YESTERDAY'S PLAN. TODAY'S ACTION.
LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR AURORA'S FUTURE.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Mayor’s Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Transition Team Leadership Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Transition Team Subcommittee Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Transition Plan Summary and Highlights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Government Administration Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Public Safety Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Arts, Recreation and Culture Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Housing and Community Development Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Economic Development Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Transportation, Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainability Subcommittee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Attachment - Tallahassee Penny Tax Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LETTER FROM
THE MAYOR

Dear Friends,

The Irvin Transition Team exemplifies what can clearly be accomplished when citizens are given the opportunity to engage with local government and lend their expertise, experience, desires and ideas to our city's growth. Over 200 city of Aurora stakeholders participated in the creation of this transition report with the idea that their recommendations would influence and be an integral component of future governmental decisions. These recommendations were so much in alignment with my vision for the city of Aurora and my goals to achieve that vision that this transition report has evolved into the City of Aurora's Action Plan.

For example, during my campaign and early in my administration, I spoke regularly of the need to improve the educational and career outcomes of Aurora’s youth. I believe our young people should be offered many academic and skills development opportunities that will ultimately lead to successful careers. The Education and Workforce Development subcommittee agreed. Recommendations that the subcommittee offered included coordinating and promoting internships and apprenticeship programs for high school students, as well as supporting workforce development programs that train residents for current and future employment opportunities.

Furthermore, economic development is also a significant focus of my administration. The Economic Development subcommittee offered substantial suggestions on what the City of Aurora should do to truly become the economic driver for the northwest region of Illinois. In the area of revenue generation, the subcommittee suggested that the City institute a penny-tax similar to what was launched in Tallahassee, FL to be used to spur new development. To raise awareness of our city’s activities and assets, the subcommittee strongly encourages my administration to conduct a comprehensive branding program that consistently markets the city to developers and investors. The Economic Development subcommittee also recognized the importance of business recruitment and retention, and suggested that the city create a SWAT Team for development that focuses on expanding businesses in Aurora and helping new businesses navigate the development process.

Moreover, during the last few decades, we have made significant strides in crime reduction since the crime spike of the 1990s. In order to maintain this downward trend, it is imperative that the city’s Public Safety personnel utilize all of its available resources. As per the Public Safety subcommittee, this includes increasing the number of City of Aurora police officers and firefighters, and building effective relationships with community members through neighborhood and youth groups. The subcommittee recognized that to continually improve the image and perception of Aurora, we must make our residents feel and be safe; and their recommendations address these needs.

These are only a few of the many recommendations offered in this report that I am confident will help guide our strategic planning and inform our decision making. I express my wholehearted appreciation to all of the volunteers that were involved in this valuable and critical task. I look forward to working with every citizen and stakeholder of Aurora to bring the contents of this report to reality.

Sincerely,

Richard C. Irvin
Mayor
Dear Friends,

Shortly after the mayoral election, we were given the task by then Mayor-elect Irvin, to form a transition team comprised of a diverse cross-section of Aurora stakeholders. Nearly 100 people accepted this call to serve in this volunteer role, and to that we are so grateful. If one didn’t know the depths to which Aurora residents are involved with and love their city, the activity of this transition team demonstrates these characteristics quite clearly.

The task assigned to the transition team was to develop a transition plan that would serve as a guide for the Mayor and his staff in how to move Aurora forward. Topics such as arts & culture, housing & community development, government administration and many more were identified as critical discussion areas that, when addressed, would lead to fostering a vibrant city. For over 3 months, team members conducted meetings, attended town hall meetings and developed draft after draft of subcommittee reports to finally arrive at this comprehensive document to submit to the Irvin Administration for recommended action.

The recommendations included in this report are thoughtful, strategic and align well with the vision that the Mayor has set for our city. Administration will work in concert with staff and city stakeholders to best incorporate these ideas and solutions within current and future city plans, programs and initiatives. This will truly be a living and breathing document that will be referenced by administration regularly.

We are so appreciative of and thankful for the commitment and dedication of the Transition Team members in developing this transition report. These recommendations will guide us from today and well into the future.

Onward and upward,

Irvin Transition Team Leadership,

Brian Dolan
Co-Chair

Alex Alexandrou
Co-Chair

Dennis Cook
Co-Chair

Dr. Adrienne M. Holloway
Director
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Dennis Hiffman
Scott Samson
Bill Blattner
John Cordogan
Brian Dolan
TRANSITION PROCESS &
MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

On April 8, 2017, a core group met to discuss the Mayoral transition process that had as its goal, the development of a transition plan to be used as a guide by the Mayor in establishing his administration.
THE TRANSITION TEAM LEADERSHIP, consisting of co-chairs Brian Dolan, Alex Alexandrou and Dennis Cook and transition team director Adrienne M. Holloway, Ph.D., formed 8 subcommittees structured to develop recommendations for the transition plan. The subcommittees included: Economic Development; Intergovernmental Affairs; Education and Workforce Development; Transportation, Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainability; Arts, Recreation and Culture; Government Administration; Housing and Community Development and Public Safety.

Over 100 people served as content experts across the subcommittees and over 28 meetings were held between May and July. In addition to the subcommittee meetings, two working Town Halls were organized to broaden community input. The first town hall was held on June 14, 2017 at Waubonsee Valley High School where over 65 people were in attendance. The second town hall was held on June 19, 2017 at West Aurora High School where more than 140 people attended. Recommendations given by town hall attendees were disseminated to the appropriate subcommittees and were subsequently integrated into subcommittee discussions and reports.

Government Administration

**GOAL**
To provide recommendations on how the City of Aurora can offer outstanding service in an efficient, effective and responsive manner. This requires a review of governmental systems and the development of recommendations that will foster an organization that is committed to performance and accountability, and is responsive, nimble and creative.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Improve government efficiency and effectiveness by developing a strategic plan with specific measurable goals and action steps.
- Aim for a customer-driven city by investing in customer feedback tools.
- Implement inclusive policies for people of all abilities by establishing a board or commission for residents with disabilities.

Education & Workforce Development

**GOAL**
Provide recommendations on how the City of Aurora can promote a world-class education that prepares all Aurora students for success beyond high school. This will include articulating the foundation to which the Irvin Administration will establish an Education Commission for the City of Aurora.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- An education and workforce development commission should be created to provide centralized leadership and coordination of education partners.
- Conduct a comprehensive inventory of existing programs, services and resources in the City of Aurora and serve as an information hub for the communication of resources.
- Foster experiential learning through career program expansion that includes promotion of internship programs and apprenticeships.

Public Safety

**GOAL**
This subcommittee will provide recommendations on how to ensure that City of Aurora police
Officers, firefighters, and emergency services personnel have the support, training, and resources they need to do their jobs effectively. Recommendations should also include ideas on curtailling youth-engaged crime by developing opportunities for first responders to build a sense of trust and community with Aurora residents.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Continue to increase community engagement by enhancing and growing neighborhood groups.
- Improve public safety by increasing Police Department and Fire Department personnel.
- Reduce juvenile crime and increase youth engagement by returning the “Cop in the Park” program and instituting a “Mayor’s Summer Youth Employment Program.”

**Arts, Recreation & Culture (ARC)**

**GOAL**

_This subcommittee will provide recommendations on how to further nurture our creative economy and expand its reach across the City of Aurora. Recommendations should also consider opportunities to encourage residents across the city to engage with Aurora arts, cultural and recreation programming and installations through innovative awareness and marketing campaigns._

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Create an arts, recreation and culture alliance that would be a single point of information and contact for arts and culture initiatives.
- Create a centralized calendar of all community events.
- Leverage arts & culture events and activities for economic development purposes.

**Housing and Community Development**

**GOAL**

_To provide recommendations on affordable housing and market housing strategies, enhanced youth and adult programming and support of community cultural celebrations._

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Investigate options to lower property taxes like instituting a Payment in Lieu of Taxes program.
- Increase involvement of faith-based and nonprofit organizations in city issues, activities and events.
- Increase community awareness and engagement by improving communication of events and activities that cater to young families.

