

An Initiative to Re-Establish a Full-Service Grocery Store

in the Town of Aurora, North Carolina

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Executive Summary

The initiative to re-establish a grocery store in Aurora began shortly after the closure of the Town's last-existing grocery service in 2014. The closure of the previous grocery service in Aurora was largely due to the opening of a Walmart store in Grantsboro, North Carolina, approximately 16 miles away. This chain of events would result in the collapse of the grocery industry in Aurora, transforming the Town, surrounding Richland Township, and even southern half of Beaufort County into being classified as a 'Food Desert' by the United States Department of Agriculture. Public Engagement input reveals that many residents are prepared to support a re-established grocery service, often citing the challenges of traveling, along with inflation as reasons to bring a store back into the local area.

The purpose of this project has been to identify and document the current food situation in Aurora while discovering the feasibility of re-establishing a grocery service. This feasibility has been accompanied by input from the general public, and has focused on identifying suitable locations to re-establish a grocery store. The purpose of this project has also been to analyze the financial leakages in the area as a result of not having a full-service store, while also analyzing the costs associated with re-establishing one, and locating potential sources of funding required to do so. These tasks have been accomplished by determining the practicality of restoring the former grocery store site while also determining the efficiency of constructing a new storefront. Similarly, other solutions have been examined alongside potential sources of funding made available via grant opportunities. The ultimate goal and scope of this project has been to aid in attracting and incentivizing a grocer to return to the area.

This project was sponsored by Major General Kurt Ryan of the Aurora Leadership Council on behalf of the Town of Aurora and overseen by Mr. Merrill Flood, academic advisor, and instructor.

Community Profile



Image 1: The Fossil Museum of Aurora
Source: Credit to Creator



Figure 1: Beaufort County, North Carolina
Source: Town of Aurora

Location

Aurora, North Carolina is located in the southern part of Beaufort County and is bisected by the Pamlico River to the North. Aurora is located within the Richland Township, one of six within the County. The Township exists in an area of 168.5 square miles. The main land route to Aurora is NC Highway 33, which transverses the Town horizontally and acts as a southern boundary for the Downtown area. Most of Aurora sits approximately three feet above sea level, on average. The Town's jurisdiction exists within a little more than one square mile. The County seat is the Town of Washington, some 30 miles North West.

History

The land that would become present-day Aurora was once in close proximity to a Pomouik Native American settlement. The land was eventually owned by Christopher Gale, the first Chief Justice of the North Carolina colony. By 1880, the Town of Aurora was officially incorporated, and named after the Roman Goddess of dawn and the morning light. It is speculated that this name was chosen due to the sun rising in the East, and the Town being located in one of the Easternmost parts of the Continental United States. The area saw steady growth through the 1960s when the Texas Gulf Mine and Chemical plant facility was established for the purpose of mining phosphate, the area's most heavily exported resource. This phosphate would be shipped around the world for the purpose of creating fertilizer, food preservatives, cosmetics, and various other goods. In 1995 the Town's phosphate mines were officially taken under the jurisdiction of Nutrien, which at the time was the world's largest provider of crop inputs. Aurora maintains a fossil museum dedicated to the natural sciences, which remains a popular activity for tourists and school groups. The Town is also home to an annual 'Fish and Farm Festival' and 'Fossil Festival.'

Image 2: Aurora History Museum
Source: Credit to Creator



Demographics

Data from the 2020 US Census estimates that Aurora's population stood at approximately 450 people. 2021 estimates place this number past 455, with many fluctuations according to various sources, some even ranging up to 490 people in 2020. The Census Reporter estimates that the greater Richland Township's population is approximately 2,718 at present (2023). A slight majority of the Town's population is female. Approximately half of the population is working age, and approximately 22% of the population is retired or of retirement age.

Town of Aurora Population Pyramid (2020)

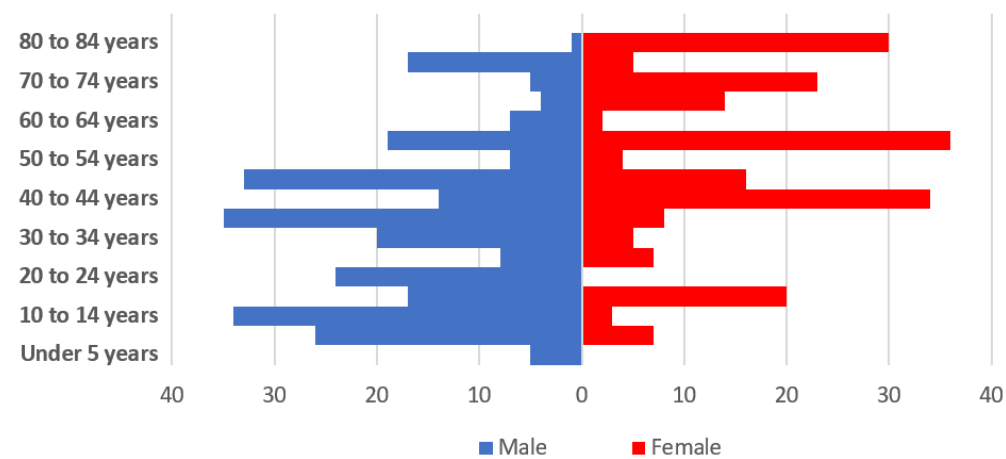


Figure 2: Population Pyramid

The median (average) annual household income for the Town of Aurora is approximately \$38,026, approximately \$10,000 less than the annual average household income of Beaufort County, which is likely inflated due to the more developed County seat of Washington, NC.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Figure 3: Median Household Income

