



City of Aurora

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Legistar History Report

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In Control: Planning & Development Committee

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File Name: CMAP - Downtown Master Plan Amendment

Final Action:

Title: An Ordinance Approving Revisions to Aurora's Comprehensive Plan for Property Located Adjacent to the Fox River from Illinois Avenue on the North and North Avenue on the South and Approving the Updated Downtown Master Plan (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) - 15-00569 / AU22/2-14.347-COMP - SP - Ward) (PUBLIC HEARING)

Notes:

Agenda Date: 09/28/2017

Agenda Number:

Sponsors:

Enactment Date:

Attachments: Exhibit A - DowntownMasterPlanDRAFT 2017-09-18.pdf, PublicHearingMasterPlanPPT 2017-09-20.pdf, DowntownMasterPlanExecutiveSummaryDRAFT 2017-09-18.pdf, MOU and SOW - DowntownAurora 2015-06-24.pdf, PublicHearingMasterPlanPPT 2017-09-18.pdf

Enactment Number:

Planning Case #: AU22/2-14.347-COMP

Hearing Date:

Drafter: sphifer@aurora-il.org

Effective Date:

History of Legislative File

Ver- sion:	Acting Body:	Date:	Action:	Sent To:	Due Date:	Return Date:	Result:
1	Committee of the Whole	10/06/2015	(INFORMATION ONLY)				
Action Text:		INFORMATION ONLY					
Notes:		<i>Stephane Phifer, Director of Planning and Zonig, explained that the City of Aurora has received a grant for Local Technical Assistance through the Chicago Metropolitan Agency of Local Planning (CMAP). As a grant recipient the City of Aurora will receive technical assistance from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency Local Planning (CMAP) to prepare City staff to review the Downtown Aurora Plan and incorporate walkability and art and culture elements. Trevor Dick from CMAP spoke regarding the types of assistance and tools typically provided on this type of project to assist City Staff to incorporate improvements into the downtown area plan.</i>					

2	Planning Commission	09/20/2017	Forwarded	Planning & Development Committee	09/28/2017	Pass
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Action Text: A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron, seconded by Mr. Chambers, that this agenda item be Forwarded to the Planning & Development Committee, on the agenda for 9/28/2017. The motion carried.

Notes: *Ms. Phifer said first I want to thank the patience of the residents that have come here tonight to hear this item. They got to see a little bit of our planning process in work here tonight, so I appreciate their patience. The CMAP Master Plan was a long journey, a collaboration, a very positive collaboration between the City of Aurora staff and CMAP. It involved a lot of stakeholders and a lot of input. Lindsay Bayley from CMAP was the lead planner on the project with CMAP and I'm going to let her introduce her team, but this journey really started back in 2014 when city staff submitted an application for what they call a LTA grant with CMAP. Now it is a grant, but that does not mean that there were any funds involved. It is a grant of CMAP's time. Lindsay will tell you that we got a very good deal because she has put many, many, many hours into this plan and really feels that Aurora is her adopted home and I think that we are going to convince here that maybe it should become her home. We have gone through a lot of effort to really try to involve the public and Lindsay is going to go over that. But what we are looking to do is in 2006 the Seize the Future Master Plan, some of the Commissioners were there when we brought through the Downtown Development Plan at the same time that we brought through the Riverfront Vision Plan, so it was really a unique situation where we had open space advocates and business advocates all coming together to support both of those plans. I believe what we have for you this evening is really the same thing only incorporated into one plan, so really trying to look at creating a very diverse and vibrant downtown, looking at arts and culture, looking at walkability, looking at open space, but also looking at the business community and really taking a holistic look at the downtown in all of its aspects. So with that, I know Lindsay has a great presentation ready for you to go over the plan itself, so I'm going to turn it over to her.*

