance this dynamic and provide opportunity to all residents. A strong educational foundation and public school system are key pieces to supporting an inclusive and equitable Allentown. Enhancing access and opportunities starting with quality Pre-K and K-12 education to pathways in higher education, technical and trade schools, and workforce development are essential for economic mobility and opportunity. Access to a good education, living wage jobs, training and workforce programs, housing, and essential services is the basis for building an inclusive, equitable future for all Allentonians.



In Allentown, taxes cover a number of essential city services, including supporting the Allentown School District. Allentown recognizes citizens deserve a high level of service for the taxes they pay. And through strategic development of new and existing retail, residential, industrial uses, and commercial areas, Allentown's tax base will increase. Improved services and recreation options can help to improve social indicators of health, which will lead to a better quality of life for Allentown residents.

The strength of a city is directly linked to the strength of its school district. The City of Allentown and the Allentown School District are two separate entities, but there is a mutual benefit to collaboration and a shared vision of success for the communities they serve. The City of Allentown and the Allentown School District are committed to establishing a collaborative approach to address shared priorities of enhancing opportunities for our youth, supporting our neighborhoods, and strengthening our city and school district to improve the quality of life for all Allentonians.

## Why Economic Inclusivity?

**57%** of the population are not homeowners, and therefore are not building equity in property

Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2013-2015)

**85%** of the population over 25 does not have a college degree, exempting them from the highest paying jobs

Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2013-2015)

**27%** of residents are living in poverty, which is more than double Pennsylvania's poverty rate

Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2013-2015)

## Why City as a Steward?

**Taxes support the essential services and functions of Allentown**, including our schools, public safety, and maintaining our roads and infrastructure.

**The City commits to transparency and accountability** to be a good steward of citizen tax dollars.

**The City of Allentown seeks to achieve financial stability.**

**Investments by the City** to improve the quality of life for all Allentonians will support future investments and growth to enhance the economic outlook of Allentown.



### 03 DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Allentown has long been a diverse city, but not everyone has always felt included. Allentown will be a city of welcoming neighborhoods. Allentown’s diversity is a strength, and as we head towards 2030 all people should feel welcome, respected, and safe in our community.

#### Community Insight:

*Allentown Vision 2030 Survey (fall 2018)*

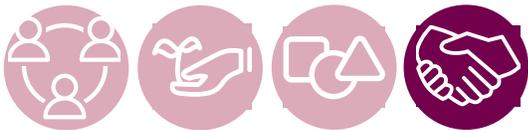


“Celebrate being a city and all the diversity that comes with it.”

“Diversity is a positive. Use it as an advantage.”

“Include those living in the city to be a part of the revitalization and not a perceived nuisance .”

“[Have] more cultural events that include people from all cultures led by a diverse board of community members. This should be a collaborative effort.”



### 04 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT & COLLABORATION

Citizens have come together to contribute to Allentown Vision 2030, and their participation will ensure that the vision is brought to fruition. The city will facilitate this participation through new structures of engagement, guided, in part, by Allentown Vision 2030.

#### Community Insight:

*Allentown Vision 2030 Survey (fall 2018)*



“Get more diverse people of the community to get involved in helping Allentown move forward for the future.”

“Find ways to engage the community in projects...make people feel pride and ownership...encourage them to stay and make improvements when needed.”

“Allow community members to have a say in their city. This includes youth...make sure they are included in community improvement decision making.”



People from different backgrounds see the world differently. New insights can lead to new ways of doing things, new business opportunities, and new ways to experience a place. Economically speaking, today's world is increasingly global, and in order for Allentown's economy to thrive, its companies will need to meet the needs of a changing consumer population in the United States and abroad. Welcoming and valuing diversity makes a city and its economy stronger.

Ashraf and Galor describe how cultural diversity creates stronger economies. "[The] interplay between cultural assimilation and cultural diffusion have played a significant role in giving rise to differential patterns of economic development across the globe." [1]

[1] Ashraf and Galor, "Cultural Diversity, Geographical Isolation and the Origin of the Wealth of Nations," National Bureau of Economic Research, 2019

## Why Diversity and Inclusion?

**Allentown is growing more diverse.** While the Hispanic population has grown in recent years, there are many diverse cultures in Allentown. According to the US Census Bureau, over 6,000 households in Allentown speak a language that is not English or Spanish.

Neighborhoods are vibrant and multifaceted and serve the needs of all residents when they have a **diversity of income levels and corresponding housing situations.**

**According to the Allentown Vision 2030 Community Survey (fall 2018), Allentonians feel most comfortable or welcome in arts and cultural spaces, with healthcare providers, and in parks. Allentonians feel less comfortable or welcome in regards to public safety, education (K-12), and childcare.**



In the last decade, Allentown's population has grown. New residents may be unfamiliar with how to engage in city government or make their ideas heard. Additionally, in recent years, turmoil in city government has caused mistrust from citizens. Top-down planning decisions have advanced the city's economy, but neighborhoods that are outside of the downtown have not seen the same attention. Opening up the process of planning to neighborhood groups will help deliver smaller-scale wins that build trust.

Developing a vision for 2030 will inspire community groups, institutions, and nonprofits to join in its implementation. The City of Allentown cannot accomplish Vision 2030 alone. The newly formed Allentown Vision 2030 Community Ambassador Program provides a way for community members and neighborhood groups to engage in projects to support the implementation of Vision 2030. Collaboration and partnership on these actions will bring success.

## Why Community Empowerment and Collaboration?

**16%** of residents in Allentown are between the ages of 20 and 29. Allentown has a young population.

There is disparity in incomes between residents of different neighborhoods of Allentown and **everyone deserves a voice in how the city develops.**

Source: Census American Community Survey 2018 1-Year Survey

## Chapter 2

# COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

A collective vision of the future could not be created without meaningful engagement and community participation. The Allentown Vision 2030 community process was guided by principles to ensure that Allentonians' voices are heard.