Food Desertification

The History of a Grocery Store in Aurora

Some form of a full-service grocery store had existed in Aurora since the official establishment of the Town, until 2014 when the most recent store closed its doors after several changes in ownership and several decades of service to the community. The most recent full-service store to exist in Aurora was Piggly Wiggly, which operated at 305 North Fifth Street. The Piggly Wiggly provided not only the Town of Aurora with adequate provisions, but the entirety of the Richland Township, and even surrounding areas which depended on the service. At the time, the Piggly Wiggly provided access to fresh produce and even featured a butchery that further provided access to fresh meats on demand. As of April 2023, the former grocery store building still stands vacant, frozen in another time. Retrieving answers from a full investigation into the decline of Aurora's Piggly Wiggly may never be feasible, however, one chain of events may be reported as the chief underlying factor: The development of a Walmart in Grantsboro in the same year of 2014. The Town of Grantsboro is located approximately 16 miles south of Aurora in neighboring Pamlico County. In 2014, the estimated population of Grantsboro was 667, making Grantsboro comparable to Aurora in size. Why the town of Grantsboro was chosen for the development of a Walmart is not known, but what is known are the effects of this decision. It should also be noted that a Food Lion has existed in Grantsboro since 2015, and was therefore not a competitor to Aurora's Piggly Wiggly and regular customer base. The development of a Walmart location in Grantsboro is the likely factor that resulted in the shrinking of Aurora's regular customer base at Piggly Wiggly. Many Piggly Wiggly customers from the Richland Township and surrounding areas made the decision to drive to Grantsboro for all of their grocery needs, a decision which crippled the stability and future of Aurora's last grocery store. Ultimately, the Piggly Wiggly would close its doors for the last time no more than several months after the opening of the Grantsboro Walmart. In the same year, the Grantsboro Piggly Wiggly was also forced to close its doors after 50 years of community service.

drive more than 16 miles round trip to do so, with an average travel cost of \$10 to \$20 for this round trip. 95 percent of people will shop for groceries at least once a week, spending anywhere between \$400 and \$800 monthly, depending on household size.

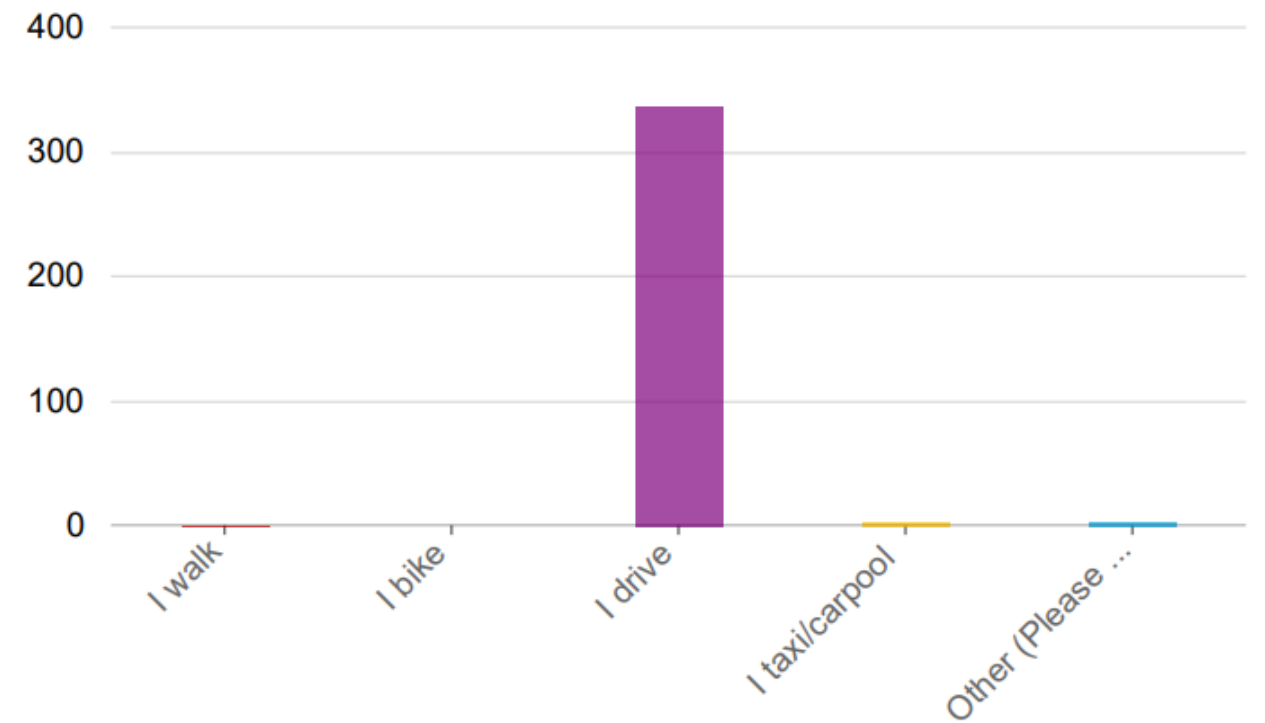
Approximately 80 percent of people feel that inflation spikes impact them directly when shopping for groceries, and 75 percent of those who reported concerns of inflation believe that having a grocery store closer to home would ease some of the impacts of inflation. Within the past six months, 95 percent of people have visited the Food Lion or Walmart in Grantsboro, Pamlico County to shop for groceries. If a full-service grocery store were to be re-established in Aurora, approximately 70 percent of people stated that they would visit often, and 65 percent stated that they would be most likely to purchase their groceries there more often than anywhere else.

