WHAT IS THE DOWNTOWN AURORA MASTER PLAN?

The Downtown Master Plan outlines the community's vision for the future and identifies policies to help achieve that vision.

Downtown Aurora is rich in historic, cultural, and natural resources, which are highly valued and contribute to the quality of life enjoyed by its residents. Enhancing these qualities is the central priority of the Plan. Based on the key findings of the existing report, the following guiding principles emerged as priority recommendation areas to be addressed by the plan. These helped form the structure of the plan.

The process to develop the plan began in late 2015.

The City of Aurora received a grant for technical assistance to develop the Master Plan from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

CMAP is the regional planning agency for the seven counties of the Chicago Metropolitan area. CMAP has been working with City staff and leaders to develop the Draft Plan.

READ THE EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT:
http://cmap.is/lta-aurora

Guiding Principles & Vision

1. **Downtown Aurora will have a strong and diverse economic base, highlighting its creative entrepreneurs and restaurant options, built off of arts successes in the recent past.**
2. **Downtown Aurora will be welcoming to people who live here, work here, or just come to visit.**
3. **Downtown Aurora will be promoted and recognized as a desirable destination.**
4. **Downtown Aurora will have a comfortable and inviting environment for all modes of transportation.**
5. **The Fox River will be celebrated as the heart and center of Aurora.**
6. **Downtown Aurora will be known for its unique, memorable and attractive public spaces.**
7. **Downtown Aurora will be known for its robust and inspired arts, culture, and entertainment community.**
8. **Downtown Aurora will have a growing and engaged residential community.**

THE PLAN IS BASED ON PUBLIC INPUT

A plan is only as good as the commitment to implementing it by the public and their elected representatives. Therefore, it is crucial that public participation be a major component of plan development.

The City of Aurora and CMAP have worked to engage residents in the planning process through public workshops, one-on-one interviews with community leaders and stakeholders, steering committee meetings, focus group meetings, surveys and on-going communication with City residents.

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee was composed of representatives from several City departments, business community, arts commuity, developers and consultants, and residents. The steering committee provided guidance on the project and reviewed steps in the process:

Kirk Albinson, The Community Builders
Jimi Allen, Gravity Building
Lulu Blacksmith, Waubonsee Community College
Allison Buchwach, Metra
Karen Christensen, Fox Valley Music Foundation & A-Town Poetics
Rena Church, Aurora Public Art
Eric Gallt, City of Aurora
Kim Granholm, Aurora Downtown
Joe Grisson, African American Heritage Advisory Board
Martin Sandoval, Pace Bus
Dave Hulseberg, Invest Aurora
Sherman Jenkins, SLJ Development & Consultant, Inc.
Alex Minnella, City of Aurora
Gina Moga, City of Aurora
Cynthia Penne, Fox Valley Park District
Cadence Peterson, Invest Aurora
Stephane Phifer, City of Aurora
Heather Tabbert, RTA
Bill Wiet, City of Aurora