Mrs. Bayley said thank you Stephane. Yes this project has taken awhile. It is officially older than my daughter, who is now arguing about bedtime, so just to give you some overall perspective. I want to thank all of you and thank the City of Aurora for the chance to work here. It has really been a pleasure on the Master Plan for Aurora's downtown. Again, my name is Lindsay Bayley and I'm with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. We really kicked off the project in winter of 2015, and as Stephane mentioned, the application was submitted in 2014 and we had our kickoff visioning event in January 2016 and that was a really an exciting event. At the same time, we started interviewing key stakeholders, looking to do research on the existing conditions, taking tours of downtown, and we presented our existing conditions report at an Open House and we also presented our initial recommendations at this Open House in June of 2016. We got some great feedback and we were able to incorporate that into our draft plan through several revisions and we also worked with three different Mayors over the course of the project, but we were lucky that Mayor Irvin was involved from the beginning. This was taken from our Visioning Workshop. We had standing room only. We even had to turn some people away and reach out to them later, but it was a great event. As you can see, Mayor Irvin is there in the background. Then at that point, we released our first survey of recommendations. It is not the one shown here. It was a different format. That was in English and Spanish and we received over 700 responses, completed surveys from that. Then a short while later we released another survey looking at some of our ideas for approaches and strategies to get people's opinions on those and we had over 900 completed surveys for that time. We also attended many events and had booths and worked with lots of people and we got input on what people envision for their downtown, what they love about Aurora and what they'd like to see improved. We had Aldermanic meetings on the east side, and on the west side. We spoke to the Hispanic Heritage Advisory Board, the African American Heritage Advisory Board, and the Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board. Aurora Downtown worked with us quite a bit and many other events. I have pictures of a process where we had people put their vision in a bubble just from different events. We also in our survey collected points that people could place on a map and put a comment and we turned this into an interactive map so people can click on the points and see what others have said and that's on our project website. We also had a kiosk. It moved around downtown to 7 different locations, spending a week at each location so that people could have a chance to take the survey if they didn't have a computer at home. People can still go and look at those findings. This morning I made some edits to my presentation because I wanted to come up with some overarching themes

for our recommendations and the plan. What I came up with was first preserve, enhance and build upon your existing assets. These are things like your buildings, your streets, your people, the transportation options and the river of course. The second is make downtown a great place for the people who live here. I think we need to focus less on convincing people to come here and just make it great for the people who are already here, which will lead others to come join. Finally making it easier to be creative and do business in the city, helping entrepreneurs and artists and as much as possible trying to get out of the way of the innovation. I have to say that these ideas were not things that we pulled out of thin air. These are a lot of things that the city and that other groups in downtown Aurora are already doing and already working on. So we want to commend the efforts that have been ongoing and many of our recommendations actually start with continue to xyz. I want to reiterate that we're not the geniuses here. You guys are already doing really wonderful things. Our first theme is Experience and the recommendations go to enhance the built environment to create a sense of place, a downtown that's friendly to both residents and visitors alike, will respect the historic context of the area and highlight its importance in the region. Having good wayfinding and signage will help for people who are new to the area to easily get around. Enhanced branding and marketing will help highlight the local successes you've had and also combat some of the negative perceptions that outsiders have of downtown Aurora. For the second theme of Economy, we recommend the 3 development partners, the city, Invest Aurora and Aurora Downtown, to continue working collaboratively to cultivate a strong business base in the downtown and enhancing the business climate with efforts to attract, retain and expand the downtown businesses with a focus on small and local niche businesses, giving new tools to empower entrepreneurs and existing business owners. We also have recommendations that suggest ways to enhance quality of life for the downtown residents, as well as bringing on new residential units to help build the tax base. Our third theme is Arts, Culture and Entertainment. We see extraordinary potential for arts and culture to help Aurora achieve its broader goals for the downtown and to strengthen the entire community in the process by bringing together the various arts efforts. We recommend the formation of some sort of arts and culture alliance that would be able to use what we have called CMAP's Arts and Culture Tool Kit and walk through the steps outlined there. We also have some short term recommendations like enhancing architectural tourism and adding art around downtown. Our next theme is Transportation. We really prioritized at the city's request walkability, so making it a really pleasant place to walk. I've already seen improvements happening while we've been working on this plan. Also making it a great place to ride a bike, not just for recreation on the weekends, but to run errands. We have recommendations to address bottlenecks in traffic that aren't necessarily to speed travel times, but to create consistent travel times because when you have slower traffic at a consistent speed moving through your downtown it is better for your businesses and it is better for safety. Then we have recommendations that look at improving parking, ADA accommodations and transit. Of course, the Fox River is undoubtedly one of those aspects of Aurora that we need to preserve, enhance and build upon. We identify ways to activate the corridor and improve connections between the river and the downtown core. Finally, there is the theme of Community. We found a very engaged and active community here in Aurora and we believe that Aurora's people are a force to be reckoned with and listened to, expanding the city's reach outside of the usual suspects and building trust between community groups and with the city will really help strengthen the downtown. Those are all of the overall themes of our recommendations and you've been given our Executive Summary that has every recommendation listed on the last page. I'd like to mention we have 3 more meetings and if the city approves the plan, we will commit to implementation over the next 2 years. That is all I have for you at this time, except that I would like to thank our partners at the city for all their hard work, Stephane, Alex, Bill and also I'd like to thank my colleagues Ricardo Lopez and Don Hughes for the great work that they've put in throughout this project. We really have enjoyed our time here. Even though it has been a long time, at least it's been a project that we really love.