Approximately 93 percent of people are likely to support a small chain grocery store, and 57 percent of people are likely to support something locally owned. On a scale of one to five, 66 percent of people gave the Richland Township a one for the area's ability to provide fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats. 99 percent of people would agree that having access to such things should be a vital priority for the town. 80 percent of people either agree or strongly agree that the local area is capable of supporting a grocery store, financially. A section of the survey was dedicated to open-commentary and free responses. Of the hundreds of comments received and reviewed, the summarized results are as follows:

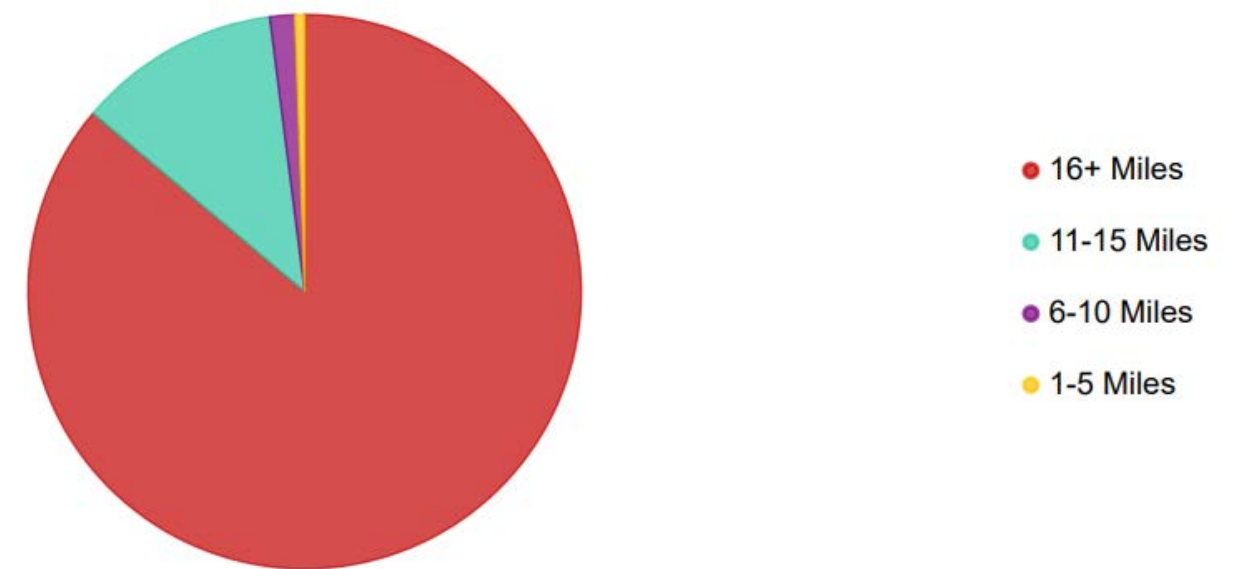
Overall, at least 90 percent of the population agrees; that access must be improved to fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and fresh meats. The same population is also deeply concerned about the elderly, and their ability to access this nutrition as at present, the only way to do so is to drive or be driven; something not always possible. These transportation concerns were further revealed when much of the general public stated their dissatisfaction for having to drive into other Counties to purchase groceries. The general public also recommended establishing a full-service pharmacy within a grocery store, largely targeted toward the elderly population, but with the benefit of all in mind. Other comments occasionally listed current inflation spikes as a concern, especially in regard to keeping a re-established grocery store operable.

Public engagement via this survey revealed that a strong support system exists in favor of re-establishing a full-service grocery store. The Town is eager to re-establish a grocer.

What form of transportation do you most often utilize to shop for groceries?



On average, approximately how far do you travel to shop for groceries, round trip?



Figures 5 & 6: Transportation Type and Distance Traveled
Source: Credit to Creator

Comments from the General Public, collected April 2023:
(Displayed Directly As Received)

Our township desperately needs a grocery store in Aurora. I would support it 100%. Ours closed in 2014 time frame.

Our town only has a Dollar General and Family Dollar that provide mostly high carbohydrate non perishable foods with a few frozen options and limited dairy. These options are not sustainable and do not provide balanced nutrition for the residents of the town. Additionally most of our towns residents fall below the poverty index and have limited resources to obtain the fresh food needed for adequate nutrition and health.

Our community consists of many elderly and many people who do not have access to transportation. We also have many with limited income. Having a grocery store will help so many...BUT... it must also provide competitive prices and good quality.

