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**Project Steering Committee**

Kirk Albinson, The Community Builders
Jimi Allen, Gravity Building
Lulu Blacksmith, Waubonsee Community College
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
Michael Groh, Pace Bus
Brian Hacker, Metra
Dave Hulseberg, Invest Aurora
Sherman Jenkins, Economic Development Consultant
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

Unless otherwise specified, all photos are by CMAP staff.
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Executive Summary

This report contains an in-depth look at the following topics: background and history of downtown Aurora, transportation and circulation, built environment, economy and jobs, health and safety, natural environment, arts and community services. There is also an overview of community outreach conducted to date and the direction of potential recommendations to be pursued in the development of the master plan.

Walkability

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 creating a more walkable downtown area and improving safety for all modes include addressing jurisdictional hurdles, push-button wait signals, and infrastructure built around the personal automobile. Gateways into downtown lack distinction and due to traffic speed and narrow sidewalks, some thoroughfares do not feel safe to walk along.

Sustainability

The Fox River is the heart of the downtown study area, and the City has proven its interest in improving the river’s visibility and quality with a number of green infrastructure projects and open space development. The river provides recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and drinking water through the City’s nationally recognized water treatment and supply system. Unfortunately, as wildlife habitat and a recreational asset, it suffers from impaired water quality, attributed to man-made dams, urban runoff, combined sewer overflows, and point source discharges. Increasing the recreational use of the river and enhancing overall enjoyment for residents and visitors is a high priority for many, as evidenced by the recently completed River Edge Park development.

Livability

Downtown has an older and smaller housing stock with many studio and one-bedroom apartments. Although building codes have been modified recently to help facilitate redevelopment, there is a perception that some codes and requirements, such as having retail on the first floor, may still be obstacles. The City has many buildings of architectural significance, and passionate groups dedicated to protecting them. High-level arts, such as the Broadway Series at the Paramount Theatre, have been a great success in Aurora, attracting thousands of visitors to the area on a regular basis. Numerous museums and institutions offer culture, classes, and valuable programs that are often underutilized by the community.
Trends

A growing arts and culture scene has brought new interest and appreciation for the downtown area in recent years, which should complement the many public and civic organizations that exist and enhance economic development opportunities and attractiveness. However, economic development progress has been slower than some expected downtown due to a number of factors, including weak private sector job growth, limited new housing development, a lagging recovery from the recession for Aurora and other markets, and significant competition in the retail market. High office vacancy rates may indicate that industry sectors such as finance and insurance, information, and other service-related sectors desire types of space not currently available in the downtown.

Despite a significant increase in safety and a decrease in crime in Aurora, based on public input it is apparent that the perception of crime and danger downtown may still impact public willingness to visit, walk, and bike downtown. A multi-pronged approach to inviting people to enjoy the many cultural and recreational opportunities, while promoting growth in targeted industries, will help the downtown to build the future that so many see as its strong potential.
In partnership with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the City of Aurora is developing a downtown master plan amendment to the 2006 Seize the Future Downtown Master Plan. The updated plan will define the vision of the Downtown’s future and the steps needed to achieve that vision. Having an accurate understanding of the existing conditions in the City is a necessary step to developing an appropriate and effective downtown plan that addresses the issues and concerns of the community.

Purpose of the Existing Conditions Report
This Existing Conditions Report—representing the result of approximately four months of research, analysis, and public outreach activities—provides an overview of the current conditions in Aurora and is designed to provide a starting point for creating a shared vision of the future.

What is a Downtown Plan?
The Downtown Master Plan will serve as a guide for elected officials, property owners, City staff, community residents, business owners, and potential investors. The Plan will assist in making informed administrative and implementation decisions about future efforts that affect land use, transportation, infrastructure, urban design and identity, historical and architectural preservation, and capital improvements within Downtown.

The Downtown Master Plan will serve as a guide for elected officials, property owners, City staff, community residents, business owners, and potential investors.
Why Does Aurora Need a New Downtown Plan?

In 2006, the City of Aurora approved the Seize the Future Downtown Master Plan, which provided a 10-year plan and long term vision for the downtown, focusing on neighborhoods and economic development. Since the development of the plan, Seize the Future has become a nonprofit public-private partnership responsible for city-wide economic development, and is now called Invest Aurora. Developers are interested in seeing a new plan in place and City leaders desire to incorporate recommendations for the northern part of downtown and close to the Aurora Transportation Center. The new plan will complement and enhance the existing Downtown Master Plan by addressing walkability, sustainability and livability. With a robust public engagement process, the new plan provides opportunities for the City to comprehensively address issues related to its role within the regional and local marketplace, land use priorities, and improvement of pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation needs. Figure 1.1 shows the study area chosen for this planning project.
Planning Process

The planning process to create the City’s Downtown Master Plan includes multiple steps that will last approximately 12-15 months. The process has been crafted with assistance from City staff and has been designed to include resident, stakeholder, and business owner input throughout.

City staff and CMAP worked together to develop a scope of work for the project. The scope of work sets program tasks, a timeline for the program, and recommends participation by a community steering committee to assist CMAP staff in developing the final plan and recommendations. The key steps in the planning process are illustrated in Figure 1.2. Per the direction of City staff, the steering committee is comprised of residents, developers, business owners, City staff from various departments, and representatives from transportation agencies, the Aurora Downtown SSA, Invest Aurora, and Waubonsee Community College.

Figure 1.2 Aurora Planning Process

A Downtown Master Plan for Aurora

1. Project orientation
2. Existing conditions assessment
3. Draft downtown plan development
4. Plan completion and approval
5. Community implementation of plan
Section 2
BACKGROUND
Section 2: Background

Historical context

This section gives an overview of downtown Aurora’s history, context in a regional setting, the relationship with this process and the GO TO 2040 Regional Comprehensive Plan, and past plans completed for the downtown area.

History of Aurora and the Downtown

Before the first European settlers arrived in the area now known as Aurora, Potawatomi Indians inhabited the land along the Fox River near Stolp Island. In 1834, two brothers from New York, Joseph and Samuel McCarty arrived in the Fox Valley searching for a new home. They decided to build a mill at a bend in the Fox River and close to a waterfall on Stolp Island. The rest of the McCarty family arrived and established a permanent settlement on the east bank of the Fox River called the Village of McCarty Mills. Quickly, the village grew as people settled close to the river and mill. In 1837, the Village of McCarty Mills was renamed Aurora.¹ On the west bank of the Fox River, new settlers established the town of West Aurora and in 1857 the two towns joined to form the City of Aurora, agreeing to locate public institutions on Stolp Island, so as not to favor one side over the other.²

In the nineteenth century, Aurora emerged as the industrial powerhouse of the Fox River Valley, initially producing textiles and later as a railroad manufacturing hub. Factories and mills developed on both sides of the river in order to utilize the Stolp Island waterfall. In 1855, the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad Company built its offices and construction shops in downtown Aurora. The railroad company remained the City’s largest employer until the 1960s. These events encouraged construction of a roundhouse on the east side of the river, the largest in the country.³ Workers moved to the City for factory jobs, increasing housing demand prior to the Civil War. Housing development started moving west away from the central business district. Commercial buildings and businesses opened in downtown looking to capitalize on the City’s economic growth. In 1881, Aurora leveraged its industrial strength to publicly light the entire City with electricity, becoming the first city in the United States to do so and earning the nickname “City of Lights.”⁴

HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN AURORA and past planning efforts

- Transportation
- Arts & Culture
- Sustainability
- Economic Development
- Long-range planning

About this timeline. The line across this timeline corresponds to population estimates for downtown Aurora. Census data, available from 1960 to 2010 was used, with earlier years following trends in the City as a whole. Prior to 1960, there is no population data available for the downtown area.
During the nineteenth century, the “City of Lights” gained a reputation as a progressive city. Aurora welcomed European immigrants who worked in the factories and residents supported abolition before the Civil War. After the Civil War, African American churches flourished. Residents were also forward-thinking on issues of education, women, and religion. A free public school district, the first in Illinois, was established in Aurora in 1851 and a school for girls formed in 1855.

The “City of Lights” became home to a number of entertainment and cultural options as well. The historic Paramount Theater opened on Stolp Island in 1931, hosting films, plays, and comedy acts. Leland Tower, the tallest building in the City, was built as a hotel in 1928 and was known for the Sky Club, a dinner and dancing venue where famous Jazz musicians played. Through the Great Depression and World War II, Aurora remained an industrial center. Manufacturing firms continued to locate in the City, attracted to the City’s skilled workforce, transportation access, and highly industrialized economy. By 1960, Aurora’s population reached 63,000 and the City was an economic center for areas of DuPage County and rural counties to the west. During this period, downtown Aurora was the center of activity for the City, containing many large department stores, small businesses, financial institutions, and theatres as well as rail service to areas across the United States.

The economic shift from manufacturing to services and technology hurt the downtown. In 1974, the Roundhouse and associated shops closed. The following year, the Westfield Fox Valley Shopping Mall opened in eastern Aurora. By the 1980s, many of the manufacturing factories had closed, resulting in Aurora’s unemployment rate rising to sixteen percent. As the City’s economic fortunes changed, the downtown struggled to compete with new suburban development to the east. Around this time, development in DuPage County had generated significant population growth, which attracted major residential, retail, office and industrial development in these areas. Aurora’s far east side benefited from this growth. In downtown Aurora, however, retail shopping declined and the last major department store closed its doors in 1982.
In response to changing economic conditions, the City pursued new economic development strategies for Downtown Aurora. Planners sought a riverboat casino for Stolp Island and converted downtown industrial buildings into stores and restaurants. In 1986, Stolp Island was added to the National Register of Historic Places and the island became home to a number of arts and culture attractions. The Paramount Theater was restored as the Paramount Arts Center in the 1970s. In the 1990s, the Riverfront Playhouse, David L. Pierce Art and History Center, and the Hollywood Casino opened on Stolp Island. With the help of grassroots efforts and active citizens, the local arts scene continues to grow. The City’s historic neighborhoods and buildings in downtown Aurora have been preserved and Stolp Island is the cultural center of the City.

Downtown assets such as the Waubonsee Community College, the Paramount Arts Center, and RiverEdge Park draw thousands of residents and visitors, and the Fox River provides active recreation opportunities.

The City’s commitment to updating Seize the Future and creating a new Downtown Master Plan reflects the desire of residents, City leaders and business owners to ensure growth and prosperity in downtown Aurora.
Regional Setting

Downtown Aurora is located in Kane County at the geographic center of the City, situated on Stolp Island and along sections of the east and west banks of the Fox River. Approximately 40 miles west of downtown Chicago, the rest of Aurora extends into DuPage, Kendall, and Will Counties. The City is bordered by North Aurora and Batavia to the north, Naperville and Warrenville to the east, Montgomery and Oswego to the south and Sugar Grove to the west. The City encompasses several pockets of unincorporated land in the eastern section of the City near the Kane-DuPage County border.

Aurora is a regional transportation hub in the Fox River Valley, situated close to highways, commuter rail service, and regional bikeways. Interstate 88 passes through the northern section of the City, providing convenient access to downtown Aurora via Illinois Route 31. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Rail line runs through the City with Metra commuter service at the Route 59 station and the Metra terminus at the Aurora Transportation Center downtown. Chicago O’Hare International Airport is twenty six miles to the northeast and the regional Aurora Municipal Airport is located eight miles west of the City in Sugar Grove, Illinois.

Relationship with GO TO 2040

The GO TO 2040 plan has 4 chapters: Livable Communities, Human Capital, Efficient Governance, and Regional Mobility.

The most relevant GO TO 2040 recommendations for this project are those concerned with:

- Changes in land use and housing that allow for more compact, walkable, mixed-use development with a range of housing options
- Improvements to bicycling and walking conditions to increase the percentage of people using active transportation
- Support for economic innovation
- Preserving and protecting natural resources
- Improvements to public transportation to increase the transit mode share

The Downtown Aurora Master Plan’s highest priority is to provide guidance at the local level and to address community needs and desires. GO TO 2040 states that “municipalities are critical to the success of GO TO 2040 because of their responsibility for land use decisions, which create the built environment of the region and determine the livability of its communities.” By undertaking a planning process to update the Seize the Future Downtown Master Plan, the City of Aurora has taken responsibility for guiding its future and demonstrated its commitment to helping shape the future of the region as well.
Figure 2.2 City of Aurora and Downtown Study Area
Recent past plans

Aurora has a history of planning efforts with common themes and important implementation success stories. Capitalizing on the Fox River, encouraging business activity in the core, improving transportation options, preserving important architectural landmarks, and bringing east and west sides together are frequently mentioned. The following plans have been reviewed as part of this process:

- **1974** The Preliminary Development Program for Downtown Aurora identified priority development projects through broad public engagement activities and action-oriented recommendations.

- **1984** The Strategic Plan for Downtown Aurora prepared for the Greater Aurora Chamber of Commerce looked at development opportunities to revitalize the downtown area over 3-5 years.

- **1987** The Report on Current Development Opportunities published for the Aurora Downtown Redevelopment Corporation (ADRC) provided market analyses, development factors, regulations and incentives.

- **1993** Aurora’98: A Strategic Plan for the Development and Management of Downtown identified strengths and weaknesses in downtown Aurora and proposed a new structure of organizations and stakeholders to manage downtown development.

- **1997** ULI presented a report on development needs and challenges for downtown Aurora, with recommendations for transportation, residential housing stock, and market enhancements with a main goal of increasing foot traffic in downtown.

- **2006** The Seize the Future Master Plan was developed as a long-term vision for downtown Aurora focusing on mixed use development and strong physical connections around Stolp Island and the Fox River.

- **2006** The Aurora Riverfront Vision Plan was adopted with the goal of restoring the Fox River through open space, bicycle and pedestrian connections, and mixed use development.

- **2006** Historic Property Districts and Landmarks Guidelines were revised to protect the character of Aurora’s older neighborhoods and individual historic landmarks.

- **2007** RiverEdge Park Master Plan was approved for the protection and restoration of public open spaces along the Fox River and envisioned a regional destination complete with an outdoor performance venue.

- **2008** An update to the 1993 FoxWalk Overlay District Design Guidelines provided design and development guidelines for buildings within downtown Aurora by emphasizing walkability, incorporating potential views of the Fox River, and respecting Aurora’s architectural history.

- **2008** A Downtown Parking Study completed by Walker Parking Consultants found the parking spaces in downtown to be around 50% occupied and recommended potential locations for future parking garages.

- **2009** The Sustainability Plan established broad strategies to improve long term environmental sustainability in Aurora such as encouraging sustainable growth, protecting natural resources, and reducing waste in City operations.

- **2009** The first Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for Aurora focused on improved design, construction, and promotion of bike ridership and walkability.

- **2011** Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Amendment to take advantage of enhanced flexibility of CDBG funds for pursuing economic development, housing, and public services activities.

- **2013** Downtown Parking Plan approved the removal of meters and new enforcement efforts based on time limits.
Successful implementation projects resulting from past plan recommendations include the renovation and restoration of the Paramount Arts Center, the completion of RiverEdge Park, closure of the gap in the Fox River Trail bicycle route, additional portions of the RiverWalk completed, roadway reconstruction to restore two-way travel to much of the study area, a downtown college campus, a new and modern library, reconstructed bridges, and much more.

What is missing from this list is a comprehensive plan for the City of Aurora, which makes it more challenging to identify the role of the downtown in the overall growth and development of the City. The City maintains a land use planning map to guide development, but does not have a recent comprehensive plan.
Section 3
COMMUNITY OUTREACH
Community engagement

To emphasize a broad-based inclusion of the community, the outreach and engagement process has entailed close coordination with City staff and the Steering Committee and involved several activities including meetings with the steering committee, confidential interviews with key community leaders, a public visioning workshop, and an online survey and social media. The following provides a summary of what has been done so far; outreach activities will continue during the course of the planning process. Since the start of the formal planning process, over 1,700 residents and stakeholders have participated (see Table 3.1).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Public Engagement Activities</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<td>1st Steering Committee Meeting</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Interviews</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public visioning workshop</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online engagement (as of 3/15/16)</td>
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<td>MetroQuest Online Survey</td>
<td>1106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site visits (Completed surveys)</td>
<td>(417)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus group presentations</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media followers</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total unique visitors interacting w/ Facebook page</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,725</td>
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</table>

Source: CMAP, Metroquest, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr.

Common themes expressed so far at outreach activities:

- Make the downtown a destination place with mixed use development and nightlife entertainment.
- New businesses are desired in the downtown area such as diverse retail/shopping amenities and restaurants to complement current arts and culture scene.
- The City should celebrate the diversity and character of the community.
- Aurora suffers from a major perception problem; people who haven’t been downtown in many years mistakenly think the river still smells bad, crime is rampant, parking is still metered, and there’s nothing to do.
- Maintaining and preserving historic structures and landmarks is an important way to maintain the downtown’s character.
- Absentee landowners are a problem with vacant downtown buildings. Some are waiting for a better market to do anything with their property, while many buildings deteriorate.
- More improvements to streetscape elements would create an attractive and walkable downtown.

*These statements represent common perceptions from local stakeholders and may not represent factual conditions or the opinions of all who were interviewed.
How we involved the community

Committee of the Whole Meeting
On October 6, 2015, CMAP staff joined a regular meeting of the Committee of the Whole to introduce members to the downtown plan project and to outline the proposed scope of work and study area boundary.

Steering Committee
The Steering Committee is tasked with providing guidance and feedback on existing issues and opportunities, developing central goals, reviewing plan documents, and identifying stakeholders who should be involved in the planning process. Composed of individuals representing a wide variety of interests and perspectives, the Steering Committee members include:

- Kirk Albinson, The Community Builders
- Jimi Allen, Gravity Building
- Lulu Blacksmith, Waubonsee Community College
- Karen Christensen, Fox Valley Music Foundation & A-Town Poetics
- Rena Church, Aurora Public Art
- Eric Galit, City of Aurora
- Kim Granholm, Aurora Downtown
- Joe Grisson, African American Heritage Advisory Board
- Michael Groh, Pace Bus
- Brian Hacker, Metra
- Dave Hulseberg, Invest Aurora
- Sherman Jenkins, Economic Development Consultant
- 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

The first steering committee meeting was held on October 30, 2015, at City Hall to provide background on CMAP and the planning process and begin a conversation about the specific issues facing downtown Aurora. The steering committee discussed the strengths of the downtown and what they would like to see addressed in the plan. Strengths of the downtown included the arts and culture community, the architecture and historic buildings, the access to natural and open space amenities like the Fox River and River Edge Park, the diversity of the community, and transit access. Concerns were also mentioned, including the need to make downtown a destination space with mixed used development, improved water quality and recreation, housing amenities, historic preservation, walkability, quality jobs, and the perception that downtown is unsafe.

The steering committee members identified many improvements that could occur in the downtown including: improving the streetscape elements to create an attractive and walkable downtown, attracting retail and restaurants to complement current arts activities; identifying development opportunity sites; pursuing state historic preservation funding to preserve historic structures, and developing a capital improvement plan that analyzes the downtown TIF districts and explores tax credits and potential funding revenue for public arts.

The second steering committee meeting discussed key findings from the existing conditions report and ways to further engage citizens and stakeholders in the planning process.

Key person interviews

In order to gain further insight into the issues and opportunities that exist in Downtown Aurora, CMAP staff conducted interviews with 23 individuals representing a variety of backgrounds throughout the community. These individuals ranged from institutional and neighborhood leaders to business owners to elected officials.

While the conversations were designed to be confidential in order to promote an open dialogue, several broad themes emerged. Collectively, these stakeholders brought up many needs and challenges, ranging from economic development to mobility and streetscape improvements. Their input helped to frame the direction of the report and guide areas for additional inquiry and research.
Public visioning workshop

To initiate the public’s involvement in the downtown planning process, a public visioning workshop was held to hear from residents and stakeholders. The workshop was held on January 21, 2016, at Waubonsee Community College with over 160 residents and community stakeholders in attendance. Participants learned about the planning process through a brief presentation by CMAP. Participants were guided in a table discussion with five questions:

1. What do you love most about downtown Aurora?
2. What are some types of businesses (or events) that you leave Aurora to find, but would like to see downtown?
3. Besides having more destinations to walk to (and uncontrollable things like the weather), what are some ways to encourage people to walk more?
4. What are some barriers and/or challenges to revitalizing downtown Aurora?
5. What are some (additional) ways that downtown Aurora could leverage its strong arts and culture scene to attract businesses, restaurants, and more residents downtown?