The public input portion of the public hearing was opened. The witnesses were sworn in.

Hello. My name is Margie Logman and I came down here tonight. I heard about all these surveys and everything. I was not asked to participate and didn't know. There is a quote I have "government is something that is done to you or something we participate in as citizens". A lot of times in Aurora I believe we are as citizens not informed like we should be. We would love to have a hard copy of that plan. I do go on the computer, but I would like a better way for us to be informed as citizens with plenty of time so we can think about these things a little more and have more time to come to public

hearings and be fully informed on situations. As far as the downtown plan, I have a couple of questions. I was just in Waxahachie, Texas which if it was transplanted looks just like downtown Aurora. I couldn't believe it. It is about 30 minutes by car south of Dallas. They are doing the same thing. They have the same old building with worn out signs of what it used to be and little shops and a lot of those little shops are starting to close because the economy cannot support it. I'm wondering here in Aurora will the economy support small shops? We are a working class people and are these little shops, as a senior citizen, am I going to want to go downtown to a very specialized shop and buy fancy stuff and things like that? Is that what's going to draw me downtown? Another thing, we talk about One Aurora, but I see a lot of separation in Aurora between the Boards, between the Chambers, even in our museums about people being able to get together. I know you can ride now downtown. I'll go downtown to go somewhere with publicized hours and they are not open. That is a deterrent to me. Also I'm wondering about so many murals downtown. This idea is great, but are we going to lose our architecture painting everything everywhere? Before moving on, I think we have a few things to address. Are we One Aurora? Are we going to move on this together or does that separation still exist? Just a couple of things that recently happened, I was downtown for the parade and two of the people, the dignitaries in the viewing stand, said where can I get a cup of coffee? I don't know. Nothing was open and there was no place for them to just get a cup of coffee. We have a beautiful Stolp concert place down there. I was at a beautiful concert and the poor guys were practically spitting out bugs while they were signing. I was like where was the city in that? Also we had an Easter Egg Hunt downtown put on by the city, publicized. A lot of people came, but I was down there watching little kids crying because nobody is supervised and somebody came in and took all of the eggs, so at Sci-Tech, the old Elks Building and the Library were little kids crying. So it was publicized, a lot of people came, but it wasn't that well organized. I think some of the ideas are great, but I think we need to do some more research before we go on. I don't want to see downtown become a place where we put little buildings in again. They open and close and open and close just to make something vibrant that will speak to everyone and that we can be more united before we move on. Thank you very much.

