

Feb. 9, 2009, Community Meeting #3 NOTES
Aurora Avenue Land Use Visioning and Urban Design Study

Transit Station Plazas, Notes on Comments

1. There were no negative comments from any of the four groups that rotated through. The presenter stressed the need to be incremental in growing the plazas over time.
 - This approach would initially satisfy the immediate bus shelter area needs, and then plazas could be expanded over time with new adjacent private development, and become better-activated as open space amenities with uses such as cafés nearby.
2. Maintaining public safety and avoiding criminal activities in the plazas through crime-preventive design principles (“CPTED”) was on nearly everyone’s mind.
3. Commenters were split in their preferences for full-street-closure plazas or retaining one-way out street options.
4. Many commenters were eager to move ahead with the station plazas and asked when and how the City will engage with the residents and businesses adjacent to each of the streets where station plazas are proposed. The presenter said to stay tuned to the City website and to the Action Agenda Committee efforts.
5. Many asked: why study only the three stops and not more of the entire Aurora corridor? The presenter noted this is a prototype study to explore ideas and community support.
6. A plaza design that retains two-way traffic in/out was seen as a problem due to pedestrian and automobile safety concerns and lack of enough space for the shelter area. The presenter agreed, but said this illustrates a short term solution that would allow existing businesses using side street parking to continue such parking.
7. Most commenters liked the idea of traffic-calmed and pedestrian-oriented local streets linking to the bus stops. They believe they will be quieter and safer.

Specific commenters’ questions included:

8. Why are we sixth in line for BRT service if we have the highest ridership?
9. Can there be parallel-timed signals for safe pedestrian crossing directly to the station area that are linked to the adjacent traffic signal? The presenter noted the assumed need to limit traffic signals on Aurora, but that this is a good question for all the agencies.
10. Can there be an increase in policing along corridor for safety – bicycle patrols etc.?
11. Would the bus pull out into the plaza area for passenger pick-up and drop-off? The presenter noted this was not likely because of traffic flow and space concerns.
12. How soon will King County Metro start their public process? [Fall 2009]
13. Several folks said the shelters are not used much due to smokers or other activities. Can a new shelter design, or no shelters, be explored? Question for King County Metro.
14. Several commenters voiced dismay at the reduction in stops and having to walk further. The presenter noted the connectivity, schedule, speed and efficiency elements being studied to define the BRT stops.

Right of Way Concepts, Notes on Comments

Most participants simply had questions about details of the various streetscape elements. The most interesting comments were as follows:

- We should not bother widening sidewalks. It puts too much of a burden on the private property owner and nobody will sit at a café table along Aurora for coffee. It is too loud and uncomfortable (two people were vocal about this). When told that certain sidewalk sections did not meet ADA standards, one of the two was more amenable to the concept of widening sidewalks to better accommodate disabled pedestrians.
- Center medians should provide a safe refuge (level surface with no shrubs or impediments) to accommodate those pedestrians who chose to cross Aurora at unsignalized intersections. Treatment of medians at mid-block should discourage pedestrians from crossing.
- Should consider pedestrian tunnels or bridges for additional crossing spots.
- One business owner was concerned about who would be responsible for maintenance of street trees and tree pits. Specifically, who is responsible for cleaning up leaf litter?
- Should capture the history associated with Aurora and surroundings through historic plaques, art projects, or custom streetscape elements.
- Like the street end plazas.
- Utility undergrounding would be nice.
- Center medians should allow emergency vehicle access in places.

Information presented at this table can be summarized as follows:

Streetscape Concept

Intent:

The intent of the streetscape improvements is to transform Aurora Avenue from an auto oriented street into a more balanced multi-modal street that better accommodates transit and pedestrians. The streetscape improvement priorities are to improve pedestrian safety and security, meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), improve transit operations, maintain smooth traffic flow, and implement access management principles. The intent is also to improve the appearance and character of Aurora Avenue making it more attractive for residents, businesses, and developers.