**Intergovernmental Affairs**

**GOAL**

_Provide recommendations on strategies that enable taxing bodies to increase revenue, including cost saving measures possibly achieved through joint purchasing and contracting._

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Designate a point person who will have the authority to coordinate large and small projects across city departments and divisions.
- Assist taxing bodies by providing grant writing resources to enable them to secure grant funds.
- Foster stronger relationships across stakeholders by hosting quarterly networking meetings.
Economic Development

**GOAL**

*The subcommittee is charged with providing recommendations on how the City of Aurora can adjust internal business processes to establish a business friendly and welcoming culture. Moreover, the subcommittee should address key elements associated with economic development that vitally affects business growth, development, jobs and additional revenue for the City.*

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Create a pro-job/development friendly culture by developing a team that has as a goal to welcome and find solutions for business owners and developers who wish to locate or expand in Aurora.
- (Re)create an Economic Development Commission.
- Engage in a multi-year branding & marketing campaign.
- Create a “Fast Track” for downtown development.
- Complete the planned development of RiverEdge Park, inclusive of building an iconic bridge.
- Institute a penny sales tax on local goods.

Transportation, Infrastructure, Environment & Sustainability

**GOAL**

*Provide recommendations on how the City of Aurora can develop smart transportation policies that integrate sustainable and innovative options to better connect our neighborhoods, our city and region. The subcommittee should also consider our current physical and technological infrastructure and provide recommendations for expansion and/or enhancement.*

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Implement the City of Aurora’s Sustainability Plan.
- Implement a “Gateways to the Downtown” plan.
- Review building code standards to allow for sustainability efforts to be considered in our Historical District.

Over 100 people served as content experts across the subcommittees and over 28 meetings were held between May and July.
The members of the Government Administration subcommittee formulated recommendations on how the City of Aurora can provide outstanding service in an efficient, effective and responsive manner to its constituents. Their work provided recommendations as a result of a review of governmental systems and an examination of current policies and procedures to determine best practices.
THE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION SUBCOMMITTEE formulated recommendations on how the City of Aurora can provide outstanding service in an efficient, effective and responsive manner to its constituents. Their work provided recommendations as a result of a review of governmental systems and an examination of current policies and procedures to determine best practices. Below is the result of this committee’s work.

Build a Financial Stewardship Plan

The City should analyze programs each year and not simply fund them as a matter of course. It should also justify and evaluate every expense included in the city budget. The City of Aurora, like most governmental bodies, applies comprehensive planning principles to forecast expenditures over a five- to ten-year period. However, these long-term objectives are not always modified to accommodate economic fluctuations. Therefore, the City should make every effort to maintain a fiscal policy that is sustainable and structured to promote economic efficiency.

To move in a fiscally appropriate direction, the following recommendations are provided.

• Develop and maintain a transparent, sound and responsible short- and long-term financial plan with measurable business objectives.
• Adopt zero-based budgeting as a method for scaling down the City’s budget.
• Strengthen the linkages between community infrastructure needs and the financial capacity of the City.
• Analyze the cost and benefits of paper-based marketing.
• Assess City Ward appropriations to ensure they are expended only for appropriate City services and programs.
• Review the financial relationship between RiverEdge Park (ACCA) and the City.
• Hire a consultant to review the benefits program for employees and retirees.
• Review and develop cost saving strategies for contracts.
• Replace staff with volunteers for quality of life activities, such as parades and festivals.

Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness

Given the unstable federal and state financial climates, the City of Aurora must ensure that it can continue to provide programs and services that are at the core of its mission. Therefore, the City of Aurora should focus on providing effective, high-quality core services, and look for solutions to improve efficiency in all its operations.

The following recommendations are offered as a guide.

• Develop a strategic plan with specific, measureable goals and action steps for improved efficiency and service delivery of programs and services.
• Investigate technology solutions to improve efficiency while reducing workforce costs, such as in payroll.
• Continue to advocate for the abolition of the Aurora Election Commission and to work with other units of government in streamlining services and eliminating duplication of services.
• Evaluate programs and services provided by the City and eliminate activities that divert resources from core City functions.
• Consider outsourcing government functions without undermining accountability and customer service. For example, transferring park properties to the park district and museums to community organizations.
• Enhance coordination, sharing and consolidation of services with other government entities.
• Streamline and share information between government bodies to increase efficiencies and maximize property tax value.
Invest in Human Capital

*Staff is both the City’s greatest asset in service delivery and its largest budgetary expense. Therefore, it is the Irvin Administration’s responsibility to create a workplace culture that empowers and encourages employees to go above and beyond with a shared vision, deconstructing departmental silos and increasing communication between managers and employees to foster both trust and efficiency.*

*The subcommittee recommends the following action steps.*

- Improve internal communications to engage employees at all levels and encourage collaboration and information sharing among departments.
- Create an environment that empowers staff. Give decision-making power to staff who have demonstrated capacity to handle responsibility and give them discretion and autonomy over their tasks and resources to improve operations.
- Recruit and retain a highly-skilled and diverse workforce.
- Implement cross-training to ensure that every City function can continue uninterrupted in the event of an employee’s absence.
- Create opportunities for collaboration and information-sharing between departments to increase efficiency.
- Create and foster an environment in which employees are encouraged to express ideas and opinions about their work and how to improve operations.

Aim for a Customer-Driven City

*Bureaucracy, as a rule, can be complex and confusing for residents, business owners and other customers, resulting in inefficiencies, frustration, and poor service. Therefore, the City of Aurora must develop, among its staff, a customer-oriented culture and is encouraged to consider the ideas below.*

- Develop performance measures for resident satisfaction, perception of safety and other metrics, by investing in customer feedback tools.
- Publish the answers to a number of frequently asked questions and common concerns about building permits, code compliance and processes for coming into compliance.
- Enhance training for all City staff.
- Evaluate and restore historic preservation grants.
- Develop a “How the City of Aurora Works” informational series to inform residents about available programs and community services.
- Establish a clear and transparent system and procedure for addressing complaints.
- Do an ordinance audit every 3, 5, and 7 years to ensure relevance.

Enhance Image and Public Engagement

*Despite its significant population, strong location, forward-thinking infrastructure and world-class entertainment, the City of Aurora still suffers from limited name recognition and a lingering reputation for crime two decades behind it. Therefore, the City must continually engage with the public on the local, state and national level to increase visibility and engagement with all stakeholders.*

*The following suggestions towards this end are offered below.*

- Develop a marketing and communications plan to promote the City of Aurora and highlight the factors that make it a great city.
It is the Administration’s responsibility to create a workplace culture that empowers and encourages employees to go above and beyond with a shared vision, deconstructing departmental silos and increasing communication between managers and employees to increase both trust and efficiency.
• Increase community policing to provide a sense of safety for all residents.
• Create and publish a citywide calendar of events for the City’s website, social media accounts, and on kiosks throughout Aurora.
• Improve the quality of services to ensure that service provision is equal regardless of neighborhood.
• Provide more opportunities for all residents and use the Mayor’s influence and authority to advocate on behalf of low-income individuals, particularly children.
• Engage with residents in a more thoughtful, robust, inclusive way to build trust.

Implement Inclusive Policies for People of All Abilities

The City of Aurora has a duty to serve all residents. Therefore, the City should renew its commitment to ensuring that all residents have equal access to City services and equal opportunity to participate in civic life regardless of physical or mental impairment. This includes a self-evaluation of ADA compliance with regards to facilities, programs and services that require modifications or accommodations as well as accomplishing the actions steps below.