Using keypad polling, participants were asked to rank their priorities for mobility improvements, vitality improvements, and things that they’d like to see more of in downtown. For downtown mobility improvements, participants ranked walking and pedestrian environment (26%) as the top priority, while wayfinding and amenities (19%), and parking (19%) tied for second. For downtown vitality improvements, business mix (24%) and entertainment/culture (24%) were clear winners, with recreation and parks (11%) and Fox River (10%) competing for third place. For what participants would like to see more of downtown, restaurants (27%) and retail/shopping (26%) were the top choices, with lounge/nightclub in third place (13%) (Figure 3.3).
Meeting participants brought up many needs and challenges that they hope the downtown master plan will address, ranging from addressing the perception of safety in the downtown to business retention to empty storefronts and vacant buildings. Attendees expressed concern with the unattractive abandoned buildings and gateways. It is perceived that this poses challenges to attracting businesses, residents, and visitors to downtown and feeds into the misperception of a dangerous city.

Participants associated the appearance of the downtown with absentee landlords, permitting, and high costs to rehabilitate structures. Another common theme raised was the need to address the demographic divide. Participants reflected on the growing diversity of the community and the need to include all members into the strong sense of community that is found in Aurora. A majority of the attendees were white, indicating a need for more targeted outreach in the community.
Attendees also identified many strengths of Aurora, the things that the downtown should be well known for and are important to residents. People, architecture, arts and culture scene and events like First Fridays and music at the River Edge Park were frequently mentioned. Individual businesses – like Two Brothers Roundhouse, Ballydoyle, and La Quinta – as well as individual buildings, like the new library, Paramount Theater, and Waubonsee Community College were also mentioned. Attendees also identified the growing diversity of the community as an important asset.

Meeting attendees saw an opportunity to improve the appearance of the City and better market the downtown to attract more businesses, residents, and visitors. One idea is to create community-oriented events -like outdoor activities such as walking tours, fitness challenges, and music festivals. Additional ideas included streetscape improvements, wayfinding signage, public gathering spaces, and public art.
What are your top 3 priorities for mobility improvements?

- Wayfinding & Amenities: 19%
- Access to Metra trains: 4%
- Lighting: 12%
- Walking and pedestrian environment: 26%
- Bicycling: 6%
- Traffic flow: 11%
- Parking: 19%
- Bus service: 3%

What are your top 3 priorities for vitality improvements?

- Recreation and Parks: 11%
- Business Mix: 24%
- Historic Preservation: 9%
- Safety: 9%
- Housing options: 8%
- Public Art: 6%
- Entertainment and culture: 24%
- Fox River: 10%
Figure 3.3 Keypad polling results from the public workshop

What is your age?

- Under 20: 0%
- 20 – 29: 6%
- 30 – 39: 8%
- 40 – 49: 19%
- 50 – 59: 24%
- 60 – 69: 19%
- 70 or better: 11%

What is your gender?

- Female: 48%
- Male: 50%
- No answer: 3%

What is your race?

- African American / Black: 11%
- Asian: 2%
- Caucasian / White: 5%
- Hispanic / Latino: 5%
- Native American / Alaska Native: 1%
- Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander: 2%
- Multi-racial: 1%
- Other: 0%
- Prefer not to answer: 8%

What would you like to see more of downtown? (TOP 3)

- A variety of housing options: 27%
- Public art / sculptures: 27%
- Tourism / hotel: 20%
MetroQuest Online Survey

To be as inclusive as possible and reach a broader audience, CMAP also developed an interactive website to engage people who could not attend meetings. Additionally, a Spanish version of the survey was created to reach participants with limited English proficiency. This online tool serves to educate the community about the purpose of the project and learn about their priorities and preferred choices to address issues in and around downtown Aurora. As of February 15th, 2016, the website has received over 747 visits with 323 people leaving behind detailed comments on the challenges, priorities, and opportunities for mobility and vitality issues in downtown Aurora. The interactive survey launched on January 21st and will be open through April 20th.

Moving forward, CMAP staff will continue to work with steering committee members and local groups to promote the survey to residents, service users, and employees. The online survey is accessible through the City’s website and has been promoted in the local newspaper, the Facebook page, as well as through fliers distributed to public event participants. During the months of March and April, iPad kiosks with the survey will be dispatched and circulated at various high traffic locations throughout the City to ensure access to the online survey.

Social Media / Interactive Engagement

To expand upon traditional methods of community engagement, CMAP LTA staff is using social media platforms to promote the project, engage a broader audience, and provide links to interactive engagement efforts. A Facebook page, a Twitter account, an Instagram account, and a Flickr page are in active use and have reached over 1,000 people. A recorded version of the presentation was uploaded to YouTube for people who were unable to attend the public visioning workshop. On February 9th, 2016, over 1,000 unique users were reached through the Facebook page, and an average of 26 people engage with the project’s Facebook content on a weekly basis.
Section 4
TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION
Transportation overview

This section provides an overview of existing transportation options within Aurora. In order to develop appropriate recommendations for improving active transportation, this section outlines information about how people access the downtown area, how they travel within the downtown area, and potential barriers to increased active transportation. The information in this section was obtained from various sources, such as the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), Metra, Pace, Cook County, the City of Aurora, and is also based upon a visual assessment of existing conditions in the community.

Key Findings

- **One-way streets lower overall access and connectivity.** The City is in the process of converting many downtown one-way streets to two-way streets, which may cause initial confusion, but should result in improved safety, traffic flow, and business visibility.

- **While only two blocks away from downtown Aurora, the Metra station feels disconnected from the downtown.** Due to an unfriendly pedestrian environment, the eight-minute walk along the state highway to the downtown core is perceived to be far, unpleasant, and to some, dangerous.

- **Aurora has a rapidly improving bicycle route network.** Completion of the City’s first barrier-protected bike lane (along River Street) fills a major gap in the regional trail network, and improved connections to City neighborhoods are forthcoming.

- **Pedestrian infrastructure in the downtown core is strong.** Sidewalks, planters, and clearly marked crosswalks are present throughout much of the study area, with excellent examples in the core. The corridor along Broadway, connecting to the train station, needs improvement.

- **Major gateways into the downtown area are unappealing.** The first impression when driving into the downtown area is mixed, depending on the direction of travel.

- **Pace and Metra serve Downtown Aurora, but Aurora transit ridership is low.** While there are approximately 4,000 people getting on or off trains at the Aurora Metra Station during the weekday, less than five percent of Aurora’s commuting population uses transit to get to work.

*(key findings continue on next page)*
Key Findings (continued)

- After an in-depth analysis of low Pace ridership in early 2015, the agency has instituted changes to routes in the Fox Valley District.
- According to the 2008 Walker Parking Study, there are approximately 650 on-street and 3,550 off-street parking spaces in the downtown core, with more in the full study area. The City updated parking policies in 2013 and continues to improve the system with some areas experiencing more parking congestion than others.

Walking

Sidewalks and crossings

Sidewalks, which provide a dedicated right-of-way for pedestrians, represent the most basic and essential element in walkable communities. However, the mere presence of sidewalks does not guarantee that travel on foot will be safe, comfortable, and convenient. Sidewalks vary in quality and in the experience they offer to those who use them. Issues such as obstructions, poor maintenance, lack of accessibility features, insufficient width, proximity to high-speed traffic, and gaps in the network can limit the utility and function of sidewalks. Sidewalks along high-speed, high-volume roadways with no separation or buffer are especially inadequate. Although such an arrangement meets the basic requirement of providing a walkway, the danger and discomfort of walking along such facilities discourages walking.

Downtown Aurora has a mostly complete sidewalk network, with sidewalks on both sides of the street and within the parks and open space. There are crosswalks on all sides of all major intersections in the downtown core, usually with the preferred “international style” zebra stripe design. Pedestrians do not, however, have automatic right-of-way at these intersections. Instead, pedestrians must request passage through “push-to-walk” buttons. By prioritizing synchronized traffic signals and implementing optional pedestrian crossings, the rapid thru-movement of vehicles is encouraged to the detriment of walkability. Outside the core, most intersections have the standard parallel line crossings marked.
Route 25, or Broadway, does not have a sidewalk on the east side of the street from Illinois Avenue south until the parking lot for Gil and Cruz Attorneys at Pierce Street. The lot at the southeast corner of Illinois and Broadway is built out to the curb and is inhospitable to pedestrians and the east side of Broadway is entirely inaccessible to people using wheelchairs (Figure 4.1 A). While it would seem impossible to walk on this side of Broadway (and it is certainly dangerous), worn paths (“goat trails”) indicate that people do walk here (Figure 4.1 B).

The sidewalk that does exist along Route 25 is quite narrow for a high-speed four lane arterial with no on-street parking, particularly on the east side of the street where there is no parkway separating the narrow sidewalk from the fast-moving traffic (Figure 4.1 C). The presence of truck traffic, buses, and high-speed automobiles along Route 25 makes this stretch particularly harrowing for pedestrians, with no barriers between them and the moving vehicles. This corridor is a key connector between the downtown’s core (restaurants, Paramount Theatre, the Hollywood Casino, bars), the area’s only hotel, the Two Brothers Roundhouse and the Metra station. Within the downtown core, Broadway’s traffic counts drop and there is on-street parking, but the 4 narrow lanes (plus parking) create traffic problems and make it very difficult to parallel park.

Water Street Mall is a one-block pedestrian mall on the east side of the river between Galena Boulevard and Downer Place. Municipal cars drive on the street, but it is otherwise closed to vehicular traffic and provides a pleasant pedestrian connection and an excellent location for outdoor events such as First Fridays. It did not become the retail center that was hoped for in the 1970s, suffering a similar fate to other regional pedestrian malls, but it remains an asset for the downtown core.

Figure 4.1 (A-C) Inhospitable pedestrian environment on Route 25
Intersections and safety

Of the 133 intersections in the study area, 25 are signalized with traffic lights, 55 have stop signs, and 53 are not controlled. “Not controlled” intersections are mostly T-intersections with no cross-street, but in some cases, there is a cross-street with a “yield” sign on one street. As shown in Figure 4.3, Broadway, New York Street, and Galena Boulevard have higher concentrations of all crashes (bike, pedestrian, auto) than other streets in the study area. An analysis of bicycle and pedestrian crashes found that many of the pedestrian crashes occurred on Broadway during the late evening to early morning hours, particularly between Galena Boulevard and Downer Place. Further investigation into lighting conditions and speeding along this stretch of the roadway is recommended.

The two most dangerous intersections in the study area for all types of crashes are (1) Lake Street (IL-31) and New York Street, followed by (2) Broadway and Galena Boulevard, with 55 and 48 crashes (respectively) within 100 feet of the intersections between 2011 and 2013.

As part of the 2009 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, the City of Aurora planning staff conducted a Walkability Assessment using the Walkability Checklist distributed by the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. The intersections studied include four in the downtown study area:

- Illinois Avenue and Lake Street (IL-31)
- New York Street and Broadway Street (IL-25)
- Galena Boulevard and Broadway Street (IL-25)
- New York Street and River Street

For pedestrian crashes, Broadway Street clearly stands out for incapacitating and non-incapacitating injuries (Figure 4.4). For bicyclists, New York Street has a number of crashes, but the overall pattern of crashes is more dispersed. For drivers, Galena Boulevard seems to have slightly more crashes than other streets, as well as Broadway from Spring Street to Benton Street.
Intersection Density and Walk Score

Like most neighboring communities, the City of Aurora is considered a “car-dependent city,” where most errands require the use of a car. While Aurora has a WalkScore™ of 37 (Car-dependent), the downtown core has a WalkScore™ of 83 (Very Walkable), and a transit score of 41 (Some Transit). The ratings mostly rely on the number of accessible amenities, but also include factors such as access to transit, intersection density, block length, and population density. Strategies that help to create a more connected and attractive pedestrian network focus on the importance of clear wayfinding systems, connections to transit and other modes, as well as public space amenities such as street furniture, landscaping, and public art. Having a high-quality pedestrian experience is important to encourage more people to walk and to enhance overall quality of life through increased environmental sustainability, safety, and mobility.

While a fairly fine-grained street grid pattern is found in many neighborhoods close to the downtown, many other areas have large barriers to connectivity. Within the study area, there are roughly 130 intersections per square mile. Areas are typically considered very walkable when there are at least 140 intersections per square mile. The Fox River and the BNSF railroad, as well as long block lengths north and south of the downtown core (from Clark Street to North Avenue on LaSalle Street is roughly 1500 feet), prevent a continuous street grid and decrease walkability in the study area (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Intersection density
Biking

Around town

The City of Aurora has outlined policy goals of providing safer conditions for cyclists and pedestrians and encouraging residents to use their bikes or walk for short, local trips. The 2009 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan includes a number of recommendations specific to bicycling, such as improved signage and wayfinding, improved connections to schools, neighboring municipalities, transit, and regional trails. Additionally, the plan recommends educational and promotional programs for bicycling, as well as recommendations for future infrastructure.

The major bicycling gaps in the study area identified in the 2015 revisions to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan are in the downtown core on either side of the Fox River, where the Fox River trail has some stops and starts. The plan revision also recognizes the poor connectivity between the neighborhoods west of the river and the Aurora Transportation Center. Other bicycling priorities in the plan include: development of consistent signage and wayfinding, addressing safety issues, reducing conflict points, and using a city-wide approach to sidewalk and bikeway development.
Strava Data

In the absence of a more thorough bicycling audit, it is difficult to say with certainty where people are bicycling most – or whether most cycling trips are primarily for recreation or for transportation. One source of information about cyclists’ travel routes is Strava Labs Global Heat Map.13 This map visualizes the routes and the aggregated volume of cyclists using the Strava app on their smartphones as they ride. An obvious caveat regarding Strava Labs’ data is that it applies only to people actively using the app. These users tend to be serious, confident, and experienced cyclists who are more likely to be bicycling for fitness and recreation than for transportation; they may often be riding in groups or with cycling clubs. They are less likely to be low income riders, and more likely to be male. Nevertheless, in the absence of better data, Strava data is useful since cyclists of all levels and abilities tend to seek out and utilize safe and convenient routes and avoid less safe, higher stress routes.

The downtown Aurora residential neighborhoods are considerably less represented in the Strava heat maps (Figure 4.6 A) than the residential areas around Naperville’s downtown (Figure 4.6 B). Similar to the Village of North Aurora, downtown Aurora shows a consistent stream of bicyclists traveling along the Fox River without particularly strong connections to the neighborhoods or the downtown. This does not mean that people are not biking in the study area; it is simply an indicator that more Strava users are biking through downtown along the river without much deviation from the path. The popular biking routes for Strava users in Aurora line up well with Google Maps’ identified bicycle facilities and bike-friendly roadways (Figure 4.7 A), while they seem to use almost all roadways in Naperville (Figure 4.7 B). For Strava users that do travel between the Aurora neighborhoods and the Fox River Trail, the roads most frequently used to connect to the trail are Downer Place and Benton Street. This is not surprising since these streets have the most traffic calming infrastructure improvements, which creates a more comfortable cycling environment.

13. Strava Labs is a project of Strava Inc., a bicycle ride and run tracking and sharing app. Strava Labs does not produce a legend for their heat map. The map represents generalized frequency of rides by Strava users. Red lines indicate more users, blue lines fewer users. Thicker and darker lines mean more users.
Regional Biking / Routes and Trails

The downtown network of bike routes and trails works to connect the river, downtown, and nearby residential communities. The major regional bikeways near the downtown study area are the Fox River Trail and the Virgil Gilman trail to the south of the study area. The Fox River trail extends north into McHenry County with inconsistent connectivity through Aurora, where there are path segments on both sides of the river. The completion of the River Edge Park included a path that goes from a parking lot north of New York Street along the park, to connect to the Aurora spur of the Illinois Prairie Path trail.

South of downtown, the west side Fox River Trail connects to the Virgil Gilman Nature Trail, and continues into Oswego. Until recently, the bikeway gap between the northern and southern portions of the Fox River trail was an important missing link. In 2004, in collaboration with the Fox Valley Park District, the Kane County Forest Preserve District, the City of Aurora sought to fill this gap. As a result of this collaboration, pathways along the river were provided as part of new developments such as Waubonsee Community College and the River Street Plaza development.

To connect the final gap on the west side of the river, the City constructed an on-street protected bike lane along River Street. The project is the first of its kind in Aurora and one of very few protected bikeways in the region. The innovative arrangement is designed to add extra protection for people on bikes. It can still cause confusion for drivers and will take some adjusting, but the hope is that the extra level of protection will entice new riders to try bicycling in town.

There is bicycle traffic throughout the study area and there are bike racks at some of the businesses as well as at the Aurora Metra station. Bike lockers are located at the Aurora Transportation Center, in a parking space near the drop off area. The Two Brothers Brewery (adjacent to the ATC) often attracts large groups of bicyclists, especially in the summer months, and has cited a need for additional bike racks at the Roundhouse. There are some difficult crossings that are not trail gaps, but could be considered barriers to easy access for people on bicycles. Planned and programmed routes in the study area will better connect local neighborhoods to the downtown area.
Transit

Metra

The Aurora Metra Station (Route 25) is the last commuter station on the BNSF line. The station is about an eight-minute walk from the downtown core. Each weekday, 29 trains depart Aurora for Chicago’s Union Station and 31 trains arrive in Aurora from Chicago. Of Aurorans who work in the Chicago Central Business District, 68 percent ride Metra to work.

The two stations to the east are Route 59 and Naperville, about 5.9 miles and 9 miles east of the Aurora station, respectively. All three stations have seen an increase in weekday ridership levels since the 1980s, but Aurora and Naperville have not increased as substantially as Route 59 has since opening in 1989. Route 59 has substantially more parking spaces, but even absent major parking supply increases between 2002 and 2014, weekday station ridership grew by over 800 riders.14 Between 2000 and 2010, an increase in multi-family residential within 1/2 mile of the Route 59 station has helped to provide more potential riders and the percentage of riders who accessed the station by walking increased from 2 percent in 1999 to 6 percent in 2014. Over the same period, the number of riders walking to the Aurora station declined from 3 percent to 2 percent. In Naperville, it has remained at 9 percent.

These numbers for pedestrian access to the station are low compared to other stations on the BNSF line (93 percent at Hollywood, 60 percent at the Harlem station, 54 percent at Riverside, for example).15 During a typical weekday, about twenty percent of all BNSF riders walk to their train station and slightly fewer than half drive alone. In early 2016, the Regional Transportation Authority conducted a Pedestrian Access Study for the Aurora and Route 59 stations to understand conditions and make recommendations for improvements.

Naperville has nearly double Aurora’s ridership and fewer parking spaces. The station’s drive alone mode share is less than half, whereas nearly 75 percent of Aurora Metra riders drive alone. As shown in Figure 4.10, the next largest difference between the stations is in the number of commuters who access the train by bus (15 percent versus 2 percent) and then by the number of commuters who walk to the train (9 percent versus 2 percent). Table 4.1 summarizes weekday ridership information provided by Metra for those three stations. Most riders access the Aurora station by driving alone and the parking lots are heavily utilized (Table 4.2).

14. Parking supply data and ridership data are not available for all the same years. See Figure 4.9.
To accommodate additional vehicular access to the station, multiple parking lots were added to the Aurora Transportation Center over the years. The parking lots can accommodate 1,633 vehicles, with 644 dedicated permit parking spaces, 817 daily fee spaces, and 169 “swing” spaces and an additional 27 ADA-accessible spaces. Swing spaces are permit spaces that are available for a daily fee of with a “convenience permit” that does not guarantee a space. The 2014 Metra occupancy study found the daily parking spaces to be over 99 percent occupied, permit spaces to be 67 percent occupied and “swing spaces” to be 29 percent occupied. The swing spaces require crossing IL-25 and that is one likely reason why they are underutilized.