Hello. My name is Rebekah Axtell. First of all, thank you so much. Unlike my neighbor, I actually did have multiple opportunities to participate in the planning over the last couple of months and I'm so sorry that those messages didn't reach you, but appreciate your words as well. I think I want to focus on a couple of key points. Number one, a balanced attention to a range of cultural expressions. I'd like to focus on that for a moment. There is a very hungry appetite for vibrancy, for music, for art, for recreation downtown among the younger families and among visitors. There is a spark in their eye when they take a walk on the Fox River Trail. I think that spark needs a lot of nurturing. It is like a little bit of spark. It needs a lot of kindling. My creative team recently was awarded a grant to do public art on a historic property downtown and the focus of that grant was very much about we want this to last for many, many years, we want to make sure this is an investment and I would really encourage more locations for designated street art that are mindful of the historic districts and don't, as my neighbor recommended, don't just color over all the historic buildings, but there is designated street art areas. There is a concern about affordability of art and if Aurora can celebrate its own creators by offering opportunities for more temporary installations that are more affordable and maybe only are up for a gallery outdoors, I believe you would see more foot traffic and would see more participation and it will satisfy the appetite for a balanced range of cultural expressions. Aurora has many cultures and it is hard not to leave anybody out and when there is only one opportunity here or there every couple of years, cultural groups start to feel marginalized and that's certainly not something we want to see happen, so I'd recommend that. I'm really happy that gateways are focused on and welcome signage. I didn't hear the word Welcome Center, so I want to say it out loud. Aurora needs a Welcome Center. There is so much space that is available. We need more than just a couple of display racks with brochures. We need a person who is there and maybe that can be something at the new Art and History Center. We don't really have one and we need one. I got to help direct traffic during the Harry Potter Festival. Thousands of people were downtown and I literally had to walk people from Water Street Mall over to Restaurant Row 5 times that day because I couldn't explain how to get there and it was just 3 blocks away. It was a beautiful walk. I told them to go down one street, down to the Fox Trail, up and they'd be able to cross town safely and walk by the river, but the lack of vibrant signage makes that really difficult. I've lived here for 20 years. It seems very strange as to why this is such a challenge. I would encourage leveraging Aurora's local creative community to produce marketing and signage. There is a lot of celebration of

old ghost signs in cities around the country. I think there is something very distinctive and the word place-making is thrown around in urban planning, so I'd like to see Aurora's own artists with their own two hands asked to help equitably spend some of the marketing budget and create signage. Functional art I would call that. That would really be a practical use both of the local creative talent and practical use of the budget. I would also like to see transparency in how our marketing dollars are spent. That didn't really happen with the logo implementation. All the money for marketing went to Tennessee. Please let's not have that happen again when you have local creative service providers right here within walking distance of City Hall. It doesn't really make sense to send that money out of state or out of Aurora. Last but not least, I want to call for a true unity around this Downtown Master Plan. It is very, very disconcerting and really erodes trust when you have an Alderman here or an Alderman there who seems to not really be on board with some of the core features of the plan, such as preservation. If many of us wanted to live in a big municipality with giant skyscrapers, we certainly wouldn't have picked Aurora. I would really love to see agendas for redevelopment and development made explicitly clear, no hidden agendas. It definitely is disconcerting when you don't feel a sense of unity in your community about these things. I would also like to see just clear articulation about what's going to happen with the buildings around Water Street Mall that the city owns and how practically those are addressed in this plan. I would like to see unity and transparency in city leadership about their intention for what is to happen with the portions of Aurora that were built brick by brick and those portions of Aurora that carry with it Aurora's heritage and stories. Thank you very much for your time.

