CITY OF AUBURN
Developing a Connectivity and Placemaking Element for the Comprehensive Plan

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University of Washington ○ College of Built Environments
Urban Design and Planning 507: Livability Synthesis

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SPECIAL THANKS TO:

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DEVELOPING A CONNECTIVITY AND PLACEMAKING ELEMENT FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ABOUT LIVABLE CITY YEAR

The UW Livable City Year program (LCY) is an initiative that enables local governments to tap into the talents and energy of the University of Washington to address local sustainability and livability goals. LCY links UW courses and students with a Washington city or regional government for an entire academic year, partnering to work on projects identified by the community. LCY helps cities reach their goals for livability in an affordable way while providing opportunities for students to learn through real-life problem solving. LCY has partnered with the City of Auburn for the 2016-2017 academic year, the inaugural year of the program.

The UW's Livable City Year program is led by faculty directors Branden Born with the Department of Urban Design and Planning, and Jennifer Otten with the School of Public Health, in collaboration with UW Sustainability, Urban@UW and the Association of Washington Cities, and with foundational support from the College of Built Environments and Undergraduate Academic Affairs. For more information contact the program at uwlcy@uw.edu.

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ABOUT THE CITY OF AUBURN

The City of Auburn is well-positioned to take advantage of many of the opportunities in the Puget Sound region. Centrally located between Seattle and Tacoma, Auburn is home to more than 77,000 residents. It is the land of two rivers (White & Green), spread across two counties (King & Pierce), and home to the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe.

Auburn was founded in 1891 and has retained an historic downtown while also welcoming new, modern development. Known for its family-friendly, small-town feel, Auburn was initially an agricultural community, the city saw growth due to its location on railroad lines and, more recently, became a manufacturing and distribution center. Auburn is situated near the major north-south and east-west regional transportation routes, with two railroads and close proximity to the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma.

Auburn has more than two dozen elementary, middle and high schools, and is also home to Green River College, which is known for its strong international education programs. The city is one hour away from Mt. Rainier, and has many outdoor recreational opportunities.

The mission of the City of Auburn is to preserve and enhance the quality of life for all citizens of Auburn, providing public safety, human services, infrastructure, recreation and cultural services, public information services, planning, and economic development.
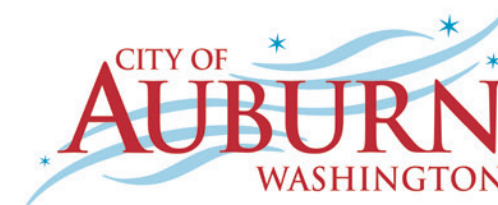
WWW.AUBURNWA.GOV

01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Auburn guides and synthesizes planning efforts through a Comprehensive Plan most recently updated in December 2015 (City of Auburn 2015c). The Core Comprehensive Plan is a city policy document supplemented by seven independent volumes known as elements. Each element section focuses on a specific theme pertaining to Auburn's urban development: land use, housing, capital facilities, utilities, transportation, economic development, and parks and recreation. The objective of this project was to provide a preliminary draft of a connectivity and placemaking element to be delivered to the City of Auburn for review and possible adoption in the Comprehensive Plan.

The connectivity and placemaking element aims to provide a framework for the city to address opportunities and challenges related to cultivating vibrant places and strengthening the social, economic, and physical networks that link people to them. The element also attempts to discern best practices for public engagement and the communal expression of Auburn's civic ideals.

The report provides rationales for each policy recommendation by working to describe the importance of connectivity and placemaking for cities and specifically addresses Auburn's unique situation. Our policy suggestions seek to build connections and a strong sense of place that assess current challenges and use Auburn's opportunities to address issues in connectivity and placemaking.

Connectivity and placemaking in Auburn from four distinct but intersecting perspectives: reinforcing neighborhood character, increasing transportation outreach to residents, strengthening the network of community service providers, and improving activity and engagement downtown.

A student group took each of the above themes to and investigated how it might be applied in Auburn. Each group aimed to inform potential city policies and suggest possible strategies in a format similar to Auburn's other Comprehensive Plan elements.

As in Auburn's existing elements documentation, our organizational hierarchy begins with broad goals that are supported by objectives that are then supported by specific policy recommendations. The connectivity and placemaking element consists of four overarching goals: to strengthen existing channels of communication between residents and government; to foster social cohesion through neighborhood identity and character; to support the needs of Auburn's diverse community through the provision of services and amenities; and to develop a thriving, accessible, and inclusive downtown Auburn.

Three to four objectives clarify each goal's strategy and organize thematic connections for the policy ideas that follow. Each objective is supported by several policy recommendations with additional description explaining their importance. These recommendations build on one another to reinforce their connections to Auburn's current planning strategies recommendations according to their projected implementation timeframes, ranging between short-, medium-, and long-term implementation timeframes based on our preliminary research.

Finally, the connectivity and placemaking element aims to assist Auburn in expanding community cohesion through the continued application of the seven city values: character, wellness, service, economy, celebration, environment, and sustainability. These values informed our entire process and provided the foundation for the report's suggestions.

02 INTRODUCTION

The City of Auburn hopes to address connectivity and placemaking in its Core Comprehensive Plan. These are broad terms within the field of urban design and planning and it is important to define them in this context.

Connectivity refers to the ways in which people navigate their physical environment as well as digital, economic, social, and cultural networks. Physical connectivity comprises the transportation systems that link and facilitate the movement of people and goods within their city, including roads, sidewalks, transit systems, bicycle lanes, and train stations.

Relevant forms of connectivity also exist beyond purely physical space. Digital connections encompass telecommunication networks that bring people together online. Social and cultural connectivity refer to the bonds that link neighbors, friends, families, and people with shared religious, ethnic, and cultural affiliations. Economic connectivity expresses a similar concept in financial terms, and includes the transactions that build relationships between people and the businesses they patronize.

Placemaking, while related to connectivity, concerns different aspects of the social and physical urban experience. It is about building spaces that are attractive, engaging, and vital for the community. The notion of the "third space," a public place apart from home and work, describes places whose primary purpose is enabling human interaction (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982). Third spaces like bars, restaurants, parks, bakeries, and coffee shops facilitate spontaneous gathering, novelty of experience and interaction, social and cultural bonds, as well as economic activity. These places define the urban experience by establishing communal hubs where all are welcome to assemble and interact.

Placemaking and connectivity complement each other in terms of conceptual thinking about cities and their lived experience. How does someone travel from his or her home to a destination that attracts them, and what makes that place attractive? What kinds of places and spaces are connected to each other, such that visiting one leads easily to visiting the next? In what kinds of places do people strengthen social and cultural relationships, and what makes those places special? How does a strong sense of place and shared community benefit local businesses and local institutions? These are the kinds of questions at the intersection of connectivity and placemaking.

A major finding of a previous Livable City Year project, "City of Auburn: Placemaking Imagined by the Community," corroborated this problem statement: physical divisions of topography and geography are partly responsible for divisions among Auburn's neighborhoods; but there are also social, digital, cultural, and economic divisions that lead residents to feel disconnected from their neighbors and from the city as a whole, to the point that some express reluctance to identify as an Auburn resident (Livable City Year 2016). Connecting residents to broader city objectives is made more difficult by this lack of cohesive connection and unity.

Poor connectivity and placemaking can have negative implications for a city. A lack of social and cultural connectivity can contribute to feelings of loneliness and alienation if people are unsure on whom they might rely, leading to a sense of "placelessness" in which there is little harmony or emotional connection between

Value descriptions:

- Character: Developing and preserving attractive and interesting places where people want to be.

- Wellness: Promoting community-wide health and safety wellness.

- Service: Providing transparent government service.

- Economy: Encouraging a diverse and thriving marketplace for consumers and businesses.

- Celebration: Celebrating our diverse cultures, heritage, and community.

- Environment: Stewarding our environment.

- Sustainability: Creating a sustainable future for our community.