### **VISION 2030 ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES**

Provide opportunities for ALL residents of Allentown to engage in the visioning process

Build trust between the City of Allentown and the residents, organizations, institutions, and companies that call it home

Make Allentown Vision 2030 a catalyst for change

The community planning process reflects an ongoing conversation between the city, the Allentown Vision 2030 planning team, and the community.

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### **The Planning Process**

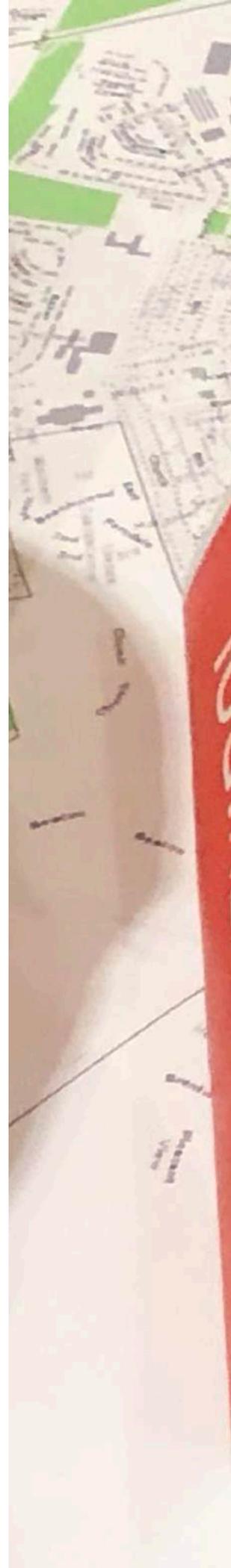
### **Community Voice**

### **Community Collaboration Meetings**

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*Results from  
Storymapping Activity*

*Source: Community Collaboration Meeting, June 2019*



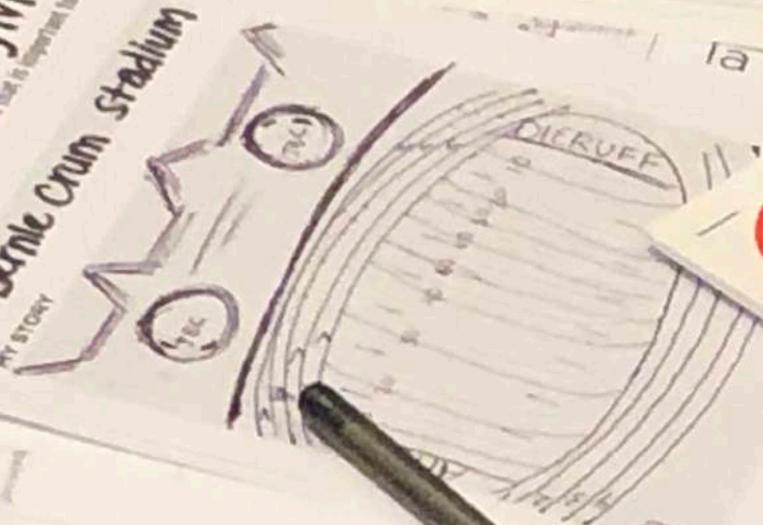
# Allentown StoryMap

Tell us a story about a place in Allentown that is important to you

MY PLACE

J Bernie Crum Stadium

MY STORY



CIOS SON  
STANDO OPORTUN  
CENTRO DE ACTIVIDA

# Allentown StoryMap

Tell us a story about a place in Allentown that is important to you

East Allentown  
All of the buildings, jobs  
and 16 year olds,  
many opportunities  
such as, jobs.

South Allentown  
Many houses that  
people can afford  
and places where  
kids and adults  
can have fun  
there is variety  
of places to choose

How and why  
does the  
hood change  
How can  
change?  
what can  
change?

## BUEN

Los residentes  
conectados a cen  
centro y la región via  
**TRANSPORTE PÚBLICO Y C**  
para bicicletas y peatones  
**CAMINOS DES**  
**PEATON**

Maguel 472-5529  
609-261-890  
Esperal

Para tradicion simultanea  
Navegue (1)

PRIMAVERA

DESC



# The Planning Process

The Allentown Vision 2030 community planning process provided a variety of ways to receive insights, feedback, and ideas for the future of Allentown.

In some phases, the conversation was literal - through interviews and focus groups, Allentonians conveyed their hopes and concerns for the city. In other stages, the planning team created ways to listen, such as a citywide survey that was taken by over a thousand people.

In person, citywide conversations happened through Community Collaboration Meetings where community members shared their voices and ideas. This was done through facilitated group activities and prioritization exercises, such as voting on key actions that would help achieve the collective goals of Allentown Vision 2030. There were four total Community Collaboration Meetings. All meeting materials, as well as presentations and facilitated activities, were available in English and Spanish. Each Community Collaboration Meeting built on one another to guide the recommendations outlined in the plan.

