

AURORA AVENUE URBAN DESIGN AND LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES STUDY

Introduction

In response to requests from the community in 2007, Mayor Greg Nickels launched an initiative to assist in the revitalization of the Aurora Avenue North Corridor from North 72nd Street to North 90th Street. The goal of this planning project was to engage a wide variety of community stakeholders and develop a common vision that reflects local desires and ideas for the future of this segment of Aurora Avenue. In October 2007, the city and community launched an Aurora Avenue Action Agenda Task Force. Eight businesses and property owners and eleven community stakeholders participated on the Task Force over a seven month period. In addition, the task force represented local churches, renters and home owners, folks who shop locally and those who work at local businesses, as well as long time residents and relative newcomers.

In April 2008, the Task Force completed its Action Agenda and delivered it to the Mayor who committed to work with the group to implement many of its recommendations including developing an Urban Design Vision Plan for the future of the study area.

Background

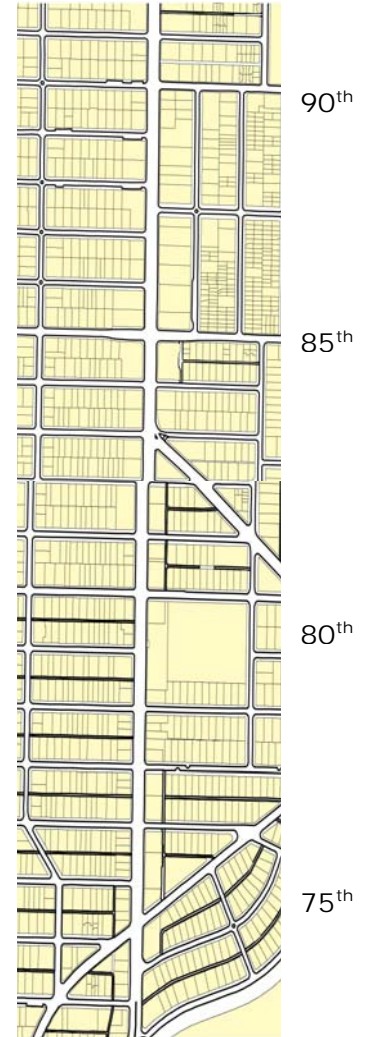
The study area is the Aurora Avenue corridor north of Green Lake from N. 72nd Street to N. 90th Street. This area is an active local business district with a diversity of businesses and building types, and a growing residential base nearby. In recent years, community dialogue with the City about protecting and enhancing the business community, aesthetic, traffic and public safety concerns led to development of the Aurora Avenue Action Agenda which outlines 40 specific recommendations for improving the community. Upcoming changes to bring improved “Bus Rapid Transit” (BRT) service to Aurora Avenue also provide a catalyst for evaluating the appearance and function of streets, sidewalks, and private development opportunities particularly at three sets of BRT stops in the study area, anticipated near N. 75th, 85th and 90th Streets.

An Aurora Avenue Urban Design and Land Use Opportunities study, co-led by the Seattle Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and Department of Planning and Development (DPD) staff, is the next step to evaluate possible futures for this corridor.

Study Objectives and Tasks

The Urban Design and Land Use Opportunities study is meant to:

- ascertain opportunity areas for future development that will complement the corridor, and recommendations that will help achieve a favored land use pattern;
- generate urban design concepts for enhanced pedestrian streetscapes that will complement and improve this major arterial right-of-way; and



- generate urban design concepts that will provide for attractive and functional BRT bus stop areas.

This scope of work intentionally combines land use form, transit stops, streetscape improvements and street use topics because the corridor's success as an environment will depend upon all four.

A. Land Use Development and Urban Form Opportunities

This area has a lot of potential for improvements in aesthetic character and usable, attractive public spaces. It could benefit greatly from a new vision portraying how the form and function of its uses and development patterns can make a difference in creating a better environment for businesses and daily use by nearby residents and pedestrians. The study will explore a range of possibilities for the future, seeking compelling strategies to influence the form, identity and comfort of this area. In large part this would be assumed to occur through individual infill redevelopment projects occurring over the long term. The land use concepts developed in this task will complement the streetscape design concepts investigated in other tasks. The study will investigate the following suggested range of land use/infill development scenarios, with concepts described in graphic and written form:

1. **General Infill/Least Change in Intensity:** Guidance on how to best encourage compatible and improved forms of infill development, considering the variety of property depth dimensions along the corridor and continuing right-of-way functions of the corridor.
2. **Targeted Changes in Intensity:** Concepts for significantly improved urban environments concentrated in districts near BRT bus stop areas.
3. **Highest Level of Change:** Boldest concepts to improve the intensity, livability and attractiveness of this corridor.

These three scenario types could generate design concepts that are complementary to one another, or could represent distinct scenarios at different intensity levels.

