



Image is fundamentally important to economic success. People form their first opinions of Auburn at its gateways; that is, at the entrances to the city and the various neighborhoods, especially downtown. Major corridors serve the same function, introducing people to the city and its cultural or commercial offerings.

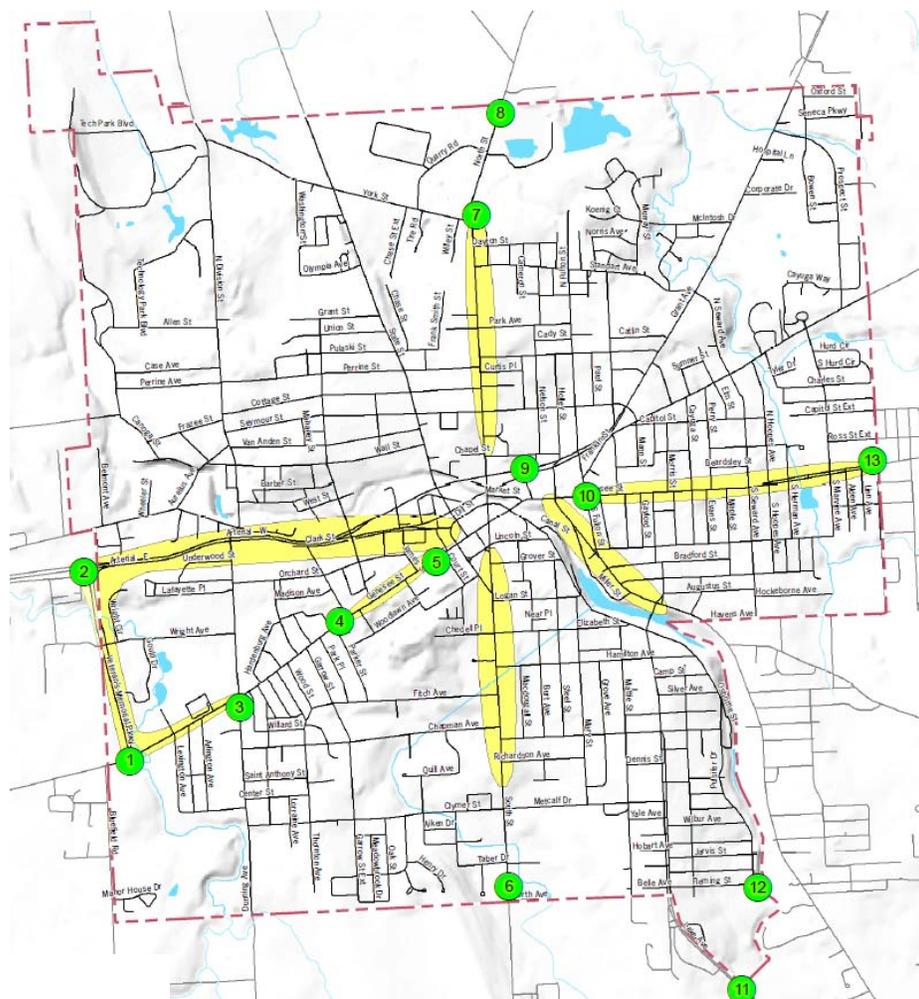
The degree to which a community takes care of this “first impression” can say a lot to visitors and potential investors about the values of residents and businesses. Gateways also provide a sense of arrival to a community for visitors as well as returning residents. Finally, gateways offer an opportunity to change traffic patterns, particularly to slow traffic that might be traveling at a high rate of speed outside of city limits.

There are primary gateways for Auburn from the north, south, east and west. From the north, visitors from the Thruway (I-90) are greeted by a series of unkempt signs and properties. From the south, the historic nature of the Harriet Tubman house hints at the municipality beyond. From the east, a high quality of life is on display along the landscaped divided boulevard of Genesee Street. Getting into the city from the west is more problematic as most travelers end up on the Routes 5 & 20 arterial.

Corridors serve the same promotional introduction to a community as well as offer businesses an alternative to downtown to put their best faces forward. Some prominent corridors in Auburn include North Street, from the city line into downtown, as well as Owasco Street, a main route to the lake.



The map below is an inventory of the important or potential gateways (green circles) and corridors (yellow areas) in Auburn. Each serves a specific purpose, as described. Some are the subject of strategies that follow, later in this chapter.