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

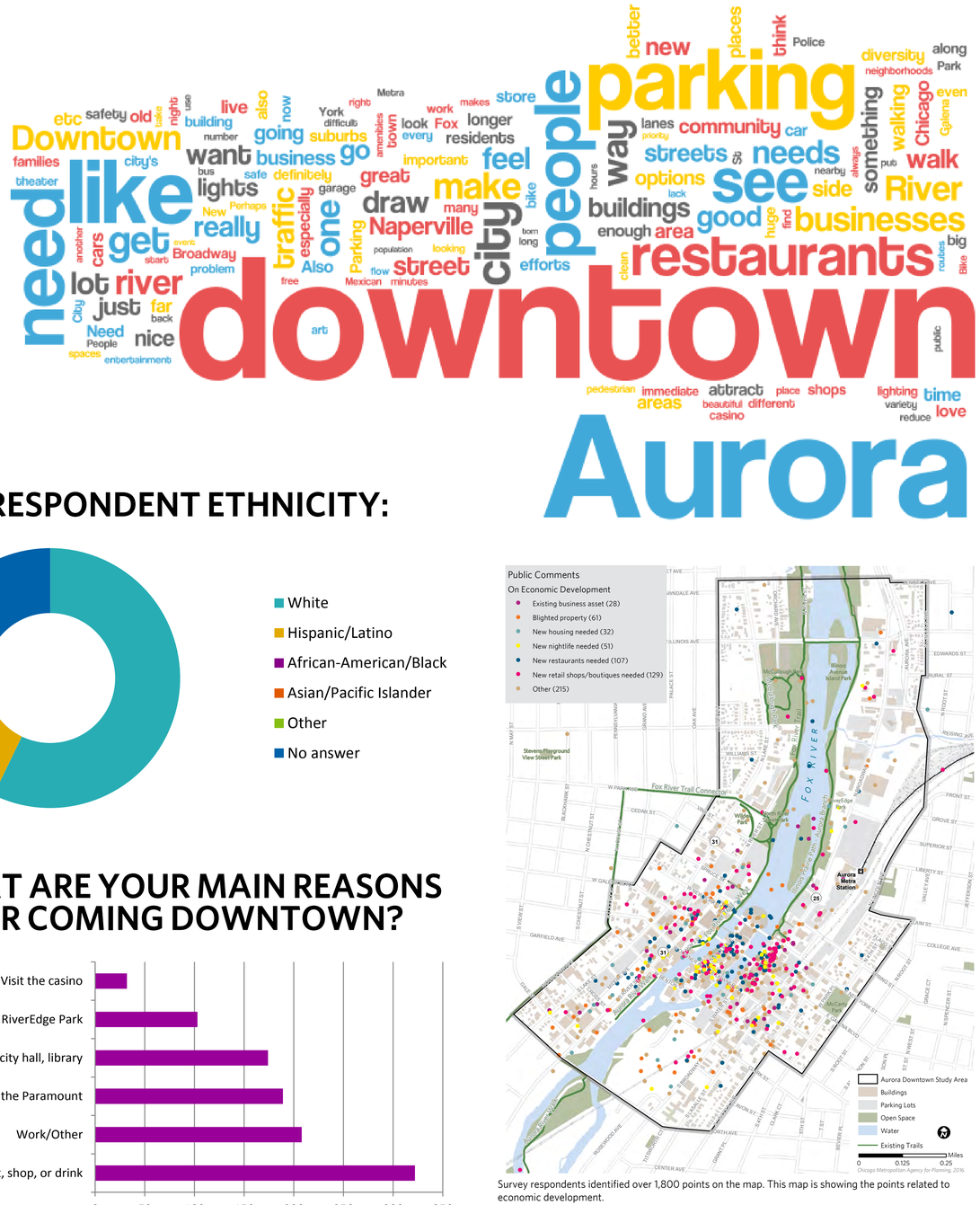
PUBLIC VISIONING WORKSHOP
- January 21, 2016

DIRECT OUTREACH TO LOCAL GROUPS
- African-American Heritage Advisory Board Meeting
- Public Workshop with Aurora Downtown
- Visioning with First Fridays Participants
- Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board Meeting
- Restore the Neighborhood Meeting with Alderman Garza
- Visioning with 15th Annual El Día de Los Niños Participants
- Aurora Hispanic Heritage Advisory Board Meeting
- Alderman Saville's Ward Meeting

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE
- To give input on recommendations

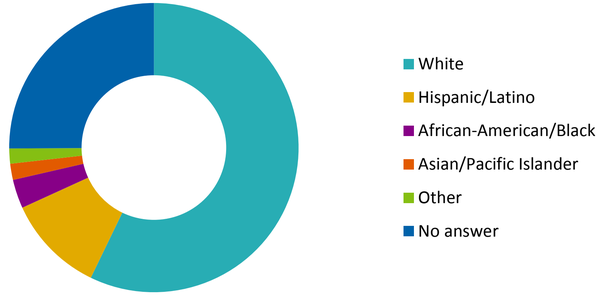
ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES - Phase 1 Priorities