• Determine which existing staff position should also serve as the City's ADA Coordinator, and add their contact information to the website.
• Add accommodation language to City agendas, similar to the following: Any individual with a disability requesting a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in a public meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting. The City Clerk's Office can be reached in person at 44 E. Downer Place, Aurora Illinois, via telephone at 630-256-3070 or 630-256-XXXX (TDD), or via e-mail at city clerk@aurora-il.org. Every effort will be made to allow for meeting participation.
• Offer interpreters/assistive listening devices at public meetings upon request.
• Review building codes and other ordinances for ADA compliance.
• Review training for public safety personnel.
• Establish a board or commission for residents with disabilities.
• Consider relocating more meetings to the new City Hall annex/old PNC building rather than in City Hall.

Increase Tax Revenue

Aurora has always ranked in the top five communities in the Chicagoland area in retail sales. The Route 59 corridor, for example, has ranked number one for several years. However, there is retail “leakage” in some geographic areas of the community where residents have to go out of town to purchase certain goods and services. It is important to identify the areas of the community where sales and service providers can prosper. People retention is as important as business retention, and working to get needed services closer to our residents should be a priority. Therefore, the City should examine the effect of developing up to municipal boundaries, keeping in mind the underlying forces of economic conditions. In addition to the recommendations provided below, the City should forecast all projected revenues and expenditures to evaluate the impact of the various government decisions made over time.

• Prepare a tax analysis and tax revenue forecast, examine revenue and spending based on the realities and complexities of the City, and project for short-, mid-, and long-term revenue.
• Increase the sales, commercial and industrial property tax bases.
• Study areas where revenue has decreased and the commercial tax base has diminished over time and identify solutions for rebuilding those bases.
• Evaluate property tax impacts to determine the City’s property tax values, the extent to which the City relies on property
taxes as opposed to other revenue sources, and how the City can improve quality of life for residents through more effective taxation policies and land stewardship.

- Update the Land Use Master Plan to guide a healthier mix of commercial and residential developments.
- Identify changes that have taken place in the Hotel/Motel Occupancy Tax base and reevaluate the way revenues are used.

Create a Fair Bidding Environment

There exists a public perception that the City awards contracts too frequently to the same vendors. Therefore, the Irvin Administration must redouble its efforts to maintain a fair, transparent, accountable bidding environment that puts the community and taxpayers above all other interests.

This should include the following:

- Adopt best practices in procurement, keeping communications equal and open with all vendors to ensure a fair and transparent competitive process.

Enhance Economic Development and Growth Management

The City of Aurora has many untapped opportunities for economic development. The City should invest time and resources analyzing the viability and impact of all development projects, remain vigilant in using smart growth strategies, and conduct comparative analyses in land use decisions. Further, realizing that economic conditions are dynamic and ever changing, the City must adopt a comprehensive planning approach to increase its economic vitality.

The following recommendations on how the city can enhance its economic development activity is provided below.

- Increase the commercial industrial tax base to reduce property tax burden.
- Develop a strategy to attract and retain businesses.
- Employ smart growth strategies in land use and planning.
- Create a Mayor’s Office of Economic Development to retain, recruit and assist in the growth of Aurora’s economy in order to ensure that all reasonable ideas receive proper vetting and discussion.
- Consider hiring a high-level business development advocate who reports directly to the Mayor.
- Develop a gateway beautification plan to attract both residents and businesses.
- Create a business registry that is not onerous to business owners, for the sole purpose of providing the City with information necessary for further economic development.

Engage in Collaborative Policymaking

The City of Aurora faces many of the same challenges and opportunities as other government agencies, legislators, and the business community, who all have the same goal: to work together to build a great place to live. Therefore, the City of Aurora can leverage limited resources by enhancing communication and partnerships with governmental bodies, legislators and our business community.

The subcommittee also recommends the following action steps:

- Regularly meet with state legislators and other governmental bodies in an effort to build meaningful relationships.
- Partner with governmental bodies and legislators to inform the public on the implications of legislative proposals (i.e. tax freeze).
- Regularly meet with the business community to enhance relationships.
Mayor Irvin’s vision for education was clear when he stated, “I believe that every child should have a positive educational experience in the city of Aurora. Working towards this end, I want to ensure that our educational institutions receive the necessary resources to thrive. Further, our high schools and workforce development agencies need to prepare those who are not college bound, to be workforce ready by providing trade and work placement opportunities. It is my pledge to support the schools, the teachers and the professors that share their knowledge with our children.”
AS PER ADVANCE ILLINOIS, “EDUCATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE.” Eight out of ten Illinois employers say they need employees with some postsecondary education, so we can’t afford to think of our students’ futures in terms of ‘college or career readiness,’ but rather ‘college and career readiness.’ Today all high school graduates need to be prepared for some postsecondary education and/or training if they are going to have options and opportunities in the job market,” (Advance Illinois, 2017). Based on this information, nearly half of the residents of the City of Aurora are not prepared with the resources beyond high school to succeed in today’s workforce. In this vein, the Education and Workforce Development subcommittee offers the Irvin Administration the following recommendations on how the City of Aurora can provide a world-class education that prepares all Aurora students for success beyond high school.

Creation of a City of Aurora Education and Workforce Commission

The commission’s role would be to provide leadership to achieve a network of world class education and training solutions that prepare residents for life and career success, ensure equity, and eliminate poverty within the community.

It will accomplish this by implementing the following recommendations:

• Develop centralized leadership and coordination of partnerships that promote a common vision and a unified message of college and career readiness.
• Recognize that all residents will require education or training beyond high school and promote the development of appropriate career path programs.

Increase Leadership and Collaboration Across Education & Workforce Development Stakeholders

Recognizing the financial challenges of the state of Illinois, it is imperative that public and private entities increase the level of collaboration in order to meet the needs of residents. Multiple entities with similar or duplicative missions seek access to the same dwindling funding sources. Duplicated facility and administrative costs reduce funding available for the delivery of service. With strong leadership and information, public and private entities can better align their missions, refine their services, and establish collaborations that leverage their collective efforts and maximize the impact of their funding.

With this in mind, the city should consider the following recommendations:

• Conduct a comprehensive inventory of existing programs, services and resources in the City of Aurora.
• Serve as an information hub for the communication of resources.
• Lead efforts to maximize existing resources and identify service gaps. Some of those efforts may include:
  • Advocate for early childhood education.
  • Support the Pathways to Prosperity initiative.
  • Build collaboration across county or other boundary lines.
  • Assist in securing grants and private funding to support research and innovation.
  • Develop a consistent set of learning targets for each grade across school districts.
  • Address the needs of students who transfer among school districts.
  • Create awareness of existing resources available to assist residents in pursuing education or employment.
  • Establish a collective impact model to coordinate practices, share data, and use continuous improvement to align community goals.
Identify and Contribute to Experiential Learning Opportunities

Research shows that active learning promotes much better recall, enjoyment and understanding. Active learning involves learning by doing – manipulating, moving, listening, tasting, building, taking apart and creating. Children who are curious and explore the world around them fare better at school and relationships, and ultimately, are more successful in life. In addition, a recent study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers indicates that nearly 73 percent of students who complete an internship received a job offer (National Association of Colleges and Employers, May 2016). In a competitive job market, having at least one internship on a resume greatly improves a student’s odds of being employed within six months of graduation. Based upon results of a comprehensive survey as outlined within the leadership and collaboration section.

The following recommendations are offered:

- Promote the creation of programs to address identified gaps. Such efforts might include:
  - Coordination and promotion of internship programs and apprenticeships for high school students.
  - Create summer and/or after-school programs that expose students to a variety of experiences.
  - Identify financial support for participation in effective programs that identify gaps.
  - Develop stronger connections between businesses and educational institutions.
  - Create programs that reach under-served populations such as students who do not complete high school, and students with disabilities.
  - Promote college and career events that connect students with higher education and area businesses.

