

# Auburn, Illinois



**Concept Plans for City Entrances  
and other Community Enhancements**

# **Small Town Roadway Character Pilot Project**

**November 2017**

This report is the result of the *Small Town Roadway Character Pilot Project*, an initiative of the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) to assist small towns in Sangamon County in formulating ways to enhance their image and community recognition.

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## ***Small Town Roadway Character Pilot Project***

### **Introduction to the Project**

This report is the result of the *Small Town Roadway Character Pilot Project*, an initiative of the Springfield and Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) to assist small towns in Sangamon County in formulating ways to enhance their image and community recognition. Because of size, small towns often have difficulty in establishing identities and attractive characteristics that can promote community pride and encourage visitors to tour local points of interest, attend community events and patronize businesses. Visitors' involvement with communities can potentially lead to interest in making small towns their homes and places of employment as well.

### **Small Towns in Sangamon County**

Scattered throughout Sangamon County are some two dozen towns with populations of 5,000 or fewer, most with origins in the early to mid-1800s. Settlers of the Sangamo Country, as it was known, found home sites near waterways where woodlands met open prairies. Rivers provided water and a means of transportation and the forest trees were used for building, cooking and heating in the winter. Some early homesteads attracted others and grew into towns as a result of favorable natural conditions or successful commercial ventures.

Beginning in the 1860s, railroad development greatly benefitted the towns that were fortunate to be located along the lines. Railroads provided convenient shipping of local products to outside markets and imported goods for townspeople to purchase. As time went by, additional towns were established along rail lines, however, communities that had been bypassed tended to decline or disappear.

The twentieth century development of high-speed highways and the interstate system took a toll on small towns. Highways bypassed communities leaving them without through-traffic and seemingly with little to attract motorists to exit the highways and explore their communities. Today, many small communities struggle to maintain their viability and prospects for the future.

This project is an effort to assist small towns in Sangamon County to overcome difficulties faced by contemporary conditions and to promote pride and optimism for their future.

### **Four Pilot Study Towns**

Four Sangamon County small towns are involved in the study. Three towns - Auburn, Riverton and Dawson – are interested in improving their community entrances to entice visitors to explore their communities. The fourth town, Illiopolis, wants to improve their downtown area to create a more attractive environment for current and new businesses.

The study involves developing improvement plans to address the needs that each town identified. In addition, the plans are meant to be models, or templates, that can be adapted for other towns in Sangamon County.

A further objective of this study was to develop enhancement plans that could visually unify towns to create a recognizable image of "A Sangamon County Small Town." To accomplish this goal, several types of community improvements were devised: Downtown Improvements, Entrance "Community Pride" Signs, Highway and Street Sign Enhancements, Wayfinding Signs, Community Welcome Stations, Tree and Flower Planting Programs and Silo Embellishments. Towns may adopt one or more of these enhancement concepts and phasing in the improvements over a period of time that suits each community.



# City of Auburn, IL

An initial meeting was held with City Office Manager Kristy Ponsler at the Auburn City Hall on July 25, 2017, to kick-off the project. The overall parameters of the study, its purpose and anticipated results were reviewed as described in the introduction to this report. Discussion then turned to the city's objectives and what they envision as possible community improvements.

Auburn selected the category of *Arrival Character Areas* as their particular need and interest. The City's goal is to create a welcoming entrance to town for residents and visitors.

Ms. Ponsler explained that both IL Route 4 running north-south on the west side of town and IL Route 104 running east-west on the south side of town are heavily traveled by motorists to and from Springfield and other surrounding communities. Many of these people could become visitors to Auburn if they knew the opportuni-

ties available, especially downtown. As it is now, the lack of signage and features indicating the quality and character of the community results in motorists driving by Auburn, not stopping to explore.