- City of Auburn 2015c, p. 19

people and their environment (Arefi 1999). Without digital connectivity, people might feel left out of neighborhood conversations taking place on social networks or city events broadcast on Facebook. Low economic connectivity can adversely affect businesses in a community, particularly small local businesses. An absence of physical connectivity makes physical space difficult to navigate if people are unsure how to travel from one place to another, whether it is safe to bike on a road, or how to safely navigate a discontinuous sidewalk.

A community might feel "placeless" without a strong sense of place. If people perceive little reason to gather outside of home and work, then there is a missed opportunity to reinforce social cohesion through appealing places that bring people together in the community.

Strong connectivity and placemaking is necessary to mitigate these consequences. For that reason, our primary objective was to compile potential strategies, framed as policy recommendations, to address connectivity and placemaking in Auburn. To develop ideas to bolster community connectivity and placemaking, students collaborated with the city, particularly the Planning Services section of Auburn's Community Development and Public Works Department, to generate precise and targeted recommendations in a document that can coexist with existing planning strategies.

Auburn's Comprehensive Plan, which was updated in December 2015, envisions how Auburn may grow and change through a 20-year period to 2035. The plan is organized around topics including: land use, housing, transportation, the environment, parks and open space, and economic development. The plan is also driven by the seven city values: character, wellness, service, economy, celebration, environment, and sustainability.

The vision expressed by the Comprehensive Plan and its Community Vision Report (City of Auburn 2015b) sets a direction that our element aims to follow. The City of Auburn believes in the importance of incorporating city values into civic engagement and municipal business practices, so the element includes strategies to establish those seven values in Auburn's community.
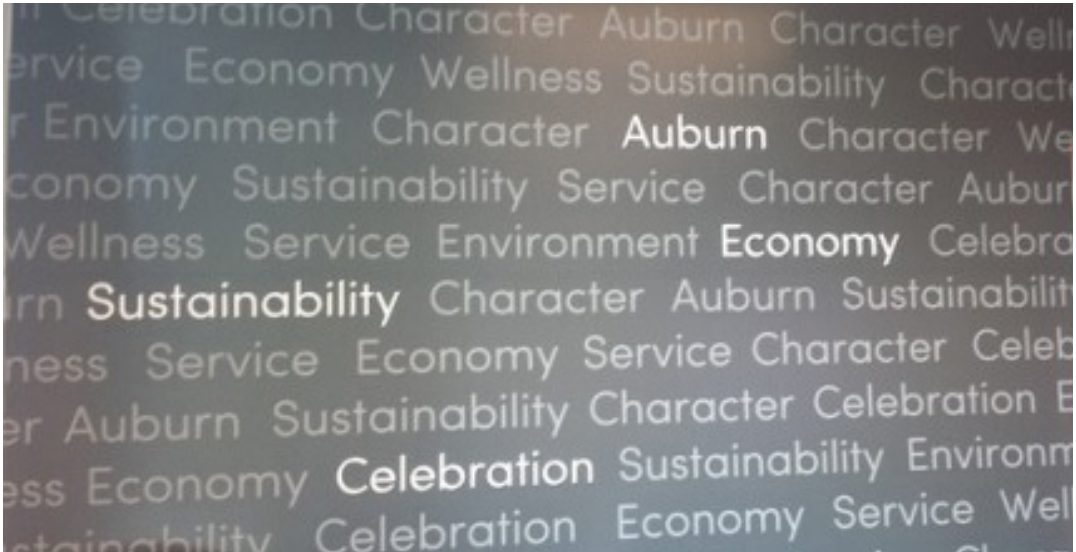
FIGURE 1

Students present draft of the project to City staff for review.

FIGURE 2

CITY VALUES

Walls of the City of Auburn offices are painted with the City's values.
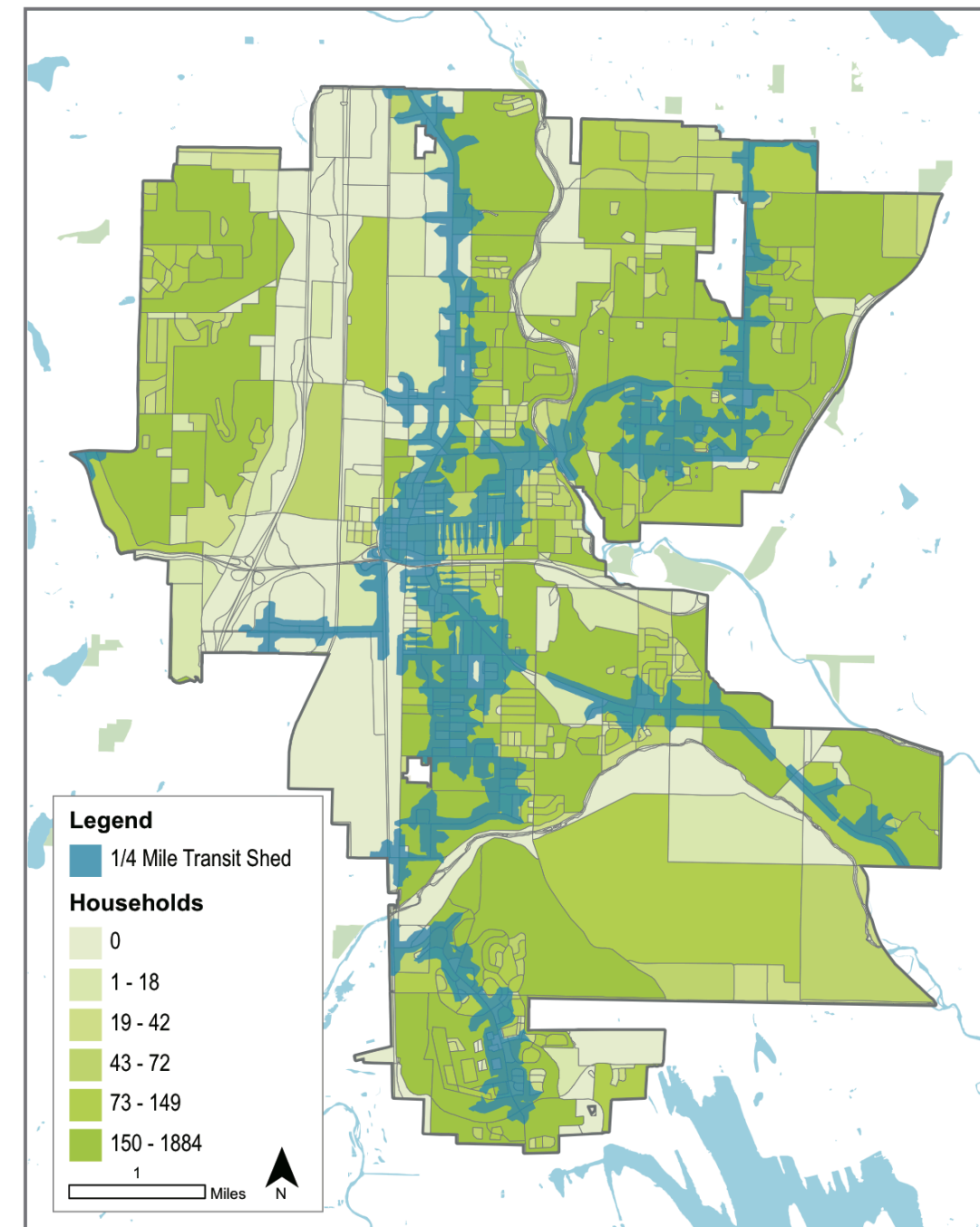

Credit: Student team

03 METHODS

Essential topics for connectivity and placemaking in Auburn, identified in the preliminary research of the winter quarter, were first sorted into the four main subcomponents of the element: community services, neighborhood identity, downtown, and transportation. These would later be compiled into a unified, cohesive document centered on four goals served by objectives and policy recommendations.