Please establish a grocery Store Aurora have suffered for years it's not fair to the local farmers to grow produce and sent it too other towns

Please do what you can to help us....

PLEASE bring better good to our community!

Please bring a store!!

Please 🙏 a grocery store is a needed now!

Eastern North Carolina has a high rate of diabetes, strokes and heart attacks. The Aurora area being a food desert does not provide the types of foods that promote healthy living. People need to be able to choose to be healthy. The choice becomes impossible when there is only Dollar General and Family Dollar to choose your family meals by way of can foods or boxed food. The area consist of elderly people and others who do not have a vehicle to travel 15-25 miles for groceries.

A grocery store makes a town feel like a community. When the grocery store closed the town evaporated

A grocery store is much needed here in Aurora my family will support it 100 percent

It's a shorter commute to Aurora for me than Chocowinity.

It would be beneficial to the community, especially seniors to have a grocery store in Aurora. We need one desperately.

It would be awesome to have a grocery store!

It would be a huge help to folks on a fixed income and I would support it

It would also be a good way to provide local people with jobs.

Imperative that a grocery store is located closer to Aurora especially with the aging population, distance to other grocery stores and inflation.

If it grocery store would be placed in Aurora, it would be good if a pharmacy was located inside.

I would support a locally-owned grocery store if it had quality food. A chain store usually has a good distribution system.

My concern is Aurora being forgotten.

I sure hope a Grocery Store is built in Aurora I'm Disabled and my Mom does the Driving she is 82 and her Health isn't good so we can't go sometimes cause it's so far for us to go now

I personally think that a grocery store is needed for the low income families that live in the community... is the store going to make hand over fist profits probably not.. but it's definitely needed to sustain the food need and urgency of the need for food in the town!!

I live walking distance to the old grocery store and wish we still had that one open and running. A grocery store in aurora would be so helpful. Giving job opportunities and easy access to shopping.

The Economic Gap

To fully understand the benefits of re-establishing a grocery store in Aurora, it would be most logical to actually start by understanding the detriments; what the Town has lost. A Retail Market Place Leakage study estimated by the East Carolina University Small Business Technology Development Center revealed a significant loss of financial opportunities in the Town of Aurora and the general Richland Township vicinity. The study uses data from 2017 and encapsulates a 4-mile radius around Downtown Aurora. The study revealed that the demand within the Grocery industry alone was approximately \$2,576,560, with the potential of \$8,543,063 due to the lack of any full-service grocery store. The difference is \$5,966,503 in lost potential or 'leakage' as this revenue is currently nonexistent. Note that this analysis includes the area's local markets as grocery stores and still produces a deficit:

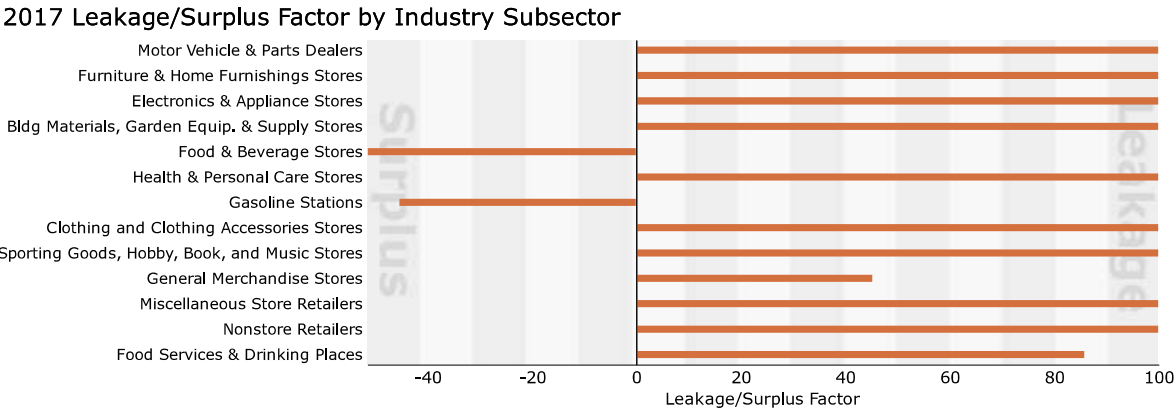
Figure 7: Economic Analysis

2017 Industry Group	NAICS	Demand (Retail Potential)	Supply (Retail Sales)	Retail Gap	Leakage/Surplus Factor	Number of Businesses
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	441	\$3,737,976	\$0	\$3,737,976	100.0	0
Automobile Dealers	4411	\$3,094,046	\$0	\$3,094,046	100.0	0
Other Motor Vehicle Dealers	4412	\$311,557	\$0	\$311,557	100.0	0
Auto Parts, Accessories & Tire Stores	4413	\$332,373	\$0	\$332,373	100.0	0
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	442	\$521,367	\$0	\$521,367	100.0	0
Furniture Stores	4421	\$319,597	\$0	\$319,597	100.0	0
Home Furnishings Stores	4422	\$201,770	\$0	\$201,770	100.0	0
Electronics & Appliance Stores	443	\$406,215	\$0	\$406,215	100.0	0
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	444	\$1,179,059	\$0	\$1,179,059	100.0	0
Bldg Material & Supplies Dealers	4441	\$1,098,388	\$0	\$1,098,388	100.0	0
Lawn & Garden Equip & Supply Stores	4442	\$80,672	\$0	\$80,672	100.0	0
Food & Beverage Stores	445	\$2,753,956	\$8,629,746	-\$5,875,790	-51.6	3
Grocery Stores	4451	\$2,576,560	\$8,543,063	-\$5,966,503	-53.7	2
Specialty Food Stores	4452	\$99,906	\$0	\$99,906	100.0	0
Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores	4453	\$77,490	\$86,683	-\$9,193	-5.6	1
Health & Personal Care Stores	446,4461	\$1,050,769	\$0	\$1,050,769	100.0	0
Gasoline Stations	447,4471	\$1,850,763	\$4,943,434	-\$3,092,671	-45.5	1
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	448	\$619,905	\$0	\$619,905	100.0	0
Clothing Stores	4481	\$419,400	\$0	\$419,400	100.0	0
Shoe Stores	4482	\$103,714	\$0	\$103,714	100.0	0
Jewelry, Luggage & Leather Goods Stores	4483	\$96,791	\$0	\$96,791	100.0	0
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	451	\$376,408	\$0	\$376,408	100.0	0
Sporting Goods/Hobby/Musical Instr Stores	4511	\$322,007	\$0	\$322,007	100.0	0
Book, Periodical & Music Stores	4512	\$54,401	\$0	\$54,401	100.0	0
General Merchandise Stores	452	\$2,467,556	\$933,755	\$1,533,801	45.1	2
Department Stores Excluding Leased Depts.	4521	\$1,727,035	\$0	\$1,727,035	100.0	0
Other General Merchandise Stores	4529	\$740,521	\$933,755	-\$193,234	-11.5	2
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	453	\$766,967	\$0	\$766,967	100.0	0
Florists	4531	\$20,162	\$0	\$20,162	100.0	0
Office Supplies, Stationery & Gift Stores	4532	\$127,805	\$0	\$127,805	100.0	0
Used Merchandise Stores	4533	\$64,618	\$0	\$64,618	100.0	0
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	4539	\$554,381	\$0	\$554,381	100.0	0
Nonstore Retailers	454	\$282,234	\$0	\$282,234	100.0	0
Electronic Shopping & Mail-Order Houses	4541	\$181,311	\$0	\$181,311	100.0	0
Vending Machine Operators	4542	\$14,788	\$0	\$14,788	100.0	0
Direct Selling Establishments	4543	\$86,135	\$0	\$86,135	100.0	0
Food Services & Drinking Places	722	\$1,446,628	\$109,925	\$1,336,703	85.9	1
Special Food Services	7223	\$13,732	\$0	\$13,732	100.0	0
Drinking Places - Alcoholic Beverages	7224	\$82,177	\$0	\$82,177	100.0	0
Restaurants/Other Eating Places	7225	\$1,350,719	\$109,925	\$1,240,794	84.9	1

Data Note: Supply (retail sales) estimates sales to consumers by establishments. Sales to businesses are excluded. Demand (retail potential) estimates the expected amount spent by consumers at retail establishments. Supply and demand estimates are in current dollars. The Leakage/Surplus Factor presents a snapshot of retail opportunity. This is a measure of the relationship between supply and demand that ranges from +100 (total leakage) to -100 (total surplus). A positive value represents a total of retail opportunity outside the trade area. A negative value represents a surplus of retail sales, a market where customers are drawn to from outside the trade area.

The same analysis also highlights the leakage in gasoline stations, another missing component from the Town at the time, and one just as essential to Aurora's survival as access to food. These industries have a much greater possibility for revenue in the area than investors may initially believe.

Figure 8: Economic Analysis 2



A previous gap analysis was reviewed from 2016, a Snapshot Study of the Aurora Market. This study was conducted through the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, using information provided by the State Department of Commerce and ESRI. This study focuses on retail gaps based on households, and also provides an insight into how the retail needs of Aurora's residents were being met in 2016. The most significant discovery resulting from this study would be the approximate 1.5 million dollars that have 'leaked' from the area every year due to retail gaps.

Figure 9: Economic Analysis 3

Radius Around Aurora	1 Mile	3 Mile	5 Mile
2016 Population	594	1,185	1,960
2016 Households	272	504	814
2016 Median Household Income	\$43,911	\$45,492	\$46,331
2016 Average Household Income	\$51,894	\$52,804	\$53,072
2016 Per Capita Income	\$23,660	\$23,264	\$22,900