## PHASES

1

### level setting

SEPT - DEC 2018

our current understanding of the history, people, places, businesses, and assets that make Allentown unique

2

### vision+scenario development

JAN - MAR 2019

the evaluation of possible and preferred strategies to support community values and enhance Allentown's strengths

3

### build sessions

MAR - AUG 2019

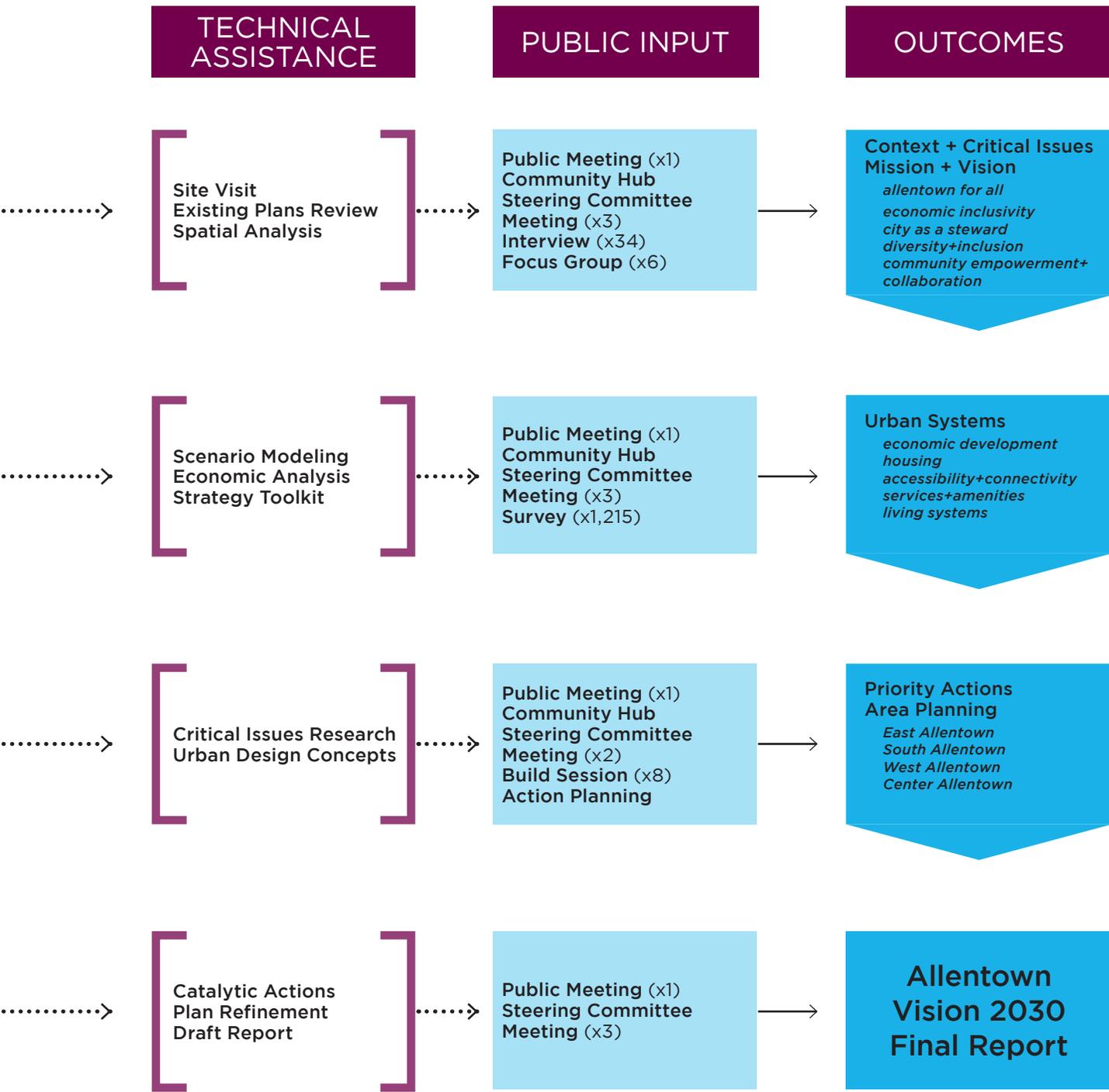
in-depth sessions to brainstorm creative solutions, opportunities, partnerships, and funding sources

4

### launch

SEPT - DEC 2019

a framework for action that comprehensively and succinctly reflect the city's vision



# Community Voice

Who took part in these conversations? The process was designed to capture voices across all of Allentown. Engagement included the Community Collaboration Meetings, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, as well as input from the Allentown Vision 2030 Community Ambassador Program and the Allentown Vision 2030 Steering Committee.

## STEERING COMMITTEE

*List of Steering Committee Members on page iv*

The Steering Committee is comprised of community, nonprofit, institutional, and private sector leaders from the city and region.

## COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

The Community Ambassador Program is a network of community members who work with Allentown Vision 2030 to advance engagement and capacity building across our neighborhoods. The Program leverages community expertise and input in the planning process, and helps create capacity for the implementation of Allentown Vision 2030 in our communities and neighborhoods.



*Build Session Meeting*  
Source: City of Allentown

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HUB

In March 2019, the City of Allentown Department of Community and Economic Development opened the Allentown Vision 2030 Community Engagement Hub in a donated storefront in downtown Allentown. The Community Engagement Hub invited community members to drop in, learn about the Allentown Vision 2030 planning process, and participate in activities to capture their priorities and feedback on plan development.

The Community Engagement Hub is a model to make city government, programs, and projects more accessible and transparent for citizens. The Hub was open from 12-5pm every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in March through October 2019, and was used as a meeting space for local neighborhood groups and nonprofits. During its open hours, the Hub engaged hundreds of Allentown residents, workers, and visitors in the Vision 2030 planning process.

## INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

The Allentown Vision 2030 planning team conducted 34 stakeholder interviews and hosted 6 focus groups in topic areas of Environment, Youth, Neighborhood Organizations, Economic Development, Arts and Culture, and Small Business.

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION MEETINGS

The Allentown Vision 2030 team hosted 4 community meetings, one in each area of the city. In each meeting the community considered a different set of issues and participated in a series of activities that informed the planning team's next steps.