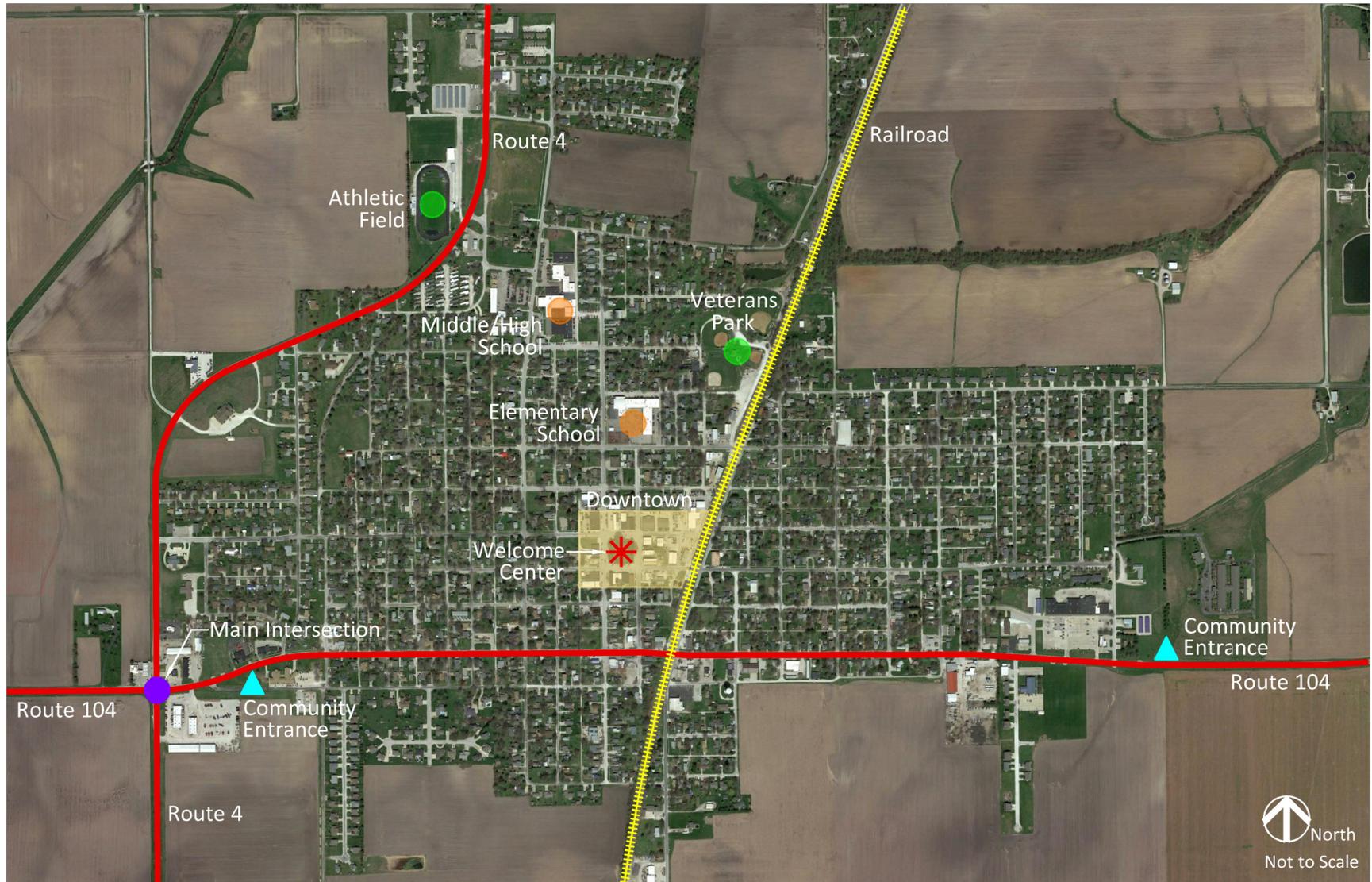
Auburn's downtown square is dominated by a historic two-level bandstand and surrounding lawns. Shops, eateries and other businesses as well as City Hall and community services surround the square, many occupying historic buildings. Stately homes and churches spread beyond and through the community. Community events and seasonal celebrations, sponsored by the city and business organizations, take place downtown.

At a City Council meeting on September 5, preliminary ideas were presented and discussed. Comments were noted and the following recommendations were developed.



# City of Auburn, IL

## Map of Community Features





*Auburn City Hall and Library*



*Entrance to City, Route 4 southbound*



*Historic Bandstand on the Square*



*Entrance to City, Route 4 northbound*



*Commercial Buildings on the east side of Square*



*Entrance to City, Route 104 west bound*

## ENTRANCE “COMMUNITY PRIDE” SIGN

*Distinctive signs at community entrances identify a town and also make a strong visual statement about the character of the community. Other signs within the community, can reinforce the identity and character and provide information useful to both village residents and the public.*

As a bold statement of the city’s identity, a site along Route 104 could be improved with a large sign in an attractive setting. An optimum location for this feature is the triangular open space located on the south side of Route 104, just east of the intersection of Van Buren Street. This parcel is owned by the adjacent church but might be available for lease or purchase for such a community project.