Increase and Enhance City of Aurora Workforce Development Goals

A skilled workforce is key to economic stability and growth. According to career development experts – the majority of today’s students will be employed in jobs that don’t yet exist. And for those currently in the workforce, this would reinforce the importance of lifelong learning through on-the-job training, professional development opportunities, or formal education.

Recommendations for workforce development efforts include:

- Identification of “barriers to employment” preventing full participation in the workforce.
- Analysis of skills needed by employers and skills possessed by residents to identify gaps.
- Develop strategies to recruit employers/employees and train residents.
- Emphasize the importance of employer investment in professional development through awareness and incentives.
- Partner with existing events that promote career awareness or match employers and job seekers.
- Support programs that provide worker retraining and reskilling to meet industry and business standards.
Public safety personnel that participated on the subcommittee represented both fire and police departments as well as law professionals and concerned citizens. This group was responsible for providing recommendations on how to ensure that Aurora’s police officers, firefighters, and emergency services personnel have the support, training, and resources they need to do their jobs effectively. They also provided recommendations on how the City can curtail crime by providing opportunities for young people to establish effective and trusting relationships with public safety representatives.
Increase Community Engagement

In a city of 200,000+ citizens and a police department of 289 officers and a fire department of 204 as of July 2017, the safety of the community depends on the cooperation of our residents. An open dialogue among neighbors’ leads to a more active and more responsive neighborhood which will further encourage people to watch out for each other, report crime, and cooperate with the police. The Aurora Police Department has made great strides in the last two years through community forums, pushing information through social media like the Aurora Police Department Facebook page and Nextdoor page, and implementing a department goal of increasing community engagement. Officers are encouraged to park and walk/meet residents throughout their tour of duty.

Recommendations to enhance current activity levels include the following:

- Enhance work of existing neighborhood groups by building their capacity to assume more community building tasks.
- Establish neighborhood groups in communities to which they are lacking.
- Increase overall activity of neighborhood groups.

Increase Police Department and Fire Department Personnel

The understaffing of the Aurora Police Department limits the ability to address crime and quality of life issues in both traditional and non-traditional methods. Traditional methods include two-man patrol cars, foot and bike patrols, proportional caseloads for investigators, truck enforcement, parking enforcement, and truancy enforcement. Non-traditional methods include Cybercrime/ Social Media Unit, Technical Surveillance Unit, full-time Crisis Intervention Unit, homeless outreach, and youth engagement. Augmenting police department staff will ensure that the city of Aurora receives optimal service in the reduction of crime and the betterment of resident’s quality of life.

Further, the addition of 10 firefighters/paramedics will significantly reduce the overtime budget and increase work performance of the Aurora Fire Department. The recommendation for both departments is to augment the City budget by allocating funding to increase personnel, without tax implication or sacrificing the quality of other services offered by the City to its residents.

To accomplish these goals, the following recommendations are provided.

- Increase Aurora Police Department sworn officers from 289 to 380 as per guidelines provided by Bureau of Justice statistics.
- Maintain the appropriate level of firefighter and emergency medical services personnel within the Aurora Fire department to reduce overtime expenses.

Reduce Juvenile Crime by Increasing Youth Engagement

As our youth remain occupied, they are off the street, making a positive impact on their own lives as well as the lives of others. Given the following recommendations, our youth will have opportunities to learn and develop skills and attitudes necessary for success in today’s world. They will be exposed to leaders in their community who provide a positive example. They will remain engaged in their community and develop a sense of pride and ownership about where they come from, instead of hurting their community by committing acts of violence or other crimes.

- Increase and offer affordable recreational opportunities for youth participation during evenings and during the summer.
- Reinstate the “Cop in the Park” program during the summer where police officers would work with youth in organized recreational activities.
- Continue to offer the Aurora Police Department’s Youth Law Enforcement Academy during the summer for kids between 14-18 years of age.
• Continue the Aurora Police Department’s “Knock and Talk” meetings with parents of youth who are in the initial stages of gang involvement.
• Develop and implement a Summer Youth Employment Program that employs hundreds of youth and subsequently engages them in positive youth activities.

Enforce Violations that Impacts Resident’s Quality of Life

Poor enforcement of quality of life issues such as parking enforcement, residential overcrowding, noise, animal complaints, and yard upkeep represents significant dismay among residents. Though considered small issues, their consistent presence has a more direct impact on communities. Addressing these code violations will decrease calls to the City and to public safety personnel and will create cohesive and aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods throughout the city.

The City is asked to consider the following:

• Timely address of animal complaints.
• Ensure property standard ordinances are adhered to by the public.
• Increase property standards enforcement personnel as appropriate to remain vigilant in the area of enforcement.
This subcommittee was comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders with longstanding interest and passion for growing the arts presence in Aurora. Their charge was to develop ideas on how the City can further nurture its creative economy and expand its reach across Aurora. They not only considered this element, they also focused on developing recommendations that would entice residents across the city to engage with and participate in arts, cultural and recreation programming and installations.
Improve Direction and Coordination in Creating/Installing New Projects

To avoid duplication and complicated processes in the creation and installation of new projects, effort by a focused group of individuals should be convened.

The subcommittee recommends the following:

- Develop an “Arts, Recreation and Culture Alliance” or “ARC” to be the outreach arm on local area arts and culture activities.
- Inventory all current initiatives/events.
- Develop a Cultural Plan for Aurora.
- Develop a database of creative professionals (a “Directory of the Arts”) so that organizations, businesses and event planners could fully utilize and easily access the creative talents of our residents. This should also include spaces that are available for public and private use.
- Act as an ongoing facilitator to coach and offer support in the creation of initiatives that fall under the umbrella of Arts, Recreation and Culture.
- Develop a volunteer workforce to serve the arts community.

Create and Promote a Centralized Events Calendar

Having all events listed consistently in one complete calendar makes it easier for residents to know what is happening in the City and therefore increase attendance at events, decrease scheduling conflicts between organizations, facilitate for cross marketing of events, and encourage collaboration between groups.

The following ideas supporting this concept are recommended.

- Capitalize on the new functionality of the City’s website calendar to create a complete calendar of events.
- Offer residents event oriented monthly newsletters.
Increase the Presence of Arts, Recreation and Culture in Aurora

Aurora can and should build upon already successful accomplishments relating to arts and culture. Such an investment will increase patron visitors who will also be more likely to spend additional time and money in the area. Engaging in creative placemaking by incorporating public art with city structures such as streetlights and benches, will also attract more pedestrians to different areas within the City.

To meet this objective, the subcommittee recommends the following:

- Work on removing barriers or “red tape” that hinder the process of bringing more art and cultural events to Aurora.
- Add art to public spaces to improve aesthetics and increase pedestrian interest in walking downtown.
- Add self-guided tours of downtown to increase pedestrian activity.

Develop Local Support for Arts, Recreation and Culture

To ensure that community members are aware of Aurora’s commitment to public art, the Irvin Administration should be more vigilant in promoting sponsorship of area arts, recreation and cultural activity occurring in the city.

The City should consider the following recommendations:

- Engage Aldermen in promoting events to their constituents and encourage resident participation.
- Encourage Aldermen and all City officials to attend, support, promote and speak positively about arts related events and initiatives.
The members of the Housing and Community Development subcommittee were charged with developing recommendations aligned with the creation of affordable and market rate housing strategies for Aurora, the enhancement of youth and adult programming and the expansion of Aurora sponsored cultural celebrations.
Reduce Property Tax Dependency

To increase the number of homeowners in the city, there needs to be a dedicated focus on increasing economic development activity.

Activities that should be implemented include:

- Consolidating city funded programs to reduce expenses.
- Investigate the possibility of instituting a Payment in Lieu of Taxes program (PILOT). Charitable organizations are exempt from paying property taxes. An instituted PILOT program captures payments made voluntarily by nonprofits as a substitute for property taxes.

