**HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN AURORA**

and past planning efforts

- **Transportation**
- **Arts, Culture, & Entertainment**
- **Sustainability**
- **Economic Development**
- **Long-range planning**

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**1834** Joseph McCarty builds a campfire on Stolp Island and decides to invite his brother and family to join him in settling the land along the Fox River.

**1837** A post office is established and the village is named Aurora, after the goddess of the dawn.

**1850** The Aurora Branch Railroad opened on September 2, 1850.

**1854** West Aurora becomes an incorporated village.

**1855** The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad locates its roundhouse and locomotive shop in Aurora. It was the City’s largest employer until the 1960s.

**1856** East and West Aurora jointly incorporate as the City of Aurora, agreeing to locate most public buildings on or around Stolp Island, in the middle of the river.

**1857** East Aurora becomes an incorporated village.

**1860** The Aurora Branch Railroad opened on September 2, 1860.

**1881** The City becomes one of the first cities to use electric lighting, and earns the nickname “City of Lights.”

**1884** The Aurora Fire Department’s North Broadway Hose House and Police Patrol building opened.

**1887** A February flood destroys the original McCarty Mill.

**1888** The Aurora Public Library is established through City Ordinance.

**1890** The Aurora Carnegie library opens on Stolp Island.

**1894** The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Memorial Hall was completed. The memorial for Civil War veterans fought for veteran’s benefits locally and nationally.

**1895** The Aurora Hotel opens on Stolp Island and is the tallest building on the island. It was saved from demolition and renovated in 1996 and now houses senior citizens.

**1900** Sears Roebuck and Company ordered, manufactured, and sold homes across America, many in Aurora. Aurora currently has 136 authenticated properties, making it one of the largest concentrations of Sears homes in the country.

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**1934** The boxcar community in Eola is closed because many workers were deported back to Mexico during the Great Depression.

**1940** Old Second Bank was designed by George Emmons. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and a later addition aimed to match the original style.

**1950** The Paramount Theatre opens as the first air-conditioned building outside of Chicago.

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Photo from the City of Aurora.

Photo from the Aurora Region Fire Museum.

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.
The City’s Latino population begins to grow in the 1980s and continues to grow faster than all other demographic groups combined.

1982 Carson Pirie Scott, the last major department store in downtown Aurora, closes.

1985 Aurora Public Art Commission is established.

1993 The FoxWalk Overlay District and Design Review Committee established.

1993 The Aurora Downtown Redevelopment Corporation (ADRC) begins a strategic planning process to look at strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for downtown on the heels of Hollywood Casino’s opening.

1993 Riverfront Playhouse is founded. Since its creation, the nonprofit storefront theater company has produced over 200 shows in downtown Aurora.

1989 RiverWalk Commission created.

1990 SeTech Hands on Museum relocates from Naperville to Aurora.

1997 City of Aurora’s downtown census tracts saw a decline in population in the 1970s. With the closing of the railroad shops, many other factories and industrial areas relocated or went out of business. Yet the City’s Latino population begins to grow in the 1980s and continues to grow faster than all other demographic groups combined.

1978 The Roundhouse re-opens after a major restoration. The Roundhouse and Commission are established.

1983 Pace Bus service starts.

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1999 The Roundhouse Overlay District and Design Review Committee established.

2011 Waukegan Community College moves into a larger, new campus on the west bank of the Fox River, and helps the City to develop the riverfront walkway.

2005 The Seize the Future Development Foundation was formed, which resulted in the creation of the STF Downtown Master Plan in 2006.

2003 The 1st Midwest Literary Festival is held in downtown.

2001 Reservation 5 members of the Aurora County African American Chamber of Commerce formed.

2010 City’s downtown population begins to grow in the 1980s and continues to grow faster than all other demographic groups combined.

1978 Burlington Northern begins operating commuter rail service on the railroad line from Aurora to Chicago.

1968 Dr. Charles Smith begins creating a sculptural landscape in his yard. The site was known as the African American Heritage Museum and Black Victory’s Archive.

1974 The Roundhouse and shops close. The structure remains abandoned for 21 years.

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1980 Population: 37,400

1990 Population: 38,700

2000 Population: 41,800

2010 Population: 49,400

2011 City’s downtown population begins to grow in the 1980s and continues to grow faster than all other demographic groups combined.

1974 The Roundhouse and shops close. The structure remains abandoned for 21 years.

1980 Population: 37,400

2000 Population: 41,800

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