Gateways (green circles) and Corridors (Yellow areas)

1. Not a major gateway at the moment, but the Cayuga County Tourism Office has discussed signs to divert travelers from the arterial in order to get them to travel through the cultural and then commercial parts of Genesee Street.
2. This is the official and current gateway into Auburn from the west along the arterial. The gateway and the corridor beyond it are designed to speed people through Auburn rather than engage them.
3. Point three marks the end of the large-scale commercial corridor on the western end of Genesee Street. Businesses, especially on the northern



side of this stretch are more appropriate in a suburban than urban location.

4. Gateway 4, which has not really been defined yet, is the beginning of the Museum Corridor part of Genesee Street.
5. This is the end of the museum stretch of the street and a major gateway to downtown.
6. This is the southern access to the city. It quickly empties people into the historic district, which is the corridor just to the gateway's north.
7. This point is considered a major gateway point as it is here that some travelers heading south could turn right onto York Street and the industrial areas beyond. Or people could proceed south onto the North Street Corridor and head into downtown Auburn.
8. While this point is the official border of the city, it might not be considered an important gateway as Auburn does not gain its more urban appearance until point seven and the start of the North Street corridor. It is presently poorly marked and does not offer an overly positive impression of the community beyond.
9. This point is another place along the arterial where visitors from the east could decide to head into downtown. Such directional signage here and around the city is not helpful to finding Auburn's central business district.
10. This intersection is another potential gateway for travelers from the east to enter downtown.
11. Point 11 is a major gateway from the south and takes people by the high school complex. It is the major link to Owasco Lake.
12. This entrance to the city is another from the south. Less well-used, the road takes people along the Owasco River and through residential areas. It is not a major entrance to the city, but used often enough that it warrants attention.
13. A major gateway from the east and easily the most welcoming entrance into Auburn.

Finally, the Owasco Street corridor, which does not have a major gateway number on either end, is an important link for travelers to the lake. Many people, never intending to travel to downtown Auburn may use this route. It is therefore an important opportunity to impress people with the community and try to get some to stop and engage in commerce.



Goal 1. Create a more welcoming environment for visitors and improve the experience of arriving in Auburn.

Strategy G1 – Upgrade important gateways into the city.

A successful gateway into the city should indicate the transition from suburban to urban, and the entry into a specific “place.” When driving, there should be no confusion about when one has entered Auburn.

A good gateway will convey that Auburn is an attractive, vibrant place, and encourage people to enter and explore—a calling card of sorts. The signage in the vicinity—not just municipal signs, but business signs as well—should be in a style that communicates the character of the city, and should be—at the very least—clean, easily visible from the road, and readable.

To tackle every potential gateway and corridor would make this comprehensive plan overwhelming. Therefore only the most crucial get treatment in this plan – North Street, South Street and the western gateway. (The E. Genesee Street gateway is in fine shape.) Others should be considered and included in future updates to the plan.

A.) North Street

The welcoming gateway need not be right at the city line. For example, in this comprehensive plan, it is recommended that travelers from the north be “welcomed” at the intersection of North Street and York Street. It is here that drivers must decide whether to turn right to conduct business in the industrial park, or continue south towards downtown and the lake. It is also near here that efforts to bring a passenger train back to Auburn may result in a station.



Though not right at the border, this is one of the first images welcoming people to Auburn on North Street. Does it give the right impression?

Unfortunately, visitors are now greeted with the down and out commercial sign depicted to the left. As recommended elsewhere in the plan, such pole signs are not appropriate in an urban setting and should be phased out across the city. Instead, there is an opportunity to create welcoming and directional signage that fits in with the growing History's Hometown brand for the city or efforts to market the Technology Park as a place for green business.

One place to start might be the style of signage already found on Genesee Street at the eastern gateway. Then directional signage could be added and perhaps an information kiosk. As plans, recommended elsewhere, for universal WiFi move forward, this point could allow drivers who stop the opportunity to download an e-brochure to their computer or smart phone.

Signage and information are not the only components of a successful gateway. This is an opportunity to show off the urban character of Auburn ahead. The zoning in this area should be restructured to emphasize a walkable node along the North Street



corridor. The area around the intersection of York and North might be considered a gateway zone. As new buildings are erected, they should be brought up to the street. The goal is to create a walkable area where people who get out of their car – and have no intention or need to visit other parts of the city – have the opportunity to learn about Auburn and fulfill some basic food, retail or service needs.