Since daily spaces make up only about half of the supply, this means that there are over 300 underutilized parking spaces. The daily fee to park is $2, and the monthly fee is $42, and there is a three- to five- year waiting list for monthly permit spaces. This indicates that commuters unable to get a permit parking space (due to the long wait list), are taking a chance to find spots on a daily basis, and other commuters may not take the train to avoid this gamble. Meanwhile, some permit holders who are not regular commuters continue to pay for the space even if they rarely use it.

In 2015, Aurora was awarded $8.6 million in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funding to enhance connectivity to the station. The project would include a bicycle and pedestrian bridge over the river, relocating and improving the bus transfer point, and improving access to the Two Brothers Roundhouse.

Source: RTAMS, 2015.

16. Of all Metra commuter parking spaces, 21 percent of the spaces were not in use for the 2014 Occupancy Study, which is 344 spaces.
Table 4.1. Weekday Ridership and Parking (2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Boardings</th>
<th>Alightings</th>
<th>Parking spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>1,972</td>
<td>1,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route 59</td>
<td>5,874</td>
<td>5,363</td>
<td>4,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naperville</td>
<td>4,002</td>
<td>4,099</td>
<td>1,463</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RTAMS, 2015.

Table 4.2. How commuters access the Metra stations (2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Walked</th>
<th>Drive Alone</th>
<th>Dropped Off</th>
<th>Carpool</th>
<th>Bus</th>
<th>Bike</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route 59</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naperville</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RTAMS, 2015.

Figure 4.10. Mode of Access for Metra Stations (2014).
Pace Bus

Within the downtown study area, Pace Bus operates five fixed bus routes, and all routes serve the Aurora Transportation Center (ATC). The ATC is a “bus pulse point,” which allows for timed transfers. All buses stop at the ATC every thirty minutes. None of the routes have Sunday service; the route serving the Fox Valley mall has the highest ridership by far. (See Appendix for additional ridership information)

In October of 2015, Pace initiated a service restructuring for the Fox Valley area, providing new and reconfigured routes and introducing Call-n-Ride service to the ATC area. The new Fox Valley network extends service to new destinations that have developed near Aurora’s eastern and northern boundaries. Pace has improved service frequency on most routes to every 30 minutes, with evening service running until at least 8pm on weekdays.
Driving & Parking

Many streets in downtown Aurora have recently undergone a significant makeover. Nearly half a century ago, the trend to prioritize rapid automobile travel through downtown areas resulted in many wide, one-way arterial streets. Recent studies have found that multi-lane one-way streets encourage speeding, create more dangerous conditions for pedestrians and people on bikes, and can reduce the productivity of a street in terms of overall tax revenue. The process to restore two-way directional travel has already been completed for Benton Street, Downer Place, and River Street, as well as for portions of New York Street and Galena Boulevard, east of Broadway. While two-way streets are considered an improvement for the neighborhood, this change may be unpleasant for people who are used to speeding through the neighborhood, and may have some negative impacts on parking.

Street Connectivity and Access

Connectivity measures how easily residents, workers, and visitors can take full advantage of services, public spaces, and transportation options within Aurora. Connectivity is often measured by intersection density because this metric is most closely correlated with levels of walking, bicycling, and transit use. Areas with short blocks and frequent intersections can also relieve traffic congestion on major arterials due to the varying route options to a given destination, resulting in shorter, more direct trips.

To access downtown Aurora, people driving from outside of the City can utilize several of the arterials and local streets that feed into the area from Broadway (Route 25) and Lake Street (Route 31). The limited signage to direct travelers to Downtown Aurora along the arterials is easy to miss.

In the recent past, all four streets connecting east and west sides of downtown Aurora across Stolp Island were one-way streets. Benton Avenue was the first of the four streets to be converted back to a two-way street (completed in 2012), with Downer Place and River Street following. Galena and New York Street have also been converted back to two-way streets east of Broadway and City staff is assessing the possibility of converting them both to two-way streets between Lake Street and Broadway across the island. One challenge to converting these sections to two-way is that certain infrastructure has been built up around the one-way operations, including the parking garage on the NE corner of Galena and River and the Casino parking deck on New York Street.

**Functional Classification and Thoroughfare Type**

Thoroughfares perform three vital roles in a community – the space for mobility, commerce and civic life. Streets vary on how much of each role they provide based on their design. The functional classification of a road describes the character of the road in terms of vehicular mobility. The following is a breakdown of roadways by functional classification based on IDOT’s classifications (Figure 4.12).

**Arterials:** Arterials roadways crisscross the downtown study area. Arterials are designed for higher speed travel and to accommodate longer distance trips. Creating a walkable neighborhood based on a grid of arterials is a major challenge for the downtown. The two north-south arterials are state roads (IL-31 and IL-25). East-west arterials include Illinois Avenue, New York Street, and Galena Boulevard.

**Collectors:** There are no collector streets in the downtown study area. The function of these streets is to distribute traffic from arterials to the local streets.

**Local Roads:** The remaining roads in Downtown Aurora are known as local streets and their central mobility role is to provide access to private property. The travel speeds and traffic volumes are low and mostly consist of one moving lane in each direction.
According to the 2008 Walker Parking Study, there are 4,210 parking spaces in the central area of downtown Aurora (bounded on the north by Spring Street, on the west by Lake Street, on the south by Clark and Benton Streets, and on the east by Lincoln Avenue) with 2,533 available to the general public and 1,677 privately owned spaces. Of those, there are approximately 650 spaces on-street and the rest are in parking lots or garages. A 2013 count of off-street parking spaces found over 3,000 public off-street parking spaces.

The 2008 study also found that the peak parking occupancy was 56% on weekdays and 33% on Saturday evenings, indicating an excess supply of parking, with an imbalance in the location of high demand parking areas. Of the 28 blocks surveyed, the central area south of Galena had the highest occupancy rates, but few reached the desired level of 85% occupied. A number of changes to downtown have occurred since the 2008 study was conducted that would impact the current conditions. In 2013, the parking meters were removed and enforcement transitioned to time restrictions. In 2011, Waubonsee Community College relocated to a new building on the West bank of the Fox River. Also in 2011, the Broadway Series debuted at the Paramount. Other events and business openings or closings would have an impact on parking conditions, but these three are likely to have had the biggest impact on the downtown study area.

15. Occupancy rates of about 85 percent are desirable because it means that most spaces are full with about one space per block, or one of every seven spaces, available. For more information, see CMAP’s “Parking Strategies to Support Livable Communities” report: http://1.usa.gov/CMAP_Parking.
With the meter removal, Aurora unveiled a hierarchical parking system, with parking lots and streets color-coded according to associated time limit. This system is supposed to encourage long-term parkers to park in garages, or further from the core. Permits for the more centrally-located, more desirable lots cost more money and permit holders of higher ranks may park in any lower rank lot. Annual overnight residential permits are available, and drivers can call in if they need to leave their vehicle overnight. Enforcement hours are from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturday on public streets and alleys, and from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday in City-owned parking facilities. The City code does not allow parking meters to be installed. The City uses license plate recognition (LPR) enforcement technology, making enforcement of complicated time limits easier to manage. They also use an increasing scale of ticket fines to target repeat offenders. Tickets may be issued to a driver exceeding the time limit if they re-park on the same block, unless they vacate the block for one hour or more.

Overall, the transition to free parking was well-received by the public but there have been some complaints about the new system. The myriad of color-coded signs is confusing to visitors; congested areas remain full while nearby parking is underutilized; some businesses have customers who need to park for longer durations. People want to park where they don’t have to walk much, regardless of how long they are staying, and they tend to avoid going to garages unless they are motivated by financial incentives. Heavily congested areas (like New York Street and Galena) would be better served by demand-based parking pricing than by time limits. As Aurora has discovered, when it comes to parking, you can never please everyone all the time. People want a parking space directly in front of their destination, and they don’t want to pay for it. A parking problem is a good thing to have; it means people are coming to the downtown. A more recent parking occupancy study has not been conducted, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there is still an excess of supply with an imbalance in the distribution of that supply, particularly around Restaurant Row and Waubonsee Community College.
Freight

Industrial uses in Downtown Aurora are primarily located along Routes 25 and 31, with trucks using major arterials in the study area. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF), a Class I railway, operates the freight rail line in the City. There are roughly 150 freight trains passing through Downtown Aurora each day, but the grade-separated lines mean that freight trains do not have a significant impact on traffic in the study area. Local residents have expressed concerns regarding the safety of materials transported along the freight lines.

There are no state- or locally-designated truck routes in the study area. To the south of the study area, there is a sizable amount of freight truck traffic along the border with Montgomery. To prevent truck traffic from funneling north into the downtown area, it may be worth pursuing a designated truck route on Route 31 south of Copley Park, to connect with Montgomery Class II truck routes and US Route 30.
Transportation Indicators

The following tables summarize how Aurora compares with the rest of the Chicago region on a number of important transportation metrics that give insight on how residents are moving around and how much they are spending on transportation. Table 4.3 shows that the number of miles driven annually by Aurora households (VMT) is more than the VMT for the rest of the region and slightly less than the VMT for Kane County. Aurora households in the downtown core area are driving fewer miles per household than the rest of the City, and fewer than the region as a whole. This household VMT number is likely skewed low because of the high density of elderly adults, most of whom are no longer traveling for work.

Mode share indicates what percentage of trips taken using a specific type of transportation, such as driving alone or transit. The vast majority of Aurora residents drive alone for work trips. A higher proportion of study area residents carpool or walk their way to work than the rest of the region, see Table 4.4. The high carpool rate could indicate demand for transit that is not currently being met with existing options.

Table 4.3. Total Annual Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) per Household, 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparable communities</th>
<th>Downtown study area</th>
<th>Aurora, IL</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Elgin, IL</th>
<th>Rockford, IL</th>
<th>Naperville, IL</th>
<th>Joliet, IL</th>
<th>Chicago Region (MSA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16,596</td>
<td>21,025</td>
<td>22,762</td>
<td>20,767</td>
<td>20,327</td>
<td>21,316</td>
<td>22,127</td>
<td>18,440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4.4. Mode Share, as Percentage of Work Trips, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Downtown study area</th>
<th>Aurora, IL</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Commuters</td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>91,951</td>
<td>240,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive Alone</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpool</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mode shares are expressed as percentages of the working population that did not work from home.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (for county and region figures); 2009 - 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (for municipal and study area figures).
Section 5
BUILT ENVIRONMENT
Overview

The following section describes the existing built environment in downtown Aurora, focusing on its urban design, housing, land use, and zoning. This section also provides an overview of Aurora’s historic preservation initiatives and significant infrastructure. To create effective recommendations, a solid understanding of the area’s physical characteristics is necessary. The information in this section has been obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, the City of Aurora, and a visual assessment of the community undertaken by the project team.

Key Findings

- Significant recent housing construction in Aurora has been taking place outside the downtown area. Nearly one fifth of the City’s housing stock has been constructed between 2000 and 2013, while only 85 housing units have been built in the downtown study area during the same time period.

- The downtown study area has a high housing vacancy rate compared to the rest of the City. In 2013, Aurora’s vacancy rate was 7.7%, while the downtown study area’s was approximately 20%.

- There is a concentration of vacant land along the east bank of the Fox River south of the downtown core. The 2008 housing market collapse halted potential development of these lands.

- The combined cost of housing and transportation, as a percent of household income in the downtown Aurora study area, is affordable. The Center for Neighborhood Technology’s (CNT) Housing and Transportation Affordability Index shows that the average percent of household income spent on housing and transportation is 40%. This is lower than CNT’s standard of affordability, which is 45%. Also, the index suggests that downtown Aurora is more affordable than Kane County and the region.

- Downtown Aurora’s housing stock is older and smaller compared to the rest of the City. 58% of the downtown housing stock was built before World War II and 52% of downtown dwelling units are studios or one bedrooms.

(***key findings continue on next page***

Stakeholder interview comments related to the built environment:

Maintaining and preserving historic structures and landmarks is an important way to maintain the downtown’s character and can be a potential economic development source.

Some downtown building owners are waiting for a better market to do anything with their property, while their buildings deteriorate.

The first floor commercial requirement makes new residential construction financially difficult to justify.

The City does an excellent job with infrastructure—water, bridges, streets, etc.

Increased housing options and density near the Roundhouse is desired.

Demand for housing in the core is increasing.

*These statements represent common perceptions from local stakeholders and may not represent factual conditions or the opinions of all who were interviewed.*
Key Findings (continued)

- Downtown zoning districts aim to create a pedestrian-friendly environment and encourage access to the Fox River. The Aurora Zoning Ordinance emphasizes pedestrian comfort and walkability in the downtown and provides standards to ensure new developments maintain pedestrian access and incorporate potential views of the Fox River.

- Downtown Aurora has a high number of historic buildings and landmarks which are maintained through various historic preservation initiatives. Twenty historic buildings are within the Stolp Island National Register Historic District, including the Paramount Theatre and the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial.

- Several facades in Downtown Aurora would benefit from architectural enhancements. Some businesses in the downtown district may benefit from better lighting, signage, use of color and texture in the facades to attract visitors and to maintain favorable visual effect along business corridors.

- Aurora has integrated many streetscape and signage amenities in downtown Aurora. However, many of these amenities are located in Stolp Island and signage pertinent to the business district is limited.

Urban design and identity

This section reviews the physical characteristics of the spaces between the buildings and the streets – the urban design of Downtown Aurora. It explores the identity and image of the downtown district through a closer study of key buildings, an analysis of the streetscapes, and of other noteworthy spaces such as the Fox River riverfront and the BNSF station. Information discussed from this section comes from the Aurora Historical Commission, City of Aurora Website, Metra, BNSF, and visual surveys from staff site visits.
Architecture

The urban fabric of a community is crucial to creating a sense of place. Aurora’s historic architecture and urban character is preserved in its seven historic districts and protection of landmarks and older neighborhoods significant to Aurora’s history and culture. As an older postindustrial city, Aurora has preserved its history while reinventing itself as a culturally diverse and growing city. In the face of significant economic and cultural shifts, Aurora has maintained an identity independent of the larger Chicago metropolitan region.

In the downtown area, there are several historic buildings representing a range of architectural styles from Art Deco to Prairie School. Throughout the downtown core, the average building height is three stories; there are many red-brick and terra cotta facades that create a dense and walkable built environment. Several commercial buildings were designed by the architect George Grant Elmslie and reflect elements of the Prairie School architectural style, which emphasizes horizontal features and ornate decorations. The Keystone Building on Stolp Island is an example of this style. Newer buildings in the study area include the downtown Aurora campus of Waubonsee Community College, the Santorini Public Library, and the Hollywood Casino.

The City of Aurora offers a number of self-guided tours on their website, including the Stolp Island Historic District Tour, LaSalle Street Auto Row Historic District, and the general self-guided Driving Tour. Each tour has information about the buildings, year built, and a small map. The tours offer a huge amount of information about the area’s rich architectural history.

Streetscape

The geometric design of streets is integral to how motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, and other street users behave on them. The width of the street, including the number of lanes and the width of those lanes, plays a large role in the feel and function of a street. The width will determine what design elements can fit within the given space, such as the position of vehicles, on-street parking, landscaped medians, and bicycle lanes. In addition, the overall width of the street affects the building height-to-width ratio, which is a way to measure the spatial definition or sense of enclosure that is an important component of urban thoroughfares. The Institute of Transportation Engineers recognizes that wide streets, such as those greater than 60 feet, can create barriers for pedestrians and encourage higher vehicular speeds. Higher operating speeds result in higher automobile crash rates and property damage.

Existing building height in the downtown area varies from 1-21 stories, with an average of three stories. The FoxWalk Overlay District Design Guidelines states that buildings should occupy the entire width of the parcel along a street, height-to-width proportions should be consistent with other buildings on the block, be at least two stories high and a maximum of one story above tallest building on the block.

Wayfinding and signage

Having attractive wayfinding, signage, and streetscape amenities is important for enhancing circulation and making pedestrians feel safe and welcome. The 2006 Seize the Future plan sought to develop a lively, human-scaled, easy-to-access central area, so as to attract new residents and workers to downtown Aurora and entice visitors to return. To that end, the plan recommended streetscape enhancements, including upgraded wayfinding and signage programs that clearly communicate to visitors that they have arrived in downtown, particularly along Broadway Street, River Street, and related lateral streets. The City has already accomplished many recommendations that were either specifically stated or implied in past strategies and continues to actively promote a user-friendly downtown. Streetscape improvements already accomplished include the integration of street furniture, such as benches, bicycle racks, bollards, decorative lightings, FoxWalk railings, hanging floral baskets, kiosks, litter receptacles, newsracks, street planters, tree grates, and wayfinding and destination signage.

While many streetscape and signage amenities have been accomplished in the core center of Aurora’s downtown, signage pertinent to the business district is limited. This makes it difficult to direct visitors to the area, specifically those coming from the surrounding thoroughfares of Lake Street, Broadway, Galena Boulevard, New York Street, and Illinois Avenue. Although the Metra Station is centrally located in the business district, no signs are available to offer information about the existing commercial establishments. While there are numerous plaques for the “Downtown Heritage Tour,” these plaques offer limited information; there is no map of other sites, no website with additional information, and no directions to other sites. A paper pamphlet can guide visitors on this tour, if they know to pick up the pamphlet.
Marketing and branding

In addition to the physical elements that create a sense of place, branding and marketing play a crucial role in distinguishing a community from its neighbors and identifying it to the greater region. The 2006 Seize the Future Master Plan recommended the creation of a neighborhood branding program to strengthen and expand business recruitment and retention efforts. The Aurora ’98: A Strategic Plan for the Development and Management of Downtown called for marketing Downtown through advertising, promotion, public relations and other activities. The FoxWalk Overlay District Design Guidelines – Regulations and Procedures aims to honor Aurora’s downtown by creating programs that raise awareness of Aurora’s rich historic architectural roots.

The City has executed a number of policies and programs to market the downtown. One of them is the Downtown Heritage Tour where thirty porcelain enamel signs mounted on decorative cast iron poles delineate a self-guided tour of downtown’s architecture and history. Included are markers for significant buildings that have been demolished. The Downtown Architecture Poster and Trading Cards is another example of how the City has promoted its downtown to residents and local youth.

Line drawings of iconic downtown buildings, created by local artist David J. Merk, were reproduced in the form of commemorative posters and are given annually to winners of the Mayor’s Awards for Excellence in Downtown Property Improvements. These same drawings were reproduced in trading cards and used in an educational program targeted at third-grade students as part of their Community Studies curriculum; the students were guided on walking tours of downtown Aurora.

The City also works with a number of local partner organizations to actively promote art and cultural events. One organization is Aurora Downtown, an organization of property owners, created as a Special Service Area that actively markets the downtown through a number of initiatives designed to create awareness among local residents and promote the downtown to the region. These events attract visitors and sponsors from throughout the western suburbs and the region. Some of these events include: Downtown Alive! Festival Series at RiverEdge Park, Downtown Taste of Aurora, Aurora Artwalk, Dia de los Niños, Alley Art Festival, Louche Puce Market, Downtown Aurora Arts Mixer (DAAM!), Aurora Farmers Market, Winter Lights Holiday Walk, Fiestas Patrias music festival, and the Puerto Rican Heritage Festival.
Housing

Housing Stock

The City of Aurora contains a variety of housing types and architectural styles. There are 66,827 housing units within the City of Aurora and approximately 60 percent are single family homes. In the downtown study area, the housing stock includes more apartment and condominium housing options, with nearly half consisting of multifamily buildings over five units (see Appendix: Housing Data Table 5.1). The architectural styles range from early Vernacular to Victorian era revivals to modern homes. Most Victorian era homes were built between 1860 and 1900. Later home builders adopted other styles such as Queen Anne, Stick, and Shingle. In the 1920s, homes were designed in the New Prairie style by Eugene Malmer and Frank Lloyd Wright. Since 1950, many modern style homes have been built in Aurora.17 A 2006 Homes for a Changing Region report recommended new housing near the Roundhouse and Aurora Metra station, higher-density housing appealing to a range of income levels (including luxury), mixed-use developments, historic preservation to create and retain housing options, and suggestions for achieving those goals.

