

Community Renewal Area FAQs

Shoreline’s City Council adopted Resolution 333 on September 4, 2012, thereby creating the Aurora Square Community Renewal Area (CRA). The CRA establishes that economic renewal of the 70+ acre Aurora Square commercial area is clearly in the public interest. With the CRA in place, the Shoreline Office of Economic Development is freed to work in cooperation with the Aurora Square property owners to draft an economic renewal plan for the CRA.

Q: What is a Community Renewal Area (CRA)?

Washington law (RCW 35.81) allows cities to establish a *Community Renewal Area* along with a Community Renewal Plan (collectively a CRA) to help areas that need renewal. In the case of Aurora Square, economic renewal is needed. Once a CRA is established, the city gains a toolkit designed to help it facilitate renewal. For example, while Washington law typically limits cities from working with private enterprise, cities are encouraged to partner with private enterprise to rejuvenate a Community Renewal Area, a tool that can be particularly effective at helping Aurora Square reach its potential.

Q: Why a CRA at Aurora Square?

RCW 35.81 describes what an area that needs economic renewal looks like, and Council affirmed that four of the five reasons aptly describe Aurora Square:

1. “Old, obsolete buildings” such as the vacant Sears Catalogue Sales building and the three vacant buildings on the Joshua Green triangle. The Sears retail building, while occupied, reflects a Sears of decades ago rather than a structure it would build today.
2. “Defective or inadequate street layout” and “faulty lot layout” is readily apparent at Aurora Square. Shoppers cannot walk or drive easily between buildings, and traffic on Aurora and N 160th Street has difficulty accessing the site. In addition, the lot layout and topography of the site work against the retail function of the businesses.
3. “Excessive land coverage” at Aurora Square is evident in acres of parking in inaccessible or unnecessary locations, a lack of landscaping, and inadequate storm water management that poses costly hurdles for additional development.
4. “Diversity of ownership” at Aurora Square—which has ten different ownership groups—results in the inability to make changes at the speed necessary to respond to opportunities.

Aurora Square faces daunting challenges which developed over decades, leaving a center that is difficult to navigate with disconnected islands of buildings. What’s more, current building and storm water laws add more challenges to those demanded by today’s lifestyles and customers. Together, these challenges stymied redevelopment, limited reinvestment and produced poor sales, values and rents.

Q: What is Aurora Square’s potential?

Aurora Square is a sleeping giant. Given its size, location, demographics, transportation access, and the projections for growth in the Puget Sound economy, Aurora Square could be special. The City regularly surveys its citizens about ways to improve Shoreline, and better shopping, entertainment, and destination restaurants are constantly mentioned. Aurora Square is a key to accomplishing all of these opportunities. Of course, outstanding businesses already operate on site, and we trust that these ventures can grow even more successful with the synergy created. All this activity means sustainable sources of revenue for city services, too. Aurora Square can become a model of “lifestyle Shoreline,” with smart-built infrastructure, residences, offices and generous open spaces tied to transit, neighborhoods, and the Interurban Trail.

Q: What role might the City play?

Now that the CRA is established, the City will initiate tailored assistance to create a Community Renewal Plan based on the needs of the site and its interaction with the property owners. Examples may include:

- Designing area-wide storm water management or energy systems that allow individual lots to take advantage of economies of scale;
- Commissioning traffic and parking studies to justify more development through right-sizing parking and providing improved access;
- Creating a special signage district to offset the fact that the Interurban Trail pedestrian bridges tend to block site visibility from passing motorists on Aurora;
- Reworking N 160th Street with hopes of giving Aurora Square another “front door” and of better engaging Shoreline Community College’s 9,000+ students;
- Tailoring zoning in special districts that will generate new investment from tenants or users that aren’t currently on site;
- Designating central, consolidated plazas and parks that serve the entire center and become focal points for community gatherings;
- Financing major infrastructure improvements that allow for more predictable and intensive development.

Q: Does the CRA change zoning or heights of buildings?

No, the CRA itself doesn’t change anything, but is merely a toolkit for a city to use for the very limited purpose of bringing about renewal.

Q: Will the City master plan Aurora Square?

In a limited way; the City will partner with Aurora Square property owners to provide connections and the infrastructure necessary to serve the site. However, the City will not be dictating to the owners how they use or develop their sites.

Q: Will my property taxes or values increase or decrease?

