

# Community Renewal Area FAQs

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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. On July 7, 2013, the Council adopted the Aurora Square CRA Renewal Plan to outline how the City proposed to bring renewal. With the CRA and Renewal Plan in place, the Shoreline Office of Economic Development is freed to work in cooperation with the Aurora Square property owners to bring renewal to 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 160<sup>th</sup> 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?**

As outlined in the [CRA Renewal Plan](#), the City can initiate tailored assistance based on the needs of the site and its interaction with the property owners. Examples 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 160<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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 at the [Aurora Square CRA Project Page](#). You can also contact the Office of Economic Development at 206-801-2218.

# iMAP



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