

HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN AURORA

and past planning efforts

- TRANSPORTATION
- ARTS, CULTURE, & ENTERTAINMENT
- SUSTAINABILITY
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- LONG-RANGE PLANNING



Photo from the City of Aurora.

■ **1856** The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad locates its roundhouse and locomotive shop in Aurora. It was the City's largest employer until the 1960s.



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

■ **1904** Aurora's Carnegie library opens on Stolp Island.



Image courtesy of Larry T. Nix, Library History Buff Blog.

■ **late 1930s** The Sky Club atop the Leland Hotel was a popular dance club and famous blues recordings were made here. The Blues on the Fox Festival celebrates Aurora's early blues history.



■ **1928** The first vision of Downtown Aurora's potential is developed by Jacob L. Crane, Jr. and recommends establishing zoning districts for the City.

■ **1928** The Leland building, at 22 stories high, opens as a first-class hotel and entertainment center. It was rumored to be a spot used by Al Capone during Prohibition. It is now an apartment building.

■ **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.

■ **1857** 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.



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

■ **1881** Aurora Public Library is established through City Ordinance.



Photo from the Aurora Regional Fire Museum.

■ **1894** The Aurora Fire Department's North Broadway Hose House and Police Patrol building opened.



■ **1917** The eight-story 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.

■ **1921** The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Rail company begins hiring Mexican workers after a 1921 law restricted immigration from Europe. The workers lived in boxcars in Eola, an unincorporated community adjacent to Aurora.

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

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

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

■ **1845** East Aurora becomes an incorporated village.

■ **early 1800s** The area now known as downtown Aurora is a Native American village.



■ **1864** The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad constructs a railroad line connecting Aurora to Chicago.



■ **1878** 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.

1910
(no population data available)

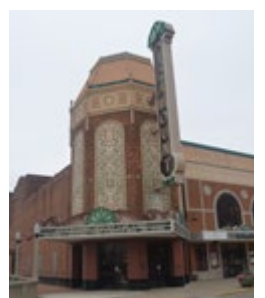
1920

■ **1924** Old Second Bank was designed by George Elmsie. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and a later addition aimed to match the original style.



1930

1940



■ **1931** The Paramount Theatre opens as the first air-conditioned building outside of Chicago.

1870

1880

1890

1900

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.

DOWNTOWN AURORA EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

Visit <http://bit.ly/AuroraTimeline> for a digital version of this document.



1975 Westfield Fox Valley Shopping Mall opens in eastern Aurora.



Photo from the Library of Congress.

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



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

1970 Burlington Northern begins operating commuter rail service on the railroad line from Aurora to Chicago.



1978 Riverfront Playhouse is founded. Since its creation, the nonprofit storefront theatre company has produced over 200 shows in downtown Aurora.

1978 Paramount Theatre reopens after a major restoration.

1979 Aurora City Council establishes the Preservation Commission to preserve properties that reflect the City's rich history.

1989 Riverwalk Commission created.

1985 Amtrak trains stop servicing Aurora.

1990 SciTech Hands on Museum relocates from Naperville to Aurora.

1986 The 1st downtown TIF and SSA districts are established.

1986 Waubensee Community College opens a new downtown campus in the former Carson Pirie Scott department store.

1985 Aurora Public Art Commission is established.

1983 Pace Bus service starts.



1993 The Hollywood Casino opens, bringing a surge in tax revenues for downtown redevelopment projects, which peaked at \$16.2 million in 2002, declining in later years with only \$8.9 million in 2013, and approximately \$7 million in 2014.

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 The FoxWalk Overlay District and Design Review Committee established.

1996 The Roundhouse re-opens with a brewpub, restaurant, museum and pavilion by Walter Payton's investment group.

1996 The restored David L. Pierce Art & History Center opens.

1996 The 1st Blues on the Fox festival is held.

2000 Members of the Aurora Council of Neighborhoods and the City initiate a neighborhood planning approach to develop local neighborhood plans.

2000 Seize the Future, the five-year public/private campaign for economic growth is launched by the Aurora Economic Development Commission (AEDC) and the Greater Aurora Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

2012 Construction begins on RiverEdge Park, an idea that emerged from the Seize the Future Master Plan to reconnect the neighborhoods and create an outdoor gathering space.



2011 Waubensee 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.

2006 Aurora listed as one of 100 Best Places to Live in Money Magazine.

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.

2008 Ballydoyle's Pub opens on New York St. & the river.

2008 Aurora hosts GreenTown conference.

2010 Population: 49,400

2015 Santori Library opens on River Street.

2015 The city's first protected bike lane opens on River Street, connecting two major regional trail segments.

2012 First Fridays (art, music, dance) is started by the Aurora Downtown organization.

2015 CMAP awards \$8.6 million through CMAQ to improve access to Metra train station.

While the City of Aurora's population continued to rise, the 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.

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

1963 Plans for Progress

1974 Preliminary Development Program

1984 Strategic Plan for Downtown Aurora

1987 Report on Current Development Opportunities

1993: Aurora '98 Strategic Plan

1997 ULI "Getting to the Next Level" Development Review

2006 Aurora Riverfront Vision Plan

2006 Historic Districts & Landmarks Guide

2007 RiverEdge Park Master Plan

2008 Walker Parking Study

2009 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

2013 Parking Management Policies