## KEY THEMES

The following ten topics of concern emerged from the interviews and focus groups:

1. **PAST ADMINISTRATION/GOVERNMENT**  
How can we re-establish trust?
2. **NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT ZONE**  
How can this create beneficial outcomes for all of Allentown?
3. **PARKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
How do we maintain and improve access?
4. **WORKFORCE**  
How do we educate and build skills?
5. **INEQUALITY AND PROMOTING EQUITY**  
How can we ensure prosperity flows to everyone?
6. **LEADERSHIP CAPACITY**  
How do we build a pipeline of leaders?
7. **EDUCATION**  
How can we best support our young people?
8. **ENTREPRENEURSHIP**  
How do we create access to opportunity?
9. **RE-INDUSTRIALIZATION** How do we balance industrial jobs with other city needs?
10. **PRIVATE INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT**  
How can we bring everyone to the table?



## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION MEETINGS

13 November 2018  
Eastside Youth Center

1

### LEVEL SETTING

Where is Allentown today and where do we want to go?

7 February 2019  
South Mountain Middle School

2

### BUILDING A VISION FOR ALLENTOWN

Shaping Allentown's Future

18 June 2019  
JCC of the Lehigh Valley

3

### PRIORITIES & PLACES

How do we make our Plan a reality in our neighborhoods?

12 September 2019  
St Luke's Sacred Heart Auditorium

4

### YOUR CITY, YOUR VOICE, YOUR PLAN

Review of the draft Allentown Vision 2030 Plan

'Areas of Allentown' Activity

Source: Consultant Team

**55%** of residents rate the quality of life **GOOD** in Allentown

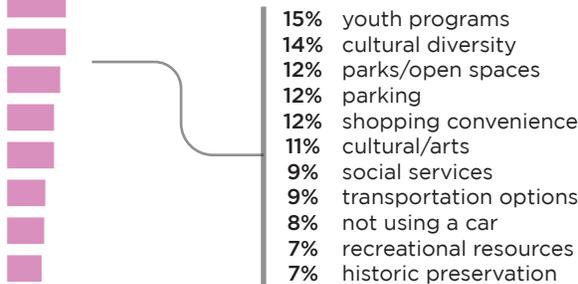
55% GOOD  
29% FAIR  
6% POOR  
1% EXCELLENT

## Community Survey Findings (Fall 2018)

### Top investments to enhance our quality of life



### We also care about



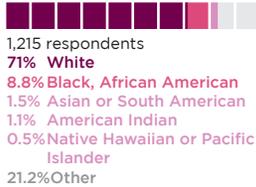
From November 16th - December 20th, 2018 an online community survey was available to help guide the direction of the plan. The survey was distributed with the purpose of gathering community input about the future of Allentown. There were 1,215 total survey respondents, and 116 of them were completed in Spanish.

Questions focused on the following areas:

- Economic Mobility
- Quality of Place
- Accessibility
- Community and Economic Priorities

Extensive analysis of the survey is included in the Community Survey Results Appendix, including information on education, commutes, comfort and accessibility of amenities, and prioritization of economic development focus areas.