Each group used precedent studies, literature reviews, and reviews of municipal documents from Auburn and similar cities to ensure that our research built on the existing body of knowledge pertaining to planning in the context of Auburn. Each group also recognized the community as a key analytical component. Observations, sketches, and urban photography informed the development of ideas about community connections and strength of place in Auburn. Finally, each group engaged the community to a certain extent. The student teams hosted joint community meetings with the City of Auburn, once in the winter quarter on March 8 and once in the spring quarter on June 8. Beyond these public meetings, students also interviewed and spoke with members of Auburn's community to gauge residents' perceptions of the issues we studied.

Each group developed unique methods depending on their research area. With an emphasis on the physical dimension of connectivity, the transportation group used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to build maps of Auburn to analyze overlaid data covering median household income, car availability, median age, topography, proximity to transit service, and access to grocery stores.

This group also reviewed Washington's Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Law and associated plans and programs; transportation plans and visions from the Puget

Legend
1/4 Mile Transit Shed
Households
0
1 - 18
19 - 42
43 - 72
73 - 149
150 - 1884

1 Miles N

Source: 2010 Census, City of Auburn, Sound Transit, King County
Credit: Student team

Sound Regional Council, King County Metro Transit, Pierce Transit, and Sound Transit; and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) master plans for Washington cities including Kent, Redmond, Bellevue, and Seattle. These plans were compared to Auburn's Comprehensive Transportation Plan to assess gaps and identify opportunities for strategic changes to transportation infrastructure in Auburn.

The group researching Auburn's community services began with a literature review of documents including: the Auburn Community Vision Report, the Auburn Public Participation Plan, the Auburn Community Services Brochure, the Auburn Health Impact Assessment, the Auburn Core Comprehensive Plan, and reports from previous Livable City Year teams studying connectivity and placemaking in

Auburn. Stakeholder interviews comprised another foundation of the group's analysis. In a snowball sampling method, wherein interview subjects were drawn from their association with other subjects, the group identified major philanthropic organizations serving Auburn to identify other important stakeholders in the city's network of community services. Interviews in-person and over the phone were conducted with representatives of Auburn Food Bank, Auburn YMCA, Auburn Junior City Council, Auburn Senior Center, Auburn Library, Auburn Teen Center, Nexus Youth and Families, and St. Vincent de Paul.

This research formed the foundation for a tabular matrix analyzing the characteristics of the organizations listed in Auburn's Community Services Brochure to try to discern patterns and shared features of organizations. A more comprehensive interviewing

strategy would have generated a more complete representation of the state of the community, but the matrix represents a preliminary attempt to order and organize Auburn's community service resources. Quantitative research included the creation of an asset map to locate the physical locations of services in Auburn and identify spatial patterns as well as a chart to visualize the location of these resources as being either based in Auburn or elsewhere in the region.

Finally, the community services group reviewed reports from the National Wraparound Initiative, a program of Portland State University's School of Social Work, to investigate the relevance of wraparound services for Auburn. This approach to community services focuses on holistic methods of addressing complex individual's needs through research-based programming.
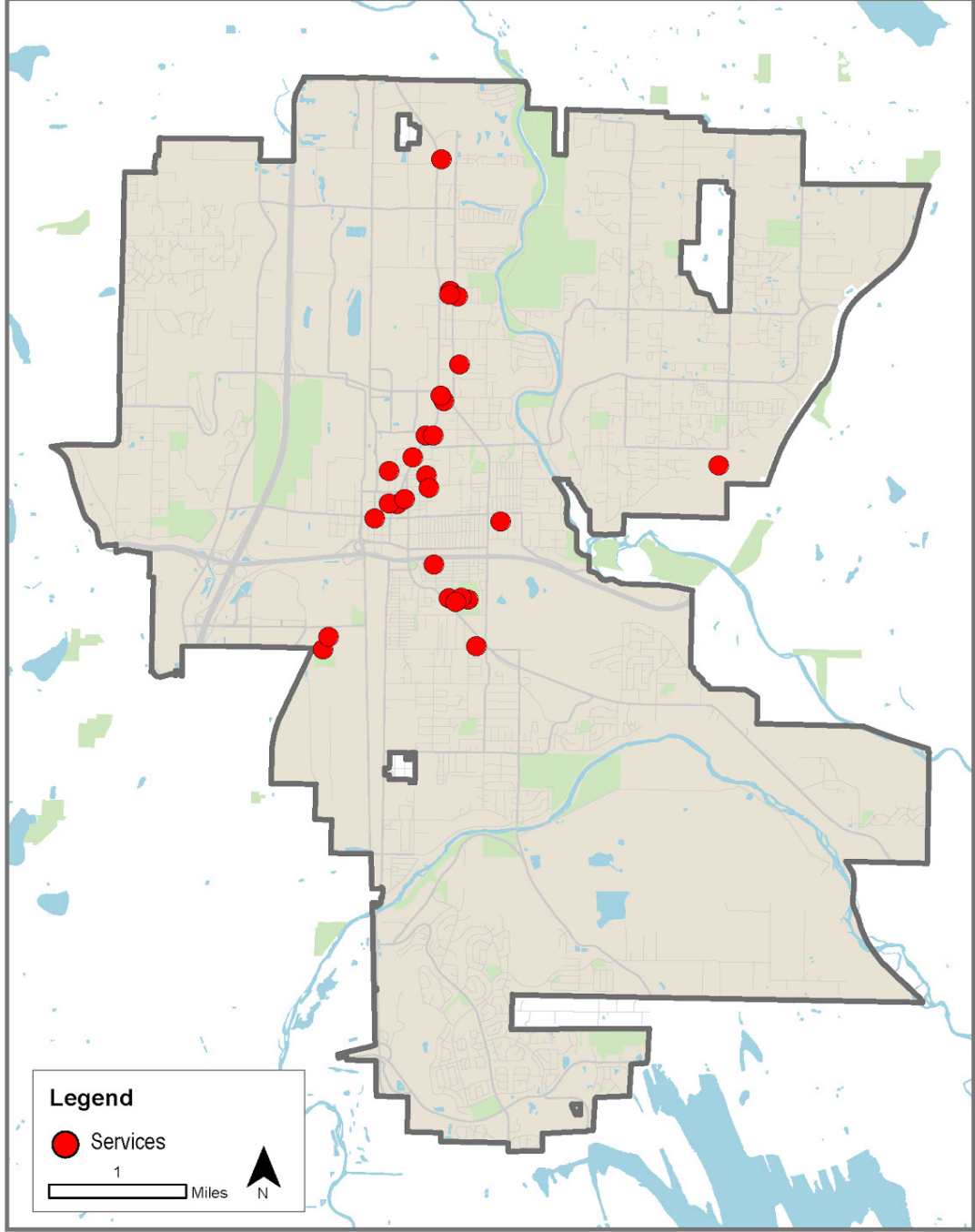
Source: City of Auburn, King County GIS