The Metroquest online survey was open from January 21st through May 1st. A Spanish language version was available as well. The survey was promoted through the City website, to local groups, through social media, on printed fliers and posters, and at interactive iPad kiosks at rotating locations downtown. Over 2,700 people viewed the online survey, with 773 fully completed surveys. The following charts and graphics represent a basic breakdown of responses. The words in the middle were pulled from the written comments and the size of the lettering corresponds to the number of times the word was mentioned.



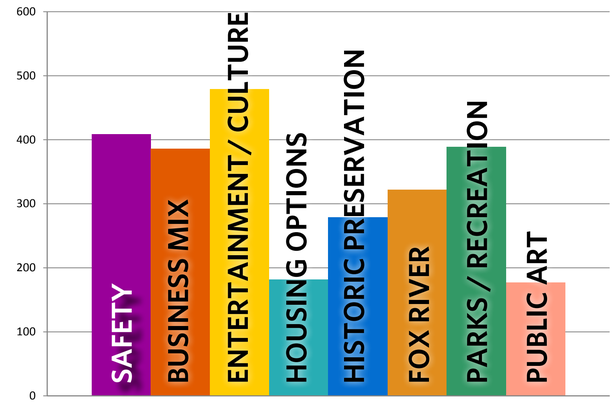
SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

RESPONDENT ETHNICITY:



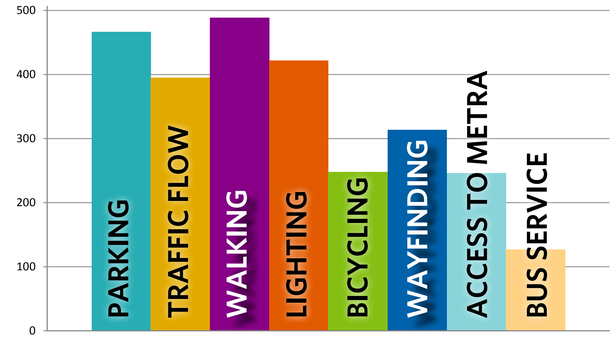
Survey respondents identified over 1,800 points on the map. This map is showing the points related to economic development.

VITALITY PRIORITIES

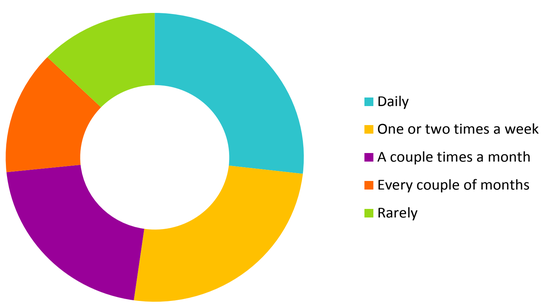


These charts (above and below) show how many times the items were ranked as a high priority by respondents.

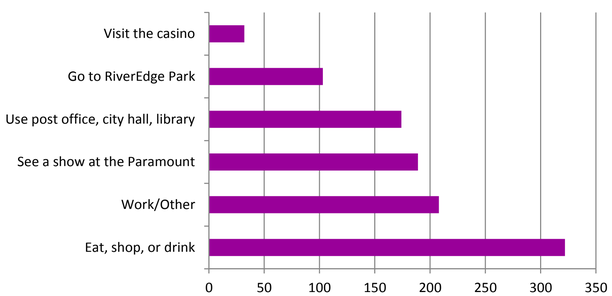
MOBILITY PRIORITIES



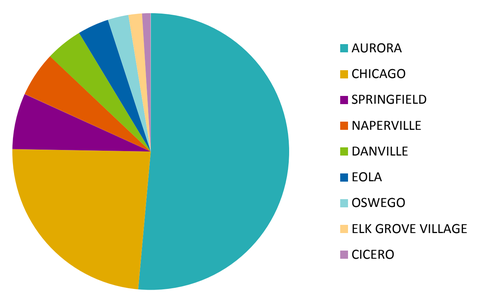
HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU COME DOWNTOWN?



WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR COMING DOWNTOWN?



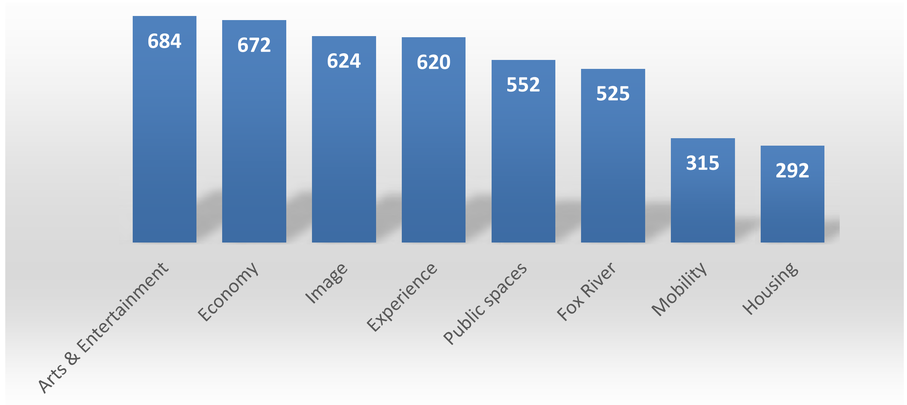
SURVEY RESPONDENTS FROM:



Local survey respondents were primarily from Aurora, IL, but did come from a variety of locations. Not shown: site visitors from outside Illinois, and locations with fewer than 15 visitors.

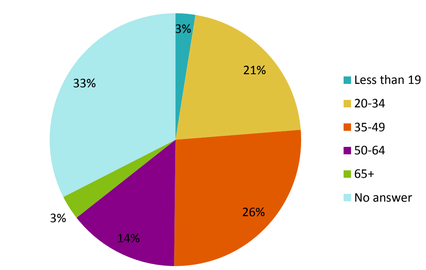
ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES - Phase 2 Recommendations

THEME RANKING

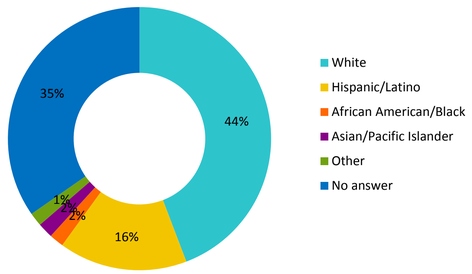


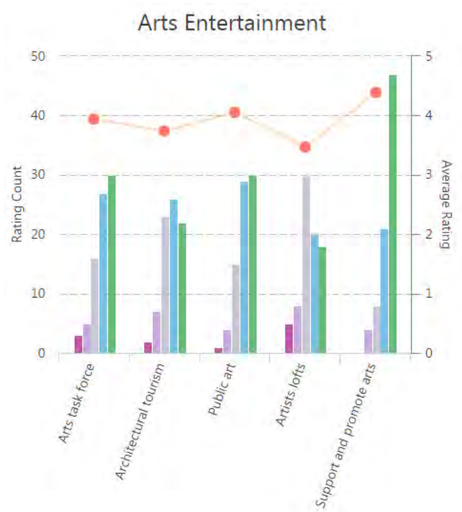
After the Public Meeting on Recommendations, a second survey was open for input on recommendations. Over 1,650 people viewed the online survey, with 905 fully completed surveys. The following charts and graphics represent a basic breakdown of responses to proposed recommendations.

