B. Promoting the Quality of Life in the City

VISION

When the goals of the city are achieved…

Aurora is known throughout the metro area, statewide, and in the country as a world-class city featuring an educated and diverse workforce, internationally renowned health care and research facilities, the highest standard in quality of life, the preferred business address in the west, and a thriving environment for economic development. More specifically…

- Aurora is a leader in smart growth, urban renewal, and preservation of natural resources.
- Aurora is a magnet both for residents and visitors because of its shopping, restaurants, recreational opportunities, open spaces, museums and other cultural amenities, historic resources, and community events.
- Aurora is known as a place where businesses flourish because of its educated workforce, business-friendly environment, strategic location in the metro area and in the country, and proximity to one of the world’s largest airports and one of the country’s most traveled interstate highways.
- Aurora has at least one major entertainment attraction that brings it national attention.
- Aurora serves as a tourism base camp for visitors to Colorado.
- Aurora has an immediately clear identity marked by its attractive and distinctive entryways and hospitable streetscapes.
- Aurora has attractive visual corridors, streetscapes, neighborhoods, and public areas enhanced with public art.
- Aurora is recognized as having the most comprehensive system of open space and trail networks in the region.
- Aurora is known as a place to learn about and participate in a rich and varied history drawing on the city’s legacy of pioneers and military, science, and health traditions.

DISCUSSION

Existing Conditions. Easily accessible to the rest of the world, Aurora is a safe city with progressive ideas, comfortable neighborhoods, vast educational opportunities, and ample amenities. In comparison with 41 U.S. cities with populations between 250,000 and 475,000, the City of Aurora was ranked the 11th lowest in the number of violent crimes in 2008. Aurora can take advantage of these assets to improve its image as a place to live, work, and visit.

Aurora has become a large, full-service city. Because of its size, it will continue to have a varied mix of development projects, housing types, household incomes, and demographics. As a big city, it also faces all of the issues that accompany being an urban area. It is becoming increasingly important for Aurora to maintain and improve its image in order to help attract businesses, residents, and visitors.

The major projects and developing centers in Aurora, such as Fitzsimons, City Center, Havana and E-470 corridors, and Original
Aurora, offer major contributions toward enhancing the image of Aurora.

The Aurora Municipal Center makes a bold, significant statement about how Aurora envisions itself. Buckley Air Force Base, with its high-technology mission and nearby aerospace businesses, makes strong declarations about Aurora’s current and future roles in national defense, homeland security, and space-related industry. The development of the Fitzsimons Life Sciences City illustrates Aurora’s innovative approach toward building a city worthy of recognition beyond its boundaries.

In Original Aurora, the city has created and is growing an arts district. The strategy is bringing new life to an older part of Aurora and bolstering the city’s cultural center. The Aurora Sports Park has become a major destination for regional and national sports tournaments, showcasing the city’s positive attributes to participating teams and spectators. Such projects are changing perceptions about Aurora, creating a momentum for enhancing the city’s image.

Plans and Programs

Communications Department

The City of Aurora works to maintain and strengthen media relations. It maintains a communications department that serves as a contact point for media and initiates positive media stories. The city frequently issues news releases on a number of subjects pertaining to city programs, services, and innovations within the city. The communications department provides guidance and advice to city staff on public relations and media issues. In addition, the communications department produces positive visual images of Aurora on news and feature programs via the city’s municipal television station (KACT-TV Channel 8).

Destination Marketing

In the past, the task of promoting tourism within the city was the responsibility of the Visitors Promotion Advisory Board whose members were appointed by the City Council. Aurora is currently in the process of moving towards the creation of an independent Destination Marketing Organization that will market the city to event planners and business and leisure travelers across the country.

Under the direction of City Council, a number of steps have been taken to implement destination marketing objectives. In 2009, the city submitted documents to the Colorado Secretary of State detailing the legal structure for a new Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). The state has approved creation of an Aurora DMO and in 2010 the first Board of Directors will be seated and staff recruited.

Arts District

In the East End Arts District in Original Aurora, an Arts District Loan Fund offered through the city will assist artists, art space developers, and arts-related retail businesses and provide an incentive for their relocation into the district.

