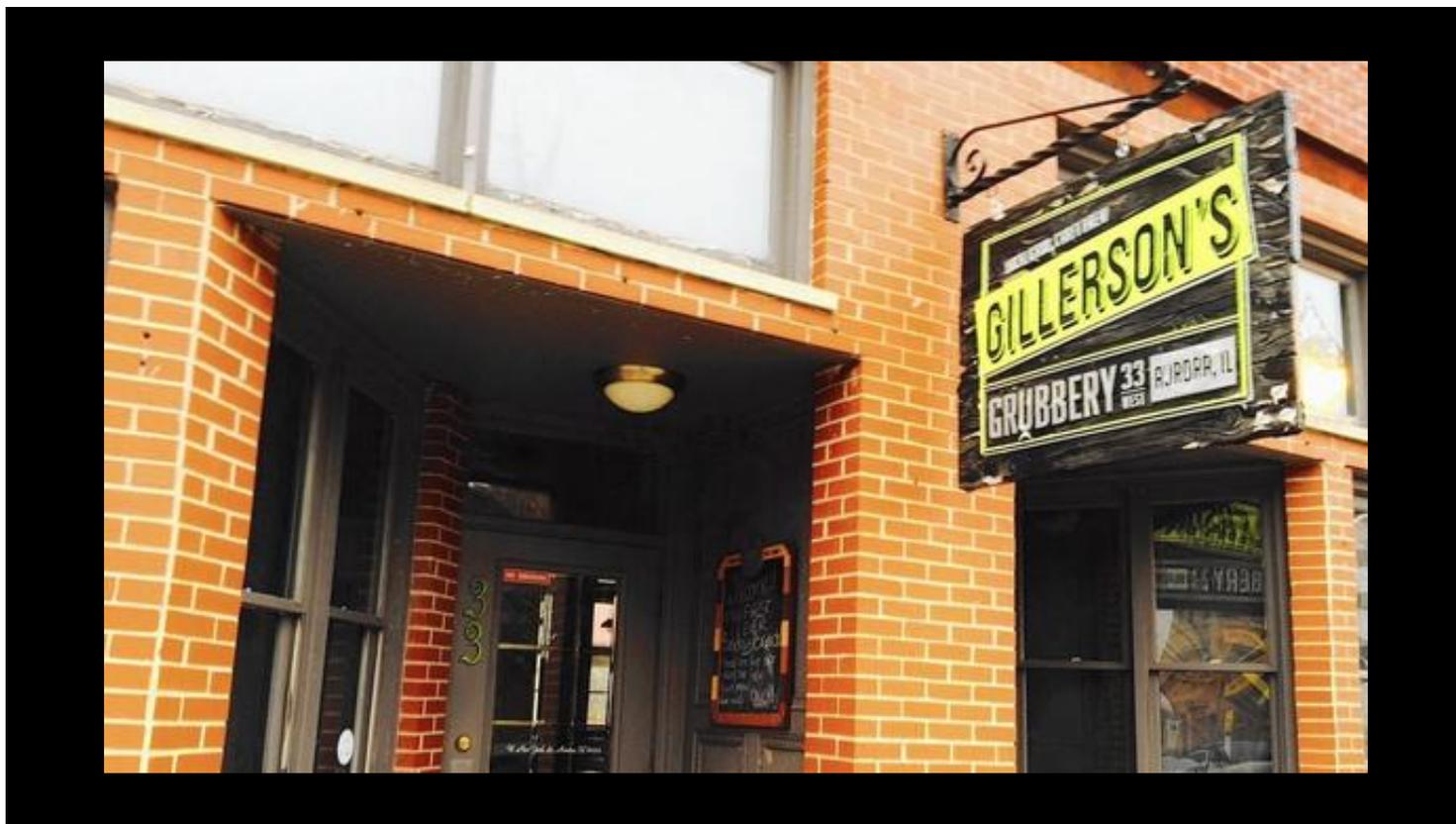


Residents want more restaurants, walkable areas in downtown Aurora



A packed house was present to help a regional organization start a plan for downtown Aurora

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Aurora Beacon-News

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People in [Aurora](#) want a downtown that is more walkable, with more restaurants, entertainment, businesses and shopping.

Those, at least, are the early returns from the first planning session – called a visioning workshop – of a downtown Aurora plan being put together by a regional planning agency.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, or CMAP, is developing the plan. The agency is giving Aurora some of its staff to work on the plan, as part of a Local Technical Assistance Grant program. Aurora applied for the grant, which it was awarded on a competitive basis.

The agency is a state-sponsored, regional planning group for the seven-county Chicago region, covering 284 municipalities and more than 1,200 units of government.

The agency looks to develop plans with specific, practical steps that can be taken, and that's the eventual intention of the downtown Aurora plan, according to Lindsay Bayley, of CMAP. She said it will not "be starting all over." It intends to "complement and enhance" the downtown plan done about 10 years ago by Invest Aurora, then known as Seize the Future.

"We will have specific actions, and ideas for what other organizations can do," she said. "The last plan was about 10 years ago, and a lot has changed since then."

Interest was high for the first part of the planning process. About 100 people signed up, prompting organizers to move the workshop to a larger room at the Waubensee Community College campus downtown. Then, more than 160 people showed up, which brought the room to the capacity allowed by the Aurora fire marshal. So, CMAP officials took the names of people who could not get in, and said they will hold another session. As it is, the plan schedule allows for a public open house later on in the process.

Rick Guzman, Aurora's assistant chief staff, said officials were sorry they had to turn people away. But he called it "a good problem to have," because it showed there is great interest in the downtown plan.

"One thing we've learned is people of Aurora are very passionate," Bayley said.

The workshop turned into a discussion session, as the audience broke up into small discussion groups, which were moderated and recorded. The discussion questions asked participants what they liked about downtown Aurora, what they wanted to see downtown, what they think are the most important things missing, and other similar ideas. Discussions were lively and varied between the tables.

Things people listed that they liked about downtown included the people who are down there, the new library, the Two Brothers Roundhouse, the live music available and the riverwalk, among other things. Some of the things people said they wanted to see are more restaurants, more walkable areas and better parking.

At the end of the evening, organizers used electronic polling devices to poll the room on certain questions. The poll showed that almost everyone there lived in Aurora, with the largest segment living on the West Side. Some 63 percent said they work in Aurora.

When polled about the top priorities downtown, 26 percent said better walking and pedestrian opportunities. Better parking and better marked routes to downtown amenities each came in at 19 percent during the poll. When asked about priorities to improve the vitality of downtown, 24 percent said a better business mix, and another 24 percent said more entertainment and culture. When asked what they want to see more of, 27 percent said more restaurants, and 26 percent said more retail and shopping opportunities.

People who did not attend the session, and would not be able to attend another workshop, can weigh in to the planning process online. By going to <http://aurora.metroquest.com>, people can access the same questions about downtown online and leave their input anonymously.

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