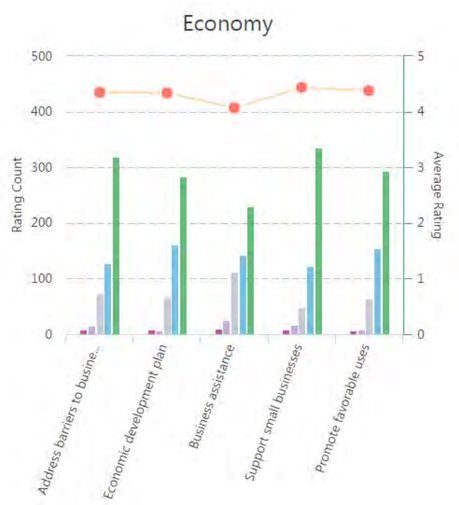
SURVEY RESPONDENTS AGE:

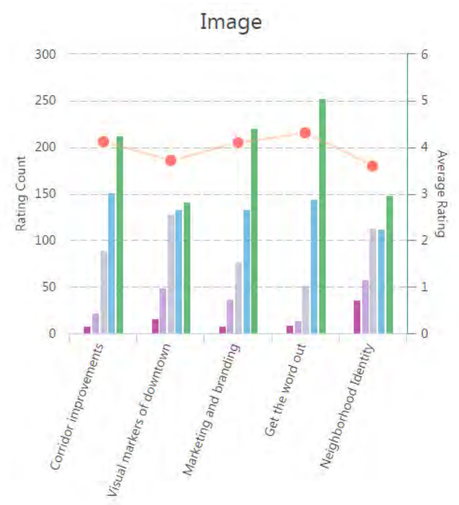


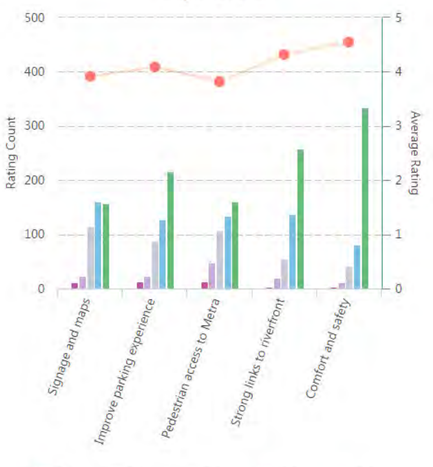
RESPONDENT ETHNICITY:

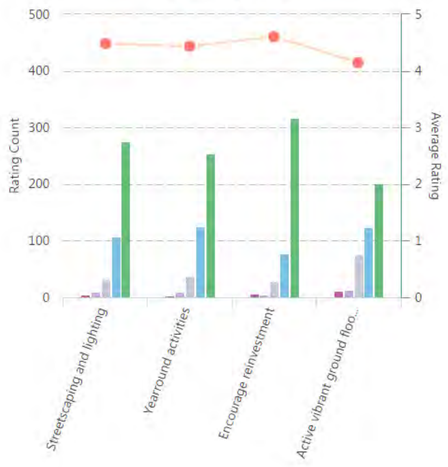


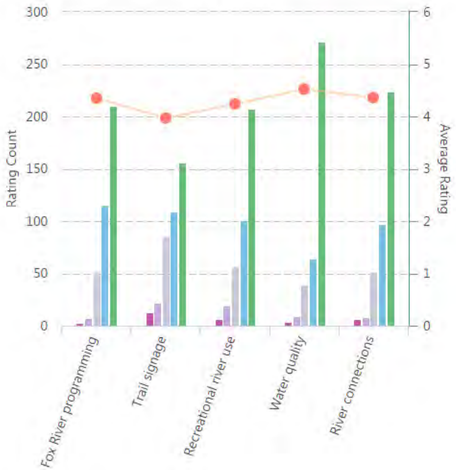


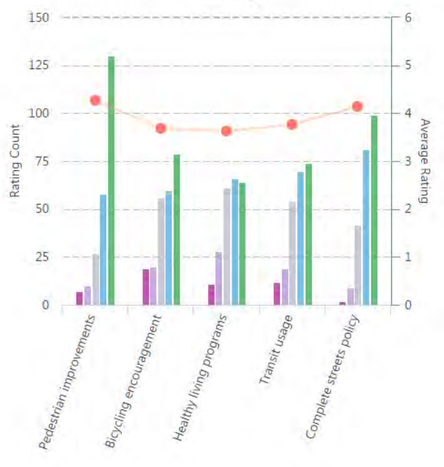


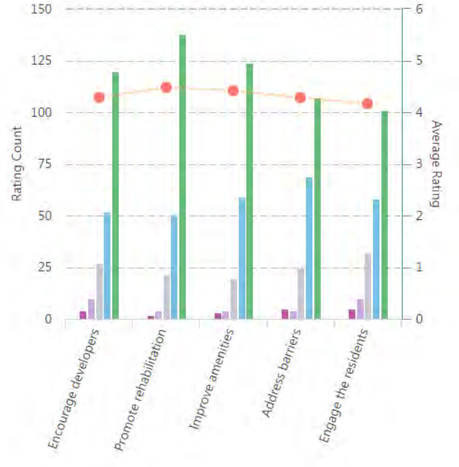












1 Star | 2 Stars | 3 Stars | 4 Stars | 5 Stars | Average Rating

AN EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will be promoted and recognized as a desirable destination to people who live here, work here, or just come to visit.

OVERVIEW

Successful cities are built upon the connections of mutually supportive activities and functions and the overall ease and comfort with which people can fluidly navigate those activities. Downtown Aurora is many things to many people; the Fox River, Stolp Island, and historic and cultural assets give downtown a unique sense of place. Other aspects of the experience of coming downtown can create a sense of welcoming and help to support meaningful social interaction.

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance the built environment to create a sense of place

- Identify and prioritize major and minor gateway entrances into, and prominent corridors within downtown
- Target infrastructural and aesthetic improvements to enhance the sense of place
- Develop stronger visual and physical links to the river front

Develop and implement a comprehensive signage and wayfinding program

- Identify key routes between destinations and important gateways in downtown
- Coordinate with other riverfront communities to create a cohesive wayfinding package to promote riverfront downtowns
- Extend signage and marketing to the tollway and the City's major arterials to draw visitors into the downtown area

Enhance marketing, branding, and communication

- Promote and cultivate the creative, cultural identity of downtown
- Establish a broad marketing reach

Improve feelings of comfort and safety

- Identify and evaluate common pedestrian routes and parking facilities for safety improvements
- Identify and activate vacant spaces
- Promote community engagement and enhanced patrolling techniques

FAVORITE IMAGES

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES

GROWING AND DIVERSIFYING BUSINESSES

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will have a strong and diverse economic base, highlighting its creative entrepreneurs and restaurant options, built off of arts successes in the recent past.

OVERVIEW

Downtown Aurora's reemergence as a regional destination and an attractive home to new residents may not happen overnight, but it is happening. By reinvesting in the City's historical buildings, leveraging infill opportunities, filling niche business opportunities, and supporting the vitality of businesses downtown, there are many opportunities to continue downtown Aurora's progress.

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance the business climate by focusing on economic development initiatives and programming to encourage investment

- Create a redevelopment facilitation strategy and continue to streamline and improve efficiencies in permitting for redevelopment
- Identify an Individual to Coordinate Downtown's Economic Development Partners
- Continue efforts to attract, retain and expand businesses through engagement and collaboration

Focus on growing small, local, and niche businesses

- Reestablish specialized efforts for growing small businesses
- Explore the expansion of new hotel exhibition/ meeting space opportunities throughout downtown and support boutique hotels in existing properties
- Continue to expand technical assistance provided for local business development including incubator resources for startups, and accelerator resources for growing businesses

Support the downtown core by enhancing livability

- Maximize the rehabilitation of the existing downtown residential spaces through engagement, resources, and support
- Increase access to goods and services for current and future downtown residents
- Continue to support inclusive and supportive housing initiatives
- Identify and support key sites for the construction of new higher density residential development

A PLACE FOR CREATIVES

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will have a robust and inspired arts, culture, and entertainment community.