Diversify Downtown Housing and Development

Limited parking, inadequate retail and services within walking distance, and eyesore properties that include both vacant buildings and those that are poorly maintained, limit residential and community development activity in the downtown area. Thus, improving downtown amenities will increase favorable development activity.

Toward this end, the following recommendations are provided:

- Create a balance of retail, residential and quality of life options within walking distance of downtown.
- Expand mixed-use development with retail, residential, entertainment and the arts.
- Incentivize the establishment of shopping and service options, particularly grocery markets and amenities such as dry cleaning and salon services.
- Repurpose vacant and unused buildings.
- Improve walkability, access to transportation and livability.
- Improve advertisement of activities occurring in the downtown area.
- Add more free parking downtown.

Expand Affordable Housing Options

Housing options for low-income citizens are limited and often sub-standard, thereby creating unsafe conditions. These unsafe conditions also create a barrier to attracting first time home buyers to Aurora.

The subcommittee offers the following recommendations for the Irvin Administration to consider.

- Expand affordable housing options to include subsidized rentals and affordable owner-occupied homes accessible to low-income renters and first-time buyers.
- Expand and create educational and financial incentive programs to attract first time homeowners and assist low-income community members seeking homeownership.
- De-centralized public housing through the development of scattered site housing.
- Create mix-financed housing options available to renters at varying income levels.
- Institute careful screening processes for tenancy of newly developed housing options.
- Institute and enforce community service, education or employment requirements for Aurora Housing Authority residents and also offer participants a path to homeownership in Aurora.
Promote Economic Development

Both housing and community development is highly dependent upon a strong local economy. Therefore, they should be planned in concert and work in tandem toward achieving aligned goals. Further, attracting businesses, spurring employment opportunities and engaging in a concentrated effort to improve economic development, will increase the local tax base, reduce unemployment and improve the retail/consumer climate.

The subcommittee offers the following recommendations:

- Improve and increase public-private partnerships to help grow city-wide economic and community development.
- Increase involvement of faith-based and nonprofit community entities in city issues, activities and events.
- Focus effort on areas of vacancy including the West Galena corridor and Northgate Plaza.

Ensure Consistent Adherence to City Property Standards

In order to improve city cohesiveness and citizen engagement, attention must be focused on building stronger, resilient neighborhoods. Enforcement and standards maintained across the city are inconsistent, particularly in the city’s historic districts.

The following recommendations are offered.

- Increase involvement and refine the definition of neighborhood groups with the goal of improving the City's partnership with neighbors and respective Aldermen.
- Increase resident awareness of City of Aurora property standards.
- Strengthen enforcement of rental property owners’ adherence to City of Aurora property standards.

Increase Overall Community Awareness and Engagement

To improve community engagement, Aurora’s efforts towards this end must extend to increasing public activities that are appropriate for our young adults, our young families and our diverse community.

Recommendations include:

- Survey community to explore/assess best avenues to communicate/disseminate information to Aurora households.
- Create a centralized, comprehensive, citizen information and resource guide.
- Communicate all published City of Aurora communications (print, social media, website) in both Spanish and English to be inclusive of the entire community.
- Utilize technology (text alerts, social media, NextDoor app, etc.) to provide targeted information to stakeholders of all ages, socio-economic levels and areas of interests.
- Improve communication between Aldermen and constituents.
- Define purpose of neighborhood groups and increase Aldermanic and citizen involvement in groups.
- Improve public education to build awareness of transportation resources including rental bicycles, walking paths and public transportation.
- Increase preventative approach to community development issues confronted by area youth and expand opportunities to engage people ages 18 – 29 in citywide events and activities.
- Promote use of 256-INFO as an entry point for any city service, community concern or question.
Workforce Development and Employment Opportunities

Unemployment, poverty and the barriers to employment faced by young people, low-skilled employees and first-time offenders create a ripple effect within the community that limits Aurora’s vitality as a whole. Our 18-29 year olds (post high school age) lack recreation venues, job training, and employment. As a result, they are afforded limited housing options.

To enlarge housing options available for this cohort, the subcommittee recommends the following:

- Identify area high school students who can enroll in certification and training programs and partner with appropriate agencies that can provide specialized training.
- Institute Aurora Housing Authority employment/job training, community service and/or mentoring programs to improve employment opportunities for young people to become gainfully employed and less reliant upon housing authority services.
- Create a City-led summer employment and job training opportunity that works in partnership with Kane County, area agencies and local employment partners.
- Improve public transit routes to existing and new job opportunities to better support workforce.
- Partner with agencies that provide job training and wrap-around services, especially geared toward ex-offenders and persons suffering from substance abuse and mental health issues.
- Improve service coordination across the faith-based community, social service agencies, nonprofit organizations and government to better support homeless, first time offenders, senior citizens and low-income residents.

In order to improve city cohesiveness and citizen engagement, attention must be focused on building stronger, resilient neighborhoods.
The goal of the Intergovernmental Affairs subcommittee was to provide recommendations on strategies that will enable taxing bodies to increase revenue, not inclusive of taxation. The recommendations provided by the subcommittee embrace cost saving measures that are possible from joint purchasing and contracting.
Improve Intergovernmental Cooperation

Subcommittee members reported that city staff and officials were at times, slow to respond to sister taxing body’s concerns. In some cases, the city contact person working with different government units was not high enough in the chain of command to expedite problems or projects across departments. For this reason, the subcommittee recommends the following.

- The Mayor should designate a point person at the City of Aurora for intergovernmental affairs. Ideally, this person would work in the Mayor’s office to have the authority to coordinate large and small projects across city departments and divisions.

Subcommittee members reported they felt that Aurora has a good history of working with other units of local government on large and small-scale projects. One example is the two Aquatic Centers – a joint project owned and operated by the City of Aurora and the Fox Valley Park District; and the Eola Community Center and Branch Library – a joint project of the Fox Valley Park District and the Aurora Public Library.

The subcommittee recommends the following as examples to increase intergovernmental collaboration:

- Establish an agreement where the City of Aurora and the Aurora Township Highway Department trade snow routes to improve efficiency.
- Establish an agreement where Aurora Police Department dispatchers serve the North Aurora Police Department.

Increase Networking Opportunities

While the City has a good history of working with other units of local government on large and small-scale projects, more can be done to facilitate discussion on new opportunities for collaboration.

Aurora is encouraged to consider the following recommendation:

- Host semi-official meetings of local units of government that serve Aurora, held on a quarterly basis, to encourage networking of local officials. This will lay the groundwork for more opportunities for cooperation, improved efficiency and cost savings.

Increase Access to Grant Funds

Federal grants may not be sought after by local government units due to having limited grant writing resources and experience. Therefore, the subcommittee recommends the following:

- Grant writing resources be provided by the City of Aurora to regional government partners.

Create a Public Health Committee

The subcommittee recognizes the growing challenges of mental health disorders, as well as the need to limit obesity and improve overall health and quality of life. Public health committees have been established in surrounding cities such as Elgin.

The subcommittee encourages Aurora to follow suit.

- Create a City of Aurora Public Health Committee to ensure that the city engages in action and policy development that targets area public health concerns.
The Economic Development subcommittee was asked to focus on two elements: citywide economic development and downtown economic development. Collectively, however, each subgroup shared the same goal of providing recommendations on how the City of Aurora can adjust internal business processes to establish a business friendly and welcoming culture. Moreover, the subcommittees addressed key elements associated with economic development that vitally affects businesses growth and development, jobs and additional revenue for the City.
Business Expansion/Retention/Redevelopment

Aurora must create a “Pro-Job/Development/Friendly” culture throughout city government. This includes ensuring that its development team, has as a goal, to welcome and find solutions for business owners and developers who wish to locate or expand in Aurora. The pro-business hospitality of the City must begin with a clear message from the Mayor to all department heads and City staff that Aurora is not only open for business, but aggressively willing to champion business expansion and development.