Credit: Student team
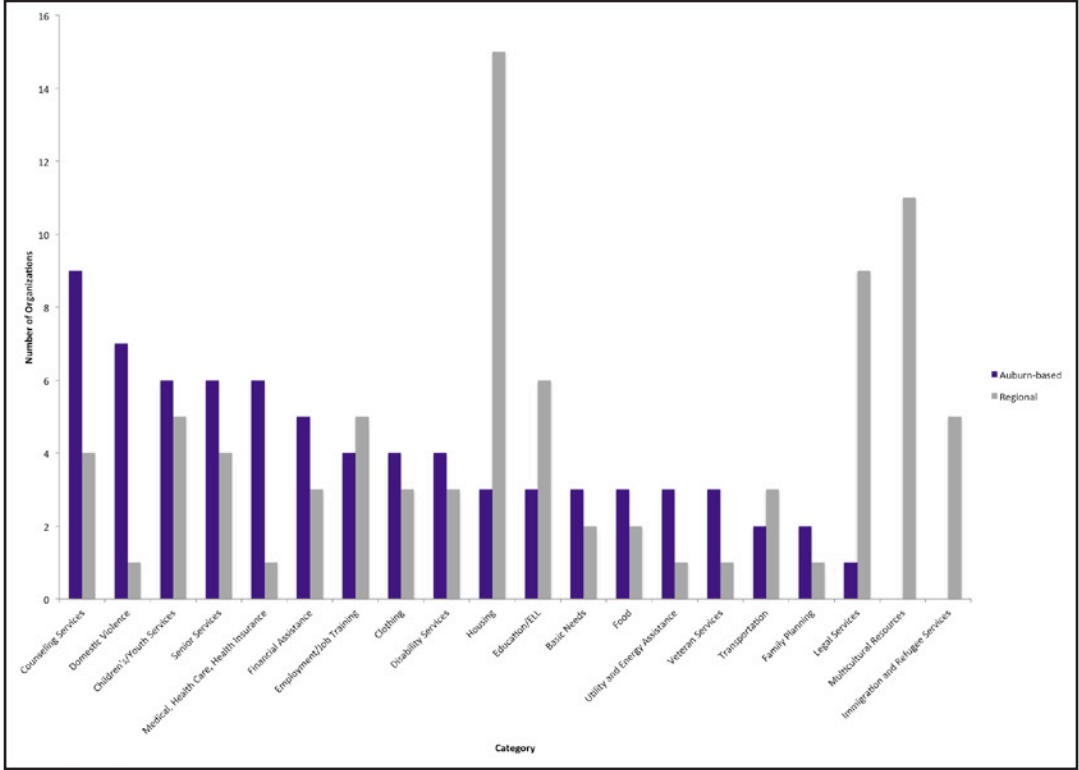
Credit: Student team

The downtown group conducted on-the-ground reconnaissance studies of the downtown area and its surrounding neighborhoods, supplementing their observations and photography with interviews with city employees in Public Works and Community Planning, Economic Development, and Environmental Sciences.

The group then reviewed 19 planning documents pertinent to the Downtown Urban Center (DUC), including the Auburn Downtown Plan, the Downtown Facade Improvement Grant Program Packet, and the Ten-Year Economic Development Strategic Plan, and began a preliminary synthesis of relevant policies and programs for downtown Auburn. To address the places of overlap in these plans, the group mapped their recommendations, policies, and places of interest by hand on a paper map of downtown Auburn and the proposed Greater Downtown Planning Area. The physical mapping process generated spatial analysis of the downtown area's hubs and connections, with implications for both connectivity and placemaking.

Credit: Student team

Like the downtown group, the group researching neighborhood identity began with on-the-ground observation of the Outlet Collection, Lakeland Town Center, Riverside High School, Muckleshoot Casino, Les Gove Community Center, Green River College, the Food Market at Lea Hill, and Mountain View High School. They evaluated these locations in terms of their walkability, commercial presence and viability, existing zoning regulations, topography, geography, housing types, and character. To complement these observations of place and connectivity, the group conducted interviews by phone and email with six stakeholders: a librarian, an apartment manager in Southeast Auburn, a Green River College professor, a community volunteer and semi-retired property manager, and two Homeowners' Association (HOA) members in Lakeland. These interviews, while not representative of Auburn's entire population, established a starting point to collect public feedback and engage with a cross-section of Auburn residents.

In addition to reviewing documents including the Auburn Community Vision Report and Comprehensive Plan to synthesize information on Auburn's neighborhood character, the group also conducted precedent studies, particularly in their research on activated parking lots and community events. Precedents drew from related events in Bellevue, Washington; Monterey, California; Chicago, Illinois; Atlanta, Georgia; and Fayette County, Pennsylvania.

Finally, to conclude the research and writing process, a compilation team with representatives from each group formed to integrate each group's vision, goals, objectives, and policies into a single unified document centered on connectivity and placemaking.
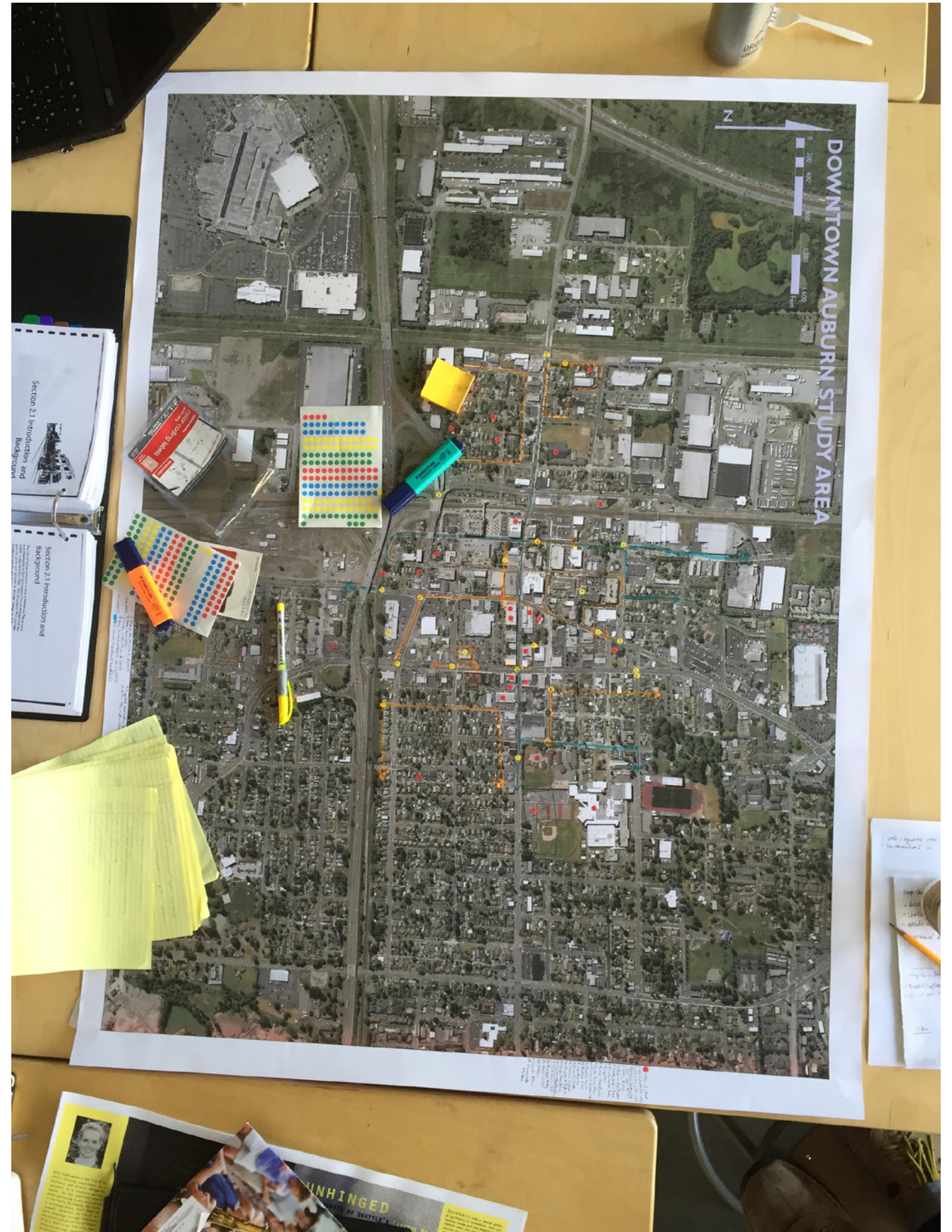
Credit: Branden Born

04 AUBURN'S CONTEXT

Each group identified particular challenges for building connectivity and a stronger sense of place while integrating Auburn's values at the same time the major challenges stem from the physical separation among the city's six or seven neighborhoods. This physical separation makes it difficult for residents to establish and maintain digital, social, cultural, and economic connections. Low internal cohesion within Auburn's neighborhoods themselves can also compound disconnection between local government and residents.