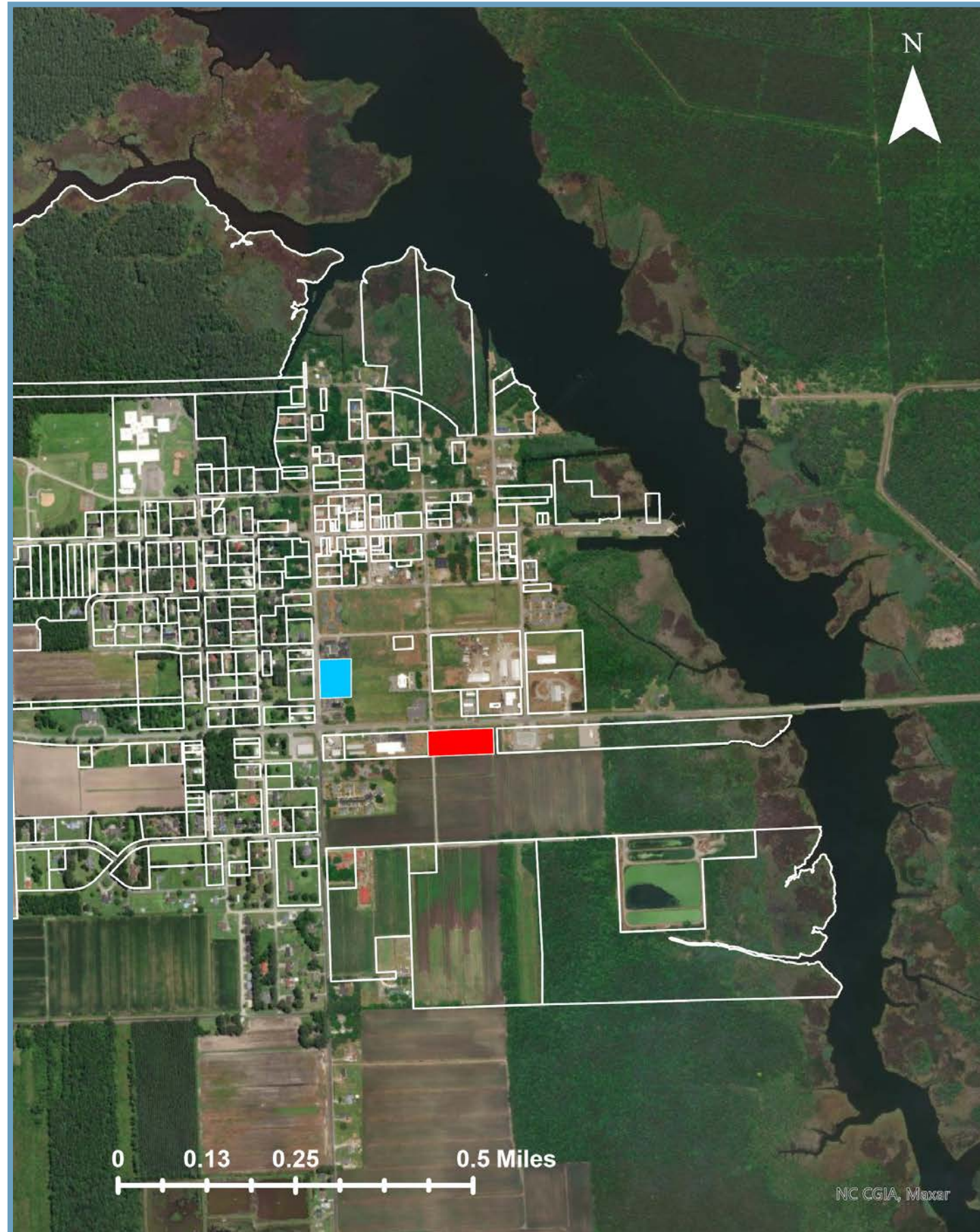
Industry	Leakage in Dollars	*Capture Rate 20%	Number of Businesses
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	4,815,735	963,147	0
General Merchandise Stores	2,162,940	432,588	2
Food Services and Drinking Places	1,520,642	304,128	2
Health and Personal Care Stores	1,282,222	256,444	0
Electronics and Appliance Stores	790,847	158,169	0
Total	10,572,386	2,114,476	

Radius	Demand/Potential	Supply/Sales	Retail Gap (surplus in red)
1 Mile Radius, 272 Households	\$686,528	\$0	\$686,528
3 Mile Radius, 504 Households	\$1,272,096	\$0	\$1,272,096
5 Mile Radius, 814 Households	\$2,054,536	\$0	\$2,054,536

One major task that must be achieved to attract a brick-and-mortar grocer back to Aurora is to determine the location of this storefront. While other innovative options for a grocer do exist, the following describes the estimated requirements and approaches determined to be necessary in the re-establishment of a storefront.

The first option is to determine the status of the existing grocery building, and estimate the costs and feasibility of returning the site to being fully operable. This option will be known as the 'Love It' approach.

The second option is to determine a possible location for constructing a brand-new storefront. While other potential construction sites were considered and identified by their parcels on GIS, efforts were focused on one candidate location for a variety of appealing reasons, and will be discussed further. This option will be known as the 'List It' approach.