Two arts district redevelopment projects provide a combination of arts district loan fund and community development block grant (CDBG) funding. These create multi-tenant art studio and gallery spaces that anchor the emerging arts district. Additional steps that have been completed, are under way, or are planned include:

- identification of strategic arts properties
- integration of the arts district theme by including artist live/work space and gallery space in other redevelopment projects in the area
- offering small business advising and training services to artists
• redevelopment of underutilized buildings into arts studios, classrooms, and performing arts and gallery space
• transformation of a vacant tract of land at Dallas Street into a prominent public art space
• enhanced street and alley entry points to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library/Municipal Services Center

Libraries
A Central Library and several branch libraries significantly contribute to the quality of life in Aurora. They provide:

• support for students of all ages and support for school curricula, working closely with the schools to provide needed services
• online research databases that can be used in the library or from home, the school or the office
• free story times and summer reading, and free materials on any topic
• meeting space for community groups and others
• study space, computers, basic computer classes and Internet access
• business materials and support for small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs
• free reference help

Recreation
The award winning public recreation program makes Aurora a great place to live. Programs and services for all ages help to:

• enhance health and well-being
• build stronger communities
• connect families
• teach lifelong skills
• provide safe places to play
• reduce stress
• strengthen economic development

The Recreation Services Division’s Office of Youth Development is implementing a City Council Goal that states: “Ensure that every child and young person in Aurora will have access to the fundamental resources she or he needs to succeed,” using the Five Promises of the America’s Promise Initiative. Actions under way are strengthening community involvement, engaging youth and families, improving the quality and coordination of program and systems, and shifting and aligning policies and resources.

Art in Public Places
The Art in Public Places program is dedicated to creating a legacy of quality public art by building and maintaining a collection that enriches and engages the community of Aurora. By city ordinance, one percent of all city construction and remodeling project budgets over $100,000 are dedicated to public art.

Public art staff and art maintenance are funded with 25 percent of the one percent set aside for CIP projects only. The public is involved in choosing art through the use of selection panels. In addition to permanent artworks, the city has four fine art exhibit galleries in city buildings. The City Council approved the first Art in Public Places Master Plan in 2004. The Art in Public Places Commission and staff recently developed a new master plan for 2009 to 2013 (see Appendices III, Plan Summaries).

The Art in Public Places program has been instrumental in helping to revitalize the East End Arts District in Aurora’s original downtown by collaborating with Aurora Urban Renewal and Original Aurora Renewal and through the funding of public art projects.
A complementar program requires metropolitan districts to provide for the acquisition of exterior works of art in the district’s development. In association with the Planning & Development Services, the public art program is initiating a public art requirement in transit-oriented development along the FasTracks light rail transit corridor on I-225.

**Aurora Fox Art Center**

The Aurora Fox Arts Center in Original Aurora serves as an important and historic venue for the performing arts and a critical part of the arts district. The facility houses a 245 seat theatre and a 75 seat black box theatre. The Aurora Fox offers the residents of Aurora and the metro area the enjoyment of professional quality performances in a smaller, intimate, and accessible performing space. It presents contemporary and classic theatre to the metro region for both the main stage and children’s seasons, provides opportunities for children to perform in a professional environment, and offers opportunities for minority performers and audiences in the community to be involved in the Center. It also provides a location for performing arts classes for adults and children.

**Aurora History Museum**

Located on the Aurora civic campus, the museum’s permanent exhibit is *Living Aurora*, which illustrates the history of Aurora. The museum also offers changing exhibits on a variety of topics, serving as a draw for visitors throughout the metro area. A hands-on room and collector’s corner are featured, along with educational programs. The museum is a major component of the public schools’ experiential learning efforts.

**Bicentennial Art Center**

Originally a satellite building operated as part of the Lowry Air Force Base, Bicentennial Art Center now serves as a fully functioning pottery studio. Cultural Services staff not only coordinates pottery programs, but also organize dance, music, and fine arts programs scheduled at City of Aurora libraries and recreation centers. Classes are available year-round for all ages and all levels of expertise, and are taught by instructors with advanced degrees and/or expertise gained through years of experience. The City of Aurora offers arts special events including the *Banks in Harmony Summer Concerts*, *Gateway to the Rockies Art Exhibit and Sale*, and the *Aurora Potter’s Guild Pottery Sales*.