The King County Assessor's Office confirmed that creating a CRA or a community renewal plan will not affect property assessments positively or negatively, as it does not guarantee improvement, increase potential, or devalue property. Property taxes and property values will only be affected when and if the area experiences significant improvement through investment or increased tenant activity.

Q: Are there property rights objections to CRAs?

Two common property rights objections often surface when cities create CRAs: the dislocation of residents and the use of condemnation or eminent domain for economic development. Since no residents live in the Aurora Square area, the first objection doesn't apply. As for condemnation, Council adopted Resolution 333 which explicitly states that condemnation and eminent domain not be used for economic renewal at Aurora Square, even though RCW 35.81 provides cities with that tool. This action follows our legal counsel's recommendation that condemnation and eminent domain only be used as a last resort to renew areas with severe health and safety challenges, but that it not be used for economic renewal. With eminent domain removed, the creation of a CRA poses no threat to property rights.

Q: Does the City intend to acquire property?

The City already owns a great deal of right-of-way that it can use to help renew Aurora Square. Should the City find it necessary to acquire additional property, the City would act in the public interest as a typical buyer, using a negotiated purchase agreement. In addition, RCW 35.81 prescribes that cities that acquire property for economic renewal in CRAs need to do so with the intention of returning the property to the private sector as soon as is reasonable.

Q: Where can I learn more about Community Renewal Areas?

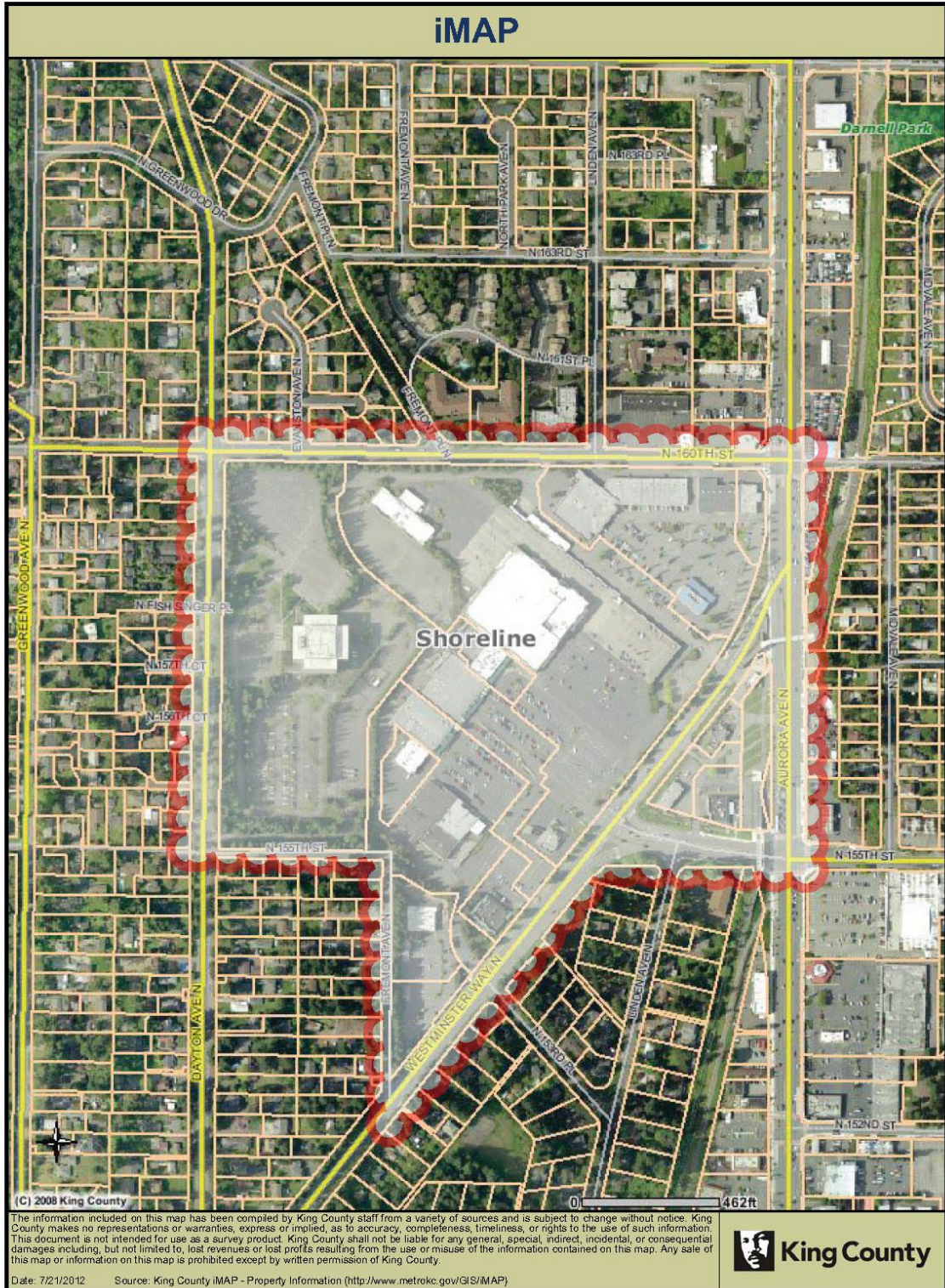
The Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington maintains a webpage with examples of CRA ordinances from Anacortes, Bremerton, and Vancouver. It also includes a link to the text of RCW 35.81. <http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/econ/ed-comrenewal.aspx>. Questions can also be directed to Dan Eernisse, Economic Development Manager, at either 206-801-2218 or deernisse@shorelinewa.gov.