Most recent housing construction in Aurora has taken place outside of the downtown study area, with only 85 new units built in the study area between 2000 and 2013 (compared to over 12,000 units citywide). Most of the new additions to the downtown housing supply occurred with the opening of a new condominium complex at Benton and River Streets along the Fox River in 2008. In the downtown study area, 57.6 percent of the housing stock was built before 1940 compared to around 20 percent citywide. The downtown study area also contains a higher concentration of studios and one bedrooms compared to the rest of the City and the region.

In the downtown, over 50 percent of housing units are studios and one bedroom units. Downtown Aurora has a vacancy rate of approximately 21 percent, which is significantly higher than the City of Aurora (7.7 percent), Kane County (6.5 percent) and the region (9.5 percent). There are 1,383 occupied housing units in downtown Aurora and approximately 69 percent are renter occupied. In downtown Aurora, housing values are lower than the City as a whole. 60.9 percent of the downtown housing stock is valued at less than $150,000, compared to 34.1 percent citywide. Factors contributing to lower housing values include an older housing stock and smaller housing size. These factors could make the properties good candidates for adaptive re-use strategies.

Housing and Transportation (H+T) Affordability Index

The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) created the Housing and Transportation (H+T) Affordability Index to better understand the transportation and housing costs across the United States. According to CNT, an affordable location is a place where a household spends no more than 45% of household income on both housing and transportation costs.

The typical Aurora household spends over 50% of area median income on housing and transportation, which is higher than CNT's 45% standard and is considered unaffordable. Downtown Aurora is affordable, with an H+T index of just 40%. In comparison, the typical household in the Chicago region spends 53% of income on housing and transportation. Housing costs are also affordable as a portion of income in downtown Aurora, with housing costs taking up only 21% of household income. This data suggests that Aurora and the downtown are more affordable than other places in the Chicago region.
The Downtown Aurora study area is approximately 652 acres with most of the land devoted to transportation, commercial, and institutional uses (Figure 5.1). The following section describes each type of land use in the downtown study area.

**Residential**

Residential uses are primarily located outside the downtown core. Most neighborhoods in these areas consist of single family homes. In the downtown core, which is Stolp Island and the east and west banks of the Fox River, small multifamily apartment buildings, condominiums, and lofts are more prevalent. There is a concentration of multi-family residential uses along the west bank of the Fox River north of Stolp Island which includes a senior assisted living facility, a five story apartment building, and the Plum Landing Retirement Community.

**Commercial**

As shown on Figure 5.1, commercial land uses are represented by the urban mix designation. These uses are concentrated on the east and west banks of the Fox River and include retail stores, offices, restaurants, and cafes. Retail stores are located throughout the downtown and provide a variety of goods and services to Aurora residents. Businesses include coffee shops, clothing boutiques, and bicycle shop. Office uses in the downtown core include law firms and small financial institutions. Two Brothers Roundhouse is located next to the Aurora Transportation Center and contains a coffee shop, brewpub restaurant, and music venue. The building is the former roundhouse for the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad.
The downtown core is also home to Aurora’s arts and culture attractions, which are indicated by the culture/entertainment land use designation on Figure 5.1. The historic Paramount Theatre, Hollywood Casino, Sci Tech Museum, and Aurora Regional Fire Museum draw visitors from throughout the region. Downtown Aurora is also home to several small theatres, art galleries, and studios.

Industrial

Most of the industrial land designated for factories and manufacturing is located on the east bank of the Fox River, north of Stolp Island and the Aurora Transportation Center. A forging company, general contractor, and an iron works shop are examples of industrial businesses in this area.

Institutional

Aurora’s central business district contains a number of institutional uses including Aurora City Hall and Waubonsee Community College. Located on the west bank of the Fox River, the Aurora campus of Waubonsee Community College is one of the busiest campuses in the community college’s system. Recently, a new 92,000 square foot public library has been completed at the corner of River and Benton Streets on the west side of the Fox River. The new library emphasizes technology and internet and makes these services available to populations that do not have access. The old library, which is located on Stolp Island, will house a high technology support company that is moving downtown and bringing about 100 jobs.18

Aurora government offices are located in Aurora City Hall as well as several other downtown buildings. Other institutional uses include the Aurora Township offices, Aurora Fire Department Central Station, and the U.S. Post Office.

There are several museums located in downtown Aurora that provide learning opportunities for residents. The Aurora Regional Fire Museum preserves the history of the region’s fire department and offers educational programming. The SciTech Museum on Stolp Island provides interactive STEM exhibits for children, and the David L. Pierce Art and History Center is home to the Aurora Historical Society and the Aurora Public Art Commission.

Transportation

The largest transportation related land use in the study area is the Aurora Transportation Center (ATC). Metra’s BNSF commuter rail service terminates at the ATC, while the Burlington Northern Main Line railroad passes beyond and continues through the eastern portion of the study area. To improve access to downtown, the City has been changing streets from one way to two way. The most prominent change has been opening New York Street to two way traffic, facilitating travel for motorists traveling from the east side of the City.

Open Space

Open space in Downtown Aurora is concentrated along the Fox River. These spaces include River Edge Park and the Fox River Trail. River Edge Park is an outdoor music venue on the east bank of the Fox River from the Aurora Transportation Center. Open space surrounds the Fox River Trail, a regional biking and walking path that runs along both the east and west sides of the Fox River through the northern part of the study area.

Parking

Off street parking is located on the east and west sides of the Fox River, and on Stolp Island. Most of these parking areas have a limited number of parking hours, ranging from two to ten hours. There is a concentration of parking lots along N. River Street between Vine and Spruce Streets. On Stolp Island, there are two parking decks serving patrons of the Hollywood Casino and Sci Tech Museum. The largest amount of contiguous parking space in the study area surrounds the Aurora Transportation Center and Two Brothers Roundhouse (Figure 4.11).

Vacant Land

Vacant commercial and industrial land is concentrated in the southern part of the study area, along the east bank of the Fox River. This area is bisected by a railroad line connecting to the Aurora Transportation Center.

The Aurora Zoning Ordinance is Appendix A of the Aurora Municipal Code and regulates the use and character of buildings constructed throughout the City. Last updated in October 2015, the zoning ordinance divides the City into four categories: (1) Open Space, Park and Recreation, (2) Residential, (3) Business, and (4) Manufacturing. The ordinance describes two open space, park and recreation zoning districts, eight residential districts, ten business districts, and two manufacturing districts. In the downtown study area, business and manufacturing zoning districts are the most common.

The ordinance describes ten different business zoning districts including the Downtown Core (DC) and Downtown Fringe (DF) districts which cover the central area of downtown (See Appendix: Zoning). The DC district encompasses Stolp Island and neighboring areas on the east and west sides of the Fox River. This zoning district contains many of Aurora's government and office buildings. The regulations for this district are intended to encourage pedestrian activity and recreation in the central business district and by the Fox River. Just outside of that is the DF zoning district, which regulates land on the east and west banks of the Fox River in the downtown core but not Stolp Island. According to the ordinance, “the purpose of the downtown fringe district is to promote economic development by allowing a maximum of uses to be permitted near the center of the City consistent with protection of residential uses, enhancement of the area's image and physical appearance, maintenance of circulation, safety, and the assurance of compatibility with surroundings.”
In 1993, the City of Aurora created the Fox Walk Overlay District which covers land within the Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe zoning districts. The Fox Walk Overlay District’s purpose is to provide a clear design and development concept to guide the revitalization of downtown Aurora and the area along the Fox River. Administration of the district is the responsibility of a Design Review Committee (DRC), which performs functions similar to a plan commission. The DRC reviews new development proposals and approves any changes to existing buildings. In 2008, the City revised a set of guidelines for the district, called the FoxWalk Overlay District Design Guidelines Regulations and Procedures. The guidelines provide zoning classification information and principles to direct development in the district, which generally relate to preserving the area’s historic character, promoting walkability, and maximizing access to the Fox River.

Infrastructure

Wastewater

Like many older communities, Aurora has a combined sewer system that collects both sanitary sewage and stormwater runoff and is gravity drained. Of the City’s 46 square miles, approximately 11 square miles are served by combined sewers (including most of the downtown study area). Under normal conditions, the centuries-old sewer system is able to adequately handle the wastewater and send it to the Fox Metro Water Reclamation District (Fox Metro). Problems occur during significant storm events with heavy rainfall. When the rain and wastewater exceed the capacity of the pipes, the excess combined sewage and rainwater can either flood residents’ basements or overflow into the Fox River, adding hazardous contamination (combined sewage overflows, or CSOs). Since adoption of the long-term control plan, the City has experienced fewer flooded basements and CSO events than in past years.

Fox Metro treats wastewater from Aurora, North Aurora, Boulder Hill, Montgomery, Oswego, Sugar Grove and portions of Yorkville and Batavia. Fox Metro has the capacity to treat up to forty-two million gallons of wastewater per day. Each year, they treat and safely return over 10 billion gallons of water to the Fox River. The City has invested in a number of strategies to reduce the number and severity of CSOs through the use of green infrastructure (bioswales, bioinfiltration, biofiltration, and rain gardens).

Water Supply

The main source of water for the City of Aurora is the Fox River. Additionally, some water is pumped from both deep and shallow wells. The blend is typically about 60 percent surface water and 40 percent well water. The water is treated at the Aurora Water Treatment Plant, just outside of the study area off of IL-25, south of E. Indian Trail. Aurora is required by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) to produce an annual water quality report by the Safe Drinking Water Act. The latest report reveals no water violations were recorded for the City in 2013. The City of Aurora is a partner in the USEPA’s WaterSense program to promote conservation and efficiency.

Fiber Optic Cable system

Downtown Aurora has a network of fiber optic cable, called OnLight Aurora. Voice and data ride this fiber network through pulses of light, allowing for high speed data transmission and very high bandwidth. In the US, the average broadband connection speed is 8.6 megabits per second (Mbps). OnLight Aurora’s fiber optic system provides 1 Gigabit, or 1000 Mbps, and the City has plans to expand that to 10 Gigabits. The underground network is designed with self-healing rings so that if a fiber is cut, the data can re-route itself and continue traveling and reduce opportunities for failure. Fast and reliable internet is an attractive feature for many businesses.

Each year The APC honors properties nominated for excellence in historic restoration with the Mayor’s Awards for Historic Preservation. The awards recognize owners who make significant improvements while maintaining the historic character of a building.

Aurora is home to a total of seven historic districts, including three Nationally Registered Historic Districts. In the downtown core, Stolp Island has been designated as a National Register Historic District because of the Island’s importance to Aurora’s history and the number of historically significant properties. In the middle of the 19th century, Stolp Island was critical to Aurora’s industrial development because its location provided excellent access to the water, which served as a power source for factories, mills, and manufacturing shops. Currently, the island is home to twenty historic buildings, including the Leland Tower, the Paramount Theatre, and the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall (GAR). The Aurora Preservation Commission provides information for a self-guided tour that highlights historically significant buildings and places of interest, see Appendix: Historic Preservation. LaSalle Street Auto Row is also a Nationally Designated Historic District. Additionally, there are several historic properties representing a range of architecture styles including Art Deco and Prairie School. Downtown Aurora is home to one of the only examples of the Mayan Revival architectural style in the country.

The City of Aurora has also designated four local historic districts, separate from the National Register, which are located within or near the downtown study area. Within these districts, there is a variety of architectural styles such as Victorian, Prairie, and Queen Anne. The City has identified 28 individual historic landmarks which are located throughout the City. These landmarks include homes, churches, mansions, and the former CB & Q Roundhouse. In 2006, the City published the Historic Districts and Landmarks Guidelines to provide rules, procedures, and assistance to property owners in order to preserve and enhance the historic character of these neighborhoods and individual landmarks.
Located on Stolp Island, the GAR is a memorial to Civil War Veterans. The memorial was completed in 1878 and is included on the National Register of Historic Places. It is one of the last remaining Grand Army of the Republic memorials in the United States. Because of the memorial’s potential to increase local tourism, the City received funding from the State of Illinois in 2014 to restore the memorial. The ongoing restoration will improve interior features of the building, provide space for historical exhibits, and include Civil War artifacts. Construction began in Fall 2014 and the City expects to reopen the building to visitors for the first time in a decade in early 2016, pending state budget allocations.

Aurora has benefited from the Federal Historic Tax Credit and the River Edge Redevelopment Zone program. The River Edge program is a state program designed to encourage rehabilitation of historic properties in several older Illinois cities with downtown riverfronts. It provides a 25% tax credit towards a developer’s cost to rehabilitate a historic property. The program expires at the end of 2016. Aurora utilized the program for funding to develop the River Edge Park concert venue and the former St. Charles Hospital. The former hospital is being converted to senior apartments. Currently, developers interested in historic preservation consider the historic Hobbs Building in downtown Aurora a potential building for rehabilitation. Known for an onion dome on its roof, the Hobbs Building is at risk of not being rehabilitated unless the tax credit program is extended. According to Landmarks Illinois, a historic preservation advocacy organization, extending the tax credit program will generate economic growth, create jobs, and strengthen the City’s tax base.20

Section 6
ECONOMY AND JOBS
Overview

This section reviews the economic conditions in Downtown Aurora. As has been reported over recent decades, downtown Aurora has good development potential if it can overcome the challenges of high retail competition, the need for different types of space, and not enough people with strong purchasing power living in close proximity. The findings are based on a review of past Aurora plans and documents, site inspections, review of interviews conducted by CMAP, additional data gathering and analysis, and interviews with identified stakeholders.

Key Findings

- Private sector jobs have declined. There was a 10.2 percent decrease in private sector jobs in downtown from 5,346 in 2002 to 4,800 in 2013.
- Jobs in health care, social assistance, arts, education, and recreation have increased. Together, these sectors have added over 1,300 jobs between 2002 and 2013.
- The number of public sector jobs has increased between 2002 and 2013. The largest employment sector is public administration with 2,014 jobs, a 64% increase from 1,228 in 2002.
- The downtown area has significant competition in the retail market. Retail trade sales in the downtown may be too low to attract national retailers.
- Office space in downtown may have lost attractiveness to office-related businesses in recent years. The loss of employment in downtown Aurora in typical office space sectors, finance and insurance, information, and other service related sectors, suggests that the high office vacancy rates are due to the outmigration of firms within these sectors.
- Historic buildings are attractive; however, newer or updated space may be needed. As of late 2015, there was no Class A office space in downtown Aurora and the average age of office space was 80 years old.
- Downtown retail has not fully recovered from the recession. The downtown area was hit harder by the recession than neighboring submarkets, and is still recovering.

Stakeholder interview comments related to economic development:*

- Groceries, restaurants, and nightlife desired.
- There is a need for another hotel, ideally part of the casino.
- There is a need for convention space.
- Efforts to attract big businesses to Aurora seem to take precedent over supporting existing small businesses downtown.
- Much of the available retail space does not meet the needs of what retailers are looking for.
- While Hollywood Casino and Waubonsee Community College draw people to the downtown, their visitors rarely patronize other local businesses.

*These statements represent common perceptions from local stakeholders and may not represent factual conditions or the opinions of all who were interviewed.
There is abundant vacant space in existing buildings, but limited vacant land in downtown Aurora. This limits the potential for new development without redevelopment of existing and potentially underutilized spaces. The viability of any retailer or restaurant downtown will depend on the availability of appropriately sized and priced land and/or buildings, and attracting patrons from nearby suburbs. The developer may also be wary of redeveloping a building without knowing how much additional investment may be needed. Since 2011, the vacancy rate for commercial real estate in downtown has remained higher than elsewhere in the City (See Appendix: Economic Development).

Residents who attended the public workshop indicated interest in more restaurants and shopping destinations. Downtown has a number of restaurants and drinking establishments serving Italian, American, Brazilian, Chinese, Irish, and Mexican cuisine, as well as a number of chain fast food establishments. However, the number of Mexican options in downtown is far greater than others. The BPO Elks building, under renovation, is planned to have a restaurant and apartments. There are also many small-scale office and retail properties in downtown catering to a variety of service needs such as tax preparation and legal services, as well as personal service businesses, like barber shops. There are several financial and insurance service providers located downtown, which once provided a major source of employment. The finance and insurance sector in downtown has not returned to pre-recession levels.

Downtown Aurora’s residential new construction has lagged behind other suburban locations. The newest units, River Street condos, were completed at the beginning of the recession. Other properties, both residential and commercial, have been converted into condos and multifamily units. In the past, there was a pattern of single-family homes being converted to multi-family homes. This practice indicates demand for additional multi-family housing and the need for affordable rents.
Study Area Employment Trends

The employment base has shifted significantly. Between 2002 and 2013, the number of jobs in the downtown increased, but private sector jobs decreased. The largest employers in downtown are the City of Aurora, Hollywood Casino, US Post Office, and Waubonsee Community College. According to the US Census’ Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Survey (LEHD), there were 6,814 total jobs in downtown in 2013. Government, health care, and arts/education/recreation all grew in the downtown area between 2002 and 2013, while eleven sectors saw declines of greater than 30 percent. (See Appendix: Economic Development).

Real estate trends

Commercial

There were over 3.7 million square feet of commercial real estate space as of late 2015. Overall, the commercial space in downtown is well-balanced between office, retail, industrial, multi-family, and specialty; there are opportunities for many types of businesses (Appendix: Economic Development). The 2014 total assessed value for the properties downtown was $49.5 million.

Office space in downtown may have lost attractiveness to office related businesses in recent years. Before the recession, office vacancy was lower in Downtown Aurora than both the City as a whole, and the submarket. However, office vacancy rates spiked after 2010. As of 4th Quarter 2015, the office vacancy rate was 21.3 percent, while rates in the City and submarket were 11.3 and 13.7 percent, respectively. There are a number of factors that can contribute to high vacancy, including corporate restructuring and downsizing, outmigration and relocation, and the national economy. The loss of employment in downtown Aurora in typical office space sectors, finance and insurance, information, and other service related sectors, suggests that the high office vacancy rates are due to the outmigration of firms within these sectors.

Figure 6.1. Office Vacancy in Downtown Aurora 4th Quarter 2015

The quality of space is a major consideration for firms locating in an area. The average age of office properties downtown is 80 years, and over 90 percent of this space was built before 1980. A property’s class is another important consideration for site selection. Class A buildings are prominent and desirable investment-grade properties. Class B buildings offer more utilitarian space without special attractions. Class C buildings are no-frills, older properties that offer basic space. Class F buildings are functionally or economically obsolete. According to CoStar, as of fourth quarter 2015, there was no class A office space in Downtown Aurora, while more than half (56.1 percent) of the office space in Downtown was class C. In contrast to downtown Aurora, the submarket had 31.5 percent Class A office space, and 17.4 percent Class C office space.
Though downtown visitors supply occasional sales, people who work regularly and/or reside within the primary trade area sustain retail businesses. For downtown Aurora, the primary trade area is defined as a 10 minute drive time from the center of the downtown core, Stolp Island; the secondary trade area is a 15 minute drive time from the same point. Within the primary and secondary trade areas, there are many shopping opportunities outside of downtown.

According to ESRI Business Analyst, the estimated retail trade sales in downtown were about $25.6 million in 2014, or about $34 per square foot of retail space. Meanwhile, the primary trade area accounted for over $2 billion, or $289 per square foot. Within the secondary trade area, there is over 21 million square feet of retail space; the estimated retail trade sales were over $350 per square foot. The low retail trade sales in the areas closest to downtown make it extremely difficult to attract national retailers. (See Appendix: Economic Development)
Figure 6.3 Primary and secondary trade areas

Rentable Building Area (Sq Ft)
- < 30,000
- 30,000 - 125,000
- 125,000 - 400,000
- 400,000 - 800,000
- 800,000 +

Primary Trade Area (10 minute drive)
Secondary Trade Area (15 minute drive)

Industrial and Flex

As of 4th Quarter 2015, there were 712,419 square feet of industrial and flex space in downtown; much (88.9 percent) of this space downtown is in older class C properties. The industrial vacancy rate was higher in downtown (9.1 percent) than in the City (5.6 percent) and I-88 West Industrial submarket (5.1 percent).

