

# AROUND AURORA



Shannon Davidson/The Aurora Sentinel

# IS WAL-MART REALLY THE TOP DRAW FOR THIS LAND

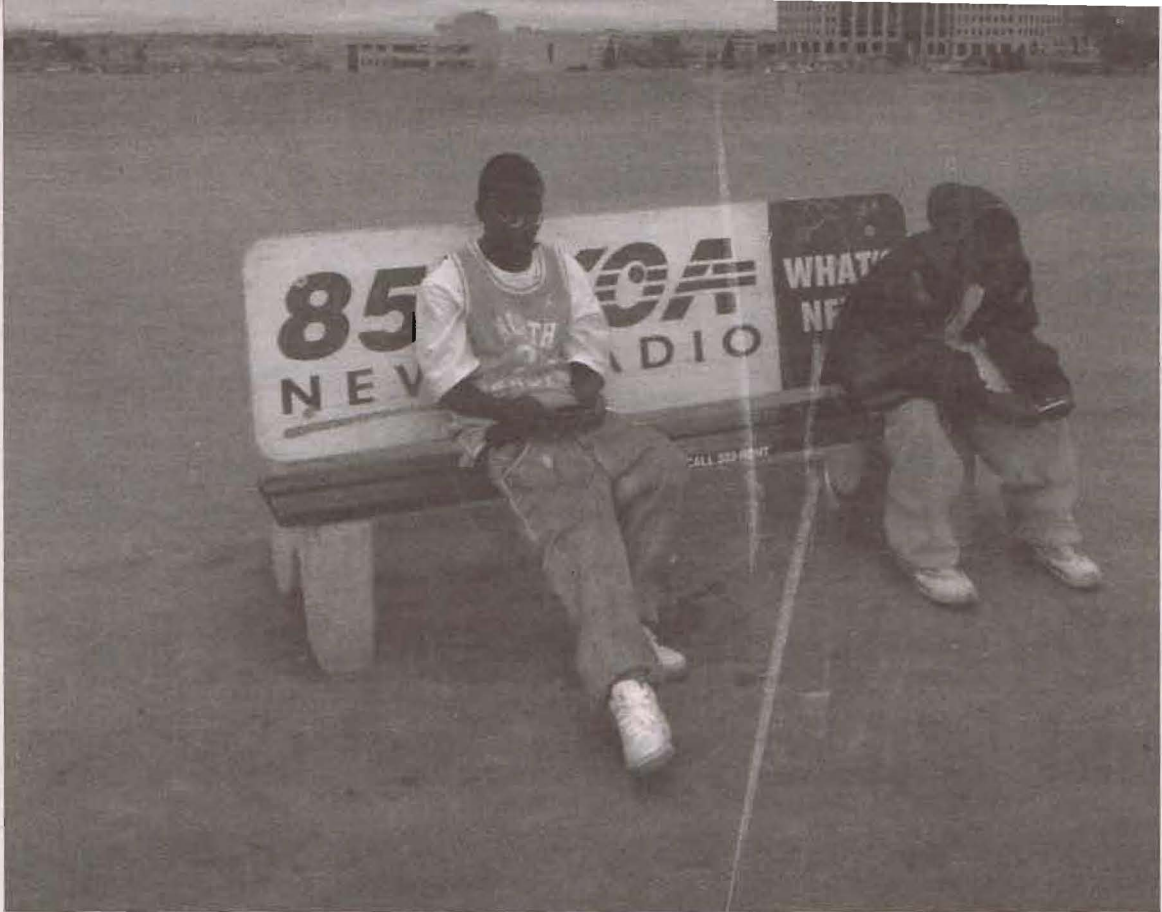


**I**n the center of the city, prairie dogs are the only inhabitants of a large plot of land that some local leaders are hoping to transform into Aurora's new downtown.

City officials and developers recently entered talks concerning the long-vacant piece of land located near Interstate 225 and East Alameda Avenue, east of the Town Center at Aurora mall.

By J.C. O'CONNELL  
THE AURORA SENTINEL

Local lawmakers want to transform the area, which is planned



Shannon Davidson/The Aurora Sentinel

Two men sit on a bench near an empty field just south of the Town Center of Aurora on Nov. 14. The field is under consideration to be developed into a multi-use mixed high-density residential area.

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The city is currently trying to develop an incentive package for the project.

"It probably is going to require some kind of incentive package ... I think the time is right. We have things happening with FasTracks, with RTD, everything that's going on," Hogan said.

RTD plans to extend light rail from the Nine Mile Station at Parker Road along I-225 and then swing away from the highway with a station planned at the location.

Hogan said he's had high hopes for the site since he first joined city council in 1979, but the land has expensive drainage issues and has gone through a variety of owners over the years that did not have the money or will to develop the area.

"It's been a history of different owners, competing visions: are we going to build a downtown or are we going to build something less than a downtown, and money, unfortunately that's what it always comes down to," Hogan said.

But the future seems brighter to Hogan these days.

Watkins said it's not surprising the area stayed vacant for so long, because it was difficult to access before the Alameda-Interstate 225 interchange opened in 2000.

"Early on there was kind of this vision for the land as an urban center much like what you might find in LoDo," said Mayor Ed Tauer.

He said city officials have had a close eye on the property for more than a decade and were disappointed in the 1990's when Prudential Real Estate proposed a plan for a high density urban center, only to sell the property once the company realized it wasn't a financially viable development.

From there, the city designed a set of guidelines that it wanted development on the land to follow, which was a "good start" according to Tauer, but also didn't have a lot of developer input.

"We've had a combination of poor access, poor visibly

Kevin Hawkins, a member of City Point Aurora LLC, which owns the property, said at an Oct. 18 meeting that a market study indicated the area was better suited for big-box stores such as a Wal-Mart Supercenter, but his company was willing to work with the city's vision.

"We're willing to modify our original approach to be in harmony with staff's approach, but we're going to need some help," Hawkins said.

The city has not agreed to any specific incentives but could offer the developers a variety of tax breaks in order to make the project a go, as they have done with commercial projects in the past.

Aurora recently helped spur development for The Gardens on Havana, a mix of retail and residential slated to replace Buckingham Square Mall, by agreeing not to collect the full taxable amount on the property, and the city also gave the Aurora Mall a financial break in order to help the out-dated center redevelop.

RTD recently held the first in a series of public meetings about extending light rail throughout Aurora.

"I hope they go fast. I want this in fast," said Walt Irvine, who lives less than half a mile from the center of the proposed development. "I like the whole idea."

"I do, too," said his wife, Char Irvine.

The couple said, as homeowners, they're very supportive of the light-rail project and all that it could bring to the area.

Ellen Belef, who also lives in that area of the city, said she hopes the development that springs up around the station will be high-density, pedestrian-friendly, and similar to the Stapleton development in Denver.

"That's something I look forward to happening there," Belef said.

RTD officials have said light rail will be built at street level through the area, resembling how light rail works in Denver's downtown.

"The fact that it's a designated location for a light rail station for FasTracks really changes everything," said Councilman Larry Beer, who represents the area.

"You're seeing these built around light rail stations ev-