#### RESPONDENTS BY RACE



#### RESPONDENTS BY ETHNICITY



#### RESPONDENTS BY GENDER



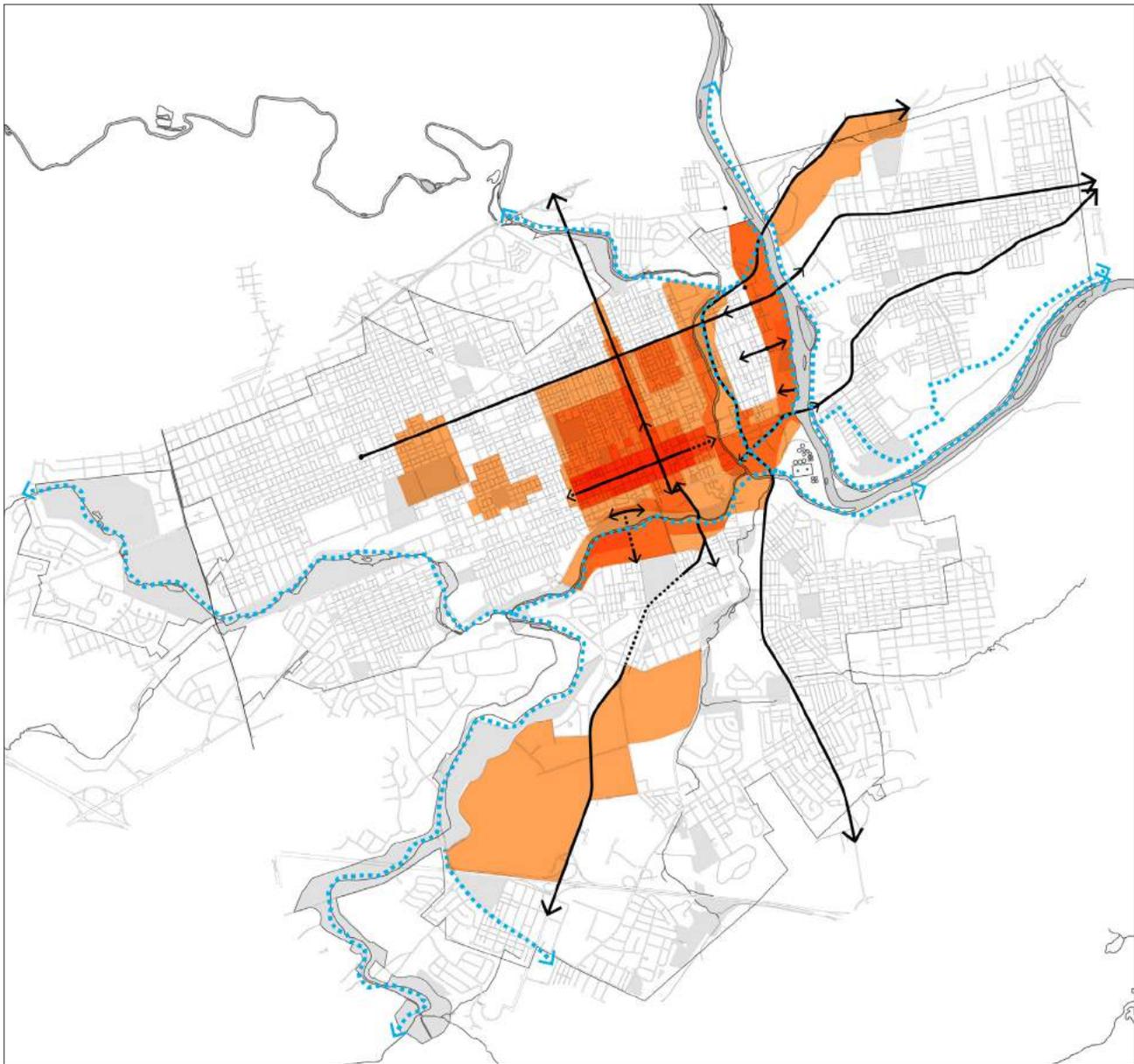
#### RESPONDENTS BY AGE



#### MOST COMMONLY USED WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE NEEDS OF ALLENTOWN



FIGURE #5



**LEGEND**

— Defined Trails - Off-road pedestrian/cyclist

— Defined Connections - Neighborhood and Regional

**# OF OVERLAPPING PLAN AREAS**

- 1 Plan
- 2 Plans
- 3 Plans
- 4 Plans

**1 MILE**

**UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY’S WORK:  
PAST PLANS SUMMARY**

Allentown and the Lehigh Valley have had many years of focused planning. In the development of the Allentown Vision 2030 Plan, fifty past plans pertaining to the City of Allentown and the Lehigh Valley region, ranging from transportation to land use to economic development, were reviewed.

The City of Allentown map above shows the geographies of previous plans with a graduated color scale indicating which areas of the city have seen the most attention (Figure 5). The downtown/Center City area and the area of the Lehigh River waterfront located in the city’s First and Sixth Wards have received considerable attention within the past 10 years.

Additionally, while planning efforts have focused on connecting major corridors across Allentown, there has not been significant planning activity in the East and South areas of Allentown. Moving forward, strategic thinking could be applied on how to spread the planning energy across the rivers.

# COMMUNITY COLLABORATION MEETINGS



13 November 2018  
Eastside Youth Center

## LEVEL SETTING

Where is Allentown today and where do we want to go?

The first Allentown Vision 2030 Community Collaboration Meeting was held on November 13th, 2018. Working alongside the community, principles and priorities were established regarding future needs. The following questions encouraged the community to share insights about the current condition of Allentown and responses helped identify a shared set of values used to guide the Allentown Vision 2030 community planning process:

- How would you describe the Allentown of today and tomorrow?
- How will Allentown be different in the future?
- Where are the places that make Allentown unique?
- What are the top issues that need to be addressed through this process?

By asking about preferences at the first community meeting, a working set of values was developed:

*'Allentown Today & Tomorrow' Activity*

Source: Consultant Team

## VALUES

### MOBILITY

We can move safely within the city and to destinations beyond. We have choices as to how we travel.

### WELL BEING & SAFETY

We are able to live healthy and active lives and to participate in civic life.

### COMMUNITY SERVICES

We value strong neighborhoods with essential services that serve a diverse population.

### LIVING SYSTEMS

We value ecological systems that are integrated into neighborhoods and improve human health and resiliency.

### PROSPERITY

Allentonians are able to thrive with equitable and abundant economic opportunity





7 February 2019  
South Mountain Middle School

## BUILDING A VISION FOR ALLENTOWN

Shaping Allentown's future

The second Community Collaboration Meeting in February 2019 focused on distilling insights from data and community feedback into potential areas of action, focusing on how to balance different future economic scenarios. Combining data and community feedback, the following four scenarios were considered as potential pathways for Allentown. These scenarios are not meant to be mutually exclusive; each can co-exist with the others.

The next step was to figure out ways that these visions could become a reality. A list of actions was developed for each scenario, sourced through research ideas put forth in the survey, and best practices from other cities similar to Allentown. In Community Collaboration Meeting #2, community members prioritized these actions and suggested some of their own.

### SCENARIOS

#### MAKER CITY

A new vision for manufacturing focused on innovation and technology

#### CITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Any resident of Allentown has the means to improve their life through accessing resources for the 21st-century economy.

#### WELCOME HOME

Housing in Allentown accommodates anyone who wants to call the city home.

#### QUALITY OF LIFE

Arts, recreation, and amenities are infused throughout the fabric of Allentown.

*'Scenario Planning' Activity*

Source: Consultant Team



# B

March 2019  
Location varied

## BUILD SESSIONS

How can we address our most critical issues in depth?

In March 2019, Allentown Vision 2030 hosted over 200 community and technical experts in Build Sessions to discuss how these topics related to creating an equitable, inclusive and prosperous future for all of Allentown.

These Build Sessions were intensive workshops where community members and experts gathered to discuss a specific topic. Allentown's Vision 2030 Build Session topics were distilled from the results of Community Collaboration Meeting #2 in February 7th, 2019. The planning team researched the topics in more detail and created short summaries of their findings and shared them with participants in advance of the sessions.

During the workshops, participants added more information and discussed possible solutions. The workshop discussions were summarized and synthesized into a final report.