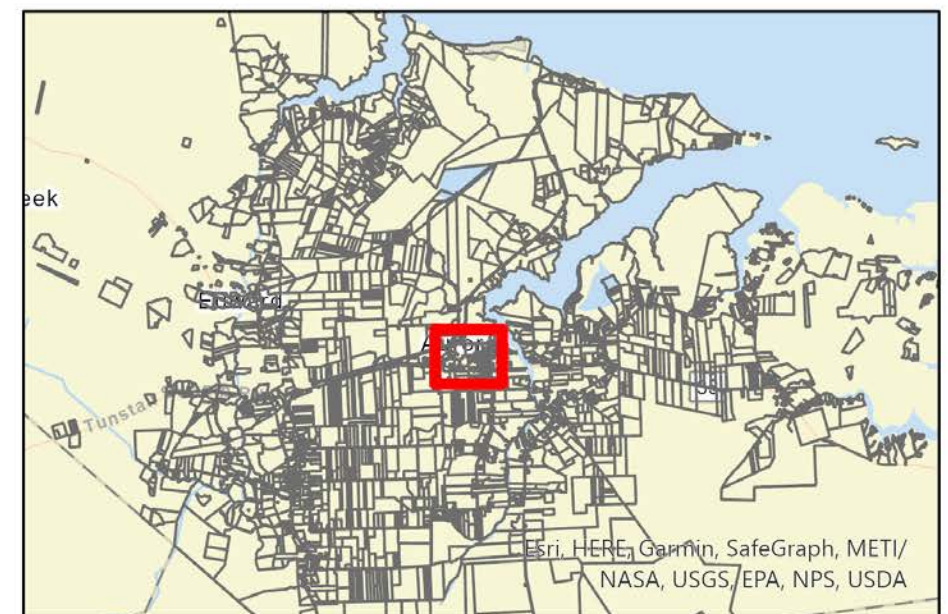
Focus Area: Vacant Grocer Building Versus Viable Future Development Site

Map by Mason Mattox

April 2023

Map Legend

- Now Vacant Grocer Building
- Currently Vacant Lot Suitable for Development
- Aurora Parcels



Love It

Or List It

The Love It Approach

This approach targets restoring the former grocery site to being fully operational once again. The now-vacant grocery building is located at 305 North Fifth Street, just south of the Downtown area and directly north of NC-33. The building of 24,000 square feet was constructed in 1976 and has a 2023 market value of \$243,607. The land value of the parcel is \$50,160, making the combined value \$293,767. The building has changed hands and companies several times since its original opening, but most recently operated as a Piggly Wiggly, being referred to by locals as ‘The Fig.’ The property is presently owned by the same owner of the Piggly Wiggly.

The interior of the store appears to be in a dilapidated state, and the structural integrity of the building may indeed be questionable without further investigation. If the building is to be restored, it must first be cleared and made suitable for repairs as necessary. Flooring costs alone can easily reach hundreds of thousands of dollars unless the building utilizes a concrete or epoxied floor. With the assistance of licensed contracting services, the following is an initial estimate of the costs associated with renovating, and the bare minimums required to bring the building up to code. Disclaimer: these costs have been estimated without entering the premises of the existing structure, and can only be approximations that utilize estimations and the knowledge that was provided.

Interior Clearing and ‘Gutting’	\$15,000
Construction Materials	\$70,000
Labor Costs	\$50,000
HVAC	\$100,000
Electrical Wiring & Rewiring	\$100,000
Plumbing	\$10,000-15,000
Total	\$345,000-350,000

Generous renovation costs already exceed the worth of the structure. These costs certainly do not include any costs associated with purchasing the fixtures necessary for a grocery store.

The List It Approach

Many Parcels were examined for the ‘list it’ approach in an effort to locate a suitable area for the construction of a new grocery store building. These parcels were examined primarily by their proximity to the Downtown area, and then by their acreage. If both of these categories were found to be satisfactory, ownership of the parcel was considered, and finally, its general suitability for the purpose of a grocery store. In the end, only one such parcel was found to be highly favorable due to its size, suitability, and proximity to the Industrial Park.

This parcel is located just south of NC Highway 33 and is adjacent to the Industrial Park. The parcel measures 2.14 acres and has a 2023 land value of \$15,873. The lot is currently vacant and is also next door to the Town’s fire station. The lot has electricity, a paved right-of-way, and the ability to connect to public sewer and public water.

The following is an incomplete list of cost factors associated with constructing a smaller grocery store than the building which already exists. The approximate size of this storefront would be approximately 12,000-14,000 square feet. Following the purchase of land, the steps required to create a commercial building require site plans, engineering, and possibly zoning as well. From this point, costs can be broken down into three categories: building construction costs, grocery store fixture costs, and regular operational expenses associated with inventory, staff, utilities, etc. All of these added together usually cost upwards of \$1,000,000.

Image 3: The Existing Storefront (Photo taken from Right of Way)
Credit to Creator



Image 4: The Industrial Park
Credit to Creator



Neither Love It Nor List It

(Through The Meantime)

One notable alternative option to a brick-and-mortar grocery store should also be presented as a potential short-term (or long-term) solution to the food desert issue facing the Richland Township. This solution utilizes mobile grocery stores: services that use vehicles such as buses to bring fresh produce to areas in need.

One such example of this is the nonprofit arm of Ripe Revival called Ripe for Revival. This nonprofit seeks to provide communities with the ability to shop for fresh groceries when required. Their mission statement is to: “Revive communities through food.” As of March 2023, Ripe for Revival offers a Mobile Market program that maintains 15 consistent sites each week, with a total of 75 sites across Eastern North Carolina. The program also seeks to purchase from local farmers when possible in an effort to keep the costs of produce affordable.