A Community Pride sign would be positioned back from the street for motorists to see from both the east and west on Route 104. The sign could include an electronic panel—possibly relocated from the City’s east entrance—and would include the Auburn city name and community web site in font styles and sizes to be easily readable at a distance in a moving vehicle. During evening hours, the sign would be lighted with power from electric service or solar panels.

The site would be improved with turf, flowers and trees. Three flag poles would provide a striking vertical feature and, with flags flying, would provide movement, color and a patriotic element. Signs or symbols for community organizations and churches could be

### Site Plan: “Community Pride” Sign





# HIGHWAY CITY SIGNS and STREET NAME SIGNS

## HIGHWAY CITY SIGNS

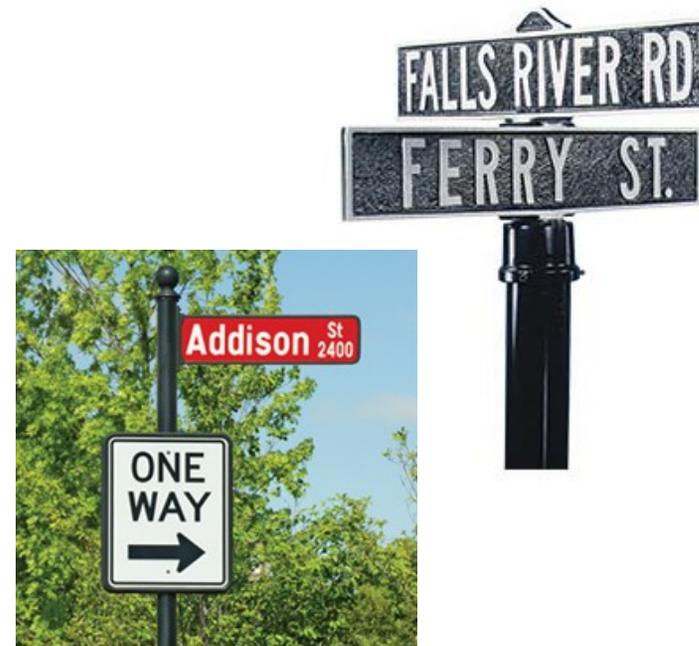
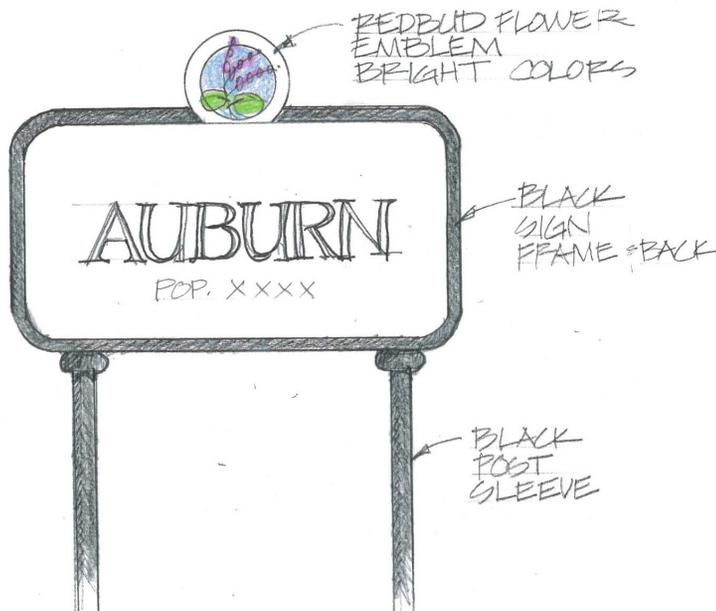
Developing recognition and distinction can start with the standard city and population signs along local highways. Standard highway signs for Auburn are now located along state Route 104 and Route 4 near the entrances to the city. A sign embellishment program could begin with the street signs along IL Route 104 and Route 4 where they are visible to a great number of motorists. Signs within the city could be embellished at future times.

Although highway signs must comply with regulations of the IL Department of Transportation, they can be embellished to become part of an overall community recognition program. Sign panels can be backed and attractively framed to improve their visibility and appear-

ance. The posts can be covered with a sleeve to provide more refinement. To further identify the community, a city symbol can be applied to the sign.