Q: Can I follow the progress of the Aurora Square Community Renewal Area?

Shoreline City Council packet information, staff presentations, and a video recording of all meetings are available on the City of Shoreline's website. <http://www.shorelinewa.gov/index.aspx?page=82>

Q: Can I comment on the Aurora Square Community Renewal Area proposal?

The Shoreline City Council values community input and looks forward to hearing from you on the CRA proposal. If your comments are submitted before 4:00 p.m. on the day of the City Council meeting, your comments will be distributed to the City Council and appropriate staff prior to the Council meeting that evening as well as posted on the City's website under public comment in the Document Library. Comments can be submitted online at <http://www.shorelinewa.gov/index.aspx?recordid=20&page=696>



<i>Property ownership by City</i>	<i>Without CRA</i>	<i>Additional abilities with CRA in place</i>
<i>Buy, lease, condemn, acquire real property</i>	Allowed, but not with intent to be resold to private party for economic development	Allowed with preference to resale to private parties*
<i>Hold, clear, or improve real property</i>	Allowed, but only for public facilities	Allowed for both public or eventual private use
<i>Dispose of real property</i>	Allowed, but not with intent to be resold to private party for economic development	Allowed with preference to resale to private parties*
		<i>* Condemnation only to be exercised to cure health and safety blight, not economic blight</i>
<i>Zoning changes</i>	<i>Without CRA</i>	<i>Additional abilities with CRA in place</i>
<i>Rezone property</i>	Allowed as a Planned Area	Allowed as a spot zone regardless of GMA/Comprehensive Plan cycle
<i>Use resources to master plan private property</i>	Not allowed since it can be construed to benefit private property	Allowed
<i>Create special districts with unique rules</i>	Allowed in a limited way as part of the Planned Area zoning	Allowed
<i>Private partnerships</i>	<i>Without CRA</i>	<i>Additional abilities with CRA in place</i>
<i>Enter into a developer agreement</i>	City can only sell property it owns through competitive bid without strings attached.	Before purchasing property, the city can identify partners to develop all or some. City can also dictate to buyers how the property will be used.
<i>Select buyer who agrees to further CRA goals</i>	Not allowed	Allowed after some kind of competitive process or any non-profit buyer without competitive process
<i>Execute contracts and other instruments</i>	Allowed to carry out City purposes only	Allowed to carry out CRA purposes as well
<i>Provide incentives to tenants who help fulfill the community renewal plan</i>	Allowed with limitations	Allowed with more flexibility

<i>Building infrastructure</i>	<i>Without CRA</i>	<i>Additional abilities with CRA in place</i>
<i>Build and repair roads, parks, utilities</i>	Allowed	Allowed
<i>Close, vacate & rearrange streets and sidewalks</i>	Allowed for city purposes	Allowed to promote economic development as well
<i>Borrow money and accept grants to carry out community renewal</i>	Not allowed	Allowed
<i>Form Local Improvement Districts to finance</i>	Allowed	Allowed
<i>Incentives and impacts</i>	<i>Without CRA</i>	<i>Additional abilities with CRA in place</i>
<i>Provide loans, grants, or other assistance to property owners or tenants affected by the community renewal process</i>	Not allowed, except in aid of lower income persons	Allowed
<i>Provide financial or technical incentives for job creation or retention</i>	Not allowed	Allowed
<i>Relocate persons affected by community renewal</i>	Not allowed except for persons affected by condemnation for public facilities	Allowed