Proposed Features:

- New sidewalk, curb and gutter, where necessary
 - Up to 15' wide sidewalks required adjacent to BRT stations (provision of additional 7.5' adjacent to the public right of way).
 - Minimum 12' wide sidewalks required in other locations.
- New curb ramps
- Bollards at corners
- Crosswalk improvements
- Landscaping and rain gardens

- Decorative street and pedestrian lighting
- Pedestrian wayfinding system
- Art
- Center median improvements and expansion
- Curb cut consolidation upon redevelopment
- Street end transit plazas with shelters, seating, lighting, and planting
- Additional intersection signalization and pedestrian crossing (N. 88th Street)
- N. Green Lake Drive intersection improvements
- Façade and weather protection required
- Possible utility undergrounding

Street-End Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Station Plazas

Intent:

The primary intent of the street-end BRT station plazas is to provide adequate space to accommodate the amenities associated with a typical BRT station. The street-end plazas have a number of other benefits. They slightly shift the impacts of bus stops away from business frontages allowing better visibility and more usable sidewalk space. The partial or full closure of residential cross streets at plaza locations reduces turning movements to and from Aurora Avenue resulting in smoother traffic flow and less through traffic on the residential cross street. The plazas also provide an open space amenity for nearby residents and businesses. Concerns about the plazas attracting crime can be addressed by using Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, such as installing adequate lighting and appropriate landscaping, by encouraging existing adjacent businesses to “adopt” and invest in the plazas, and by requiring new development to orient facades and uses toward the plazas.

Proposed Features:

- BRT station amenities:
 - Loading/unloading clear zone (10' X 12' min.)
 - Transit Shelters (20' X 8' roof size)
 - Area lighting
 - Fare-payment machine
 - Real-time transit information
 - Bicycle racks
 - Trash and recycling receptacles
- Special paving (e.g. concrete unit pavers, colored concrete, stone, or porous pavement)
- Pedestrian lighting
- Landscaping and rain gardens
- Additional seating or cafe tables
- Art

Land Use and Zoning Concepts, Notes on Comments

Roughly half of the people were first-time attendees to the study meetings. Gordon recapped the alternatives presented at the second meeting, and the rationales for:

- transit-oriented development
- transit plazas, and
- exploring possible rezones for deeper commercial properties that could bring about greater chances of infill commercial or mixed-use development.

He also sought input from the citizens on whether next-step strategies should pursue opportunities in all three of the identified subareas or two of the three subareas.

Widespread support for transit plaza concepts.

Most commenters on the transit plaza ideas were supportive, especially for the full dead-end street plaza design. The explanation of the benefits of the transit plazas seemed understood by all groups, although several questions were directed at the exact reasons for them, whether they related to bus stop capacity, as magnets for new preferable businesses, or as small open space amenities. They wanted to know what kinds of new businesses the City would prefer (e.g., restaurants, coffee shops, services for residents).

The value of supporting mixed-use transit-oriented development also appeared understood, and was especially favored by a couple of commenters in one group. There were negative comments as well. These included that unless the City addresses the wider issues of public safety on Aurora, these plazas could become public safety challenges. Also, concentrating transit riders at fewer stops at the plazas will further encourage people to drive to the stops and park in the neighborhood.

Widespread support for improvement concepts around 85th and 90th Streets.

In all four groups, many citizens nodded heads and made supportive comments about pursuing the described mixed-use and transit-station-focused strategies for the 85th and 90th Street subareas. Gordon's explanation described "planting seeds for change" by encouraging new development that would include new residential populations, an improved sidewalk environment, street-level commercial uses with windows, and concentrated growth around transit plazas. Two commenters expressed concern about the probable affordable-housing focus of such housing. Also expressed was the connection between public safety concerns and livability for residents around 85th-90th Streets.

Sidewalks and height incentives.

Commenters understood the problem of seeking wider sidewalks from private commercial properties that are already narrow in depth. They also understood the idea of offering the property owner something in return. Only a few attendees expressed support for the idea of giving 10 feet of additional building height in exchange for wider sidewalks, although some indicated potential support if they understood other details better, such as height transitions to adjacent single-family properties. A greater number of nearby residents, primarily those closer to Green Lake, were concerned about building bulk even to the existing 40-foot height limit. A couple of commenters noted that new

buildings in this 40-50 foot range would be overly dense and “choke” the neighborhood visually. They believe “design review” for new buildings cannot effectively address the shape and massing of buildings in ways that will protect nearby single family properties.

Include Green Lake Way intersection vicinity in a subarea, as a “gateway.”

Near the angled Green Lake Way intersection with Aurora, a few attendees volunteered the idea of a “gateway to Green Lake” concept. They also noted the open space and image-making possibilities at the adjacent triangle-shaped property on the east side of Aurora Avenue there.

Widespread opposition to single-family property rezones south of 79th Street.