Suggested activities include:

- Simplify and restructure the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Pre-Zoning and Zoning Process.
- Create expedited plan review zones for each of Aurora’s business/industrial parks to ensure quick and timely expansion of existing businesses.
- Create a SWAT Development Team to focus on major community changes such as large business closings like Caterpillar, Butterball, Wal-Mart etc.
- Reduce the reliance of Special Use restrictions for zoned areas of the City.
- Eliminate annual adoption of new restrictions and regulations that increase the cost of development (examples: fees, sprinklers, fire department looping).
- Work with select school districts to implement a four-year real estate tax abatement program to encourage Office Research and Industrial (ORI) development in greenfield sites within the City of Aurora.
- Enhance the City’s business visitation program to identify and respond to the needs of existing businesses. Incorporate business volunteers/chambers of commerce to reach 200 businesses per year.
- Re-create an Economic Development Department/Division within the City of Aurora. Funding for such an initiative can be realized from existing dollars currently allocated for economic development activities.
- Work to adopt the “How to Get to Yes!” attitude within the Inspections/Permit division.
- The City of Aurora should initiate a bi-annual review of its business receptivity with an emphasis on those factors that both attract and hamper potential business development.
- The City should initiate development of a Citywide Economic Development Master Plan. The plan should be formulated with the assistance from an outside economic development consulting firm.
- The role of Aldermen in economic development activity should be increased to provide businesses with the knowledge of the Aldermen’s role in City government.
- Relocate City Hall
  - Frees up prime river front property along Riverwalk.
  - Centralizes processes and removes “silos” associated with having been separated & supports ease of development.
  - Makes City of Aurora “User Friendly” for developers.

Community and Regional Improvements

Aurora has a number of factors that make it an enticing place in which to locate and expand one’s business enterprise. It is the second largest city in Illinois, a regional powerhouse located in four counties: Kane, Kendall, Will and DuPage and has enviable water, rail, and highway access while also being in close proximity to world class Chicago. Further, in Aurora, businesses can locate and expand at a cost far below that of Chicago and yet still take advantage of what the entire Midwest region has to offer. To expand upon the City’s success requires continued investment in new infrastructure improvement initiatives that support existing, expanding and new businesses.
This approach can be bolstered by doing the following:

- Create an “Aurora Now” campaign for regional economic development that galvanizes the talents, assets and resources within our region to support infrastructure and business expansion.

- Continue to improve its infrastructure in order to support and enhance its almost 100-mile fiber-optic network that is rapidly becoming an “in demand” utility by new and existing businesses.

- Enhance OnLight Aurora by connecting 25 businesses per year to the City of Aurora Fiber Optic Network thus generating a new revenue stream.

- Launch a Corp/Tech-Aurora Program at Aurora’s five interchanges (Eola, Farnsworth, Lake Street, Orchard Rd. and Galena Blvd/Butterfield Rd.).

- Develop ORI zoning at I-88 and Mitchell Road.

- Use TIF funds to purchase and extend Corporate Blvd. west to Mitchell Road and share in the cost of construction with a developer.

- Work with the Toll Highway Authority to build a tollway slip ramp at Route 25 and I-88.

- Develop an Industrial Business Park at Rt. 25 and Mettel Rd. (Location for future Transfer Station, COA Vehicle Garage, Metal Scrap Yard etc.).

- Annex and create a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District to develop 45 acres north of the Chicago Premium Outlet Mall.

- Accelerate development of high density residential and office buildings in areas near the Fox River, Tollway interchanges and transportation centers.

Marketing and Public Relations

A targeted multi-year branding program to market the City as an ideal place to live and do business is paramount to ensuring that Aurora competes in today’s national and global marketplace. States, cities and villages compete to gain the attention of site selectors, developers, investors and residents who want a place to do business, live and enjoy life. Virtually every community throughout the world has a website, but the key is what other elements are implemented to market and promote the virtues of a community. Aurora is truly a unique city: diverse population, low crime, open space, parks, good schools, a river that runs through it, airport, zoo, a large downtown area, and retail centers. However, without a targeted multi-year branding program, Aurora will continue to be the “best kept secret” in the nation and the world.

A branding program should follow the suggested guidelines below.

- Complete a comprehensive 5-year branding program to consistently market the City of Aurora to developers, investors and businesses nationally and internationally.
  - Highlight the positive attributes of Aurora…regional airport, upscale shopping, IMSA etc.
  - Accentuate the positive aspects of Aurora’s diversity.
  - Emphasize the wide range of educational opportunities available in Aurora.
  - Use social media advertising as an integral part of the branding program.

- Market and promote Aurora’s Fiber Optic Network via an extensive media campaign titled “TechLand-Aurora.”
  - Produce success stories of companies who have located to Aurora to take advantage of the almost 100-mile network.
  - Advocate for local tech companies such as Cabot Microelectronics to host seminars and workshops in Aurora.

- After every five years, conduct a review of the branding program and re-launch it to keep the City of Aurora “top of mind” among site selectors, developers, investors and citizens.

- Develop a comprehensive 5-year internal branding program to consistently market the attributes of Aurora to residents.
Workforce Development

Aurora must commit to having a well-trained and educated workforce that maintains a position as a desired place to relocate, start or expand a business by companies throughout the region, nation and world. Aurora was formally a “blue-collar town.” Now, it is a diversified city with a balanced combination of industrial, high-technology, retail, service, and agricultural enterprise and cultural activity. Workforce development, is defined as a multitude of programs and initiatives that prepare workers with needed skills, that emphasizes the importance of workplace learning and that addresses the hiring demands of employers. In essence, the goal is to place workers in jobs where there are career development opportunities.

A successful Workforce Development Strategy for the City of Aurora will include:

• Conducting a Workforce Audit to identify existing conditions, help companies develop effective strategies and plan for future growth.
• Assisting school districts in re-introducing shop programs (welding, carpentry etc.).
• Partnering with other Workforce Development agencies to develop a coordinated summer jobs program for high school students.
• Working with local area tech firms and education partners to conduct programs that provide state-of-the-art training that reach a large segment of the Aurora population.

Business Recruitment

New sources of revenue are important to municipalities in today’s turbulent government environment. Aurora must target specific businesses in order to stimulate local private investment and job creation. Recruiting new businesses to the City is important and it must be done strategically. With Fortune 500, 1000 and small firms each focusing on business and profit growth, attracting firms offering competing services and products can often be counterproductive and detrimental to the City. However, when the City identifies services or products that are lacking in the local economy, a concerted effort must be made to recruit those companies.

Recruitment efforts should include the following:

• Communicate regularly with site location professionals.
• Conduct bi-annual Site Selector Tours of Aurora.
• Specifically target high-tech companies using the City’s Fiber Optic Network as a major selling point to businesses.
• Encourage new businesses to use local suppliers and vendors.
• Conduct a targeted industry study to set priorities for business recruitment.
• Attract targeted businesses to create 10,000 new primary wage jobs.
• Establish an MBE/WBE Procurement Program to enhance the diversity of the business community.
• Focus on “Hunting Lists.”
• Increase downtown residential development to have more “feet on the street” in the downtown.
• Show development community that COA is a “Greenlight” and that changes have been made.
• Increase Tax Base for future (Original Intent of TIFs)
Funding Downtown Economic Development

As the city develops its economic development strategy, it will be faced with the challenge of how to create sustained funding streams. While traditional streams are available (i.e. TIF; revenue sharing bonds, etc.), innovative approaches should also be considered.

The Downtown subcommittee offered the following recommendation:

- Institute a penny sales tax on local goods. The fund created from taxation can be used for predetermined projects in the downtown area (See Attachment 1).

Focus on Downtown Economic Development

There are many assets in the downtown area that, when leveraged, will yield a significant boost in our local economy. They will also make the City of Aurora and the downtown unique to the area while supporting a healthy lifestyle.