Figure 6.4. Industrial Vacancy Rates in Downtown Aurora 4th Quarter 2015
Figure 6.5 Economic Generators by geographic area

Figure 6.5 outlines existing areas and corridors based on similar economic conditions or character. The designations do not supersede any existing neighborhood names or designations. The purpose of this zone and corridor-based analysis is to better understand the existing conditions of the downtown study area.
Section 7
HEALTH AND SAFETY
Overview

There is a strong relationship between health and planning issues such as transportation, open space, and food access. The dramatic rise in chronic disease rates in communities throughout the country has put the spotlight on the importance of the relationship between public health and planning. To help improve community health, planners and public officials have begun to promote design and development patterns that encourage physical activity. However, residents who don’t feel safe are unlikely to choose to walk or bike for transportation. Community health and safety are key pillars of creating a livable downtown. This section reviews data on public safety, public health, and food access.

Key Findings

- For a city of its size, Aurora has one of the lowest crime rates in the nation. Although violent crime rates per capita are higher in Aurora than neighboring communities, the rate is lower than the national average, on a per capita basis.
- Aurora is a strong advocate of health and wellness, but South Kane County fares worse than Central and North Kane County in a number of health indicators. The City works with a number of long-established service providers to deliver a number of community programs to improve the overall health of its residents.
- While Aurora is host to a successful farmers’ market, there are no supermarkets or larger grocers within the downtown study area.
- Community gardens are an important component of Aurora’s sustainability vision. The City has been proactive about expanding the number of community gardens to develop a citywide garden network.

Stakeholder interview comments related to economic development:*

Despite reduced crime rates, Aurora still suffers from perception of danger.

The new library is a fantastic asset; not enough people use it.

The farmer’s market is popular.

*These statements represent common perceptions from local stakeholders and may not represent factual conditions or the opinions of all who were interviewed.
Public safety

Maintaining a safe community helps to retain existing residents and attract new residents as well. Safety can also play a large role in encouraging residents to get outdoors and be active, which is vital for public health. Some concerns about crime and safety in Aurora were voiced during the project’s stakeholder interviews and public visioning workshop. Collectively, stakeholders believe that pre-conceived notions about crime persist and the City needs to overcome the perception problem in order to attract businesses, residents and visitors to downtown Aurora.

With a progressively declining crime rate, for the first time in six decades, Aurora experienced a year without a single homicide in 2012. In efforts to combat gang violence, the City established community partnerships with neighborhood groups and organizations, to discuss policing tactics and ways to combat the violence. A strong effort to get at the root of gang activity, with the help of state and federal law enforcement, led to the arrests of more than 130 gang members in the late 2000s. The City’s violent crime rate decreased by more than fifty percent between 2002 and 2012.

### Table 7.1. Incidence of Crime for communities with approximately 200,000 residents, 2013

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<th>Aurora, IL</th>
<th>Montgomery, AL</th>
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<td>Homicide</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Sexual Assault</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated Assault</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>3,096</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>3,409</td>
<td>4,289</td>
<td>1,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny-Theft</td>
<td>5,922</td>
<td>2,384</td>
<td>2,285</td>
<td>7,548</td>
<td>8,455</td>
<td>5,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>1,101</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime index (higher means more crime, U.S. average = 294.7)</td>
<td>500.7</td>
<td>108.6</td>
<td>163.7</td>
<td>457.1</td>
<td>646.8</td>
<td>391.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The crime rate has increased slightly in recent years, with four reported homicides in 2013 and seven in 2014. Violent crime rates per capita are higher than neighboring communities, at about 300 crimes per 100,000 residents. That rate is still lower than the national average. For a city of its size, Aurora has one of the lowest crime rates in the nation (see Table 7.1). Regardless of community policing and low crime rates, the perception that Aurora is dangerous persists.

Community Policing Programs/Initiatives
The City of Aurora has over 35 crime prevention programs listed on its website including the Citizen Police Academy, Crime-free Multi-Housing Program, awareness programs for heroin and gangs, tips for vulnerable citizens such as the elderly and children walking to school. The APD works with neighborhood groups to address local concerns. The downtown study area includes the following neighborhood groups: Good Samaritan Community, the Boulevard District Neighbors, the 4th Ward Tomcats, and the Southwest Neighbors. The City curfew for children under age 15 is 10:00 pm daily, and 11:00 pm for children ages 16-17 on Sunday through Thursday, and midnight on Friday and Saturday. If a child is operating a vehicle outside of the curfew, the vehicle can be impounded, and the owner faces fines.

Public Health

In the US, about 92 percent of all trips are made by automobile, with few trips made by walking and bicycling. The way in which our cities are designed, and the mode choices prioritized, have significant impacts on public health. Three diseases that have been found to be closely linked to a sedentary lifestyle are heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. A 2004 study found that a person’s risk of being obese increased 6 percent for each day spent in a car, and decreased by 5 percent with every hour walked daily.

Health issues of particular concern in Aurora and Kane County include heart disease, cancer, respiratory disease, stroke, and diabetes. In the US, one of every ten health care dollars spent goes toward diabetes and its complications. A 2014 Community Health Needs Assessment was undertaken for Kane County. In the Kane County South planning area (South Kane), 22 percent of adults believe that their overall health is “fair” or “poor.” This compares to 7.6 percent in Central Kane, and 12.9 percent in North Kane. These numbers are found to be higher for lower-income and Hispanic adults. Interestingly, Kane County Hispanics enjoy the longest life expectancy (84.83 years). In contrast, Kane County non-Hispanic Blacks have a markedly lower life expectancy (75.37 years).

Obesity is also a top concern for area residents, with Kane County survey respondents citing it as a concern for children and adolescents of all ages. South Kane has an obesity rate (34.5 percent) higher than the rest of Kane (24.8), Illinois (29.4), and the US (29). This rate is much higher for Hispanics (44.3) in Kane County. South Kane also reports higher incidence of respondents experiencing “fair” or “poor” mental health (16.8 percent), compared to North Kane (6.6 percent) and Central Kane (6.1 percent). Again, these numbers are higher across the county for low income adults and Hispanic adults. Infant mortality in Kane County has climbed in recent years and is much higher for black babies than for white and Hispanic babies.

24. In absence of detailed data for the study area, the data from the South Kane Planning area is used for analysis because downtown Aurora is in South Kane and Aurora comprises the majority of people in South Kane. 2014 Community Health Needs Assessment, Kane County, Illinois. Prepared for Kane County Health Department, March 2015. Online: www.kanehealth.com/PDFs/CHIP/KaneCHNADatabook.pdf (accessed 2/22/16).
Wellness and Recreational Opportunities

The City has a number of long-established service providers that support the health and wellness of residents in Aurora: the Kane County Health Department, the Fox Valley Park District, Waubonsee Community College, Aurora University, University of Illinois Extension, Partners in Health, and the Police Department. The City also sponsors several health-related events and resources to youth and seniors, such as the Partners in Health’s Annual Health Festival, the Aurora Sports Festival, the City of Lights Tournaments, Summer Youth Camp programs, and elder care and home assistance resources.

The Fox Valley Park District is also an active contributor to the City’s health and wellness via recreation-based programming. Currently, Fox Valley Park District is the largest park district in Illinois outside of Chicago and serves a population of more than 233,000 people. The district owns and maintains 2,500 acres of open space, 22 miles of river shoreline, 164 parks, 58 baseball fields, 84 soccer fields and 44 miles of trails. Other park amenities include 93 playgrounds, 26 basketball courts and 27 outdoor tennis courts. There is a combined 500,000 square feet of indoor recreation space at the district’s three main facilities, Eola and Prisco community centers and the Vaughan Athletic Center. The downtown study area includes the following amenities: Cole Center, Prisco Community Center/ McCullough Park, Illinois Avenue Island Park, Wilder Park, North River Street Park, River Edge Park, McCarry Park, Illinois Prairie Path – Aurora Branch, Fox River Trail – West, and the Aurora River Walk.

Recreational activities range from early childhood programs to active adult activities. The Fox Valley Park District also has a variety of winter and school break camps that encourage interaction with the natural environment and provide educational components in the arts, science, technology, and agriculture. In addition, the District is taking a leading role in the battle against childhood obesity. In partnership with local agencies, the District teaches children the importance of exercise and nutrition to provide them a solid foundation for a healthy future. The District’s Red Oak Nature Center and Lippold Park provides great outdoors programs for families, youth and adults as part of the district’s No Child Left Inside initiative.
Food Access

Access to fresh food is an important health consideration. In fact, some studies have shown that diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and liver disease have a positive correlation with increased distance to the nearest grocer. Locally-grown food is of growing interest to Aurora residents. Local food refers to a product available for direct human consumption that is from a community’s region or adjacent region. Defining the maximum distance is up the discretion of the community, but is typically between 100 to 300 miles. Building a strong local food system has been documented to produce a range of benefits, ranging from economic concerns, like job creation and property value increases, to more quality-of-life and environmental attributes, such as increased community interaction and stormwater retention.

Aurora is host to a long-running successful farmers’ market, but there are no supermarkets or larger grocers within the downtown study area. However, there are options just outside the study area, including a Save-a-lot on the west side and a small-scale Latino grocery store on the east side. Additionally, several convenience stores are located in the study area, including a recently opened shop inside of Leland Tower. However, convenience stores are typically limited in their options, particularly with regard to fresh food, and are more costly than supermarkets.

Aurora’s Farmers Market

A farmers market is not just a place to buy food. It also provides a social gathering space for the community and allows people to meet the farmers who grow their food. The City of Aurora Farmers Market has been in operation for over a hundred years, making it Illinois’ oldest farmers market. The market offers locally grown, just-picked produce, fresh-from-the-farm preserves, homemade breads and pastries, specialty meats, artisan cheeses, flowers, and a unique selection of handcrafted products. In addition, patrons benefit from local groups’ demonstrations, entertainment, and children’s activities at no charge. The market accepts LINK and offers a Double Value Bonus to patrons at all three of its farmers markets – Aurora’s Downtown, Aurora’s West, and Aurora’s East.

The farmers market also sponsors a number of community programs to improve the overall health of its residents by making healthy food available, accessible, and affordable. The Fresh Exchange program provides LINK Patrons a $25 dollar bonus, helping their benefit dollars go further; the Fresh First Senior program partners with Two Rivers Head Start Agency to provide monthly assistance to fixed income seniors; Fresh First is an innovative program managed in partnership with VNA Health Care designed to provide assistance to overweight and obese children, young mothers and families who are at risk of developing diet-related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. The Fresh First Outreach program provides healthy recipes, information and monthly cooking demonstrations. The Aurora’s Fresh Market also partners with the University of Illinois Extension’s Nutrition and Wellness program to provide research-based information to residents on nutrition, food safety and preservation, chronic disease management, and overall physical wellness.27

Community Gardens

Community gardens are an important component of Aurora’s sustainability vision. A community garden improves access to fresh and healthy food, promotes a sense of community, and provides an opportunity to engage in a healthy outdoor activity. The City has been proactive about expanding the number of community gardens to promote local food production and reduce maintenance costs on vacant properties owned by the City. In 2013, the Aurora City council passed the use of grant funding to create new gardens on three vacant city-owned lots and begin development of a citywide garden network. On the far-east side of Aurora, Let’s Get Growing Community Garden offers 10-by-10-foot plots to residents. The Fox Valley Park District offers over 500 community garden plots on an annual basis through the Park District’s Garden Plot Program. Another community garden sits at the East Aurora School District 131’s magnet academy. The Marie’s Community Garden Park is sponsored by the Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry and the City of Aurora for anyone’s use. Produce grown at these community gardens gets divided among the volunteer groups, individuals who run them, and the local food pantries. Community gardens have proven an effective way to encourage community well-being, connect neighbors, and grow healthy food.

27. University of Illinois Extension: http://web.extension.illinois.edu/dkk/nw/
Section 8
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
Overview

This section provides information on the environmental features in Downtown Aurora. The information was obtained from the City of Aurora, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and environmental advocacy groups, along with a visual assessment of existing conditions in the community.

Key Findings

- Aurora residents enjoy access to a large amount of riverfront open space. Lands along the river offer passive and active recreation opportunities, community event space, and a pleasant environment for walking and biking along the river. The City offers a number of high quality parks, as does the Fox Valley Park District. RiverEdge Park, with its performance space and high quality amenities, is a notable recent addition to the downtown environment.

- The Fox River provides recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and drinking water. The City draws the majority of its water supply from the Fox River. The river also provides aquatic habitat, opportunities for canoeing and kayaking, and a popular site for fishing.

- The presence of the Fox River along the southern limits of Downtown could be better utilized. According to stakeholder interviews, there is a desire to build a better connection to the river with improved amenities.

- The Fox River suffers from impaired water quality. The Fox River exhibits water quality problems along its entire length, including in the study area. According to the Illinois EPA, the river has multiple pollutants and low levels of dissolved oxygen, creating an environment that does not adequately support aquatic life, fish consumption, primary contact, or aesthetic quality. Sources of impairment include the effects of dams, urban runoff, combined sewer overflows, and point source discharges.

- Significant portions of Downtown Aurora are located in floodplains with a 1% or 0.2% annual chance of flooding. While a large amount of the floodplain in the study area is part of parks and preserved open space, there are industrial areas and even some commercial and mixed-use areas in the floodplain. The largest developed areas within the floodplain are along Indian Creek near where Broadway crosses the stream.
In addition to its many businesses, cultural institutions, and historic architecture, Downtown Aurora boasts an impressive array of natural resources. At the heart of downtown, the Fox River that first drew settlers to the area still shapes the downtown, creating its banks, views, and numerous islands. Throughout the neighborhood, plentiful public open space in riverfront parks provides recreational and entertainment opportunities for residents and visitors. These crucial natural resources have been the focus of several planning and environmental advocacy initiatives, including the installation of green stormwater infrastructure to improve water quality. The environmental assets of Downtown Aurora present a wide range of potential benefits and pitfalls, merit careful planning.

The Fox River suffers from impaired water quality for its full length in Illinois, including in Aurora. Dams across the river affect its flow and water quality, while dividing it into segments that both enable and complicate recreational use. This chapter examines the existing conditions of the river itself, the land around it, and the quality and accessibility of open space and recreational opportunities.

Water Resources

Downtown Aurora lies on both banks of the Fox River, as well as on a number of small islands in the river. The Fox River is the dominant natural feature of the area, where it defines the landscape, offers riverfront and water-based recreation opportunities, and provides a large portion of the City’s drinking water supply. While the river contributes cultural, environmental, and aesthetic resources to the downtown, it also poses a risk of flooding and suffers from impaired water quality.

The Fox River is the third largest tributary of the Illinois River. Originating in Waukesha County, Wisconsin, it flows south for 200 miles to Ottawa, Illinois, in LaSalle County. Along the way, it passes through Lake, McHenry, Kane, and Kendall Counties in Illinois, draining 1,720 square miles of widely diverse ecosystems and landscapes. The Fox River includes the Chain O’Lakes, a series of connected waterbodies in Lake and McHenry counties popular for motorized recreational boating. South of Kane County, the river basin is mostly agricultural. Recent pressures associated with expanding urban development have resulted in efforts to preserve the Fox River watershed, including the creation of local forest preserves and the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, and efforts to improve water quality through the Fox River Study Group.

Downtown Aurora is located within the Ferson Creek-Fox River watershed. Watersheds are areas of land defined by how water moves over the landscape. Areas that drain into a common point, such as a stream or river, are within the same watershed. Most of Downtown Aurora is located in the Mastodon Lake-Fox River sub-watershed, with a small area along Indian Creek part of the Town of Aurora sub-watershed and a few blocks on the northern edge of the study area in the Town of Geneva-Fox River Watershed. The Ferson Creek-Fox River Watershed is a largely developed watershed draining significant portions of Kane, DuPage, and Kendall counties, as well as small areas of northwestern Cook County and northwestern Will County.
Figure 8.1 Watershed boundaries near Aurora
Water Quality

The IEPA collects water quality information, identifying streams and rivers as “impaired” if the water quality does not support its intended use. Currently, the IEPA considers all Illinois segments of the Fox River to be impaired, along with several tributaries. In the study area, IEPA has assessed the Fox River as part of a stream segment (IL_DT-38) that runs from Mill Creek in Kane County to Waubonsie Creek in the Village of Oswego. According to IEPA’s Section 303(d) List for 2016, this segment is not meeting Illinois’ standards for water quality. Specifically, the segment is impaired for four designated uses: aquatic life, fish consumption, aesthetic quality, and primary contact, and is categorized as a medium restoration priority by the state. However, IEPA has assessed this reach of the river as having water quality that fully supports its use as a public water supply. IEPA has not assessed the segment for secondary contact (such as boating). Indian Creek also flows through the eastern part of Downtown Aurora towards its confluence with the Fox River just south of Pierce Street, and has been assessed as impaired for aquatic life and primary contact.

Table 8.1 provides more information on the analyzed impairments as well as potential sources of impairments. The impairments are connected to a range of potential causes, including changes to the river’s natural flow and vegetation, and elevated amounts of certain chemicals and bacteria. IEPA’s report cites numerous sources for these impairments, with most falling into the general categories of the effects of damming and impoundment, and point and non-point source pollution associated with urban development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream Segment</th>
<th>Unsupported Uses</th>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fox River (IL_DT-38)</td>
<td>Primary Contact Recreation, Fish Consumption, Aquatic Life, Aesthetic Quality</td>
<td>Alteration in stream-side or littoral vegetative covers, Fecal Coliform, Mercury, pH, Phosphorus (total), Polychlorinated biphenyls, Total Suspended Solids, Other flow regime alterations, Aquatic Algae</td>
<td>Streambank modifications/destabilization; Impacts from hydrostructure flow regulation/modification; Dam or impoundment; Combined sewer overflows; Urban runoff/storm sewers; Municipal point source discharges; Atmospheric deposition – toxics; Source unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Creek (IL_DTZK)</td>
<td>Aquatic life; Primary contact</td>
<td>Chloride; Fecal Coliform</td>
<td>Combined sewer overflows; Urban runoff/storm sewers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IEPA, Section 303(d) List, 2016

Downtown Aurora contains land that is at high risk of flooding from the Fox River. While most of the floodway lies in areas of preserved open space, some parking lots and industrial properties on the east bank of the river are within the floodway. Additional areas, such as the vicinity of Clark Street and Baje Industrial Drive, lie within the areas that are at a 1% or 0.2% annual risk of flooding. The largest developed areas within the floodplain are along Indian Creek, rather than the Fox River; many of the properties on both sides of Broadway along Indian Creek face a 1% or 0.2% annual risk of flooding. Properties along New York Street, including on Stolp Island, also lie within the area with a 0.2% annual risk of flooding.

Figure 8.2. Flood risk near Downtown Aurora
Dams

Within Downtown Aurora, a dam interrupts the natural flow of the Fox River. The Aurora/Stolp Island Dam is one of fifteen dams along the Illinois reach of the river. While some of these dams continue to serve important functions in regulating water levels, most are legacies of the needs of earlier eras when they were used to generate power for factories. In Aurora, the Fox River is dammed in two sections on each side of Stolp Island, several hundred feet south of Hollywood Casino. Dams have existed at this site since as early as 1915. Between the west dam and the west bank of the river, a concrete chute acts as a fish passage, which paddlers can also use to bypass the dam (but it is dangerous for inexperienced paddlers). According to a 2007 IDNR report, the east portion of the dam is owned by the State of Illinois through IDNR. The report notes that the west channel dam is under private ownership but that its ownership history is vague; however, a 2014 map created for the Fox River Study Group by the Kane County Division of Environmental and Water Resources cites the City of Aurora as the owner of the west dam.

IDNR’s 2007 report addresses the safety of river dams in Illinois, including the east dam in Aurora. The analysis, completed by CTE/AECOM, found no “obvious visual deficiencies” on the face of the dam, but did note damage and erosion to one of the abutments. It also states that characteristics of the river current around the dam suggest possible structural problems with the dam. The study describes the current as showing evidence of a “very strong” roller, as well as a section of reverse roller near the left abutment. These currents present a safety hazard, as they can trap objects or boaters against the face of a dam. According to the report, the Aurora Fire Department reported no safety incidents at the east dam, but approximately ten drownings at the west dam. There is a portage point with a ramp just north of the east dam behind the public parking lot across Broadway from the Aurora Central Fire Station, but no nearby portage point below the dam on the east side. On the west side, there is a portage point north of New York Street, about 0.3 miles above the re-entry point.