B.) South Street

This gateway into the city, which occurs near the Harriet Tubman Home and leads into the historic district, needs a simple understated greeting that reflects the city's character as "History's Hometown." Once again, a sign similar to the eastern border on Genesee Street could be employed along with informational signage or a kiosk directing people to various historic sites and museums around the city as well as the downtown business district.

C.) Western entrance on the arterial

It is the recommendation of the comprehensive plan to alert drivers approaching from the west about the cultural and commercial opportunities along Genesee Street. Ultimately, it would be ideal to steer traffic from the arterial into downtown. Those in a hurry to pass through Auburn will continue to use the arterial, but for people who want to shop, eat or are curious about the city, the goal is to get them downtown.

This strategy is based upon the recommendations of a marketing study undertaken by the county tourism board. It found that people on the arterial missed the gems of Auburn – they drove through the city before they even realized they were in it. The study by the Randall Marketing Group recommended that signs point people to turn onto Veteran's Memorial Parkway going south. At the end of that road people could turn left and head east along Genesee Street, past the museums and into downtown.

Making this happen requires a careful study and plan be created for the western gateway. In addition to signage, there might be need for an interpretive kiosk or other information providing opportunity to ensure the right people make the turn onto Veteran's Memorial Parkway and then into downtown.

Strategy G2 – Upgrade gateway signs into downtown.

The sign pictured to the right is what's currently in place at the western entrance to downtown Auburn along Genesee Street. Clearly, it is not the most enticing gateway. It does not invite drivers or pedestrians to explore, nor does it communicate a vibrant, successful community where people want to visit and shop and where businesses will thrive.

Gateway signs need not be extensive. However, they should be welcoming, express the vibrancy and historic character beyond, and give the basic information that travelers might need.



Judging a book by its cover would make a visitor think that the pages behind this sign were pretty worn.



Goal 2. Develop a comprehensive system for directing people into and around Auburn.

Strategy G3 – Craft a wayfinding plan to get people around Auburn, especially downtown.

In discussions with the public and amongst the committee members, it became very clear that much about Auburn is hidden. Some examples:

- > Few signs on the Routes 5 & 20 arterial help a visitor find downtown Auburn or boast about what is available there or elsewhere.
- > Links between downtown and the surrounding museums and/or lodging establishments are not obvious.
- > Once in downtown the location of parking and different stores is not well marked.

This is an area in which downtowns need to think like a mall. The first thing a customer sees when entering a traditional shopping mall is a directory. People are willing to walk if they know that what they are looking for is at the end of their journey. Wayfinding in Auburn is particularly important because the river and the arterial present physical, visual and psychological barriers to both automobile and pedestrian traffic. Visual clues that a longer walk will be rewarded are missing.

As shown in the following examples, many communities have developed signs... some simple, some elaborate... to help drivers and pedestrians navigate their downtown areas. Signs can also convey the image of downtown, pointing people to various points of interest, be it the river, a theater, or even a parking lot. Signage can be a powerful marketing tool.



Wayfinding signage can help people figure out where to park or to shop or to eat. The photo at the left helps pedestrians find shops on side streets in Saratoga Springs, New York making it more likely they will explore side streets. On the right, in addition to navigation, a sign helps tourists understand the historic and economic character of downtown Gloucester, Massachusetts.





Such a comprehensive system in Auburn can also help reinforce the city's "History's Hometown" brand. Signs need not be identical, but should be recognizable as part of the theme and use the logo to enhance the history, arts and culture brand that is being developed for the city.

Developing a wayfinding signage system involves streets, attractions, or other features that should be highlighted, such as historic sites, downtown, shopping areas and parking lots. All signage, but especially wayfinding signs, offer an opportunity to craft or solidify a unified message that communicates the character of the community.

Strategy G4 – Coordinate signage with adjoining communities to move visitors to downtown Auburn and around the city.