Hello. I'm Marissa Amoni and I work with Aurora Downtown to organize their events. I apologize about the Easter Egg Hunt. That was our first attempt at that so we will make sure to get more eggs this year. I just wanted to briefly thank Lindsay and her wonderful team. I think they did a great job of presenting this tonight and working with us for the last few years. I know that Lindsay and her team have come down. We've had lunch. We walked downtown numerous times and I feel like someone like me who really loves downtown as I'm sure all of you do as well, it is nice to see them immersed in our community, so it is not just somebody coming in and giving us recommendation. I feel like they really got to know it. I'm very impressed with their renderings and their ideas. I would like to see lots of practical implementation. I now that, again, working closely in downtown, I would like to see things like more play and a playground. I would like to see a nice shelter for a Farmers Market. So I want to see more practical things like that added to this Master Plan on things that staff are already looking at like other locations for a Farmers Market. I would like CMAP to work on those ideas as well. Other than that, I think they did a great job. I love the public art. I love those lights in the picture and some of the vibrancy and I think downtown is really what we want it to be and I think we are all doing a great job, this entire community, in supporting these efforts, so thank you.

The public input portion of the public hearing was closed.

Chairman Truax said I want to ask Lindsay and Stephane together maybe if you can field some of the questions.

Mrs. Cole said I have a question. It says it encompasses from North Avenue to Illinois Avenue. So my question is in regard to the old Kitty Car site up on N. Broadway. What is the status on that? I think that's part of the wetlands educational center, would it not be or is that a little too far south?

Ms. Phifer said you are correct. The environmental center is a little bit south of that. Kitty Car is kind of in a little bit of a flux area with regard to where the open space ends and the development begins, so some of that is really going to depend on when that area starts to come in for redevelopment. But that is a property that the city has spent quite a bit of dollars to clean up. Unfortunately, I can't speak more to that because there is pending litigation on that at this time, but is sort of a flex area on the plan.

Chairman Truax said I guess I have a question which is where can people go to get a printed copy of this?

Mrs. Bayley said we can make copies available at the library.

Ms. Phifer said to that end, we made copies available. There will be copies that will be on the website as well. We are still collecting comments, so I just wanted to make sure that everybody in the audience and that it was on the record as well that while this is a public hearing because that is part of our approval process, there is still lots of time to collect that information and we will be continuing to revise the plan while it goes through the extra meetings.

Chairman Truax said this is a very large document and we've had not too much time to look at it and I'm sure you folks have not either. Your comments will continue to be involving for the people who did this even though tonight we have a limited amount of time. Should I tell you my questions? A Welcome Center?

Ms. Phifer said I think it is a great idea. I think that that is an example of some of the comments that you can't really get all of the good great comments in one sort of slice of time. Everything sort of builds on each other and that's the beauty, I think, of this plan. I think with other plans that CMAP put together is it really is a living document and so you'll notice a lot of the recommendations talk about convening and continue to convene residents and stakeholders to implement the plan with further consortiums and the like. The Welcome Center is a perfect example of that's a great out-cropping of sort of the idea if we are going to create all this media, so I think Rebekah had a great idea with where do we put it all so it is easily accessible? So that is a perfect example of that.

Chairman Truax said a shelter for the Farmer's Market or future plans possible for the Farmer's Market?

Mrs. Bayley said we didn't identify sites or locations or specific uses or changes to buildings. One of our renderings does have a Farmer's Market shown next to the library in that parking lot.

Chairman Truax said so it is still open. The same thing I would assume is true about the playground downtown.

Mrs. Bayley said yes. I think when we talk about enhancing quality of life for the residents downtown we can make a specific reference to play and making it fun for families to be downtown.