“Run of river” dams, such as those in Aurora, negatively impact water quality and the safety of recreational boaters and paddlers. The presence of these dams decreases overall levels of dissolved oxygen in the river while increasing sedimentation at impoundment sites above the dams. A 2003 study funded by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) found low levels of dissolved oxygen not just immediately above dams, but rather throughout the area with dams (impounded reaches). These effects also harm aquatic habitat. Studies have found that a greater number and variety of fish species are present in free-flowing areas closer to the mouth of the Fox River and that the many dams act as barriers to large, diverse populations of fish establishing themselves upstream.

Water Supply

In addition to providing recreational opportunities, ecological services, and visual attractiveness, the Fox River is one of the City of Aurora’s main sources of drinking water. Sources for Aurora’s water supply include the Fox River and both deep and shallow wells. Typically, about 60% of the City’s supply comes from the Fox River. Because all surface water is potentially exposed to sources of contamination, the City practices a number of treatment processes for its water supply, including coagulation, sedimentation, filtration, and disinfection. Aurora’s water treatment and supply program has earned several awards, with its water treatment plant being one of only 27 in the nation to attain the President’s Award from the U.S. EPA’s Partnership for Safe Water.
Fox Valley Park District

Based in Aurora and serving the communities of Aurora, Montgomery, and North Aurora, the Fox Valley Park District maintains a series of properties in Downtown Aurora. In addition to the main properties described below, the Fox Valley Park District also maintains many of the areas of more passive open space along the river, such as Illinois Avenue Park, North River Street Park, and several small Fox River islands.

- Veterans Memorial Island: From the Illinois Avenue Bridge, residents can access a small island in the Fox River that includes a Veterans Memorial, a concrete boat launch, walking paths, and parking.
- McCullough Park: West of the river, McCullough Park features a playground, picnic shelter, open space, and connections to the Fox River Trail. It is also the site of the Prisco Community Center, which offers classes, meeting spaces, a gymnasium and fitness center, and a performance stage.

Land Resources

City Parks

Downtown Aurora features a number of large areas of open space, containing active recreational opportunities, community event spaces, conserved wildlife habitat, and large amounts of riverfront land. Both the City of Aurora and the Fox Valley Park District maintain land holdings in the Downtown area, primarily along the river and on some of the undeveloped islands.

- RiverEdge Park: Opened in the summer of 2013, RiverEdge Park is the culmination of many years of planning, design, and implementation. It offers ticketed events throughout the summer at the John C. Dunham Pavilion, an outdoor amphitheater that seats 8,500 visitors. Past events have included the annual Blues on the Fox festival and performances by Hall and Oates, Mavis Staples, and Blues Traveler. The park also hosts outdoor movies, food and culture festivals, and other community events. The park is operated by the Aurora Civic Center Authority. Residents can also experience these ticketed events for free by picnicking on the west side of the river, at North River Street Park.
- Wilder Promenade: Located on North Lake Street on the west side of the river, Wilder Promenade provides gardens, benches, a Vietnam Memorial, an Aurora Policemen’s Memorial and grassy tree shaded areas.
- McCarty Park: One of Aurora’s oldest parks is McCarty Park, located at 350 East Galena Boulevard. Originally dedicated in 1832, the park is named after the McCarty brothers who founded the settlement that became Aurora. It recently received a $700,000 renovation that added an interactive fountain and splash pad, new entryways, a pergola, energy-efficient lighting, and landscaping.
City of Aurora Green Initiatives

Aurora has been recognized for its environmental practices and commitment to sustainability, which have been a top priority for Mayor Thomas Weisner’s administration. This commitment has been demonstrated through the development of the Seize the Future Master Plan, Riverfront Vision Plan, and RiverEdge Park Master Plan, which guide sustainable development and the City's Sustainability Plan. In 2007, funding from the IEPA allowed Aurora to investigate green infrastructure strategies for stormwater management to reduce run off and improve the water quality of the Fox River. To restore areas along the Fox River, environmental remediation was conducted with the support of the IEPA at a landfill site which is now part of River Edge Park. This activity was crucial to completing RiverEdge Park, a significant accomplishment for the City reflecting a strong desire to protect land around the Fox River.

Further examples of the City’s commitment to sustainability are evident in the implementation of several green features in municipal buildings and infrastructure. Funding from a federal grant was used by the City to replace stop lights in the downtown with computerized traffic signals to reduce traffic congestion and CO2 emissions from stopped vehicles. Solar panels have also been installed at the Aurora Transportation Center and light fixtures in multiple City buildings have been modified to include energy efficient light bulbs. Municipal efforts to reduce gas consumption in City vehicles resulted in Aurora receiving the “Green Fleets” designation from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) in 2006. In 2009, the Aurora Police Headquarters opened with LEED Gold Certification. The building includes permeable pavers, and was built with recycled materials.

In addition to municipal sustainability initiatives, Aurora offers several programs that encourage residential conservation. Through a partnership with The Conservation Foundation, Aurora’s rain barrel program allows residents to purchase rain barrels that collect storm water helping to reduce runoff reaching the Fox River. The City also provides funding and technical assistance to homeowners seeking to make energy efficient upgrades to their homes. In terms of education and outreach, Aurora is one of five communities to receive the Clean Air Counts Platinum Award, which recognizes efforts to inform and educate residents on ways to improve air quality. As a result of these efforts, Aurora was named the first “Green Power Community” in Illinois, highlighting the City’s use of renewable energy to eliminate CO2 emissions.

Green Stormwater Management

To advance the water quality and conservation goals embodied in its Sustainability Plan, RiverEdge Plan, and other initiatives, the City of Aurora has pursued a number of green stormwater management strategies in the Downtown area. Green stormwater management refers to a broad set of best practices in infrastructure, policy, technology, and management that take natural systems and engineered areas that mimic natural systems to filter and infiltrate stormwater runoff. Green stormwater management can reduce the volume and pollution levels of runoff that reaches the sewer system and surface water bodies. In Aurora, green stormwater infrastructure helps to mitigate flooding and improve water quality in the Fox River by reducing both point source pollution from combined sewer overflows and non-point source solution from runoff that passes over developed, urbanized areas. Aurora’s efforts to implement green stormwater management has earned them recognition from the Natural Resources Defense Council, a national environmental advocacy organization.
Aurora developed its major green stormwater projects based on an IEPA-funded study completed in 2009. These projects include infrastructure that mitigates the impact of the surface parking near the Aurora Transportation Center, rain gardens along Spring Street, and elements of RiverEdge Park.

- **Lincoln Avenue Metra Parking:** In the commuter parking lot at the corner of Spring Street and Lincoln Avenue, the City installed a bio-filtration facility in 2010 (shown in photo to the right). To clean stormwater runoff before it reaches the Fox River, the City retrofitted an existing detention basin, installing native plants and a sand filter. The facility fully treats the first 3/4” of rainfall on the 4.5 acre parking surface, removing suspended solids and other pollutants.

- **Spring Street Rain Gardens:** Along the south side of Spring Street between 4th Street and Root Street, the City installed five rain gardens between the sidewalk and street in 2010. Rain that falls on Spring Street and the adjoining properties to the south flows to the rain gardens, which uses native plants and a sand and gravel base to clean and infiltrate the stormwater. The gardens treat the first 3/4” of rain that falls on 1.3 acres, decreasing the volume of runoff in that area by 72%.

- **RiverEdge Park Stormwater Wetland Bio-swale:** Also in 2010, the City constructed a bio-swale that contains a manufactured water quality unit and is planted with native vegetation. The bio-swale intercepts and filters stormwater from an existing storm sewer before it enters the Fox River. It fully treats the first 3/4” of stormwater that flows from a 5.2 acre area of industrial lots and Broadway Avenue.

In conjunction with these investments, the City also created a Naturalized Stormwater Management Corridor Plan (NSMCP) for a large area that includes northeastern portions of the Downtown study area, where the City was decombining its storm and wastewater sewer system. Decomination reduces combined sewer overflows, but also results in the increased flow of stormwater into the Fox River. The NSMCP helped the City identify the most promising and beneficial parcels to locate green stormwater BMPs. The City also created a stormwater management toolkit to educate landowners, developers, and government officials about best practices. These projects were funded through an EPA Section 319 Grant in partnership with CMAP.
Green Groups
Aurora and the downtown area benefit from several public and private environmental organizations that advocate for sustainability and conservation. These groups and their activities are briefly described below.

Aurora Sustainability Council
The Aurora Sustainability Council, also known as Sustainable Aurora, serves as an advisory board to the Aurora City Council on sustainability and environmental practices. The 13-member Council’s activities are primarily directed towards implementation of Aurora’s Sustainability Plan, which was adopted in 2009. The plan established broad strategies towards improving long term sustainability in Aurora by enhancing environmental practices within City operations and aligning development policies to encourage sustainable growth. To implement the Sustainability Plan, Sustainable Aurora advises the City Council on programs and activities that advance the plan’s recommendations. These recommendations include increasing sustainability in municipal buildings and encouraging transit oriented development. Sustainable Aurora includes four Committees which provide expertise, research, and programming that guide members as they advise the City Council. Other Sustainable Aurora duties include cultivating a local movement for sustainability and helping the City Council and Mayor understand community needs when considering sustainability issues.

Aurora Green Lights
An affiliate of The Conservation Foundation, Aurora Green Lights is a group of independent community organizers that coordinate the annual Aurora GreenFest. Started in 2010, the Aurora GreenFest provides eco-friendly exhibits and speakers to discuss trends in sustainability and environmental issues. Opportunities are available for children to learn about conservation and attendees can share and discover green solutions for their homes or businesses. The event draws families, business owners, and educators from across the Fox River Valley region.

Valley of the Fox Group Chapter of the Sierra Club
Since 1992, the Valley of the Fox Group chapter of the Illinois Sierra Club has been active in Kane and Kendall Counties offering a wide range of opportunities for members to support environmental conservation. These opportunities include group discussions on environmental issues, presentations from environmental advocates, and group outings to explore local forest preserves. One of the group’s most significant activities is testing pollution levels in the Fox River, which has been supported by a group called the Valley of the Fox Water Sentinels since 2005.

Green Buddha Life Center
Located in downtown Aurora, the Green Buddha Life Center is the first center in the western suburbs dedicated to sustainability and healthy lifestyles with a focus on environmental health and justice for low income and minority communities. The Center serves as meeting space for local and regional sustainability groups, sells recycled books via an online bookstore, and has an eco-arts gallery. Other green initiatives offered by the Center include a bike rental program and sound healing events.

The Conservation Foundation
Operating primarily in Will, Kane, DuPage, and Kendall Counties, The Conservation Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and protecting open space, natural lands, rivers, and watersheds. The Foundation has partnered with the City of Aurora to sell rain barrels through a municipal rain barrel program, which helps reduce storm water runoff to the Fox River. Protection of the Fox River has been a major focus for the organization.
Section 9
EDUCATION, ARTS, and COMMUNITY SERVICES
Overview

The purpose of this section is to provide an inventory of public services and facilities and identify gaps, if any, that need to be filled going forward. Existing community services are provided by the City, township, Kane County, regional organizations, and private entities. The information in this section was obtained from City staff, the Institute of Education Sciences, a division of U.S. Department of Education, and project team research and analysis.

Key Findings

- Downtown Aurora is home to many public and civic organizations. In addition to City and Township government offices, Downtown Aurora has a number of schools, religious institutions, a library, post office, police and fire stations, parks and recreation department, historic museums, and other cultural organizations within the study area boundary or within close walking distance.

- With so many arts efforts in the community, there is a need for direction and coordination. To avoid duplication of efforts and to build upon successes in related areas, improvements in coordination of efforts is needed.

- The east side school district has lower rankings than the west side for all schools. Lower student-to-teacher ratios and more children with linguistic challenges hurts the area’s test scores.

Stakeholder interview comments related to arts, culture, and community services:

- Aurorans have a unique pride about being from Aurora (but many rarely visit downtown)
- There is a need for a cultural arts center; David L Pierce is great but there’s not enough room for classes or workshops
- High-levels arts has been a great success in downtown Aurora (especially Paramount Theatre)
- Police response is quick, crime is down
- The new library is a fantastic asset, new technology is underutilized
- Roots Aurora is a fun unity festival in a city that is quite culturally divided
- The government needs to provide the “bones” to make arts and culture thrive

*These statements represent common perceptions from local stakeholders and may not represent factual conditions or the opinions of all who were interviewed.
Arts and Culture

There have been a number of recent successes and accomplishments relating to arts and culture in recent years. These include policies, programs, and infrastructural improvements such as the signs for the Downtown Heritage Tour, a set of Architecture Trading Cards and posters, downtown planters, and transportation and wayfinding improvements.

Organizations

Aurora Public Art Commission

The Aurora Public Art Commission (APAC) is a civic organization that promotes a variety of arts initiatives for the City of Aurora. It was established in 1985 by the City to develop a public arts program. The Commission consists of nine volunteer members, appointed by the Mayor. APAC hosts between six and eight exhibitions per year in its galleries at the David L. Pierce Art and History Center, as well as two annual exhibits at Aurora’s City Hall. APAC also develops programs in arts education, establishes exhibit schedules, selects artists and oversees their work.

APAC has commissioned 8 sculptures, including City Lights/City Life (North Island Center), The Journeyman (Aurora Transportation Center), The Bears and Animal Reliefs (Phillips Park), The Fireman (Aurora Regional Fire Museum), Isaac2/Swimming Stones (Benton and Stolp), The Mastodon Dig (Visitor’s Center at Phillips Park), and Marie Wilkinson (Aurora Public Library). In addition, APAC operates the GAR Veterans Memorial Museum.

Aurora Civic Center Authority

The Aurora Civic Center Authority (ACCA) was created by a Public Act in 1974 during the mayoral term of Albert D. McCoy. Its full name is the Aurora Metropolitan Exposition, Auditorium and Office Building Authority. ACCA has nine Board members appointed by the mayor, each serving a term of three years. According to the City website, the Board is “authorized by law to promote, operate and maintain expositions, conventions, theatrical, sports and cultural activities in the City of Aurora and in connection with the Paramount Arts Center.” They operate the Paramount Arts Centre, North Island Center, and RiverEdge Park.

Through an inter-governmental agreement, the City of Aurora and ACCA agreed to allow ACCA to manage RiverEdge Park. In 2013, their assets were over $20 million. Annual operating expenses are approximately $10 million, and revenues for 2013 were slightly less than that. If approved by a majority of voters, ACCA can issue bonds and they have the authority to levy taxes to pay for the bonds.

Aurora Downtown

Aurora Downtown is a Special Service Area bounded by Lincoln Avenue, Lake Street, Spring Street, and Clark Street. The association has approximately 250 property owners and a 24-member board of directors, half of whom are elected. The others are appointed by various agencies in downtown Aurora. The businesses in the district tax themselves at 1% of the property’s equalized assessed value to support various activities, beautification efforts, infrastructure maintenance, and marketing to promote the downtown. Aurora Downtown assists with promoting several independently organized downtown events such as First Fridays, Aurora Green Drinks, Winter Lights, Pop Up Shops, and more. Most recently, the group started a successful grant program for new businesses locating in a downtown storefront, and all of the recipients have participated in First Fridays.
Aurora Preservation Commission
The Aurora Preservation Commission has many responsibilities, as outlined in Section Five: Built Environment.

Local Community Arts Efforts
In addition to the official organizations in Aurora, there are many non-profits, art galleries and concerned citizens coming together to promote and enhance downtown Aurora. It is a result of these grassroots efforts that the City has seen such successes as Aurora Green Drinks, the Vacant Windows Project, Wednesdays at the Plaza, the Transcendence mural at Hesed House, Louche Puce Market, Pop Up Shops, and First Fridays. The popular First Fridays festival with art and music grew from coordinated ArtWalks by Cultural Creatives, Inc. in 2008 to a modest recurring event at Two Brothers called the ArtBar in 2012. More recent Frist Fridays have featured openings and events at well over a dozen locations. A local non-profit bookstore, Culture Stock, also hosts community arts and culture events.
Theatre

Paramount Theatre
The Paramount Theatre opened in 1931 and was the first air-conditioned building outside of Chicago. The Paramount was open and running until 1976, when it was purchased by the ACCA. At that time, the theatre was closed and the planning for a major renovation began. In early 1978, the theatre reopened offering a variety of musical, theatrical, comedy, dance, and family programs.

In 2011, the Broadway series debuted, attracting a wider audience and expanding the reach of the theatre, which currently has the second largest subscriber base in the state of Illinois. It was named one of the Top Ten Theatres in Chicago by the League of Chicago Theatres and in 2015, the first year it was eligible for the Joseph Jefferson Awards (Jeff Awards), the Paramount received 5 Jeff Awards, including best large musical.

Copley Theatre
The Copley Theatre is located inside of North Island Center, across the street from the Paramount Theatre. It is also run by ACCA.

Riverfront Playhouse
The Riverfront Playhouse is a not-for-profit storefront theater founded in 1978 that has put on over 200 shows in downtown Aurora. In addition to regular shows, the theatre also offers programming, such as children’s summer camps. It is located on Water Street, Aurora’s pedestrian mall.

Museums

David L Pierce Art and History Center
Owned and maintained by the City of Aurora, the Center contains the main offices and exhibition galleries of the Aurora Historical Society and the Aurora Public Art Commission.

G.A.R. Memorial and Veterans Military Museum
The GAR was built as a monument to Aurora’s Civil War Veterans, a shrine to their fallen comrades, and a meeting hall for veterans. The museum’s mission is to preserve and showcase the building, artifacts, and history through exhibits and programs. The GAR also served as Aurora’s first free library and will reopen to the public after undergoing significant restorations.

Aurora Regional Fire Museum
The mission of the Aurora Regional Fire Museum is to preserve and exhibit the artifacts and history of Aurora and surrounding area fire departments.

SciTech Hands on Museum
The Sci-Tech Hands on Museum hosts a variety of exhibits and programs aimed to inspire passion for science and technology for visitors of all ages. The museum also hosts a SciTech Discovery Preschool, classes, senior citizen programming, and other programs.

Tanner House Museum
The Tanner house was built in 1857 in an Italianate-style for a prominent merchant and his family. In 1936, members of the Tanner family donated the house to the Aurora Historical Society. In 1976, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, the museum hosts tours and events and is located just west of the study area for the downtown master plan.
Community Cohesion

People from Aurora have a great sense of hometown pride. A popular 1960s campaign featuring “Andy Aurora” and the slogan, “I’m from Aurora, Illinois and PROUD OF IT!” was resurrected in 2012 and the sentiment still holds strongly for many people. Aurora had many vocal abolitionists against slavery from before the start of the Civil War, and was known for tolerance and inclusivity.

Despite this strong hometown pride and tolerance, a literal and figurative divide along the Fox River exists between the east and west sides of Aurora. The two sides of town are demographically different, with more Latinos living on the east side in recent decades. Latinos have a long history in Aurora, dating back to the 1920s when Mexican immigrants were hired to build the railroads and lived in boxcars in Eola. (Additional demographic information in appendix).

Community boards and commissions are dedicated to cultivating diversity and promoting community development and human relations, including the African American Heritage Advisory Board, the Hispanic Heritage Advisory Board, Indian-American Community Outreach Advisory Board, and the Human Relations Commission.