OVERVIEW

Aurora has a robust arts and culture scene that has showcased the rich artistic and creative expression of the community, and brought renewed interest and appreciation for the downtown area. In addition to the long standing work of the Aurora Public Art Commission, a variety of new grassroots activities demonstrate the depth of Aurora's passion in this area, including Aurora's large-scale First Fridays, its Downtown Aurora Arts Mixer get-togethers, and many others. There is an extraordinary potential for arts and culture to help Aurora achieve its broader goals for the downtown and strengthen the entire community in the process.

"I really like how Aurora has encouraged and prioritized cultural efforts for the community and really appreciate the young, communal vibe of the scene here. Aurora is in a unique position to learn from Chicago's successful and unsuccessful efforts to draw and retain artists."

-Online survey comment

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursue targeted arts and culture endeavors

- Boost architectural tourism to strengthen Downtown Aurora's sense of heritage and identity
- Add public art installations to downtown at strategic locations with a self-guided public art tour
- Increase support for both active and passive arts and culture initiatives
- Create a comprehensive inventory of space available for cultural uses
- Simplify processes for arts and culture initiatives

"Love the Paramount and River Edge & think this brings people from all walks of life to Aurora. "

-Online survey comment

Coordinate and encourage local efforts to promote art, highlight culture and support the performing arts

- Develop an Arts and Culture Consortium to leverage resources through coordination and collaboration
- Develop a comprehensive arts and culture plan for Downtown Aurora

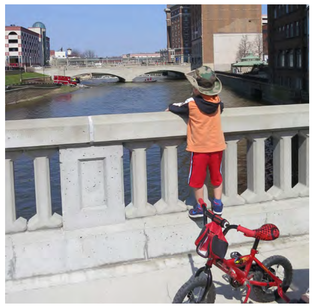
A VIBRANT FOX RIVER

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The Fox River will be celebrated as the heart and center of Aurora.

OVERVIEW

The Fox River is the heart of downtown Aurora, providing recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and an iconic, historic, and aesthetic asset to the city. Embracing and celebrating this valuable resource, and building upon its potential as an attraction, will help to remake the river as the city's front porch and a connecting element of downtown activities. The commitment to improving the river's quality and visibility has been demonstrated by a number of green infrastructure projects and open space developments in recent years. Further integration of the Fox River into downtown life will be enhanced through increased recreational use and access, activation of the riverfront, and additional management and restoration of this important ecological resource. These improvements will continue to draw people downtown for events and to enjoy the natural landscape and its wildlife.



PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Activate the Fox River Corridor

- Enhance riverfront infrastructure to increase active recreation
- Promote events and activities along the river
- Create passive recreational attractions
- Provide and enhance river and riparian habitat to create a wildlife friendly environment
- Enhance environmental education opportunities and facilities

Continue to demonstrate leadership in improving environmental quality

- Pursue collaborative environmental improvement efforts with other Fox River communities
- Identify priority restoration areas
- Encourage pride and stewardship of the river through education

Enhance connections between the Fox River and downtown

- Implement improvements that enhance connectivity
- Align riverfront planning and economic development planning
- Improve signage to provide information and connect to downtown attractions

SAFE & EASY TO NAVIGATE

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will have a comfortable and inviting environment for all modes of transportation.

OVERVIEW

Most Aurorans rely on their car for a majority of trips, yet walking, biking, and transit are increasingly convenient ways to navigate the downtown core. A review of the various transportation options available in downtown Aurora highlights many recent improvements including new pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure, as well as two-way street conversions. Existing opportunities to create a more walkable downtown and improving safety for all modes include addressing jurisdictional hurdles, removing push-button wait signals, and improving infrastructure built around the personal automobile. Gateways into downtown lack distinction and due to traffic speed and narrow sidewalks, some thoroughfares must be made more comfortable to walk along.