The downtown group found that, despite the positive forces of downtown Auburn's robust and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, strong potential for future growth, and a centrally accessible location within the city, there are still challenges for placemaking. Some obstacles include the lack of synthesis among multiple policy and programming documents related to the Downtown Urban Center (DUC), the limited availability of resources for large-scale capital improvements, pedestrian access stymied by high-traffic corridors in the DUC, and conflicts between the need for surface parking and open, public space that is accessible and engaging for the community. These obstacles decrease the area's physical connectivity; but economic and social connectivity are also hindered by downtown Auburn not yet reaching its full potential.

The transportation group explored the challenge of implementing the physical infrastructure policies put forth in Auburn's Transportation Plan. The Transportation Plan details strategies to improve the city's physical transportation infrastructure and the built environment. The plan also includes goals for changing travel behavior, with a smaller number of trips taken by driving alone in a car and a larger number

of trips taken by carpool, transit, cycling, and walking. However, the transportation group found that the plan could elaborate further on ways to connect transportation resources to residents, change travel behavior, and work with businesses to achieve these goals. The transportation group saw great potential in addressing these gaps in the city's Transportation Plan.

Ambiguous or, in the worst case, nearly nonexistent, neighborhood identity also presents a challenge for connectivity and formulating a strong sense of place. "City of Auburn: Placemaking Imagined by the Community" found that few residents could name their neighborhood and identify its boundaries, suggesting that some neighborhoods' sense of place is vague (Livable City Year 2016b). There is room for greater resident involvement in communicating with the city, participating in community events, building connections to organizations like religious groups and HOAs, identifying the needs of their communities, submitting Neighborhood Matching Fund applications, reinforcing neighborhood identity with a strong sense of place, and generally contributing to a welcoming and inclusive community that feels like a united "One Auburn," as described in the Comprehensive Plan (City of Auburn 2015c, p. 20).

Similarly, the community services group heard from multiple stakeholders that community service organizations could be better coordinated at the city level. There is an opportunity to build on Auburn's significant resources to strengthen the network of service providers to make it easier for residents to access the support they may need. Another potential challenge comes from the asset map, which showed that the primary cultural and ethnic community service organizations serving Auburn's Latino, Asian-American and Pacific Islander, Ukrainian, Jewish, and African populations are not located in Auburn, but in Kent, Tacoma, and Seattle. This may not necessarily present a challenge in terms of these communities' accessing resources, but it may indicate a potential obstacle for social and cultural connectivity within the city itself.

Finally, community engagement is a challenge. This corroborates findings from the Livable City Year report, "City of Auburn: Community Profiles and Resident Engagement in Neighborhoods of Auburn, Washington," which found that Auburn residents expressed a desire to see more public meeting spaces, opportunities to interact with their neighbors outside of social media, and dialogue between residents and the city (Livable City Year 2017). Auburn has an opportunity to engage more fully with the seven values that define its character, and to amplify the public visibility of these values when they are expressed.

Credit: Student team

FIGURE 10

INTERSECTION AT EAST 4TH STREET

05 ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The student teams took into account Auburn's specific challenges and advantages around connectivity and placemaking while formulating goals, objectives and policy recommendations.

Historic downtown Auburn is considered a major asset of the city, with a core of robust, walkable infrastructure that can support future economic development. The DUC has been identified as a future growth area by the City of Auburn and the Puget Sound Regional Council. Its central location makes the downtown area a focal point for policy interventions to increase connectivity. There is an opportunity to build pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between recently annexed areas in North Auburn and community assets like Les Gove Park in South Auburn as well as contribute to a sense that downtown Auburn is fully enmeshed in its surrounding neighborhoods. As for placemaking, downtown benefits from being a walkable area with proximity to historic residential neighborhoods, community gardens, and spaces for the community to gather, making it a prime location for the city to consider implementing small-scale programs to complement present investment in development around the transit center at Auburn Station. Interventions should be conducted in collaboration with Auburn' s marginalized communities to ensure that, as the neighborhood changes, these residents are not excluded from access to housing, business, or amenities.

Downtown revitalization projects are a key step in building identity and boosting economic activity, but such projects can sometimes centralize resources to a particular place and not enhance connectivity. This sometimes manifests in marginalized or disconnected communities not having equal access to a place and its resources. The success of placemaking is contingent on connectivity that enables access through transportation infrastructure. Downtown can be a place where residents contribute to positive transformations for everyone's benefit only where physical and social connectivity enhances the ability of all people to reach the neighborhood.

Economic connectivity can be encouraged through the citywide and downtown-specific economic growth incentives, already established by the city, to allow new retail centers to be sited downtown at minimal cost. Improvements in sidewalks, per Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations, and improved lighting have also been recently implemented downtown to increase safety. A sense of physical safety is an important component of physical connectivity and placemaking in the downtown core and throughout the entire city. These efforts present multiple strengths for the downtown area from which the city can continue its trajectory of growth and development with sensitivity to placemaking and connectivity. Our suggested interventions include developing a greenway system around downtown to increase physical connectivity, bring residents closer to green space, and make health and recreation part of downtown Auburn's sense of place. In doing so, the values of wellness, character, and economy could be strongly demonstrated.

Auburn has an opportunity to invest in programs that educate and inform residents about their transportation choices and their access to transportation services. Connectivity is not only a function of the physical connections enabled by reliable transportation infrastructure but also equitable and comprehensive access to information about those services. If residents possess the most up-to-date and relevant information about different transportation options, they can make better informed decisions about their transportation needs. This can also help the city achieve the transportation and environmental goals set by the Transportation Plan by supporting alternative modes of travel for residents who are equipped to bike, walk, carpool, or ride transit to and from the destinations that lend Auburn a strong sense of place.

Credit: Student team

FIGURE 11

SIGN FOR AUBURN AT THE SOUNDER STATION

FIGURE 12

RAIL LINE LEADING TO AUBURN

Credit: Student team

Students have identified an opportunity for Auburn to collect more detailed transportation metadata to inform policy decisions about physical connectivity. Current sources of transportation-related data in Auburn, including the Puget Sound Regional Council, the Census Bureau, and the American Community Survey, are not sufficiently detailed to represent the complexity of city-level transportation data. For example, level-of-service (LOS) data, which measures the quality and accessibility of travel routes, is only recorded for roadways, but not for bicycle and pedestrian pathways. Finer-grained data can yield more accurate information about the pedestrian experience in Auburn, including sidewalk quality and intersection safety. The city has an opportunity to develop more precise city-level measurements relating to LOS, road use, traffic volume, the quality of transportation infrastructure, and the use of non-car travel modes like transit, cycling, and walking.

The purpose of collecting detailed transportation data is to understand travel behavior in Auburn and use that information to better connect Auburn residents to their built environment. For this reason, data collection should be complemented by qualitative research, possibly in the form of travel-mode surveys that ask residents and commuters how often they drive, walk, bike, or ride public transit. This kind of research could provide an important opportunity for the city to interact with residents and affirm their lived experiences. Social trust is reinforced when people know that their government understands and values their insights.

Strengthening these channels of communication not only makes it easier for people to share transportation-related data with the city, but also helps Auburn tailor transportation information to residents. The provision of reliable and easy-to-access information can support residents who are unable to own or drive a vehicle and encourage residents able to use transit, walk, and cycle to do so. Providing reliable transportation alternatives to Auburn's residents could have a positive impact on social and economic connectivity by increasing access to Auburn's services and amenities. Regarding placemaking, providing transportation connections and informing residents about easy and reliable transportation alternatives fosters participation in activities and events that contribute to civic pride and a strong sense of place. More efficient physical connectivity is intended to reduce congestion on the roads, particularly by single-occupancy vehicles and freight traffic, to improve wellness and quality of life for all residents. In terms of city values, undertaking marketing and outreach efforts related to alternative transportation services could bolster Auburn's commitment to the service, economy, and environment values.