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*Sunrise by Tim Upham at the Aurora Municipal Center*

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*2008 U.S. Amateur Public Links Golf Championship at Murphy Creek Golf Course*
Special Events

The City of Aurora holds a number of special events, including KidSpree, Fiesta Aurora, Jack-O-Launch at PumpkinFest, and Fourth of July Spectacular. KidSpree and Jack-O-Launch at PumpkinFest are award-winning events. More than 35,000 visitors attend KidSpree each year. Aurora also coordinates and hosts Colorado’s largest Veteran Salute celebration annually. Such events enhance the city’s positive image and add to the quality of life in the community.

At the Aurora Sports Park and other city parks, Aurora hosts major sports tournaments and special events such as triathlons. The city’s golf courses host major events, such as the 2008 U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship held at Murphy Creek Golf Course. These events make a major contribution to the city’s economy and contribute to Aurora’s image as a destination city.

Historic Resources

Aurora possesses a rich history that began in 1891 when the city was known as Fletcher. Since that time, the development of Aurora has left a trail of historic resources reflecting a story of pioneers, farmers, military service, health care, and science.

- The Centennial House, built in 1890, is located at 1638 Galena Street. The city owns this two-story Queen Anne Victorian home.

- The H.M. Milliken House, built in 1891, was an original home of Donald Fletcher, the founder of Aurora. It also was the home of H.M. Milliken, the first mayor of Fletcher, and the location of the first meeting of the town trustees.

- The DeLaney Farm District, at 1-70 and Chambers Road, features the John Gully Homestead, constructed about 1870, and the DeLaney Round Barn, built in 1902.

- The Coal Creek Schoolhouse, built in 1922, replaced the original that was lost in a fire in 1920. This building, originally located near the intersection of East Jewell Avenue and Powhaton Road, was relocated to its present location at Eighth Avenue and Telluride Street in 1975. The schoolhouse is planned to be relocated one more time to a more historically appropriate site - the Delaney Farm District.
Historic sites at Fitzsimons include the following:

- The University of Colorado has secured landmark status for **Building 500**, an art moderne-style building, and has completed more than $20 million in renovations to the building. At the time of its construction, this was the largest building in Colorado, and it possesses a long history of dominating the Aurora landscape.

- The **Peoria and Colfax gatehouses**, original entrance features at Fitzsimons, will be incorporated into the new Fitzsimons entryway.

- The **Commander’s House**, constructed in 1897 as the Gutheil family residence, was designated as the commander’s house by the Army in 1918.

- The historic **Post Chapel** features numerous stained glass windows depicting saints, prophets, and insignias of various Army branches.

- The **Red Cross Building**, built in 1918, served as the military base’s recreation and entertainment center.

Aurora’s historic resources are related to several themes. Substantial archaeological sites in the city might support a Native American theme. DeLaney Farm and other sites might support a theme of dry land farming. Fitzsimons and Lowry can support the themes of military and medical history. Other sites reflect the history of Aurora itself, with potential to create historic districts in Aurora’s earlier neighborhoods.

The themes described can be used to create new interest in Aurora and its varied past. With this in mind, the Historic Preservation Commission has annually published a landmark document.

In 2009, the Aurora Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) finalized the Cultural Heritage Site program to recognize historically significant buildings and locations within the city which are not eligible for national, state or local designation based on the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation. Cultural Heritage Site nomination applications may be submitted to the HPC by property owners or other interested parties. Upon the HPC’s approval, a bronze plaque will be provided to the owner to place on the site.

The City of Aurora's cultural, recreational and library assets as well as its communications department and Visitors Promotion Advisory Board provide a basic framework to help bring the city closer to achieving its goal of having the highest standard in quality of life. However, fully realizing this goal will likely require additional resources to assure the supply of such assets matches the public demand, particularly as the needs and priorities of the population change and the city continues to grow.

**Issues and Needs**

- There is a need for an enhanced approach for marketing the city to event planners.
Regionally significant projects such as Fitzsimons, and nationally significant facilities such as Buckley Air Force Base are improving perceptions about Aurora, creating a positive momentum for enhancing the city’s image.

Issuance of media and real estate broker kits both locally and nationally will highlight the characteristics and features that make Aurora a world-class city and help shape perceptions of the city.

Improvements in streetscape and urban design standards will assist in improving the physical character of Aurora.

The fence replacement program can provide a face-lift to aging neighborhoods in older parts of the city.