Mr. Cameron said one of the pluses for Aurora is it is a very diverse city, but that also has the roots in the fact that my guess is you are never going to get 100% commitment of everyone, whether they be Aldermen or whatever because everyone doesn't always believe in the same facts and they do represent areas of the city that really haven't adopted. We know well that we have old Aurora and we have the new Aurora on the far east side and those people that are in that really have never become a part of Aurora and a lot of people in old Aurora have never become a part of Aurora. So you are never going to get 100% cooperation and agreement. The only thing we can hope is that we develop a community that has enough shared experiences that at least they have some commonality. I think some of the things like the Paramount and the musical and the entertainment areas are a vehicle to do that. Most of the concerts they have, my favorites are all dead. But the concept is great at providing some kind of a coordination/cooperation between people. We carry both the pluses and the negatives of our community. We have an old downtown. We have an absentee landlord basis and a lot of those people apparently really don't care anymore so I don't know how you go about bringing that into a goal. There is so much square footage downtown that is not conducive to developing because if it is successful there is another 100,000 square feet behind it for somebody to take advantage of that so there is no reason to go ahead and strike out on your own. During my time in Aurora, I looked at doing that a couple of times and the risk was too great for the reward and I don't know how you solve that.

Ms. Phifer said just to kind of respond to Mr. Cameron's comments, I think Lindsay actually put it best is that really this plan is really focusing on how do we really try to make a great vibrant downtown with the people we already have here and when we do that then people are going to discover how wonderful it is and want to be a part of that, so really kind of building that excitement from within. I was part of the planning process when we did the 2006 plan and the contrast is that plan was really about how do we attract people to downtown. I do think that had success. I do think that's why we are where we are today. But I think at this point we are actually readjusting that vision and we are saying

we think that the people from outside, build it and they will come. We need to make sure that this is a place for the people that are already here and build upon all of the great people who are already giving their all to this downtown and if we really make sure that they have what they need to have a great place to be everybody else is going to see how great that is. I do think that is a big shift and I want to make sure I'm highlighting what Lindsay said. It is a big shift in what this plan is trying to accomplish, I think just to talk about the investment and how that's going to help attract investment, and I think this is how we are going to address Margie's concern with the fact that how do you get businesses that actually can be successful in the downtown. Jimi Allen is in the audience and I know he didn't speak tonight, but I think he is a really good example of it's about having the people who are already here and already believe in downtown investing and creating new development in the downtown. I don't think we are in a position anymore where we have to convince people to come on downtown, let's convince you that you should spend your money down here and you should invest here. I think we have a whole community that's ready to give back and to invest in the downtown and I think it is about leveraging those individuals so that they can be the test case so that the bigger developers are going to want to come and be a part of it. So we won't need to be convincing them. Jimi's success is going to be convincing them. I really just wanted to highlight that that is a huge shift from what our previous plans were and something that I think is really exciting. I think that we don't have to worry about that we are going to make everybody happy because we're going to make a lot of people happy because they are going to be part of this, they are going to have ownership and I really do feel that ownership is the most important thing in a plan and I think that we are going to continue to do that as we do implementation.

Mrs. Cole said I want to make one more comment. I know that in this it is looking at development of high density residential and I encourage that and I want to make sure that we don't forget that we need to have access for all to the river and that the river is never closed anywhere to the public.

Mrs. Bayley said I think that's a good point that we probably need to call out in the plan. We were going with the assumptions that the Riverfront Vision Plan would stay in place and so that would be public access preserved.

MOTION OF APPROVAL WAS MADE BY: Mr. Bergeron

MOTION SECONDED BY: Mr. Chambers

AYES: Mr. Bergeron, Mr. Cameron, Mr. Chambers, Mrs. Cole, Mr. Divine, Mrs. Duncan, Mrs. Head, Mrs. Owusu-Safo, Mr. Pilmer, Mr. Reynolds.

NAYS: None

Ms. Phifer said this will next be heard at the Planning and Development Committee on Thursday, September 28, 2017, at 4:00 p.m. on the fifth floor of this building.

Aye: 9 At Large Bergeron, At Large Cameron, At Large Cole, At Large Pilmer, Aurora Twnshp Representative Reynolds, SD 204 Representative Duncan, Fox Valley Park District Representative Chambers, At Large Owusu-Safo and SD 129 Representative Head