As for neighborhood identity, Auburn's diverse neighborhoods have strong potential to bring people together and connect residents to the city by implementing city values in practice, supporting social cohesion through community events and engagement, and building relationships between residents, their neighbors, and their government through transparent, accessible outreach and communication. Given the diversity of languages spoken in Auburn, there is also an opportunity to develop materials in languages other than English so that as many residents as possible can connect to the city.

Diversity is an asset for Auburn. To counter possible barriers to social connectivity and cohesion between residents and the city, we suggest starting a Neighborhood Liaison program in which liaisons act as intermediaries between residents and the
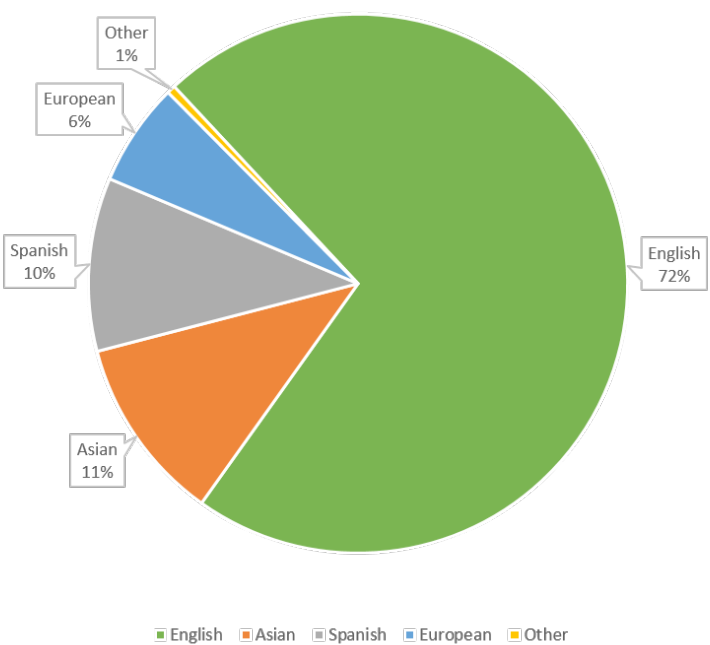

FIGURE 13

LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME IN AUBURN

city by helping connect them to services, amenities, and opportunities to get involved. Liaisons can reflect the diverse geographic, racial, and socioeconomic makeup of the neighborhoods they represent. Accordingly, we suggest hiring liaisons from underrepresented communities. The main role of a liaison is to facilitate direct communication between the city and their respective neighborhoods. Liaisons might also take on additional responsibility to maintain connections between the city and neighborhood groups, including HOAs and religious organizations, and serve as a point of contact for groups interested in submitting Neighborhood Matching Fund applications. Because they can engage residents in conversations about neighborhood strengths and help residents identify community needs, liaisons can also help to define neighborhood identity and create a welcoming neighborhood for all residents and visitors to Auburn. Finally, neighborhood liaisons might help to host public events related to city values, not only to disseminate those values but also to encourage connections between neighbors.

Equitable civic engagement entails making space for every member of Auburn's communities. Auburn's network of community service providers is another civic asset. These organizations can foster financial, political, and digital literacy for Auburn residents. By generating more opportunities for economic, civic, and social engagement, residents are empowered in ways that build robust and accessible connections to their communities and their government.

Community service organizations also connect residents to care providers for individual and communal wellness. Moreover, ensuring that people in all neighborhoods know what services and amenities are available to them is also vital for strengthening a sense of unity across the city. This is also a means for community service organizations to bring together residents of similar religious, ethnic, and cultural identities. Connecting people to services not only enhances service delivery but helps bring together people who are struggling with similar issues. Coalescing around community resources can help alleviate people's sense of isolation by making people's struggles and successes feel both validated and legible across communities.

Auburn's key community service organizations also provide opportunities to disseminate information to a wider cross-section of the community, tap into Auburn's social networks, and engage members of the community beyond those who might typically attend public meetings. Building social unity through accessible and engaging public programs also presents an opportunity to extend awareness of Auburn's city values. Whether these connections are reinforced digitally or in physical spaces, the expression of these values contributes to an inclusive sense of place that is open to all.

Expression of Auburn's Values in the Connectivity and Placemaking Element

- Character: Auburn's neighborhoods each have unique, vibrant identities that contribute to the success of Auburn as a whole. Services support self-sufficiency and ensure that every resident can thrive.

- Wellness: A walkable, bikeable, compact downtown supports health and wellness. Residents have access to health infrastructure and services that support their mental and physical health.

- Service: The city facilitates an integrated, effective, and supportive network of infrastructure and community services to support Auburn's diverse communities.

- Economy: Job training and workforce development programs help Auburn residents achieve their potential. Downtown is an appealing place for local anchor stores and restaurants. Small businesses and commercial hubs are distributed across neighborhoods, ensuring equitable access to amenities and services for all residents.

- Celebration: Neighborhoods connect communities together, celebrating culture, heritage, and connectivity. Events activate places and bring communities together. Creative uses of public space for events enhance a sense of community and center the city around its downtown.

- Environment: Auburn's unique natural environment supports residents' health and well- being. The built environment facilitates connections between places and spaces, including access to Auburn's green spaces and riverfronts.

- Sustainable: Services provide for future generations so the community can thrive. Connected communities with social cohesion and support are more resilient. Residents are empowered to preserve and protect Auburn's environment.

06 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for improving policy represent highlights from the connectivity and placemaking element and provide an overview of the most significant ideas. First, we emphasize the importance of connecting Auburn residents to the city through open communication and equitable outreach. Second, we reflect on the distinct social and commercial character of Auburn's neighborhoods and pinpoints opportunities to strengthen their sense of place, social connectivity, and physical safety. Third, we suggest that the social, cultural, and financial empowerment advanced by Auburn's network of community service providers be maintained and strengthened. Finally, in discussing strategies specific to downtown Auburn's cultural and economic development, we emphasize accessibility and inclusion for all residents. The policy suggestions compiled here all build upon city values to celebrate Auburn's character and set unified themes around which neighbors can gather.

Goal 1: Ensure that Auburn residents are well connected to the city through transparent and accessible government programs.

This goal aims to engage Auburn residents through inclusive and informative outreach from their local government. Developing these connections also entails making city values visible in public spaces.

Objective: Strengthen existing channels of communication between residents and the City of Auburn to build connections between residents and city staff and ensure the transparency of city activities.

Recommendation: Distribute a City of Auburn welcome package to new residents, available as a physical copy and online, to greet residents with a clear vision of Auburn as a welcoming and inclusive community. This package might include the updated community service brochure, information on transportation and commute options, volunteer opportunities, opportunities for civic engagement, events, and city values. A full list of suggestions is in Appendix B.

Recommendation: Expand strategic municipal web presence on community listservs and digital networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Strengthening the city's digital presence is an important part of building digital connectivity between residents and local government.

Recommendation: Lower barriers to Neighborhood Matching Fund applications by increasing public outreach and education about how to apply. Consider advertising for specific types of projects annually to spur neighborhood imagination with examples of appropriate, successful projects. If residents feel that the application process is clear and accessible, they might be more inclined to propose and apply for projects to meet their community's needs.

Recommendation: Provide meeting materials in a variety of languages and provide translation services at events and meetings to reflect the diversity of non-English languages spoken in Auburn and support residents who primarily speak these languages.

Recommendation: Establish Neighborhood Liaison positions to increase outreach to underrepresented neighborhoods and facilitate direct communication between the city and their respective neighborhoods. Communication is essential for social trust and cohesion.

Objective: Connect Auburn residents to city values through services, facilities, and events.

Recommendation: Display city values on the physical elements of public spaces and facilities, including steps, walls, banners, benches, community centers, and city-commissioned art. Increasing the visibility of Auburn's values can be an important part of placemaking by using public space to celebrate the city's character.

Objective: Through outreach, provide residents with accessible and consistent information about the state of transportation in Auburn and the variety of commute options available to them.