Representatives from the program stated that Aurora would need to raise approximately \$5,000 to cover the costs of initial visits, as \$1,000 pays for a two-hour visit. The ultimate goal would be to have a regularly scheduled return of the mobile market that is self-sustainable in terms of revenue generated from localized shoppers. Options also exist within the program for those of lower income that are unable to afford the basic prices of fresh produce.



Incentives for Investment

Adjacent to the proposed development site mentioned previously is an area that will eventually become Aurora's Industrial Park Complex. This park is owned by the Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) which seeks to promote economic regeneration in the area. Aurora's Industrial Park currently exists on 50-51 acres of land that have been set aside for heavier commercial and industrial use.

According to the Town's strategic plan, the purpose of this park is to: “Boost economic development, Increase new and existing job growth to Aurora and Richland Township, to provide a safe, attractive work environment for businesses, to host offices, educational facilities, laydown yards, fabricating and repair facilities in support of Regional business activity.” All of this is being targeted toward the various industries which support Nutrien's phosphate operations. It should be noted that the phosphate industry in Aurora is one of the area's largest employers, and without an operating grocery store, employees often find themselves at an even greater disadvantage.

The Industrial Park recently received a grant in April of 2023 for \$500,000 to build infrastructure in the area. The grant comes from the Gold Leaf Foundation, an organization native to North Carolina that specializes in economic revival. Potential grocers should note that the general area is alive and well, acquiring more support each day. The option to construct a grocery store next to the Industrial Park would not simply be wishful, but necessary.

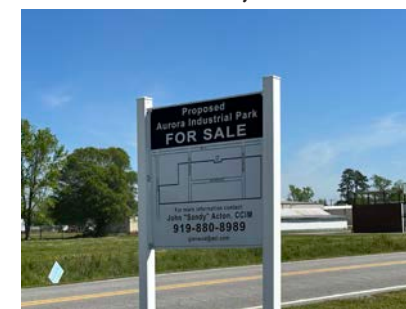


Image 5: For Sale Sign, The Industrial Park
Credit to Creator



Image 6: Nutrien Sign
Credit to Creator

Potential Funding Sources

Building Reuse Grants. These grants exist through North Carolina State programs which provide financial assistance required to support the renovations and rehabilitation of vacant or underutilized commercial spaces that are at least 20 years of age. This provides up to \$500,000 per building. Code compliance, renovations, and energy efficiency are all criteria.

Community Development Block Grants. This program exists at the Federal level and provides funding to local governments for a wide range of activities. In the case of Aurora, CDBGs can be used for infrastructure improvements and economic development initiatives. This program exists through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Healthy Foods Financing Initiative. This program exists at the Federal level and provides financing to support the expansion of grocery stores, farmer's markets, and other food retail outlets in designated food deserts. This program exists through the Department of Agriculture, the same department which designates food deserts.

Gold Leaf Foundation Grants. The Golden Leaf Foundation is a private nonprofit organization that provides grants for economic development initiatives in rural North Carolina. The foundation specifically targets underserved areas by funding community revitalization initiatives and the creation of new jobs.

Nutrien Community Investment Grants. Nutrien states that it supports the communities in which it operates. This investment program supports initiatives directly related to food security and environmental sustainability. When Nutrien's workforce in Aurora benefits, the company does as well.

The Downtown Redevelopment Fund. This program exists at the State level and provides funding for all of North Carolina, making it highly competitive. The program exists through the Department of Commerce and provides up to \$500,000 per project. Infrastructure improvements and renovations are large criteria.

The Downtown Revitalization Fund. This program exists at the State level and provides funding through the Department of Commerce, providing up to \$10,000 per project. This program could be used to cover costs associated with starting a mobile food market in Aurora.

Moving Forward

After much careful evaluation, the following details a list of recommendations in an order appropriate for their execution, based on importance.

Contact Nutrien (and other Town stakeholders) in an effort to raise approximately \$5,000. Such funding would cover several initial visits of a Mobile Market operating through Ripe for Revival. If these initial visits from the mobile market prove to be self-sufficient, continue.

Determine the structural state of the former grocery store building. If the 'bones' of the building prove to be intact, continue.

Determine the exact costs associated with renovating the existing space and the costs associated with building a new store location with a smaller footprint.

Apply for the grants listed and described in this project to create a grocery store space, without fixtures.

Contact potential grocery store investors (most likely from smaller local chains) and discuss the costs required to install fixtures and create a 'turn-key' space.

Ensure that at all stages of this process, the Town remains committed to providing assistance when appropriate, and engaged throughout these efforts, alongside the general public.

In closing, the Town of Aurora indeed has the ability to re-establish a grocery store in the area in the near future. Doing so would not only exist for the benefit of those living within an immediate distance, but would also serve the greater Richland Township, and even the southern part of Beaufort County. Aurora being designated as a food desert by the USDA will only serve to benefit the area in terms of urgently justifying several grant opportunities. In the meantime, the Town must focus on the intermediate steps required to re-establish this service, and should not bypass the option of utilizing a mobile grocery store, as this option is highly affordable. The ultimate success of a grocer will be dependent upon Aurora's population, which has eagerly awaited the return of a full-service store for many years.

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