Recommendations offered by the subcommittee include:

- Add “adventure” features to our river front.
  - Add a Zipline and/or wakeboarding feature to attract families.
  - Allow ice skating on the river.
- Supplement Casino visitors with “adventure” more likely to patronize other businesses.
The members of the Transportation, Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainability (TIES) subcommittee were asked to develop recommendations on how the City of Aurora can develop smart transportation policies that integrate sustainable and innovative options to better connect our neighborhoods, our city and our region.
Leverage the Aurora Municipal Airport

The Aurora Municipal Airport is a full-service Chicago-area corporate aircraft facility situated just outside the Class B airspace for O’Hare International Airport. Located just 8 miles west of downtown Aurora and 35 miles west of the City of Chicago, the Aurora Municipal Airport is the only airport in the Chicago area with direct tollway access. The airport has three (3) large capacity runways designed to accommodate the largest corporate, personal and military aircraft. The airport is a great asset for the City if operating efficiently. The following should be considered by the Irvin Administration as action steps to be taken to leverage the presence of the airport.

- Hire a new full-time administrator to manage and market the Aurora Municipal Airport.
- Consider an airport shuttle system to usher visitors from the airport to Downtown Aurora, Meridian Business Campus, various Aurora and Tri-City entertainment, golf, and entertainment venues and vice versa to take advantage of the growth of Honda Jet (currently at AMA), Net Jet, and/or Wheels Up commuter jet services.

Update and Follow the 2009 Sustainability Plan

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that the “scientific evidence for warming of the climate system is unequivocal”. Global climate change has already had observable effects on the environment, including loss of sea ice, accelerated sea level rise, stronger hurricane events, intensive heat waves, more frequent droughts and flood phenomenon, and loss of global wildlife. In the Midwest specifically, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) predicts that Midwestern states alone will experience extreme heat and heavy downpours and flooding that will affect infrastructure, health, agriculture, forestry, transportation, air and water quality, and more.

As the second largest City in the State of Illinois with a population of over 200,000 people, it is important that the City of Aurora play its part in promoting sustainable initiatives that mitigate the release of greenhouse gases.

Along these lines, the following recommendations are offered:

- The City should actively pursue implementation of the goals and objectives outlined in the 2009 Sustainability Plan.
- Consider designating an existing member of the Planning & Zoning division to take the lead on creating a timeline and strategy for implementation of the plan’s goals.
- Sustainability goals should be incorporated into the City’s future construction plans for new facilities beyond basic certification level(s).

Fox River Preservation

Originating in Waukesha County, WI, the Fox River flows south for 200 miles to Ottawa, Illinois. Along the way, it passes through Lake, McHenry, Kane, and Kendall counties in Illinois, draining into 1,720 square miles of widely diverse ecosystems and landscapes. As the second largest city, it is important that Aurora do its part to preserve this vast waterway. Increasing development and loss of permeable surfaces threaten both the quality and function of the Fox River corridor.

The following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- Improve and maintain the Fox River waterway for recreational uses, to restore environmental quality, manage flooding, promote tourism, and enhance the quality of life along the waterway for residents and users alike.
- Work with local municipalities like Oswego, Montgomery, North Aurora, and Batavia to develop a Fox River Corridor Plan.
Consider implementing a "River Corridor Overlay District" with specific design guidelines that regulate setbacks, quantity and quality of open spaces and native plantings, lighting standards, building construction methods, public access, river treatments, and more.

- Designate a staff person or committee to oversee the implementation of the new overlay district.

**Removal of Fox River Dams**

*Within Illinois, the Fox River is the site of fifteen dams. These dams have been constructed over a period of centuries to serve a range of purposes, from powering factories to mitigating flooding. Some of these dams continue to serve important functions, while others are legacies of the needs of earlier eras. The dams that do not serve essential functions pose issues for both public safety and the Fox River ecosystem. They also pose a high risk threat of drowning for people recreating near the river. The dam wall itself blocks fish migrations, which in some cases and with some species, completely separate spawning habitats from rearing habitats. The dam also traps sediments, which are critical for maintaining physical processes and habitats downstream of the dam. Another significant impact is the transformation upstream of the dam from a free-flowing river ecosystem to an artificial slack-water reservoir habitat. Changes in temperature, chemical composition, dissolved oxygen levels and the physical properties of a reservoir are often not suitable to the aquatic plants and animals that evolved with a given river system.*

*Non-essential dams pose issues for both public safety and the Fox River ecosystem. The removal of the dam in Downtown Aurora would resolve many of the environmental issues listed above. The removal of the dam would also create safer river recreation, especially for those travelling by boat/kayak along the Fox River corridor.*

*In concert with outside consultants, the following recommendations are offered as actionable items:*

- Discuss removal of the dam and alternative concepts for the dam between New York Street and Galena Boulevard in downtown Aurora.
- Conduct preliminary engineering studies as well as conceptual design of potential alternatives (such as artificial rapids, beaches, fishing landings, etc.).

**Enhance the Gateways to the Downtown**

*First impressions are important and the City’s gateways are not a true representation of the City’s vibrancy, culture, and history. Transforming the City’s gateways is a step towards changing people’s opinion of our great City. Many of the major gateways to the Downtown, including Lake Street (IL Rt. 31), New York Street, Hill Avenue, and Broadway (IL Rt. 25), are dilapidated and uninviting to residents and visitors alike. An example of a dilapidated land use along one of our gateways includes the junkyard near the intersection of IL Rt. 25 and Illinois Avenue and Northgate Shopping Center’s parking lot along Rt. 31.*

*The following recommendations are offered:*

- Create or implement existing corridor/gateway plans that include strategic actions to improving Aurora’s major gateways.
- Apply for the CMAP Local Technical Assistance (LTA) grant to complete these plans or hire additional planning personal to create and implement the plans in-house.
- Gateways plans should consider signage, transportation infrastructure and volume, landscaping and medians, etc.
- Identify funding opportunities for implementation, including facade improvement programs, community development grants, home improvement assistance, etc.
Transforming the City’s gateways is a step towards changing people’s opinion of our great City.
Electric Vehicles

Purchase of electric cars is increasing and predictions are that by 2025 up to 30% of all cars sold in the U.S. will be electric. This is due to the need to meet our U.S. goals to decrease tailpipe and greenhouse gas emissions by 26% by the year 2025. The possibility of more drivers switching to electric mobile vehicles should prompt the city to provide any required structure to support electric car viability in the community and region. Until the vast majority of owners can reliably charge at home, work, or while running errands, electric car technology sales and use will decrease and greenhouse gases and reliance on oil both domestic and imported will continue to increase.

In 1881, Aurora was once on the cutting edge as it was and continues to be known as the “City of Lights” because Aurora was the first town in Illinois to light its streets with electric lights. By being proactive rather than reactive - Aurora again will be “ahead of the curve” in green technology and greenhouse gas reduction.

To be an ahead of the curve city, the Irvin administration is encouraged to follow the recommendations provided below.

- Plan and prepare for plug in electric car infrastructure at employment centers, multi-unit housing locations and shopping centers.
- Aurora should be a first in Illinois with on-street parking charging stations.
- Aurora should plan on the expected loss of motor vehicle tax as a result of increase electric car usage by identifying replacement revenue sources.

Protect Communication Networks

Our fiber optic vaults are an easy target for attack on our City and its businesses and residents. Any disruption in our city services as a result of fiber optic damage could cause a total breakdown of the City’s ability to communicate. Fiber optic solution(s) should be explored to assist with residents’ future ability to utilize internet service via an all-encompassing and comprehensive city fiber optic network.

To reduce vulnerability the following should be considered:

- Complete a review of the vulnerability of Aurora’s communication network.
- Develop a transparent and clear path for growth and expansion of the fiber optic network for businesses and residents.