The Special Events Division also works to promote the City with events and cultural activities to encourage community pride and participation, enhance quality of life, and promote cross-cultural exchanges. The Division puts on the Memorial Day, 4th of July and Veterans Day parades as well as the three weekly farmer’s markets in the summer, and fireworks for Diwali, Winter Lights and the 4th of July. They also assist with the Fiestas Patrias, Puerto Rican parades, and more.
Figure 9.1 Community Facilities

1. Hollywood Casino Aurora
2. East Aurora Cemetery
3. West Aurora Cemetery
4. Claim Street Baptist Church
5. Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church
6. First Baptist Church
7. First Presbyterian Church of Aurora
8. Grace Lutheran Church
9. Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
10. Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church
11. Saint Joseph Roman Catholic Church
12. Saint Marys Roman Catholic Church
13. Saint Michaels Eastern Rite Catholic Church
14. Saint Nicholas Roman Catholic Church
15. Saint Pauls Lutheran Church
16. Trinity Episcopal Church
17. Wesley United Methodist Church
18. Aurora City Hall
19. Waubonsee Community College
20. Prisco Community Center
21. Transportation Center
22. Stolp Island Dam
23. Stolp Island Dam
24. River Edge Park
25. Aurora Fire Department Central Station
26. Broadw ay Hotel
27. Aurora RiverWalk
28. Aurora Central High School
29. Aurora Public Library
30. Township of Aurora
31. SciTech Hands On Museum
32. May Street Park
33. McCarty Park
34. Pigeon Hill Park
35. Stevens Playground
36. Wilder Park
37. North River Street Park
38. View Street Park
39. Illinois Avenue Island Park
40. Illinois Avenue Park
41. McGullough Park
42. Post Office
43. Aurora Public Library
44. L D Brady Elementary School
45. Emmanuel School
46. Nancy Hill Elementary School
47. Madonna High School (historical)
48. Saint Joseph School
49. Saint Marys School
50. Saint Michaels School
51. Saint Nicholas School
52. Todd Elementary School
53. K D Waldo Middle School
54. Young School
55. Archbishop Rorem School
56. Aurora Central High School
57. Living Waters Fellow ship School
58. STEM Academy
59. Presence Fox Knoll Retirement Community
60. Northgate Shopping Center
61. Paramount Arts Center
62. Riverfront Playhouse
63. Township of Aurora
64. Olson Center

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2015.
Community Facilities

Downtown Aurora is home to numerous social service agencies, non-profits, health care facilities, and religious institutions serving the community. Additionally, the City of Aurora provides many services for its residents, including the following departments: Community Services, Development Services, Emergency Management, Finance, Fire, Police, Public Properties, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Street Maintenance, and Special Events.

Health Care Facilities

While there are no large hospitals within the study area, Presence Mercy Medical Center is just north of the study area. There are a number of small medical offices within the downtown study area.

Social service agencies

Most social service agencies in downtown Aurora are located close to Stolp Island in the downtown core, as well as just north of the study area by Presence Mercy Hospital. Prominent agencies in the downtown area include: Family Counseling Services, Catholic Charities, World Relief Aurora, Dunham Fund, Fox Valley United Way, Aurora Township Youth Services, Family Focus Aurora, Wayside Cross, and other church-affiliated groups. Just south of the study area, the Hesed House serves to shelter, feed, and clothe homeless individuals and families. It is the second largest shelter in the state of Illinois, and the largest outside of Chicago, serving between 150 and 200 guests each night. Additionally, Mutual Ground helps to combat domestic violence, and various food pantries feed Aurora's hungry families.

Religious Institutions

There are over a dozen religious institutions in the study area and nearby, including (bold text indicates location within the study area boundaries):

- Community Christian Church East Aurora
- Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church
- First Baptist Church
- First Presbyterian Church of Aurora
- Fox Valley Hispanic Seventh Day Adventist Church*
- Free Methodist Church*
- Grace Lutheran
- Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal*
- Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios*
- Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
- New England Congregational Church
- The Oasis Bible Church of Aurora Original Temple of God church
- Our Savior Lutheran Church
- Saint Joseph Roman Catholic Church
- Saint Mary’s Roman Catholic Church
- Saint Michael’s Easter Rite Catholic Church
- Saint Nicholas Roman Catholic Church
- Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church
- Trinity Episcopal Church
- The Vineyard Aurora Church
- The Warehouse Church
- Wesley United Methodist Church
- Genesis Community Church

*Some or all services in Spanish.
Library

The Aurora Public Library is one of the oldest institutions in the City of Aurora, established in 1881 through city ordinance. The original library was a Carnegie building located on Stolp Island at 1 E. Benton Street in 1904. In the 1950s, interior upgrades were made and in 1969 a major renovation added wings and another story, almost tripling its size. The renovation included a limestone cladding and a modern appearance. In May of 2015, the Main Library was closed and the newly constructed Santori library opened in June. Both locations are in the downtown study area. Since the 1950s, the library has operated various book-mobiles to deliver books and materials to local schools and people who are homebound.

In the new library, there are meeting rooms for businesses (small ones are free, large ones are very inexpensive), there is a Maker Space with three 3D printers, a banner printer, a laser cutter, vinyl cutter, virtual reality, and a digital media lab. The library hosts story time, computer classes, and adult programming. The library works with Spark (a group associated with the United Way), World Relief, and local schools. They also bring their book-mobile to school districts that have limited on-site collections.
Educational Institutions

There are four elementary schools, one middle school, two high schools, and two private schools within one half-mile of the downtown Aurora study area. Table 9.1 provides an overview of the number of enrolled students and the student-teacher ratio for each school. Compared to the State of Illinois average of 15.19 students per teacher, only the K.D. Waldo Middle School falls below this average.

The website GreatSchools.org rates schools primarily on test data, but also includes additional data where available. There is a stark divide between the east and west school districts, with most schools on the west side ranking as “average” and most schools on the east side falling “below average.”

Waubonsee Community College provides the only higher education facility in the study area, and Aurora University is about two miles west of the downtown core. In addition to their curricula for associate degrees, Waubonsee also offers non-credit educational classes and programs in the areas of workforce development, community education, and adult education. The downtown campus has over 50 classrooms and 132,000 square feet, including a student bookstore, and a café/convenience center. The campus has multipurpose rooms and conference rooms available for public use for a small fee. The college collaborates with local organizations to host community events.

Table 9.1. School Enrollment for Schools within one-half mile of the downtown study area (public school data from 2013-2014, private school data from 2011-2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Enrolled Students</th>
<th>Student-Teacher Ratio</th>
<th>Great Schools Rating (1-10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Todd Early Childhood Center</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>26.62</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aurora West High School</td>
<td>3,711</td>
<td>18.11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora East District 131 (2013 – 2014)</td>
<td>C.M. Bardwell Elem School</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>17.42</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K.D. Waldo Middle School</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>14.02</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L.D. Brady Elem School</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>17.16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aurora East High School</td>
<td>3,525</td>
<td>20.42</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Joseph Elementary</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>17.21</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overview

Downtown Aurora is rich in history, arts, cultural and natural resources, all of which are highly valued and contribute to the quality of life enjoyed by residents. Enhancing these qualities should be one of the central themes of the Downtown Plan. Based on the key findings of this report, the following themes emerged as priority issues to be addressed by the plan:

**Build upon connections to the ATC**

In late 2015, the City of Aurora was awarded $8.6 million in federal funds through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program for changes to the Aurora Transportation Center (ATC), including a pedestrian bridge over the Fox River. The City also has a $2 million grant from the Kane County Forest Preserve District to put towards the project. The recommendations put forth in the updated master plan should build upon the improved bicycle and pedestrian access planned for the ATC.

**Increase residential density and variety, particularly near transit infrastructure**

Adding new residential units and rehabilitating older structures to provide additional housing will strengthen the downtown. Recommendations in the master plan will focus on ways to promote residential housing, with a focus on areas with excellent access to transit and amenities.

**Address safety concerns to enhance walkability**

In addition to having more destinations to walk to, research in this report and commentary provided by stakeholders has identified a number of gaps in the network of safe streets in the study area. The recommendations in the report will identify missing connections, areas for lighting enhancements, and infrastructural changes to improve safety.
**Coordinate arts and culture efforts**

In a city of Aurora’s size with a fast-growing arts and culture scene, there are many different groups working to promote and enhance arts in the downtown area. Some of these efforts are city-sponsored and others are grassroots. Lack of coordination can lead to redundancy and duplication of efforts. Ideas for improving coordination of arts and culture ventures will be addressed in the recommendations.

**Increase riverfront access and recreational enjoyment**

Strategies for introducing visitors to the river as well as better utilizing the riverfront as a community asset will be a key feature of the plan. Maintaining and building connections to local and regional trails, especially along the riverfront, is also a priority. Additionally, increasing recreational use of the river and improving water quality is an important goal, and removing obsolete structures and improving viewing sites should be considered.

**Address concerns with building codes developers perceive as restrictive**

In an effort to promote rehabilitation of older structures, the City has gone to great lengths to help developers understand and work within the building code. They have created a forum on building and permits; they have a Development Services Team dedicating to helping streamline the development process. However, some developers have pointed to certain codes or requirements that prevent them from building in downtown. The report will take a deeper look into those restrictions to understand where there is confusion, and where changes to the code are recommended.

**Foster a supportive business environment**

Innovative approaches to creating a supportive business environment have led to the creation of the region’s first fiber optic cable system to support the tech industry. Current business recruiting and retention efforts have brought new businesses to the downtown. Ongoing efforts to understand the needs of existing businesses should continue. Improved communication with, and support for existing small businesses is also needed. Identifying specific needs to attract a diverse range of businesses to the downtown will be examined in the master plan.

**Increase the visibility of Downtown Aurora**

Downtown Aurora stands out for its tall buildings and dense urban fabric. However, it is not highly visible to those traveling on nearby major roads. With multiple routes into the Downtown off of Route 25 and Route 31, improved signage or gateways on these heavily traveled corridors will help draw potential customers in to support local businesses. Improving wayfinding signage from the train stop will also help draw visitors further into downtown.

**Preserve and promote the unique history of Aurora**

Residents are proud of their historic community and the downtown plan will focus on preserving and strengthening this heritage. From George Elmsie to Mayan Revival architecture, the educational and economic development potential of Downtown can be expanded. Informed by approaches in similar communities, like Oak Park, the plan will present recommendations for building on current efforts already underway.
Make it easy to visit

Creating a city that is easy to navigate and welcoming to all is an important consideration. For those that drive, knowing that they’ll likely get a parking space is an important consideration for their trip. However, too much parking can also make it harder to create lively, walkable places. The plan will present recommendations for how the City can achieve a balance so that pedestrians, bicyclists, commuters, and drivers are encouraged to visit and that they can easily get around once they are downtown.

Next Steps

After the Existing Conditions Report is presented to the Steering Committee and City staff for review and discussion, the next step in the process will be to work with the community to create a shared vision. CMAP will work with residents, business owners, elected and appointed officials, and Village staff to begin creating a draft plan and recommendations.
Appendix: Demographic profile

The following section provides an analysis of demographic trends that impact the downtown Aurora community. Data was gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, and the Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics. For comparisons and trend analysis, data was also collected for Kane County and the seven-county Chicago region. While Aurora is located in four counties, data is provided for Kane County because it contains the largest portion of the community.

Key Findings

- Aurora is second largest city in the State of Illinois after the City of Chicago. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Aurora has a population of 197,899, which exceeds the population of both Rockford and Joliet.
- Driven by growth in nonwhite population groups, Aurora’s population increased between 2000 and 2010. Aurora’s Hispanic population grew by approximately 76 percent and Asian population rose by over 200 percent. These demographic shifts helped Aurora add nearly 55,000 residents, an increase of roughly 38 percent.
- Aurora is a younger, middle-income community. With a median age of 31.5, Aurora’s median age is about four years younger than the median age of Kane County. Aurora has a median household income of $62,493, which is similar to median household earnings in both Kane County and the Region.
- Rates of educational attainment in Aurora lag behind Kane County and the Region. While most Aurora residents have a high school diploma (76.2 percent), the percentage of adults who have attained a bachelor’s degree (31.0 percent) is lower than the Chicago Region (36 percent).
- Few Aurora residents live and work in downtown. Almost all workers employed in the downtown study area live outside of it and only 51 workers live and work downtown.
Aurora is the second largest city in the State of Illinois and has grown from 2000 to 2010. During this time period, Aurora’s population increased by 38.4% percent to a base population of 197,899. Located in Chicago’s far western suburbs, Aurora has benefited from an overall regional trend, where population growth is occurring in the region's outskirts. Downtown Aurora has experienced an increase in population.

Aurora’s average household size is comparable to Kane County’s but higher than the Chicago Region’s. Aurora has 62,564 households and 1,704 are located within the downtown census blocks. With an average household size of 3.12, Aurora has a similar average household size to Kane County (2.98). Both Aurora and Kane County have larger average household sizes than the region, which has an average household size of 2.73. The downtown census blocks have a smaller average household size of 2.59.

Aurora is a diverse community, as shown in Table 3. 41.3 percent of Aurora residents are Hispanic or Latino, which is higher than the percentage of Hispanic or Latino residents in both Kane County (30.7 percent) and the Chicago Region (21.6 percent). From 2000 to 2010, Aurora’s diversity grew, with the Hispanic population increasing by 75.7 percent and the number of Asian residents increasing by over 200 percent. Despite the significant percent increase in Aurora’s Asian population, the overall proportion of Asian residents remained small at 6.6 percent of total population. In Downtown Aurora, the population is more diverse than City as a whole, with a higher proportion of Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American residents.

### Table 11.1. Population, households, and household size, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td>4,602</td>
<td>197,899</td>
<td>515,269</td>
<td>8,431,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Households</strong></td>
<td>1,704</td>
<td>62,564</td>
<td>170,479</td>
<td>3,088,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Household Size</strong></td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 11.2. Population and change in population, 2000 and 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population, 2000</strong></td>
<td>3,862</td>
<td>142,990</td>
<td>404,119</td>
<td>8,146,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population, 2010</strong></td>
<td>4,602</td>
<td>197,899</td>
<td>515,269</td>
<td>8,431,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change, 2000-10</strong></td>
<td>740</td>
<td>54,909</td>
<td>111,150</td>
<td>285,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change as %, 2000-10</strong></td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.3. Race and ethnicity, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,235</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>78,924</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino*</td>
<td>2,473</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>81,809</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>20,348</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>13,105</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>3,713</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes Hispanic or Latino residents of any race
** includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Some Other Race, and Two or more races


Table 11.3. Race and ethnicity, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change in Population</td>
<td>Percent Change</td>
<td>Change in Population</td>
<td>Percent Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-290</td>
<td>-19.0%</td>
<td>4,467</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino*</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>35,252</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>4,959</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>8,792</td>
<td>203.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>1,439</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes Hispanic or Latino residents of any race
** includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Some Other Race, and Two or more races

Aurora's population is distributed towards the younger age cohorts in comparison to Kane County and the Chicago Region. A higher percentage of its residents are under 19 years of age (33.8 percent) than the percentage of residents in Kane County (31.0 percent) and the Chicago Region (27.4 percent). This trend is reflected in Aurora's median age of 31.5, which is about four years younger than Kane County. Contributing to Aurora's younger median age is the lower proportion of Aurora residents who are 65 years and older. Approximately 6.9 percent of Aurora residents are 65 years and over, which is lower than the share of residents older the traditional retirement age in Kane County (10.2 percent) and the Chicago Region (11.7 percent). Most of downtown Aurora residents are under 34 years of age (52 percent).

With a median household income of $62,493, Aurora is a middle income community and median earnings are similar to the Chicago Region ($62,447). The City has approximately 23 percent of households earning between $25,000 and $49,999, which is the highest among income intervals shown in Table 6. Aurora's median household income is about $7,000 less than Kane County's, which can be attributed to the lower percentage of Aurora households earning greater than $100,000 (28.3 percent) compared to Kane County (32.5 percent). Downtown Aurora has a significantly higher percentage of households earning less than $25,000 than the rest of the City.

### Table 11.5. Age cohorts and median age, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Cohort</th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 19 years</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>67,142</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 34 years</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>43,695</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 49 years</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>46,604</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 64 years</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>27,512</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 79 years</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>10,416</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 years and over</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>3,357</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes Hispanic or Latino residents of any race
** includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Some Other Race, and Two or more races


### Table 11.6. Household Income, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Interval</th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $25,000</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>9,763</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>14,460</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>11,771</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>8,291</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,000</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>9,904</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 and over</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>7,598</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income (2013)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$62,493</td>
<td>$69,530</td>
<td>$62,447</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aurora’s adult population has lower levels of educational attainment compared to Kane County and the Chicago Region. 76.2 percent of Aurora adults have obtained a high school diploma, which is lower than the percentage in Kane County (82.8 percent) and the Chicago Region (86.4 percent). In regards to secondary education, the proportion of Aurora adults with a bachelor’s degree (31.0 percent) is comparable to the percentage in Kane County (31.7 percent) but lower than the percentage in the Chicago Region (36.1 percent).

### Table 11.7. Education Levels, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population, 25 +</td>
<td>2,132</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>119,047</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or higher</td>
<td>1,420</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>90,720</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>36,956</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Aurora’s unemployment rate of 10.6% is slightly lower the Chicago Region’s unemployment rate of 11.0%. Downtown Aurora has an unemployment rate of 15.1 percent, which is higher than the unemployment rate citywide.

### Table 11.8. Employment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population, 16 +</td>
<td>2,722</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>143,277</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In labor force</td>
<td>1,945</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>105,783</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>84.8%</td>
<td>94,518</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>11,164</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labor force</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>37,494</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aurora workers are employed in a variety of industries, with the highest percentage of workers employed in manufacturing, retail trade, and health care and social assistance.

Nine hundred and thirty workers with primary jobs live in downtown Aurora. About one in three workers are employed within the City of Aurora while others commute to surrounding communities such as Naperville (7%), Batavia (5%), and Montgomery (3%). Sixty-one (7%) residents are employed in the City of Chicago.

Table 11.9. Employment of Aurora Residents by Industry Sector, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Sector</th>
<th>Aurora Count</th>
<th>Aurora Percent</th>
<th>Kane County Count</th>
<th>Kane County Percent</th>
<th>Chicago Region Count</th>
<th>Chicago Region Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>8,936</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>27,481</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>338,715</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>8,282</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>23,255</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>360,760</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>7,246</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>21,677</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>436,605</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and Support, Waste Management and Remediation</td>
<td>6,112</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>15,104</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>239,634</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Services</td>
<td>5,473</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>18,718</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>338,389</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services</td>
<td>5,254</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>14,399</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>270,668</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>4,582</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>13,254</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>244,775</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>4,445</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>14,964</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>201,327</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>3,717</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>10,589</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>204,871</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Warehousing</td>
<td>2,657</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>8,055</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>148,474</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services (excluding Public Administration)</td>
<td>2,155</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>6,189</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>124,729</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1,979</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>7,668</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>101,639</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>1,935</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>6,897</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>134,679</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Companies and Enterprises</td>
<td>1,640</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4,347</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>72,789</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>1,307</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>4,593</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>80,261</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3,822</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>61,695</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2,276</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>50,602</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>14,208</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>3,204</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1,283</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Employed Population</strong></td>
<td><strong>68,131</strong></td>
<td><strong>204,670</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,429,307</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note that the total employment figures reported in Table 11.9 are different from those in Tables 11.8 and 11.10. This discrepancy is due to the difficulty and variety of methods used to estimate employment from different sources.

** Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI MSA.
Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau
Table 11.10. Residence Location of Downtown Aurora Workers, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Primary Jobs</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>By Municipality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora city, IL</td>
<td>1,679</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naperville city, IL</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oswego village, IL</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago city, IL</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery village, IL</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joliet city, IL</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Aurora village, IL</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkville city, IL</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batavia city, IL</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar Grove village, IL</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Locations</td>
<td>2,927</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>By County</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kane County, IL</td>
<td>2,321</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPage County, IL</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall County, IL</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook County, IL</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County, IL</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb County, IL</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaSalle County, IL</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McHenry County, IL</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake County, IL</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grundy County, IL</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Locations</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Primary jobs include public and private-sector jobs. A primary job is an individual’s highest paying job.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies

Figure 11.1. Residence Location of Downtown Aurora Workers, 2013

Table 11.11. Employment Location of Downtown Aurora residents, 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aurora city, IL</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naperville city, IL</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago city, IL</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batavia city, IL</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery village, IL</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva city, IL</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Aurora village, IL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles city, IL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolingbrook village, IL</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Chicago city, IL</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Locations</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

Table 11.18 Housing and Transportation Costs as Percent of Income per Household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Costs as percent of income</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Costs as percent of income</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“H+T” Costs as percent of income</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology, "H+T Affordability Index": http://htaindex.cnt.org/map/
Appendix: Housing Data

Table 11.12 Housing Type (Units)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,739</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>66,827</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, detached</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>39,802</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, attached</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>9,754</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Units</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>3,550</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4 Units</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>3,241</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ Units</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>10,480</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 11.13 Housing Age, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 2000 or later</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>12,706</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1970 to 1999</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>27,498</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1940 to 1969</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>13,508</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built Before 1940</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>13,245</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Year Built</td>
<td>Before 1940</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 11.15 Housing Occupancy, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1 Bedroom</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>7,175</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bedrooms</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>19,267</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Bedrooms</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>24,710</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bedrooms</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>13,557</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ Bedrooms</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2,248</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 11.16 Housing Tenure, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Occupied Units</td>
<td>1,383</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>61,787</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-Occupied</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>42,722</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter-Occupied</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>19,065</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 11.17 Housing Value, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora Census Blocks</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Kane County</th>
<th>Chicago Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $100,000</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>6,152</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>8,396</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 to $199,999</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>10,015</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 to $299,999</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>10,937</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300,000 to $499,999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>6,360</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500,000 or more</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median value</td>
<td>$132,972</td>
<td>$181,500</td>
<td>$223,100</td>
<td>$236,767</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendix: Zoning Table

### Table 11.19 Key characteristics of zoning districts in Downtown Aurora, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoning Classification</th>
<th>Examples of Permitted Uses</th>
<th>Height Restrictions</th>
<th>Area Regulations</th>
<th>Setbacks</th>
<th>Parking and Vehicular Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOWNTOWN CORE (DC)</strong></td>
<td>Professional offices and services; government offices, retail stores; light industry; financial institutions; performing arts establishments; residential units above the first floor.</td>
<td>No restrictions on maximum height with exceptions provided in the Aurora Building Code.</td>
<td>No restrictions on minimum lot area, minimum lot width, ground floor coverage, or maximum floor area.</td>
<td>Exterior yard, 5 feet; river yard, 15 feet; between parking lot and river, 15 feet; between building and river, 15 feet.</td>
<td>Surface parking is only allowed in the rear yard of a zoning lot; for business or professional offices 1 off street parking space is required per 300 sq. ft. of gross floor area. Stores must have 1 parking space for every 200 sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOWNTOWN FRINGE (DF)</strong></td>
<td>Allows for more land uses than the Downtown Core (DC). Examples include retail stores, professional/office, educational institutions, contractor’s offices, restaurants, and entertainment establishments.</td>
<td>No restrictions on maximum height with exceptions provided in the Aurora building code.</td>
<td>No restrictions on minimum lot area, minimum lot width, maximum ground coverage, minimum ground floor area per building, or maximum floor area.</td>
<td>No setbacks required except for the following: parking lots with an exterior yard, 5 feet; lots with a river yard, 15 feet. For buildings with a river yard, 15 feet.</td>
<td>Surface parking allowed in the rear of zoning lots. Off street parking requirements depend on the type of use. For office/professional uses, 1 parking space per 300 sq. ft. of gross floor area is required.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology, “H+T Affordability Index”: http://htaindex.cnt.org/map/#

## Appendix: Health and Safety

### Table 11.25 Neighborhood groups in the study area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Boundaries</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Samaritan Community</td>
<td>North Ave., 2nd St., S. East Ave., New York St., N. Lincoln Ave., Spring St.,</td>
<td>4th Monday of each month, 6:30pm</td>
<td>David Smith</td>
<td>Main Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Ward TomCats</td>
<td>North Ave., S. Lasalle Ct., Bluff St., S. Lincoln Av., Marion Ave, S. 4th St., Ashland Ave., 5th St., Sherman Ave., Montgomery Rd., Lafayette St., Melrose Ave., Elliot Ave., Keck Ave.</td>
<td>3 times yearly, 7pm.</td>
<td>Bill Donnell, Alderman.</td>
<td>Bardwell School - Door 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Neighbors</td>
<td>Rathbone Ave., S. Elwood Dr., Ridgeway Ave., Woodlawn Ave., Gale St., S. River St., North Ave., Ashland Ave, Grey Ave., Terry Ave.</td>
<td>Contact for more information</td>
<td>Bill Donnell, Alderman.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulevard District Neighbors</td>
<td>Edgelawn Dr., Prairie St., Woodlawn Ave., Gale St, S. River St., North Ave., W. Benton St., S. Locust St., W. Galena Bl.</td>
<td>3 times a year, 7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Bill Donnell, Alderman.</td>
<td>New England Congregational Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: City of Aurora, 2016.
Historic Walking Tour

The following pages show an updated version of the city’s existing Historic Walking Tour of the downtown area from Aurora's Historic Preservation Commission: https://aurora-il.org/historicpreservation/hist_stolpisland.php
Stolp Island National Register Historic District

National Register Historic District: 1986 Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Historic District Self-guided Walking Tour

Stolp Island is located in the Fox River, at a site where the river drops steeply. This drop is what gave the McCarty Brothers, Joseph Stolp, and Zaphna Lake the waterpower source they desired for their milling businesses. The Fox River, although an excellent power source and motivator for industrial development, had a disruptive influence on commercial and residential development causing rivalry between the growing settlements on the east and west banks. It was because of these rivalries that Stolp Island became the neutral territory for Aurora's public buildings and other private organizations. The National Register Historic District includes good examples of the works of nationally known architects, and unique architectural styles. Due to its central location in the growing community, Stolp Island became a functional transportation link as well as an emotional link between Aurora's east and west sides. W Frederick Stolp bought this island for $12.72 in 1848. He later deeded the island to his nephew, Joseph Stolp, who built a woolen mill.

If you think of Stolp Island as an outdoor museum of architecture, one of the finest exhibits is the terra cotta. Essentially a fired clay product, terra cotta was often used with glazes of various colors and textures. It was a versatile and inexpensive building material that was used to form elaborate details, or to simulate expensive stone such as granite and limestone. Buildings clad with architectural terra cotta were originally called “china front” buildings. In America, this building material was first used in Chicago in 1895. Terra cotta's primary appeal was its ability to adapt to the variety of elaborate revival architectural styles in vogue at the time.

New York Street Memorial Bridge, 1931

New York Street (between Route 25 and Route 31)

Built in the Art Moderne style, the bridge was dedicated on Armistice Day, November 11, 1931, as a memorial to World War I veterans. Unlike Stolp Island's other bridges, the New York Street bridge structure spans the entire channel of the Fox River. The genius behind the bridge's design was sculptor, Emory Seidel. He planned the entire bridge as a memorial integrating the kneeling statues of “Memory” into the concrete structure at the pylons. He also created the bronze statue of “Victory”, the eagle statues, and the Armed Services bas-relief located in the statuary niches at the center of the span. His limestone relief below the “Victory” statue depicts a family in peacetime.

Aurora Hotel, 1917

2 N. Stolp Avenue

The eight-story hotel was the tallest building on Stolp Island when it was constructed in 1917. The first large hotel in the city, it represented an effort by the citizens who developed it to elevate Aurora's position as a center of commerce. This organization (Aurora Island Hotel Corporation) was responsible for many of the projects which made Stolp Island a commercial center. The building was in a severely deteriorated condition until it was saved by a grass roots effort in 1996. The remarkably restored building is now used as apartments for senior citizens.
Leland Tower, 1928
7 S. Stolp Avenue

Constructed in 1928 as a first-class hotel and entertainment center, the Leland building is twenty-two stories high. When built, it was the tallest building in Illinois outside of Chicago. It was designed by Anker Sveere Graven and Arthur Guy Mayger of Chicago. The architects called their building “a modern adaptation of the Italian Romanesque style”. It is now being used as an apartment building.

Block & Kuhl Store, 1928
5 E. Galena Boulevard

This building was originally the Block & Kuhl Store, constructed in 1928 by the Aurora Development Company. It became the home for the Carson Pirie & Scott store in 1961. After a major remodeling, the Waubonsee College Extension Center opened in 1986. Notice the architectural terra cotta cladding, prism glass transoms above the storefronts, and Chicago style windows on the second and third floor incorporating a fixed center glass with two adjacent operable windows.  

Stanley Furniture, 1925
14-20 S. Stolp Avenue

Built about 1925, the former Stanley Furniture store is noted for its white terra cotta facade. The building is actually two, with the terra cotta of the southern “half” being slightly creamy in color. There are four terra cotta lion heads placed between window openings at the second story level that served as canopy hooks.

The Keystone Building, 1923
30 S. Stolp Avenue

The Keystone Building is one of two Stolp Island works by architect George Grant Elmslie. It is a relatively rare example of the Prairie School style used for an office building, and is listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places. Notice the subtle coloring of blue and gold in the organic terra cotta detailing. This type of decorative motif was originally developed by Louis Sullivan, Elmslie’s former employer.

Sherer Building, 1910
9-15 W. Downer Place

The triangle shaped Sherer Building was constructed in 1910, and designed by architect Eugene Malmer. Notice the multi-colored terra cotta “S” at the parapet.
Stolp Woolen Mill Dye House c.1858
20 W. Downer Place

Dating from 1858 to 1860, the dye house is the oldest building on Stolp Island. It is located on a lower level behind the Metropolitan Business College building. The building has a coursed limestone foundation and simple arched windows that face the river. Its lack of ornamentation identifies it as an early industrial building. It is the oldest building on Stolp Island.

Metropolitan Business College, c.1915
8-16 W. Downer Place

This building represents the development of the island in the early portion of the twentieth century, c. 1915. The parapet detail design and the window detailing appear to be from the same architect, Eugene Malmer, who designed the earlier Sherer Building across the street. Both buildings were owned by Joseph Stolp Sherer, grandson of early pioneer Joseph Stolp. It was constructed in glazed brick.

Stolp Woolen Mill Store, 1860-61
2 W. Downer Place

Built by Joseph Stolp in 1860-61, 11 years after he built a woolen mill to the west of the store site. The store was constructed to sell those goods which were not shipped across the country for sale. It is listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places.

United States Post Office, c.1930
18 W. Benton Street

The Post Office building is an arcaded block building, featuring a series of evenly spaced, round arched window openings. It is a commercial style that was popular during the early 20th century, and was derived from the great arcaded porches built in Italy during the Renaissance. The gargoyle waterspouts and decorative detailing are fashioned in terra cotta. James Wetmore was the supervising architect. The building now houses SciTech, a science and technology center with over 200 hands-on exhibits.

Illinois Bell, c.1930
70-82 S. Stolp Avenue

One of the major commercial buildings on the island is the telephone company's building on Stolp Avenue. Notice the keystone carved above the single window opening at the corners of the second floor and the keystone motif decorating the metal first floor window framing. The chevron motif above the windows identifies it as an Art Moderne style. The top two floors and north bays are later additions.
Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, 1926
77 S. Stolp Avenue

Perhaps the most unusual building in Aurora, this 1926 Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman design is one of the few examples of the use of Mayan Revival in the United States. The building was originally designed in the classical style. However, prior to the time sufficient funds were raised, the great archaeological finds in Central America were discovered and the design was changed. All of the Mayan gods and Mayan relief decorations are fashioned in terra cotta. The bulk of the building is faced with clinker brick, a brick too irregular for normal construction use.

Columbia Conservatory of Music, c.1907
75 S. Stolp Avenue

This former conservatory was accredited by the State and conceded to be the best equipped school in Illinois and included schools of dancing, languages, art, music, dramatic art, and kindergarten. It is constructed of another popular substitute for stone, cast concrete.

Grand Army of the Republic, (G.A.R.) Memorial Hall, 1877
23 E. Downer Place

The G.A.R. Memorial Hall was built in 1877 and is one of Aurora’s most widely recognized historic landmarks. The building was built as a library and meeting place to commemorate Civil War veterans. Constructed with locally quarried limestone, it is in the Gothic Revival style. The side tower was added in 1904. This building is a copy of a brick G.A.R. building in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Restoration of the building is planned for the future. Contact (630) 264-INFO for information on when the building will be open to the public.

Fox Theater Building, 1910
24-28 E. Downer Place

This building was remodeled in 1910 with a new brick and terra cotta facade. Notice the reclining terra cotta fox which is the centerpiece of a circular medallion on the second story. While all three bays are technically one building, later ownership has divided the building, hence the western most bay has been painted.
Aurora Herald/Freemasons Building/Ginsberg Store, 1866
20 E. Downer Place

This Italianate commercial structure was built in 1866. It originally housed the Aurora Herald, and Freemasons. Later it was the Ginsberg clothing store. Visible on the west side, facing the alley, are the original Italianate brackets under the eaves. Note the Masonic “eye” symbol carved into the top of the limestone wall. A massive pressed metal Italianate cornice has been removed. The building now features the collection of the Aurora Historical Society, and the Aurora Public Art Commission gallery. It was renamed after former Mayor David L. Pierce who was responsible for the building’s restoration. A joint gift shop is located on the first floor. Hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Graham Building, 1926
33-35 S. Stolp Avenue

This is the other of Stolp Island’s two Prairie School style buildings designed by George Grant Elmslie. Constructed in 1926, the building is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the only building that takes advantage of its river setting by duplicating street face ornamentation on its river side.

Sesquicentennial Park, 1987
23 E. Galena Boulevard

Architects of the original Paramount Theatre designed a park called Paramount Park on this same site. It existed from 1930 to 1934, containing paths, a pond, garden, and miniature golf. It was a restful retreat area available only to theater patrons. Redesigned and dedicated in November 1987, the Sesquicentennial Park features a sculpture entitled “City Lights, City Life” by Chicago artist Jerry Peart.

Paramount Arts Centre, 1931
23 E. Galena Boulevard

The Paramount Arts Centre was designed by George and C.W. Rapp in 1931. Rapp and Rapp are renowned for their opulent movie palaces including the Chicago Theater. The movie palace opened in 1931, a terra cotta and steel building with an exterior covering of face brick. The most significant portion of the exterior is the octagonal tower. It is elaborately detailed in brick and colored, glazed terra cotta and capped by an orange tile roof. The interior combines Venetian murals with Art Deco detailing. Reopened after renovation in 1978, the Paramount is a prestigious cultural facility that serves the entire region, and offers a full season of world-class professional entertainment. Call (630) 896-6666 for information the building and programming.
Hotel Arthur / Terminal Building, 1905
2 N. Broadway

Designed by architect Eugene Malmer, this six-story pressed brick and Bedford stone 2nd Renaissance Revival building was once the tallest building in Aurora and one of the tallest in Illinois outside of Chicago. Malmer studied with William Le Baron Jenney, father of the skyscraper when he was a student in Chicago. In 1915, the building was leased to the Aurora, Elgin, and Chicago Railroad Company to serve as that company’s traction terminal station and main corporate offices. It is still often referred to as the “Terminal Building.”

(image courtesy of Google Streetview)

E.D. Huntoon House, c.1835
31 N. Broadway

Built circa 1830, this former residence is believed to be the last remaining hand-hewn timber frame structure in the downtown. For decades the building was covered over with false fronts, masking its wood construction. The building was remodeled in 2001 to reflect its appearance as a Victorian commercial era building with an Italianate cornice and window hoods.

Hobbs Building, 1892
2 N. River Street

This Romanesque Revival building features an onion dome, intricate brick detailing in the semicircular arches over the third story windows, and decorative pressed metal on the piers. It was built in 1892 as a furniture store and loft building. A photo at the Aurora Historical Museum documents a man leaping from the top of the dome into a six-foot pool of water as a featured attraction at the 1910 Fourth of July Celebration.
### Appendix: Pace Bus

#### Bus ridership data and recent route changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route Number and Name</th>
<th>Weekday Ridership</th>
<th>Saturday Ridership</th>
<th>Sunday Ridership</th>
<th>Links to Map and Schedule</th>
<th>Changes to Timing only</th>
<th>Changes to timing and routing</th>
<th>Route eliminated</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pace 524 West Aurora Circulator</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>No Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=524">http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=524</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Route 524 extends north along Randall Road to serve new destinations including Woodman's.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace 532 Illinois Avenue</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>No Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=532">http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=532</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Route 532 is converted to a peak-only commuter service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace 802 Aurora - Geneva</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>No Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=802">http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=802</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Route 802 adds service to Mercy Medical Center and adds a new northern branch running along Randall Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace 530 West Galena-Westfield Fox Valley Center</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>No Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=530">http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=530</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Route 530 is adjusted to make connections at the Aurora Transportation Center and expand evening hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace 529 Randall Road - 5th Street</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>No Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=529">http://www.pacebus.com/sub/schedules/route_detail.asp?RouteNo=529</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Route 529 is replaced by Routes 802, 524, and the Southeast Aurora Call-n-Ride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Aurora Call-n-Ride</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pacebus.com/pdf/C-n-R/SEA%20CnR%202015%20FY%20Schedule%20Book.pdf">http://www.pacebus.com/pdf/C-n-R/SEA%20CnR%202015%20FY%20Schedule%20Book.pdf</a></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These assets offer much to build on when addressing common challenges, including:

- Use of the Fox River to enhance livability and prosperity, including the revitalization of historic downtowns.
- Efficiently maintaining and improving the quality of existing housing.
- Balancing greenfield development and redevelopment.
- Meeting projected demand for senior housing.
- Growing while providing affordable housing opportunities for an increasingly diverse group of future residents.

The challenges the four communities face are not unique. Many communities that have been or will be profiled in Homes reports—Aurora, Batavia, Geneva, Montgomery, North Aurora, and St. Charles—deal with similar issues. Collectively or in sub-groups, Kane County Fox River communities have an opportunity to work together toward a prosperous future. What follows is a subregional analysis of current conditions, a review of recent policy remedies, a look at the potential housing market, and recommendations for future subregional action that can build off of these strengths to address shared issues.

### Table 11.20 Private Sector Employment* in 2002-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Sector</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>270.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Services</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>256.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Warehousing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>-31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>-32.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Companies and Enterprises</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>-37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and Support, Waste Management and Remediation</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>-42.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services (excluding Public Administration)</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>-46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>-48.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>-51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>-58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>-60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-75.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,346</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,800</strong></td>
<td><strong>-10.2%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LEHD 2002-2013

*Private sector employment excludes NAICS Sector 92 - Public Administration

### Table 11.21 Quantity of property by type

- Office: 20.2%
- Retail: 19.0%
- Industrial**: 15.7%
- Multi-Family*: 5.5%
- Specialty: 4.0%
- Hospitality: 2.0%
- Health Care: 1.0%


*May not include all single family home conversions.

**Includes flex properties.
### Table 11.22. Estimated Retail Sales by geographic area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown Aurora</th>
<th>Aurora</th>
<th>Western East-West Corridor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail Space</td>
<td>753,005</td>
<td>7,029,888</td>
<td>21,471,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade Sales Estimate</td>
<td>$25,614,426</td>
<td>$2,033,484,529</td>
<td>$7,548,109,788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Sales P/SF Estimate</td>
<td>$34.02</td>
<td>$289.26</td>
<td>$351.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 11.23 Top Ten Occupation Sectors near Downtown Aurora in 2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Workers in 2015</th>
<th>Average Hourly Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand</td>
<td>1,806</td>
<td>$12.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nurses</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>$31.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Clerks, General</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>$14.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Salespersons</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>$11.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashiers</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>$9.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>$9.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service Representatives</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>$16.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Assemblers</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>$12.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packers and Packagers, Hand</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>$10.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock Clerks and Order Fillers</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>$11.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CMAP analysis of EMSI Data

*This data includes occupations of workers from Aurora zip codes 60505 and 60506.
### Table 11.6. Household Income, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Class</th>
<th>Downtown Aurora</th>
<th>City of Aurora</th>
<th>Western East-West Corridor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RBA</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>RBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>426,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>334,558</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>2,746,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>427,470</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>1,877,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>762,028</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>5,049,758</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CMAP Analysis of CoStar Data

### Figure 11.2. Vacancy rate for commercial real estate (downtown and citywide)