Approximately half of the commenters were skeptical about or opposed rezones in the southernmost commercial district from 73rd to 79th Streets. Several homeowners, many from 76th Street, expressed their opposition to any single family property rezones in that area. One other person objected to denser residential growth north of 85th Street, due to existing townhouse densities there.

The expressed reasons to oppose single-family property rezones included:

- pushing the transition from commercial to residential properties deeper into the single-family blocks;
- spillover parking impacts from residential units, business patrons and bus riders;
- objections to the height/bulk implications on neighboring properties; and
- reduced property values.

Notably, many of these commenters expressed support for an improved Aurora Avenue environment, but they would prefer not to extend the direct impacts of new buildings further into their blocks.

Little expressed support for greater commercial property depths south of 79th St.

Due to the good graphic materials on hand, most commenters understood the rationale for accommodating greater commercial property depths. However, only a couple of commenters directly expressed support for that idea. One resident didn’t believe the outcome would necessarily be good or result in mixed-use development. She feared that fast-food restaurants might be a more likely development outcome. Where there are north-south alleys, a few commenters doubted whether there would be a valid rationale for rezoning the alley and properties on the other sides of alleys.

No support for multifamily transition zones.

No one spoke in favor of any multifamily transition zone concept. One couple said they did not wish to live in or near any such area that would look like the lowrise-zoned area north of 85th Street. Others also expressed concerns about the denser and bulkier townhouse style of development. The commenters also felt a multifamily transition zone would extend the negative effects of change too far into the single-family blocks.

More information preferred to better understand the recommendations.

A few comments urged staff to more fully flesh out the recommendations and supporting materials so they can better understand how the connection between issues and solutions. Show details such as rear setbacks and transitions to adjacent properties and streets.

Specific comments and questions (paraphrased)

1. More specifically define the potential for recommended actions to achieve intended objectives for Aurora corridor improvement. What is the likelihood for success?
2. One person expressed preference for automobile-oriented businesses north of 85th Street to be replaced with pedestrian-oriented and resident-serving businesses.
3. The Department of Corrections releases people to the 85th Street area [apparently due to availability of motel housing options]. How does that public safety concern relate to livability and increased residential presence on or near Aurora?
4. Comparing the possible alternatives shown, I prefer a smaller focused area for change rather than any corridor-wide strategy. Also, I oppose multifamily transition zones because I don't want to live in or near a multifamily neighborhood like northeast of 85th St.
5. The City could look at the option of rezoning one side of Aurora Avenue but not the other, south of 79th Street. Shadowing and blocking of sun access could be part of the reason for this.
6. I live around 95th Street on the west side of Aurora and see many crowded town-houses but also derelict industrial or commercial properties on Aurora. Who at the City is looking at that area and seeing what can be done to improve it? Is anything being done to pursue implementing the Aurora-Licton neighborhood plan?
7. Using the example of the buildings under construction at the Twin Tepees site and near Green Lake Way and 80th Street, even buildings at 40 feet are built right up to property lines and tend to have a "choking" effect on the feel of the neighborhood. You can't count on design review to affect the massing of the building if the Land Use Code says you can build it that way. Another commenter noted that design review ideas may tend to force the building massing toward the rear of the property which just exacerbates the building bulk relationship to the neighborhood. Even though there are some good building examples in Phinney Ridge, there are also plenty of poor ones.
8. There are good reasons to support transit-oriented development around transit plazas, as an environmentally sustainable strategy that is good for pedestrian walkability, growth management, reducing vehicle trips and other similar reasons.
9. A few commenters expressed doubt about the City's intentions in even talking about land use ideas. Is there a particular plan to force rezones on a wider basis or progressively upzone areas over time? They don't really have confidence in the government's intentions or whether the outcomes will be as advertised.
10. Be aware of the real-life impacts of spillover parking on neighborhood side streets due to insufficient parking for businesses and multifamily dwellings and the hide-

and-ride bus passenger parkers. The City must ensure that sufficient width of street is maintained for emergency access and that parking impacts do not overwhelm adjacent residents' needs.

11. I see possibilities for improving the triangle property next to Green Lake Way as a good opportunity for a civic amenity and a way to announce the "gateway to Green Lake" as a theme for that location.
12. There are important questions about timing that make sense to address. On the one hand, it would be good to see planted medians which would have a positive impact without the negative impacts or the public process involved in some of the other strategies. On the other hand, it may make sense to prioritize the plazas since it will take a few years to get approval, do design and create the funding for the plazas and BRT will be coming soon.