

New Aerial Imagery Available for Allegan County

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The Allegan County Land Information Services (LIS) Department has just received new high-resolution color aerial imagery of the county. The air photos were taken in April 2009 and processed by Aerocon Photogrammetric Services Inc. under contract with Allegan County.

Up-to-date aerial imagery serves as a visual base map of the county and is an integral backbone of the County's geographic information system (GIS). It is used by most county departments, local units of government, organizations, private sector companies and the public.

Within county departments, the imagery is used daily to locate 911 calls and measure acreages for accurate property appraisals. The aerials are also used in planning many county facility, drain, road and park projects. Finally, they are critical for emergency planning, response and damage assessment.

Townships and cities use the aerial imagery to facilitate property assessment, zoning enforcement, economic development, planning projects and infrastructure management for water, sewer and roads.

While the County acquires aerial imagery primarily for internal use to make government more efficient and effective, private sector companies, organizations and the general public can request copies of the aerials from LIS in paper or digital format for a nominal charge. Imagery like this is commonly used in planning development projects, marketing and evaluating property, making public presentations and even mapping out favorite hunting spots.

In an excellent example of intergovernmental cooperation, Allegan County partnered with almost all local units of government as well as the State of Michigan to share the \$75,000 cost for the new aerial imagery. As the primary user, the County paid 30%, the State of Michigan contributed 15% and local government partners each contributed between 1% and 3% of the cost based on their area, population and various other factors. Working together has eliminated duplicative efforts, reduced the cost of imagery for all partners and made it available to all levels of government.

While governments have been acquiring aerial imagery for decades, recent newcomers Google Maps and Bing Maps have helped people better understand its usefulness. While Google and Bing offer free access to imagery for personal browsing these products do not yet meet the needs of government. Beyond issues of accuracy, quality and scheduling, numerous technical limitations and restrictions on government use exist.

However, the Michigan Communities Association of Mapping Professionals on behalf of Michigan's counties and local units of government has been working closely with the State of Michigan to negotiate an imagery acquisition partnership with the Microsoft Corporation that addresses these limitations. The recently negotiated imagery partnership with Microsoft is the first of its kind in the nation and if proven successful, Allegan County could add private sector partnership dollars to its next imagery acquisition, cutting costs even further.

For more information about the aerial imagery or other services offered by the Allegan County LIS Department call (269) 673-0518 or email cbesert@allegancounty.org.