Recommendation: Measure the LOS of downtown intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists to complement existing automotive car-oriented LOS measurements. The measurements could provide the information necessary to improve the safety and convenience of Auburn's pedestrian and cycling transportation network.

Recommendation: Encourage Auburn's employers to engage in commute trip reduction efforts, including adopting a commute trip reduction plan. This is a strategy
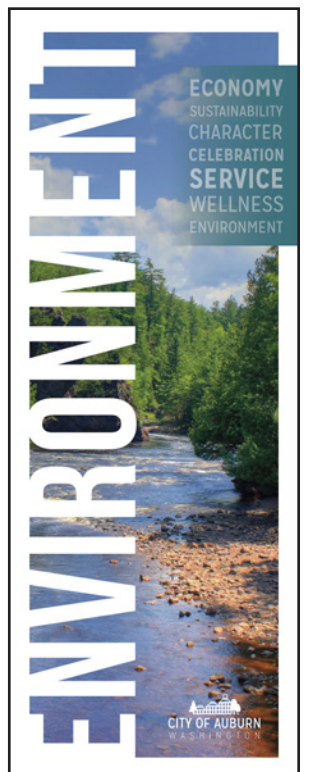
Credit: HuskyCreative student team

FIGURE 14
BANNERS OF VALUES

A Livable City Year report by HuskyCreative proposed flag banners with artistic representations of Auburn's seven values. (Livable City Year 2016a.)

to make it easier for people to reduce the amount of time they commute by driving alone in a car and consider other alternatives.

Goal 2: Foster neighborhood identity, character, and social cohesion to better connect Auburn residents and to advance regional prominence as a thriving place to visit and live.

This goal is about reinforcing the social and commercial character of Auburn's neighborhoods. Enhancing pedestrian access to neighborhood amenities is another component of this section of the element.

Objective: Build social cohesion among Auburn residents and encourage neighborhood pride and appreciation for the community's history and heritage.

Recommendation: Identify blank walls, underused pavement areas, and other publicly-and privately-owned surfaces in the city that can be included in a mural program. Public art contributes to a strong sense of place by expressing a neighborhood's sensibility and style.

Recommendation: Activate crosswalks with creative designs. A small intervention like this can enhance the aesthetic quality of pedestrian crosswalks and make walking more enjoyable.

Recommendation: Neighborhood Liaisons might help to organize formal and informal neighborhood gatherings, like those described in Appendix A, to build relationships between neighbors.

Objective: Enhance the physical safety and connectivity of Auburn neighborhoods.

Recommendation: Connect sidewalks in every neighborhood. This is a relatively small-scale physical intervention that can increase the quality and accessibility of walking in Auburn.

Goal 3: Support the needs of Auburn's diverse communities by continuing to provide quality services and amenities.

This goal sees strengthening Auburn's networks of community service organizations as a way to connect residents not only to the services they provide but also to their communities. These resources can be sources of social, cultural, and financial empowerment.

Objective: Improve residents' access to the existing service network by providing direct and transparent communication between residents and service providers.

Recommendation: Continue to provide financial support for community services and organizations that receive city funding, including the Auburn Food Bank, the Auburn Public Library, and community health organizations. Encourage city coordination with community service providers to provide a comprehensive support system that allows residents to receive assistance from the city.

Recommendation: Create a calendar of transportation-related events to encourage residents to walk, bike, ride transit, or carpool instead of driving alone.

Recommendation: Incentivize transit use in Auburn by providing subsidies for ORCA products, financially rewarding Auburn employees who choose not to drive alone but instead ride transit, and providing Guaranteed/Emergency Ride Home programs.

Recommendation: Connect neighborhood liaisons to community focus groups in a joint effort to assess the extent to which Auburn's current community service framework meets the culture-related service needs of Auburn's minority ethnic groups.

Objective: Use zoning code amendments, strategic entrepreneurial partnerships, and community input to ensure that all neighborhoods have multi-modal access to basic amenities, including grocery stores, community centers, commercial services, healthcare facilities, parks, and places of worship.

Recommendation: Encourage spontaneous and temporary commercial spaces, including farmers markets, semi-permanent sales kiosks, and the activation of parking lots through food trucks, bazaars, and flea markets. These temporary spaces can bring residents together and engage social and economic connectivity.

Recommendation: Establish citywide policies that prioritize experimentation and temporary infrastructure by incorporating principles of tactical urbanism into planning. Tactical urbanism is a deliberate, phased approach to urban design that favors temporary materials (e.g., paint instead of concrete) to test new ideas with minimal risk. Successful tactical projects can be adopted permanently, while less successful projects can be easily retooled or removed (Lydon and Garcia 2015).

Recommendation: Reduce barriers to the development of small businesses, including startup costs, in all locations throughout the city, as referenced in Auburn's Ten-Year Economic Strategic Plan (2016, p. 30). Supporting small business by building links between business owners and customers is key to economic connectivity.

Objective: Connect and develop parks, green space, and community gardens throughout Auburn to complement efforts centered on wellness and recreation.

Recommendation: Develop and preserve urban gardens and farms like the one on S. Division Street and 4th Street SW. Productive green spaces like these enhance community connections by providing an opportunity for residents to come together

in the shared goal of garden cultivation, and can thereby generate civic pride. Access to healthy food is another benefit of investing in community gardens, and promotes nutrition and wellness.

FIGURE 15
COMMUNITY
GARDEN

Credit: Student team

Implementation:

Policies are labeled short-term, medium-term, or long-term to approximate their relative timeframe of implementation.

Goal 4: Develop a thriving, accessible, and inclusive downtown Auburn.

This goal includes strategies to connect the downtown area to adjacent neighborhoods by increasing access to amenities by all travel modes. Placemaking is also an essential part of cultivating a dynamic downtown experience. Small and sustainable projects can be used to celebrate Auburn's unique downtown character and make it more accessible and engaging for all residents.

Objective: Foster a safe, convenient, and pleasant downtown Auburn for all residents and visitors through physical connectivity projects, well-designed streetscapes, and a robust multi-modal circulation network linking neighborhoods and destinations within the downtown area.

Recommendation: Maintain and invest in streetscape improvements along downtown's existing automobile arterials, showcasing the area's multi-modal connectivity.

Recommendation: Develop and install a cohesive pedestrian and bicycle wayfinding system that highlights safe routes and important community destinations. Promoting access to these destinations builds both connectivity and a strong sense of place centered on the downtown experience.

Recommendation: Design and install a "greenway" network of marked bicycle and pedestrian paths on existing low car traffic streets in the GDPA. The greenway network could formalize existing pedestrian corridors (such as Auburn High School to Les Gove Park via F Street SE) and incorporate them into a new network. It is a way to increase the physical connectivity of these corridors and encourage recreation, physical activity, and wellness.

Objective: Develop, market, and celebrate downtown Auburn's advantages as a walkable urban center with a mix of amenities and businesses that allow residents to get to and from downtown and fulfill their daily needs without a car.

Recommendation: Coordinate with Sound Transit to fill vacant spaces in the Sounder parking garage with pop-up shops, cafes, or other storefronts that could activate the transit center area and encourage commuters to stay and shop downtown. The Innovation Partnership Zone Business Incubator, also located in this garage, may be a promising pipeline for identifying and developing new business concepts for these spaces. This strategy shows how economic and physical connectivity might intersect in mutual reinforcement.

Community Feedback:

A public meeting was held on June 8 to share our findings with residents. Seven attendees shared their thoughts with us by writing down ways that city values might be embodied in their communities and by indicating positive or negative feelings toward policy suggestions affiliated with each of the four subcomponents of the element. Appendix C summarizes these responses.

Credit: Student team

FIGURE 16 SNAPSHOTS FROM THE PUBLIC MEETING ON JUNE 8 AT CITY HALL

Sticky notes on the wall show resident comments on the institutionalization of city values, and residents are presented with material regarding the city values.