"I love that downtown Aurora has dedicated and protected bike lanes and I would love to see this continue. I would also like to see this integrated into the immediate neighborhoods and supported via community programs aimed at families and schools. We should really look at the models implemented by the City of Chicago and Active Transportation Alliance, which does a lot of community-centered biking events."

-Online survey comment

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Encourage walking and enhance the transition to walking from all transportation modes

- Establish a hierarchy of walkways and pedestrian routes within the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods
- Create a clear pedestrian connection between the Downtown Metra Station and Stolp Island
- Eliminate the use of pedestrian buttons and transition to automatic walk icon at all traffic signals
- Continue to enhance overall pedestrian experience with infrastructure changes

Identify traffic network bottlenecks and high crash locations for projects to improve traffic flow

- Evaluate Broadway lane reconfiguration to address network bottlenecks and crashes
- Continue 2-way conversion initiative with New York Street and Galena Boulevard to improve traffic flow

Address downtown parking challenges

- Use simple signage and information delivery to improve the parking experience
- Continue to assess strategies for managing demand, including the potential of user fees for on-street parking
- Restructure fines to create more of a deterrent to parking abuse

Encourage more transit usage and visitors by train

- Provide clear, direct, and inviting options for connections between downtown and the Downtown Metra Station
- Improve real-time transit information delivery at bus stops
- Market transit for events, destinations

Encourage the use of bicycles for transportation

- Continue to enhance overall bicycle experience with infrastructure changes
- Encourage active transportation and healthy living through programs and activities
- Adopt a Complete Streets policy

Identify and fix barriers for those with mobility challenges

- Improve Riverwalk accessibility from downtown streets
- Continue with plans to create a drop-off area near RiverEdge Park
- ADA improvements on downtown streets

"Love the bike lanes!"

-Online survey comment

"Automobiles will always be main transportation... designated bike paths are for dreamers."

-Online survey comment

DOWNER PLACE TWO-WAY CONVERSION

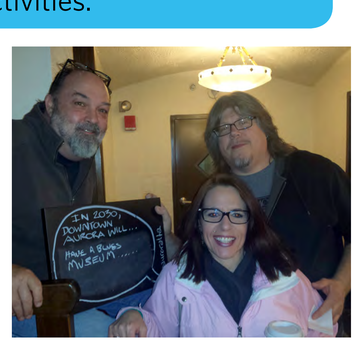
AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will have a growing and engaged residential community.

OVERVIEW

Creating opportunities for community engagement and capacity building among elected officials, City staff, and community stakeholders will be a major key to strengthening community relations and implementing the recommendations of the Master Plan. Creative and targeted approaches should be considered to engage the city's diverse residents, businesses, and institutions while forging new relationships and incorporating stakeholder priorities into plan implementation activities.



PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Explore innovative public engagement methods to implement the downtown master plan

- Hold educational forums
- Re-engage existing resident groups and facilitate the creation of new community groups
- Update website and use social media outreach

Engage the diverse population of Aurora

- Make public engagement accessible
- Address communication barriers
- Improve language access

Strengthen local capacity

- Build trust and collaboration between the City and the residents
- Foster leadership among the various constituencies
- Promote civic engagement
- Organize community building activities

Update the City's Comprehensive Plan

- The most recent Comprehensive Land Use Plan for Aurora is over 30 years old
- A new citywide plan should include long-term strategies for neighborhoods and housing, quality of life, economic and workforce development, transportation, and parks and recreation.
- Community buy-in to a shared vision is one of the most critical aspects of plan implementation, and the recommendations outlined previously can help build that community partnership.

"The only way to build a long term sustainable thriving downtown is to have more housing options downtown."
-Online survey comment

DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE ENHANCEMENTS