Auburn does not exist in a vacuum, nor does its downtown. As noted in the Boosting Downtown chapter of the Plan, Auburn's central business district has a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding neighborhoods, with a continuous flow of people and commerce between the two. The relationship between Auburn and the surrounding suburban communities is similar. Strong suburbs need a healthy urban core to provide a steady flow of goods, people, jobs, cultural opportunities and services. Just because a person lives in the suburbs does not mean that he or she never crosses into the city. Consequently, it is important to consider the signs not just within Auburn, but also from neighboring towns into the city.

The county tourism office should work with the neighboring towns of Fleming, Owasco, Sennett, Throop, and Aurelius to determine appropriate gateway signage that could direct visitors to downtown Auburn and other sites around the city. At the same time, signs in the city could lead people to important points in the surrounding areas of the county including the lake, parks and the theater. This signage does not detract one from another, but adds to the greater whole by giving Finger Lakes visitors additional cultural and art-related options.



In Saratoga Springs, New York, even the parking lot signs reinforce the city's "Horses and History" brand.



This sign, attached to the downtown parking garage is a good start to a comprehensive wayfinding system – it displays both location and promotes city sights. Under a new program, the sign could be redesigned to emphasize the History's Hometown brand, and then placed in different locations around the city.



Goal 3. Improve corridors in and around Auburn.

Strategy G5 – Improve the travel corridors of Auburn.

Auburn's corridors are important approaches to the city that shape perceptions of the city as much as gateway points do. Primary corridors of Auburn include:

- > North Street
- > South Street
- > Veteran's Memorial Parkway
- > Arterial (East and West)
- > E. Genesee Street and Genesee Street
- > Lake Avenue and Owasco Street

E. Genesee Street is an example of a successful corridor into the city. The street feels almost like a boulevard, with its green space, traffic calming elements, and relatively dense residential feel. The progression to a walkable urban core is tangible.

The North Street Corridor has many attractive landmarks, but also has numerous places with suburban style development that do not fit with Auburn's urban character.



North Street, on the other hand, lacks these qualities. There is no perception of a vibrant city just around the corner. Much more commercial than the Genesee corridor, North Street does not invite pedestrian activity nor does it convey the best of Auburn. Using zoning and design guidelines, the city should implement the following changes to North Street and other corridors. While changes will not necessarily be immediate, as properties turn over, there will be gradual change to a better corridor.

- > *Create a build-to line.* By bringing building frontages up to the sidewalk rather than setting them back (as is customary in more suburban locations), this creates a unified pathway and designated pedestrian space where there is always something ahead to walk towards. Storefronts are all along the same plane, which is good for both pedestrians and shops.



- > *Relocate parking to the back of buildings.* Moving parking lots echoes the same philosophy as creating a build-to line: it creates a designated corridor for travel. Parking lots in front of a store lack visual interest and do not encourage people to walk by—curb cuts can further complicate this. Relocating parking lots so they are not the primary point of interest creates a more urban feel that encourages walking or bicycling over automobile use, and allows people to see the businesses more closely.
- > *Unify the sidewalk along the street.* When a sidewalk is present, it often appears willy-nilly—different paving styles here and there, different widths, varying degrees of maintenance or clearing in certain areas, and so on. Unifying both the materials and the maintenance of the sidewalk along the street will unify the corridor and make it feel like a true district, not an assemblage of haphazard landscape features. As sidewalks are replaced or installed, attention should be paid to the surrounding segments to ensure that they match up.
- > *Develop a landscape plan.* A unified landscape plan will further communicate the importance of the corridors into Auburn. It should comprehensively address plantings (trees, grass, and seasonal plantings), site furniture (such as benches, trash and/or recycling receptacles, sign posts), and lighting. A landscape plan need not be costly—many of these elements exist already but are haphazard. Putting them all under the same umbrella will help create an identity for the corridor and streamline maintenance. The City could hire a landscape architect consultant or utilize existing groups to take action, such as the Auburn Beautification Commission.

Strategy G6 – Use banners to identify different districts.

Banners are a relatively inexpensive, fast, and flexible way to designate special areas, including corridors, of the city, and take many forms. They should be used to identify downtown Auburn (as described in the Boosting Downtown chapter), the museum district, as well as many other areas. Along a corridor such as North Street, they could “escort” a traveler all the way into downtown.

Since banners are quick to produce and hang, they can easily be used to announce time-sensitive material, such as events. As noted in the Downtown chapter, banners should be used where aesthetically appropriate to promote Auburn-related events or updates, whether a sidewalk sale or a graduation announcement.