06 CONCLUSION

Ensuring the long-term integrity and equity of Auburn's predicted robust growth requires continued attention to issues of connectivity, placemaking, and social engagement. Connectivity brings people together, dismantling the physical, social, digital, economic, and cultural barriers that might otherwise divide a community. In this way, connectivity facilitates inclusive civic engagement and equitable placemaking. Some sections of Auburn, especially downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods, would benefit from a more coherent and vibrant sense of place to generate the dynamic energy that makes one's urban experience feel distinct, vital, and spatially grounded. Because centralizing investment in only a few neighborhoods can carry risks of residents feeling disenfranchised, equity of investment in places and the connections to those places is essential. Connectivity and placemaking might be strengthened in Auburn through four overarching planning goals that draw from Auburn's strengths in community services, neighborhood identity, transportation, and the downtown area. A drafted connectivity and placemaking element provides a hierarchy that the city may choose to follow in adopting our recommendations. Suggestions we believe are critical to enhanced placemaking and connectivity include: establishing neighborhood liaisons to mediate relationships

CONNECTIVITY BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER, DISMANTLING THE PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, DIGITAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL BARRIERS THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE DIVIDE A COMMUNITY

between residents and the city, distributing a package to welcome new residents to the community, disseminating information about transportation mode options, and creating improvement projects in downtown Auburn to support Auburn's heritage, recreation, and local economy. Civic engagement can also be enabled by greater engagement with Auburn's seven city values of wellness, character, economy, sustainability, service, environment, and celebration. These suggested interventions aim to supplement current planning efforts that are already underway in Auburn, with the goal of connecting people to the places that define Auburn's character and building social unity between residents, their neighbors, and their city. Social resilience and equity, particularly during periods of growth, will be enabled by finer-grained data collection and concerted efforts to identify leaders, communities, and groups to help build synergy and connectivity across the city. Bolstering connectivity will help make various and often disparate groups recognize their commonalities and differences. Placemaking efforts in the city can serve as critical platforms for inclusive interaction of diverse groups and cement Auburn's future as a place of dynamic urban vibrancy.

A APPENDIX

Suggested Community Events

Character

- Neighborhood Appreciation Day: Residents have picnics in their neighborhood during which the city introduces neighborhood liaisons and other community leaders.

- Potluck events in neighborhoods during which the city can distribute welcome packages; involve library and other organizations to provide books and entertainment.

- One Auburn Day: Block party in downtown Auburn where all residents gather to celebrate the city and its history. Consider temporary street closures to support food trucks and temporary retail.

Wellness

- Walk and Bike Week: Residents compete for prizes related to walking and biking often.

- Exercise Pop-Ups in parking lots with jump ropes, hopscotch, yoga, or Pilates.

- Health providers might set up booths to advertise health services and community ride services.

- Consider partnering with different organizations to distribute free wellness items like toothbrushes, pedometers, and bike helmets.

- Exercise competitions or relay races for children.

- 5K Walk/Run around Auburn.

- Auburn Hill Climb: Residents walk up the hills and celebrate at the top.

- Healthy food options at events, possibly including healthy cooking demonstrations.

- Community Gardening Days with shared planting, maintenance, and harvesting activities.

Service

- Visit City Government Day: Host tours and open the door to the offices of the mayor, planners, or city services.

- City officials might visit schools for Career Day events.

- Fire Department and Police Department could host an Open House.

- Write a Letter to Your Mayor Day in schools.

- Clean-Up Days to paint over graffiti, help elderly residents with yard work, or pick up trash along roads.

Economy

- Small Business Day: Participants receive a stamp in a passport for visiting different small businesses and restaurants with prizes, like gift cards to local businesses, given out for stamps.

- Pop-up craft shops and farmers markets in neighborhoods, downtown parking lots, or other open areas like alleys and parks.

- Imagine Downtown: Ask residents, what would you like to see in Auburn? A brainstorming exercise for kids and adults could generate potential creative uses for flexible spaces.

- City might host an event to encourage potential entrepreneurs to start businesses in Auburn.

Celebration

- Auburn Multicultural Festival: Events sponsored by different ethnic groups with food, music, and arts and crafts.

- Block party with live music and dancing.

- Opening celebrations for activated alleys.

- Arts and crafts events for children to celebrate Auburn and its communities.

Environment

- Neighborhood Clean-Up Day: Residents meet to remove trash and debris from local parks.

- Auburn Nature Walk: Residents walk along rivers or near forests alongside naturalists who can share information about native plant species.

- Nature-related arts and crafts.

- Environmental Hazards Event: Residents hear from local experts about how to prepare for environmental hazards and can take home earthquake kits or create evacuation plans with their neighborhood liaisons and communities.

Sustainability

- Recycle Day: Events and activities related to recycling.

- City might partner with organizations to give out reusable to-go mugs that prompt local coffee shops to give users a discount, with a potential contest to create a new mug design each year.

- Gardening Demonstration: Farmers and horticulturalists show residents how to grow their own food, take home seeds, and plant starters for their own gardens.

- Public Transit Day: Partner with transit agencies to provide discounted bus rides or incentives for pledging to use transit instead of driving alone.

- Flea Market: Residents can sell their gently used items or crafts to others at different locations across the city.

- Opportunities for civic engagement, such as participating in Junior City Council or serving on boards

- Events and parades

- List of city values with definitions

Commute Materials

- Map of Auburn with neighborhood-specific information

- Downtown Auburn driving and parking maps

- Parking rates

- Park-and-ride locations and schedules

- Carpool and vanpool resources and services

- Washington Department of Licensing (DOL) locations and vehicle emissions testing centers

- Discount coupons for local auto mechanic shops

- Two free transit tickets from King County Metro Transit, Sound Transit and/or Pierce Transit, alongside instructions on how to acquire an ORCA card and low-income discount options, possibly including a promotion with special rates for ORCA cards for individuals who sign up within two weeks of their new employment or housing in Auburn

- Bus and train routes with transit stop locations and schedules

- Bicycling map that includes routes, bike parking, bike lanes, and bicycle shops, including a promotion or special rates for tune-ups, bike accessories and services, and bicycle registration and safety information

- Calendar of transportation-related events, such as bicycle classes, transit rider meet-ups, or local walking group meet-ups

B APPENDIX

Welcome Package Materials

Materials could be translated into commonly spoken non-English languages in Auburn, such as Spanish, Vietnamese, and Russian, to reach a wide segment of the population. Materials could be distributed to real estate agents, utility providers, landlords, neighborhood groups, and HOAs to make sure that new residents receive welcome packages; online packages might also be available on Auburn's website. Consider providing these packages to businesses, institutions, and community organizations (including religious institutions, community centers, public and private schools, libraries, hospitals, and City Hall) to leverage the city's investment by combining resources with existing channels. This package could also be distributed to city employees during employee orientation in a show of support from the city to its staff, businesses, and community organizations that helps to reinforce the city's commitment to the value of service. Outreach might also occur at events such as the farmers market, art walk, large concerts at the White River Amphitheater, Petpalooza, or the Veteran's Day parade.

Community Outreach Materials

- Community Services Brochure

- Volunteer opportunities

C APPENDIX

Results from June 8 Meeting

GROUP	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Neighborhoods	Activate lots with events	4	-
	Civic engagement	5	-
	Distribute welcome package	3	1
	Host neighborhood events	4	-
	Establish neighborhood liaisons	6	-
	Support delivery of mobile services	5	-

GROUP	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Transportation	Collect data on travel behavior	7	-
	Provide transit information	6	-
	Engage Private sector	1	3
	Coordinate with Public agencies	4	-
Community Services	Display City values	4	-
	Distribute welcome package	4	-
	Reach out to different communities	4	-
	Strengthen network of service providers	3	-
	Coordinate events on City values	4	-
Downtown	Pop-up plaza in B Street lot	5	-
	Improve pedestrian experience	3	-
	Rename streets to reflect Auburn's heritage	4	1
	Implement greenways	4	-
	Redevelop B Street lot	5	1

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