CATALYTIC SITES:  
SOUTH FOURTH STREET &  
ALLENTOWN STATE HOSPITAL

WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

ENTREPRENEURIALISM

HOUSING

WELCOMING NEIGHBORHOODS

ENHANCING NATURAL SYSTEMS

CONNECTIVITY AND  
ACCESSIBILITY

CHANGING DOMINANT  
INDUSTRIES

Build Session  
Workshop

Source: Consultant Team





## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION MEETING

18 June 2019  
JCC of the Lehigh Valley

### PRIORITIES & PLACES

How do we make our Plan a reality in our neighborhoods?

Using the contributions from the previous Community Collaboration Meetings, the Build Sessions, and the Steering Committee, the Allentown Vision 2030 planning team identified five Urban Systems that would organize the resulting plan.

Each Urban System has a set of principles and a series of related actions that community members were asked to prioritize. The results of this exercise informed the basis of the recommendations for the Allentown Vision 2030 Urban Systems .

The Urban Systems' actions were then applied to the geographic areas of Allentown: East Allentown, South Allentown, West Allentown, and Center Allentown. Since each neighborhood has diverse needs, Community Collaboration Meeting #3 asked community members to discuss how the Urban Systems might apply to each area of Allentown.

From previous meetings and discussions, the Allentown Vision 2030 Planning team distilled vision statements for each area. Community members were asked to evaluate the vision statements and answer the following for each area of Allentown:

- What strategies would best support each area's needs?
- What would accelerate this change?
- What would inhibit this change?

The results of this exercise inform the basis of the Areas of Allentown Plan of the report.

*'Areas of Allentown' Activity*

Source:  
Consultant Team



## URBAN SYSTEMS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

HOUSING

ACCESSIBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

SERVICES & AMENITIES

LIVING SYSTEMS

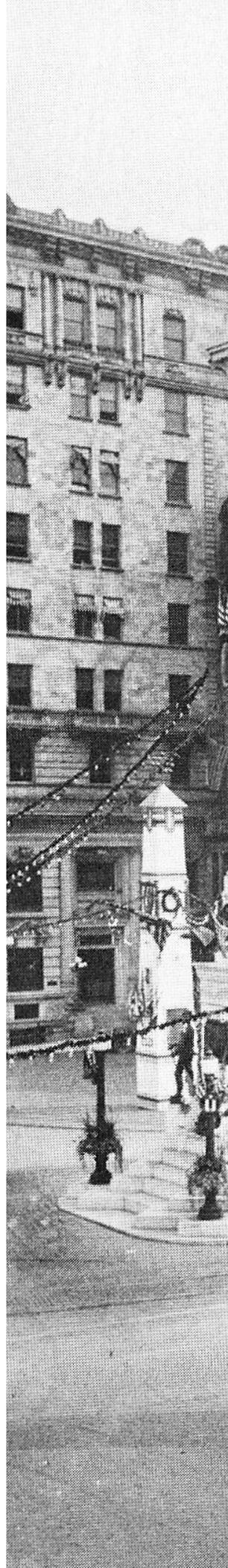
## Chapter 3

# ALLENTOWN'S HISTORY & GROWTH

Allentown's history is strongly tied to the area's economy as well as a diverse and growing population. In order to plan for our city's future, it is important to understand how our past has shaped our city today.

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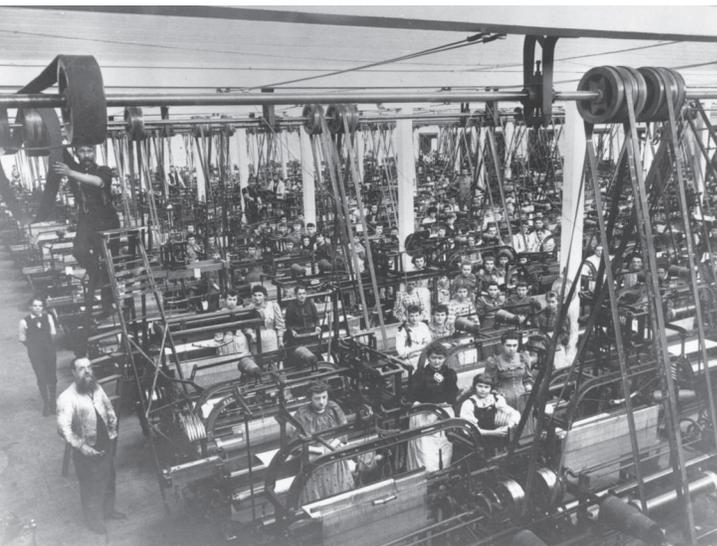
*Allentown Center Square*  
Source: Lehigh Historical Society,  
November 1918





# Allentown's Vision 2030 Historical Narrative

Image Sources: Lehigh County Historical Society



**In 1762**, Allentown was originally named Northamptontown by its founder Chief Justice of Pennsylvania William Allen. Despite its formal name, from its founding, nearly everyone called it “Allen’s town.” Northamptontown played an important role in the American Revolution in 1777 when the Liberty Bell was brought to the area to be hidden in what today is the Zion’s Reformed United Church of Christ in downtown Allentown.

**In 1838**, the opening of the Lehigh Canal provided Allentown with a connection for the passage of goods. The canal immediately opened markets for goods produced in the area, including iron, lumber, and lime, and served as a major transportation thoroughfare.

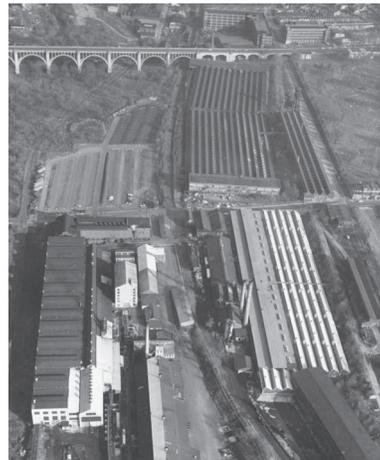
**In 1838**, the city officially adopted the name Allentown. Allentown’s industry boomed in the mid-19th century. The iron industry took off, supported by arrival of the railroad in 1851 when the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company opened its station.