Factors to consider:

- Property widths and relationship of existing and future uses to streets and sidewalks, varying from narrower confined widths to some blocks with wider property widths north of N. 85th Street
- Streetscape/bus stop improvement opportunities on public and public/private property
- Need for safe, attractive and activated public spaces (including consideration of crime-preventive design principles)
- Need for compatible transitions from commercial properties to immediately adjacent low-density residential properties.
- Need to protect parking and traffic functions for businesses along the corridor.

Tasks will include:

- Compiling data on and mapping existing conditions, using existing data and local property owner, business, resident and City staff input;
- Conducting workshop(s) that will generate community ideas for further exploration;
- Define and portray land use development and urban form concepts, including bubble diagrams, maps, sections, concept sketches, sample vignette sketches, 3-D portrayals (using tools such as Sketch-Up), photos, architectural design guidance, etc. and

descriptive text to communicate the favored building forms, appearance and use patterns of new buildings, how they will fit with existing use patterns, and relationships between rights-of-way and public and private spaces. This should include consideration of commercial uses (both as stand-alone uses and in mixed-use buildings) and residential uses.

B. Streetscape Improvement Concepts for Corridor

The study will explore streetscape urban design concepts that will be responsive to physical parameters of this corridor. The study will describe streetscape urban design concepts that can be implemented in the corridor to enhance its aesthetic attractiveness and identity as a district, while also improving pedestrian safety and accessibility, and maintaining effectiveness of its transit and general traffic roadway functions, and specifically protecting the access to local businesses. These streetscape concepts will be complementary to the Land Use Development and Urban Form Opportunities studied in the first task. They should also be compared to the standards of the Seattle Department of Transportation Right-of-Way Improvement Manual, indicating where the concepts adhere to or diverge from these standards. Factors to consider include:

- Available street right-of-way widths;
- Presence of existing features (telephone poles, street trees, utility fixtures, etc.) that narrow sidewalk widths in numerous locations;
- Potential for constraints if below-ground utilities are present;
- Narrow depths of properties and constrained sidewalk widths in some areas;
- Importance of parking and access for existing businesses;
- City of Seattle's Bicycle Master Plan;
- Probable locations of BRT stops; and
- BRT service that will also influence lane usage during peak hours and may suggest other adjustments to street use.

Tasks will include:

- Define and portray streetscape improvement concepts, including conceptual sidewalk and roadway sections, aesthetic design treatments, vegetation palette, street furniture, public art opportunities, bicycle infrastructure, safety features, pedestrian crossings, etc. in graphic and text form. These will be in sufficient detail to understand lane widths and other details to ensure street use objectives are met.
- Documenting locations with restricted sidewalk widths that may significantly affect pedestrian/ADA mobility, in all of study area or in proximity to bus stops.

C. Improvement Concepts for BRT Bus Stop Locations and Immediate Vicinity

King County Metro Transit has prioritized new Bus Rapid Transit service to the Aurora Avenue corridor from Shoreline to Downtown Seattle with planning to begin in the fall of 2009. Creating concepts that serve this segment of the community will feed into Metro's planning process. The BRT bus stop locations will serve increasing volumes of bus riders over time, creating a need for well-designed and functional public spaces near the stops. The bus stops will be an important part of the streetscape improvements, and could also serve as a catalyst for complementary new development nearby that would help achieve urban form and people-friendly aesthetic objectives. Factors to consider:

- Opportunities and constraints of roadway and sidewalk widths and adjacent properties in the three sets of intended bus stop locations.
- The potential for space-efficient transit-stop features such as canopies or waiting areas to be incorporated into adjacent existing and future building facades.
- Anticipated ridership volumes, and the functional and dimensional requirements of the BRT bus stops as indicated by King County Metro and Seattle Department of Transportation transit planning staff who will be part of the Project study team.

Tasks will include:

- Define and portray in graphic form and descriptive text BRT bus stop vicinity improvement concepts at three sets of locations (northbound and southbound stops), including plan and section portrayals tied to the dimensions at the actual bus stop locations. This will communicate feasible and preferable arrangements of the bus stops and their relationship to nearby streets and properties. It will also include one or multiple possible sets of bus stop shelters and signage as provided by or developed through conferring with King County Metro transit planning staff.

D. Deliverables

1. Draft and final reports with text and illustrations describing the following:
 - Land use and urban form concepts
 - Streetscape design concepts
 - BRT improvement concepts
 - Design guidelines and/or other strategies that would help implement these concepts and community's action recommendations (see attached list). This might include concepts for neighborhood identity, public art, etc.
2. Digital files of documents in InDesign format and source files for all graphics (format and resolution to be determined by DPD staff).
3. Facilitation of three public advisory meeting(s) to gather input. Consultant will produce materials for the meeting, assist City staff in designing the format of the meeting, facilitate and document the meeting content (City staff will provide outreach, mailings, room reservation, food and setup.)

E. Funding

The anticipated funding range for this study is \$40,000 - \$60,000, jointly funded by DPD, SDOT, and OPM.

F. Timeframe

This project will be conducted in the September 2008 – February 2009 timeframe.