Reduce Organic Waste

Inedible portions of unused food that is composted will reduce the burden on landfills, lowers methane and carbon in the air and can ultimately be used to feed and nourish the soil. Compost also reduces and in some cases eliminates the need for chemical fertilizers. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that organic waste in landfills generates, methane, a potent greenhouse gas. By composting wasted food and other organics, carbon and methane emissions are significantly reduced. Organic waste sent to landfills decomposes and produces 18% of U.S. methane gas emissions.

The following action should be taken:

- Plan and prepare to negotiate food composting in next contract for waste pickup and removal.

Identify New Revenue Sources

In order to remain competitive in the Transportation, Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainability arena, requires an investment in initiatives and capital. Thus, it is imperative that the City of Aurora identify new revenue sources.
The following recommendations are offered:

- Research advertising potential on garbage can lids and implement program.
- Sell Jericho Fishing Ponds and allow a private operator to run a Clean Construction Demolition Debris (CCDD) facility.

Pursue Pedestrian & Bicycle Connectivity

Walking and biking is a healthy alternative to driving and also decreases an individual’s carbon footprint. With both the epidemic of obesity in the U.S., as well as the rise in global temperatures, it is important that Aurora provide its residents and visitors with the infrastructure to support healthier modes of transportation. The City of Aurora and the Fox Valley Park District (FVPD) have a fine bike system, but should pursue continual improvement and fill in gaps of service to support these alternate modes of transportation.

To do, the city should consider the following:

- Implement existing plans to identify and fill gaps within the City of Aurora and the FVPD’s trail, in and around the Downtown, neighborhood commercial centers, parks, the river, and disadvantaged communities.
- Secure funding from sources like Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the National Park Foundation, or other similar organizations.

Examine Railroad Crossings for Safety

Extensive rail traffic within the City cause both transportation and safety issues. There are still locations in Aurora where grade crossing cause traffic delays and should be addressed. Additionally, given the amount of train cargo traffic that travels through the City, there should be a formalized plan so that City resources are coordinated in the event of a rail accident.

The City of Aurora should:

- Evaluate existing rail crossings to determine if bridges are warranted over the crossing.
- Develop a City emergency plan in the unlikely event of a railroad incident.
- Be an instrumental voice on CMAP (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning) to lobby Washington for federal funds to implement CREATE. CREATE’s ultimate plan is to unbundle the freight traffic in Chicagoland, including grade separations, to move freight safely and efficiently through the area.

Improve Aurora Streets

Efficient transportation promotes safe travels within the city, less stress on drivers, cheaper costs of business operations, additional expendable income, etc. Aurora’s overlay standard is one of the thinnest in Chicagoland. Although this stretches the city’s resources to overlay more land miles, the need to resurface these same streets again occurs more frequently. A “blanket” plan of a 2 1/4” asphalt overlay for each street should be reconsidered depending on the base of the street to be repaired, traffic volume, and loads carried on the particular street. Consideration should be given based on the age of the street as Aurora was a leader during the subdivision boom beginning in the early 1990’s and continuing through present with increased pavement thickness versus older interior streets that have very little structural strength remaining. To ensure that the City maximizes the amount of street overlay in the jurisdiction by maintaining highest quality construction standards and design, it is recommended that the City conducts the following:
• Conduct a comprehensive review of the street resurfacing program.
• A review of roadway construction standards, rain gardens, roundabouts, landscaping, signalization and implement best practices.

Other Recommendations

**Identify Sustainability Opportunities for Historic Districts**

• Recommendation-review and revise building codes and standards so that energy efficiency tools and techniques can be applied for historic properties.

**Reduce Vulnerability of our Water Supply**

• Recommendation-Complete a review of the vulnerability of Aurora’s water system to protect against biological or chemical contamination of our water supply.
SO HOW DO WE FUND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

BEST PRACTICES OF OTHER COMMUNITIES

_Downtown Redevelopment Transition Plan Group “Ideas without a plan are just Ideas”_

- **The Blueprint 2000 program** (Tallahassee Florida)
  - Administers projects funded by the one cent sales tax collected in Leon County.
- **Mission** To implement the Blueprint 2000 program in a timely and cost effective manner, utilizing sound but innovative business practices, while keeping the citizenry informed and involved.
- **Tallahassee Vision** Preserve, protect, and enhance the community’s quality of life through the implementation of holistic and coordinated planning, transportation, environmental and green space projects.
- **Public Access/Alternative Transportation**
- **Infrastructure Planning– Holistic Approach**

Tallahassee Penny Tax Program

**Citizen Engagement**
To provide support for future economic growth, in 2014 Tallahassee-Leon County residents voted overwhelmingly to approve a one cent sales tax which devotes 12 percent to economic development, estimated to produce $90.7 million over the next 20 years. Understanding the enormity of the opportunity for transformational change to occur in economic development, created by the dedication of 12% of total sales tax revenue, and to support, sustain and propel collective economic development efforts, a new model and approach to economic development was required. In addition to citizens’ vote, City and County Commissioners pledged that they would provide opportunities for citizen input in setting up the economic development administrative structure, strategies, programing, projects, initiatives, et.al.

**Leadership Guidance**
On February 29, 2016 the Intergovernmental Agency (IA) directed the County Administrator and City Manager to establish the Tallahassee Leon County Office of Economic Vitality through a consolidation of the City and County economic development offices within the IA structure and under the Department of Planning, Land Management, and Community Enhancement (PLACE). The Office of Economic Vitality brings together all the programs and divisions that support the long term economic health of the community under one manager. These programs and divisions include: Minority/Women and Small business Enterprise, Research, and Business Analytics. Both the City and County Commissions are committed to working collaboratively with the community’s economic Tallahassee development partners to achieve mutual goals. A point each emphasized be addressed in their Strategic Plan.

- **Research & The Voice of the Community**
  - A key step in the development of this Strategic Plan was the process of listening to the voice of the community. In all, over 1,100 individuals participated in some way to provide feedback, input and ideas for the Plan. Fifty in person interviews and seven facilitated discussions – personally reaching more than 400 people.
  - Open meetings were held to gather key stakeholder input from local leaders, community advocates and business executives. In addition, a community survey was developed.
• With the OEV staff to gather input from residents on where they would like to see the city/county focus its economic development efforts over the next five years, types of industries that should be recruited as well as suggestions on retaining talent and developing entrepreneurs. More than 700 residents provided input using the survey. The same survey was provided at a breakout session at the Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce Conference and garnered an additional 150 responses.

Some of the key takeaways from these interviews, groups meetings and the survey were:

• Overall, residents are supportive of expanded growth in industry but believe in strong support for local entrepreneurs and maintaining the quality of life.
• Over half of the survey respondents feel either positive or extremely positive about the recruitment and growth of new industry and businesses to the community with the majority.

Supporting the growth of home grown/local entrepreneurial businesses and almost two thirds wanting to see the growth of advanced manufacturing in the area. In addition to a preference to support entrepreneurialism, most want economic development to maintain the balance between quality of life and the types of businesses that it chooses to grow, expand and recruit with just over half wanting to see Tallahassee Leon County home to new, larger companies beyond universities, nonprofits and state government.

In addition to the many positive assets identified through the conversations, a number of challenges and opportunities were identified that need to be addressed:

• Presence of institutionalized silos
• Lack of a common definition and lack of shared vision for economic development
• Limited access to capital for business formation
• Reliance on public sector (government and universities); opportunity for diversification of the economy

• Need to integrate business leadership into the economic development process.
• Opportunity to better leverage technology and research assets as a draw for private sector businesses.
• As the Airport progresses with its master plan improvements, the opportunity exists to better leverage it as an economic development tool.

Finally, Vision First Advisors also conducted high level research comparing Leon County to five other counties with certain similarities making comparisons across population, the talent pipeline, employment and industry and living and travel trends. All of this information was assimilated, reviewed and considered giving context as VisionFirst outlined a strategic course of action.