**In 1881**, Allentown’s silk industry started with the Adelaide Silk Mill, and greatly expanded in the early 20th century. The abundant labor, steady water and energy, and close proximity to the large markets of Philadelphia and New York City, caused the region to become the second largest producer of silk in the world.



**In 1895**, the first trolley line arrived along Hamilton Street and growth continued in the late 19th century. The trolley opened new areas for development to the west, allowing residents to take the trolley to work. One of the city's neighborhoods spurred by the trolley line was the West Park neighborhood.

**In 1898**, the Soldiers' and Sailors Monument commemorating the soldiers and sailors of Allentown from the Civil War was installed in Center Square. Development of Hamilton Street continued with Center Square as the heart of the downtown business district.



**In 1905**, Mack Trucks, one of the most important manufacturers of trucks in the 20th century, opened its initial plant in Allentown along the Little Lehigh Creek North. The company played a major role in the production of trucks during World Wars I and II and sold trucks across the world.



**In 1928**, the PP&L Building was constructed on Hamilton Street and the vibrancy of Allentown continued through the 1920s. It was not only the highest skyscraper in town but selected by the Encyclopedia Britannica as one of the best examples of Art Deco architecture.



**In 1947**, Western Electric constructed a factory at 555 Union Boulevard for the production of television tubes and transistors. After World War II, Allentown remained a vibrant economic center. Trolley service was discontinued in 1951, and the City began a major project to renovate the shopping areas along the street. Stores such as the renowned Hess Brothers Department Stores held many special events and hosted celebrities.



**In the 1960's and 1970's**, growth slowed in Allentown as industry and service businesses declined. The industrial base of Allentown and the Lehigh Valley was undermined as many plants and mills closed including the Neuweiler Brewery in 1968, multiple Mack Truck plants in the mid-1980s, Bethlehem Steel in 1995, and Hess Brothers Department Stores in 1996. The end of the trolley era created increasingly clogged streets. The construction of shopping centers in suburban areas outside of the city created the eventual shift of shopping off of Hamilton Street. The City worked to halt this economic decline, including the installation of canopies along Hamilton Street from the 1970s to 1999 to mimic the feeling of an indoor shopping center.

**In 2009**, the state legislator passed the Neighborhood Improvement Zone (NIZ) legislation and today, Allentown is seeing more than \$1 billion in new and planned development in its downtown business district. The 10,000 seat PPL Center at 7th and Hamilton Streets anchors the new development of office and commercial buildings, new apartment buildings, and restaurants and businesses.



**Today**, Allentown is the third largest city in Pennsylvania with a population of 121,278 (2017) - the highest in the city's history. Allentown has a diverse population, with over 50% of residents identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The city boasts a variety of arts and cultural institutions and is host to two minor league sports teams.

## Chapter 4

# A MAP TO VISION 2030!

### HOW TO USE THE COMPREHENSIVE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

The Allentown Vision 2030 Comprehensive and Economic Development Plan has four major sections. Each section builds on one another and provides a strategic framework for how the City of Allentown will grow and change over the next ten years.

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DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

CATALYTIC ACTIONS

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*Hamilton Street*

Source: City of Allentown





Bayard Rustin Way

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTEN LENOX TILDEN FOUNDATION

# DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

## SECTION 01

### Executive Summary

The Executive Summary explores how and why the planning process has been undertaken.

- Allentown For All
- Community Collaboration
- Allentown’s History & Growth
- A Map To Vision 2030

## SECTION 02

### Urban Systems

The five Urban Systems are a comprehensive way to understand the City of Allentown, and encompass many different forces and factors that make up the systems of the city. Under each system is a set of principles and policies, projects, and programs that will enhance these systems.

The five Urban Systems are:

- Economic Development
- Housing
- Accessibility and Connectivity
- Services and Amenities
- Living Systems

Under each Urban System, there is a list of Principles and corresponding actions under the principles. The Principles can be defined as the goals for each System. The actions that accompany each Principle detail how the goals will be accomplished, and have been sourced through the survey, interviews, and community meetings. Principles are listed by Urban System below:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	HOUSING	ACCESSIBILITY & CONNECTIVITY	SERVICES & AMENITIES	LIVING SYSTEMS
Increase Local Employment	Improve the Quality of Allentown Housing	Create Safe and Efficient Routes	Support Neighborhood Identity and Organizational Capacity	Plan for a Sustainable and Resilient Allentown
Increase Access to Training and Skill Building	Increase the Quantity of Healthy, Safe, and Affordable Housing	Connect Places in the City	Enhance Access to Local Essential Services and Amenities	Improve Community Health Outcomes
Foster Small Business Growth & Entrepreneurship	Expand Pathways to Homeownership	Welcome People to the City	Foster Inclusive and Welcoming Communities	Increase Environmental Stewardship
Enhance Land Value	Preserve Allentown’s Historic Legacy Housing	Create Mobility Choices		Create Productive and Connected Landscapes
Connect to Regional Markets		Prepare Allentown to be a Smart City		

SECTION 03

## Areas of Allentown

“Areas of Allentown” examines the city from four geographic areas:

- East Allentown
- South Allentown
- West Allentown
- Center Allentown

Each section illustrates how the Urban Systems’ recommendations can improve quality of life for the community. Each Area is examined in-depth to understand its current character; places, policies, and programs that could meet community needs; and how changes could affect and improve the overall functioning of the city.