A well-connected trail system and open space system in Aurora attracts residents and visitors and reflects positively on the city.

Public art can make a valuable contribution toward improving Aurora’s image. Public art requires maintenance and ongoing funding.

Landscaping is important in creating a positive image. It is important to keep the city green using drought-tolerant xeriscape methods.

It is critical that entryways into Aurora be clearly recognizable, attractive, and strategically located.

**Attractions**

Because of its proximity to DIA, Aurora can be a base camp for visiting Colorado.

Aurora’s parks, golf courses, trails and recreational facilities are an essential component in attracting new residents, visitors, and businesses to Aurora. These crown jewels of the city should remain a top priority and selling point, making Aurora a prime destination for day trips, vacations, and company relocations.

Special events, such as those at the Aurora Sports Park and Aurora Reservoir, will continue to draw visitors from other parts of the country who could potentially return for other reasons based on the experience they have while in Aurora.

Aurora’s Interstate I-70/E-470 intersection is a key transportation hub in Colorado and will prove highly attractive to major companies and developers.

The arts can play an important role in attracting visitors to Aurora. A performing arts venue is essential in enhancing this role and should remain a top priority for city officials. Generating support for public funding for such a facility, however, has proven difficult.

The Aurora Fox Arts Center, in association with the arts district in Original Aurora, provides a valuable attraction, and is a stimulus to enhancing Aurora’s arts scene.

Aurora has a deficit of public indoor recreation center space available for residents. To offer a high quality of life that attracts businesses, residents, and visitors, Aurora needs to build modern, full-service community recreation centers that are, at the very least, comparable to surrounding communities.

Smaller attractions such as destination restaurants, public markets, and theaters will play a significant role in attracting people to Aurora.

Historic themes and resources also exist in Aurora and can play a role in
attracting people to the city and in establishing identity.

- Aurora can continue to take advantage of its diverse population and neighborhoods to create attractions, ethnic restaurants, arts, and shopping.

- Leading-edge retail uses that take advantage of new markets and trends can attract people to visit Aurora.

- Special events will continue to be critical. They should strive to be unique and target various demographics.

- Aurora should take advantage of and celebrate its ethnic neighborhoods, restaurants, and events.

**STRATEGIES**

**Attracting and Promoting Visitors and Businesses**

1. Continue to develop plans to create a destination marketing organization and identify a preferred approach for destination development for the city.

2. Continue to look for opportunities to create a national attraction in Aurora such as a major entertainment-based retail complex, amusement park, cultural arts complex, sports venue, or other major tourist attraction.

3. Continue to develop and distribute publications and media and real estate broker kits promoting the city.

4. Focus historic preservation efforts according to certain key themes to improve their potential to attract visitors or interest.

5. Continue to take advantage of every opportunity to provide aesthetic improvements and public art.

6. Develop a priority program for improving important entryways into the city to help ensure that visitors know when they have entered Aurora.

7. Continue to manage parks, golf courses, open space, trails, and recreational facilities to ensure positive user experiences and promote Aurora’s positive image through attention to site appearance, cleanliness, safety, and security.

8. Expand and enhance trails, parks, and the open space system so that it works hand-in-hand as part of the regional network connected to adjoining municipalities providing access via trails to destinations in Aurora.

9. Coordinate with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and Aurora Economic Development Council (AEDC) to create separate advertising campaigns and branding initiatives that target tour groups, golf and recreation enthusiasts, potential new residents, and prospective new businesses.
10. Pursue opportunities to provide events in Aurora. Emphasize the cosmopolitan nature of the city.

11. Work to incorporate new full-service hotels in developing regional centers as appropriate.

12. Collaborate with business to devise mutually beneficial permitting, incentivizing, and taxing policies and mechanisms.

13. Seek funding to enhance access between businesses and neighborhoods via alternative transportation modes.

Providing Recreation Facilities

1. Work with the community to determine needs for public recreation facilities including large, modern, full-service community recreation centers, neighborhood centers to address unique needs (e.g. teen center, senior center, preschool), sports field complexes, and aquatic facilities.

2. Engage the community in a process to identify a funding mechanism for designing, building, and operating the recreation facilities necessary to meet community needs.

3. Bring Aurora’s recreation amenities up to par with surrounding communities in order to attract and maintain a solid and thriving business base in Aurora.