September 17, 2012

70-acre Aurora Square site could become Shoreline's urban village

By [BENJAMIN MINNICK](#)
 Journal Construction Editor



Redeveloping Aurora Square will get a boost next year when Metro opens its RapidRide E Line along Aurora Avenue North. Shoreline's City Council earlier this month took a step toward redeveloping Aurora Square shopping center by creating the Aurora Square Community Renewal Area.

The designation allows the city to work with property owners and developers on an economic renewal plan for the area, which is bounded by Aurora Avenue North, North 160th Street, Westminister Way North and Dayton Avenue North.

Ten oddly shaped properties are on the 70-acre site, resulting in disconnected islands of buildings that are difficult to navigate. It is anchored by a 290,000-square-foot Sears store that hasn't had a major update since it was built in 1967, according to Dan Eernisse, Shoreline economic development manager.

The Sears store also has a strange parking layout: one lot faces the bottom level of the store and another lot is at the store's second level. Going between the parking lots, and the retailers that surround them, requires shoppers to change levels inside Sears or drive around the edges of the site.

Eernisse said retail covers about 30 acres, but many popular stores like Starbucks are missing.

"This has been an underperforming site for Shoreline for decades," he said. "It isn't a gathering place."

The other anchor is a 53,000-square-foot Central Market. There also are Marshall's and Big Lots stores, the Northwest School for Hearing Impaired Children, about 20 small retailers, and a 134,000-square-foot regional headquarters for the Washington State Department of Transportation.

Eernisse said only about 25,000 square feet is vacant, but those spaces have been empty for a long time. The vacant spots include 16,000 square feet that Sears once used as a catalog call center, an old Dairy Queen, a former paint store and a defunct pizza restaurant.

Paper Zone filed for bankruptcy in the last year and closed its 5,500-square-foot store there, but another tenant is lined up for the space, according to Eernisse.

Eernisse said tougher laws for buildings and stormwater management have stymied redevelopment and limited reinvestment, and that has hurt sales, values and rents. He said there is no modern stormwater handling system for the site and too much parking.

Sales tax revenues are also low. Aurora Square generates about \$6K per acre in sales taxes while Aurora Village, two miles to the north, brings in \$39K per acre thanks to big box retailers such as Costco and Home Depot.

Eernisse said Aurora Square has more potential than its northern neighbor to become a pedestrian-oriented village like University Village, Redmond Town Center or Mill Creek Town Center. He said Aurora Village will always be auto-oriented because of Costco and Home Depot.

The potential for redeveloping Aurora Square will get a boost next year when Metro opens its RapidRide E Line along Aurora Avenue North, which the shopping center borders.

Eernisse said it's difficult to say what could be built at this point, but demolishing what's there now and starting over isn't likely in the cards. The city will look at doing infrastructure projects such as streets, a parking garage, transit center and stormwater facilities. "What we hope for is a true public-private partnership," he said.

Rick Mohler, an architect with Adams Mohler Ghillino and associate professor at the University of Washington Department of Architecture, put on a summer architecture studio at the UW that focused on Aurora Square. Eernisse said the seven students had some good ideas.

Eernisse said redevelopment could start as early as next year and proceed in phases over five to 10 years.

Two Aurora Square property owners — Joshua Green Corp. and Retail Opportunity Investments Corp. — have expressed interest in seeing the property change. "I don't think it will be hard at all (to find developers)," Eernisse said. "This is a very unusual opportunity to have a 70-acre site that can be cohesively developed."

The city is investing \$120 million nearby in the Aurora Corridor Improvement Project. Three miles of Aurora are becoming more pedestrian friendly with sidewalks, underground utilities, bike lanes and upgrades to the Interurban Trail, including a new bridge over Aurora to Aurora Square. The final phase of that work, from North 192nd to 205th streets, is expected to start in January 2013.

Eernisse said public funding for Aurora Square will be determined by the City Council as part of the community renewal area plan. The city's consultants are QBL Partners of Seattle and Donahou Design Group of Redmond.

Benjamin Minnick can be reached by [email](#) or by phone at (206) 622-8272.