SECTION 04

## Appendix

The Appendix includes the results of community engagement and other key investigations.

- Previous Plan Scan
- Community Survey Results
- Community Collaboration Meeting Summaries
- Public Comments: Allentown Vision 2030 Draft (SEPT - OCT 2019)

EAST ALLENTOWN	SOUTH ALLENTOWN	WEST ALLENTOWN	CENTER ALLENTOWN
East Allentown has walkable, transit-rich corridors that connect the neighborhood to regional centers.	Trails and greenways connect the distinct parts of South Allentown to downtown and west.	Enhancing and connecting cultural districts can create a more cohesive neighborhood experience.	Commercial corridor development creates a cultural district adjacent to downtown.
Multi-use, transit oriented development invites people to live in the neighborhood.	Redevelopment of vacant sites can support manufacturing, mixed use development, and commercial uses.	Connection of existing trails with regional trails creates new opportunities to bike and walk to other parts of Allentown.	Transit hubs, streetscape improvements, and one-way conversions create safer and more walkable neighborhoods.
Large redevelopment sites like the Allentown State Hospital can bring jobs, business, manufacturing/industry, housing, and public amenities to the community.	A zoning update and new housing allows the neighborhood to continue to attract first-time home-buyers.	Multi-modal hubs encourage transit oriented development.	Commercial clusters develop to serve the local population and become regional attractors.

# CATALYTIC ACTIONS

“Catalytic Actions” are broad, structural programs or policies that will impact multiple Urban Systems. Implementing these actions will make the largest impact on Allentown, and have the potential to shift the way the city develops.

Catalytic Actions are integrated throughout the Urban Systems Chapters. At the conclusion of the Urban Systems Chapters is a discussion of the implementation of Catalytic Actions and the yearly Allentown Vision 2030 Report Card to provide progress updates on the Plan’s goals and actions. The Catalytic Actions from the Urban Systems Chapters are listed below:

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Support the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem  
Arts + Culture Economic Development

## **HOUSING**

Land Bank

## **ACCESSIBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY**

Mobility Hubs  
Investment in Digital Infrastructure

## **SERVICES AND AMENITIES**

Youth Development Through Pre-K  
Community Centers: Existing and New

## **LIVING SYSTEMS**

Network of Greenways and Urban Trails

There are two Catalytic Actions that are foundational for the implementation of Allentown Vision 2030 and will be underway in early 2020.

## **The Zoning Code Update and the Neighborhood Planning Framework are Catalytic Actions.**

Led by the Department of Community and Economic Development Bureau of Planning & Zoning, working alongside multiple City departments and the larger Allentown community – these catalytic actions will address all urban systems and influence the recommendations laid out in each Urban System Chapter:

## **Zoning Code Update**

**Focus:** Support a zoning code that is progressive and that helps create a high quality of life in Allentown.

Looking into the future, Allentown has the ability to pivot toward a zoning code that prioritizes the development of a variety of housing types and transportation options. Orienting toward quality, mixed-use development will allow Allentown to increase the amount of municipal taxes it collects, while also providing environments that suit the changing preferences of residents.

## **Neighborhood Planning**

**Focus:** Create a framework for neighborhood-scale planning within the City of Allentown Department of Community & Economic Development and the Bureau of Planning & Zoning. Build the capacity of community members and neighborhood organizations to plan and meaningfully engage with the city in the development and implementation of neighborhood plans.

.....→ **ACTIONS**

**GOAL** Allentown’s Zoning Ordinance aims to maintain a high quality of life for residents in the city by regulating building forms and uses. An updated Zoning Ordinance can streamline procedures, reduce obstacles to achieving economic development goals, enhance utility and user-friendliness, encourage appropriate public input into the development review process, consolidate and simplify zones and uses, and incentivize development at targeted growth locations.

The City of Allentown Bureau of Planning and Zoning will lead a comprehensive update to the City’s Zoning Code. The update process will commence in early 2020 following the selection of a technical consultant to assist the city in the review and update of the Zoning Code.

The Bureau of Planning & Zoning will actively engage the Allentown community – residents, businesses, institutions, nonprofits, and other governmental entities – in the comprehensive update. Community meetings will be held to identify issues with the current Code and prioritize updates.

The comprehensive update of the City of Allentown Zoning Code aims to create a simplified and user-friendly approach that aligns with the recommendations of the Allentown Vision 2030 Plan. Innovative tools and best practices to promote affordable housing, residential and commercial density, and mixed-use development will be evaluated.

**SUGGESTED PARTNERS**

Allentown Bureau of Planning and Zoning, HARB-Historical Architecture Review Board, Allentown City Council, Allentown City Planning Commission, Neighborhood Associations, Development Community, community organizations, institutions, private sector/business

.....→ **ACTIONS**

**GOAL** Identify a framework for developing comprehensive neighborhood plans that are aligned with Allentown Vision 2030, address residents’ concerns regarding their daily wellbeing and collective future, and identify opportunities for collaboration to achieve results.

City of Allentown Bureau of Planning & Zoning will establish a framework for neighborhood planning that allows the city to partner with local neighborhood and community groups to create, adopt, and implement neighborhood plans based on the Allentown Vision 2030 framework.

Council members, city staff, and neighborhood associations/community groups will be involved and educated about the importance of neighborhood plans and the process.

Neighborhood planning will be representative of all residents, regardless of homeownership status, and involve institutional, nonprofit, and private sector groups appropriately.

Build capacity in community groups and provide resources for growth.

As the budget allows, City of Allentown will provide administrative and staff support for the development and implementation of neighborhood plans.

**SUGGESTED PARTNERS**

Neighborhood Associations; City of Allentown Bureau of Planning & Zoning; Mayor’s Office; community organizations; Public, private, nonprofit, and institutional partners