## STREET NAME SIGNS

Street name signs can be enhanced in much the same way as the highway name signs. Frames can be installed around sign panels, posts can be painted, sleeved or replaced with decorative posts and community emblems can be added. Enhancements could begin with the signs along the most-traveled streets Route 104 and Route 4. Street signs within the village could be addressed in the future, perhaps as a phased improvement program.



# DIRECTIONAL WAYFINDING SIGNS

To aid residents and visitors in navigating around town and finding points of interest, easy to spot and read directional street signs are effective. Signs should visually stand-out from traffic and commercial signs typically found in communities. Signs should direct motorists along reasonably direct routes while taking advantage of scenic streets or landmark locations where feasible. Destinations should be “ganged” on sign panels where possible to minimize the number of signs required.

The optimum locations for a ganged directional sign along Route 104, are east and west of 5th Street leading north to the west side of the downtown square. Wayfinding signs in these locations would have Business District, Historic Bandstand, City Hall and Library ganged on a single sign. As routes diverged, signs would be provided to point the way. Directional signs could also point the way to parks, schools and other points of interest.



## COMMUNITY WELCOME STATION

The historic Town Square could be developed as a Community Welcome Station. Visitors would be directed here to learn more about the community, its history, current events and future plans. Information about the city and upcoming events could be displayed at a kiosk. City maps or brochures might be available or QR codes set to provide information through mobile devices. Routes for driving, bicycling or walking could be offered.

The Town Square already has vehicular parking around the perimeter, some benches and other features. Additional improvements would make the area even more attractive and useable. A gathering and sitting area, picnic tables and additional benches, and bicycle parking could be added. A drinking fountain for people and pets and directions to nearby public restrooms would be useful. The area should be kept clean and well maintained to best represent the character of the community.



# TREE AND FLOWER PLANTING PROGRAM

A tree and flower planting program could be initiated in Auburn. Redbud trees in particular would be promoted since they were selected years ago as the city tree species. Tree planting could be contracted out or managed within the community. Trees and pots of flowers might be purchased in quantity and sold or given to city residents and businesses. Assistance with properly locating and planting the trees would be beneficial. Civic organizations, scout troops or other volunteers might be tapped for service.

Tree species listed below are generally suited to the central Illinois environment. In selecting a tree for an exact location, site conditions should be considered including soils, moisture, sun and shade and exposure to salt spray or chemical use. The visual qualities of each species including size, texture, flowering, etc. are equally as important in making plant selections.

## Shade Trees for Streets and Parking Lots

Acer miyabei—Miyabe Maple  
Acer saccharum - Sugar Maple  
Acer rubrum – Red Maple  
Acer x fremanii – Freeman Maple  
Taxodium distichum - Bald Cypress  
Carpinus betulus – European Hornbeam  
Celtis occidentalis – American Hackberry  
Ginko biloba – Ginko  
Gleditsia triacanthos inermis – Thornless Honeylocust  
Nyssa sylvatica - Black Tupelo  
Tilia Americana - American Linden  
(Redmond or Sentry)  
Tilia tomentosa - Silver Linden  
Ulmus prospector – Prospector Elm

## Ornamental Trees for Parks and Boulevards

### Deciduous

Amelanchier species – Serviceberry  
Cercis canadensis – Eastern Redbud  
Cornus florida - Flowering Dogwood  
Crabapple cultivars  
Cornus kousa – Kousa Dogwood  
Magnolia species  
Ostrya virginiana – Ironwood  
Syringa reticulata subsp. reticulata – Japanese Tree Lilac

### Evergreen

Juniperus virginiana—Eastern Red Cedar  
Picea abies - Norway Spruce  
Pinus strobus - Eastern White Pine  
Pinus thunbergii – Japanese Black Pine

## SILO EMBELLISHMENTS

Distinctive structures in the community could be highlighted. Night lighting of downtown buildings, churches and other interesting features would add ambiance during evening hours.

The grain silos in downtown Illiopolis offer a unique opportunity. These classic mid-west structures are conspicuous features in many small towns in Sangamon County. Their massive cylindrical forms could be highlighted by night lighting and painting with artistry of any imagined subject or style.

If towns embellish their silos, each in their own way, a cohesion among communities would be created that could attract visitors for the specific purpose of viewing the unique “Sangamon Silos.” A Silo Tour route could be developed or an inter-community Silo Festival established.

Each town could also improve the grounds surrounding the silos, perhaps creating small parks or attractive landscapes. Silos might also be adapted for other uses, either permanent or temporary.

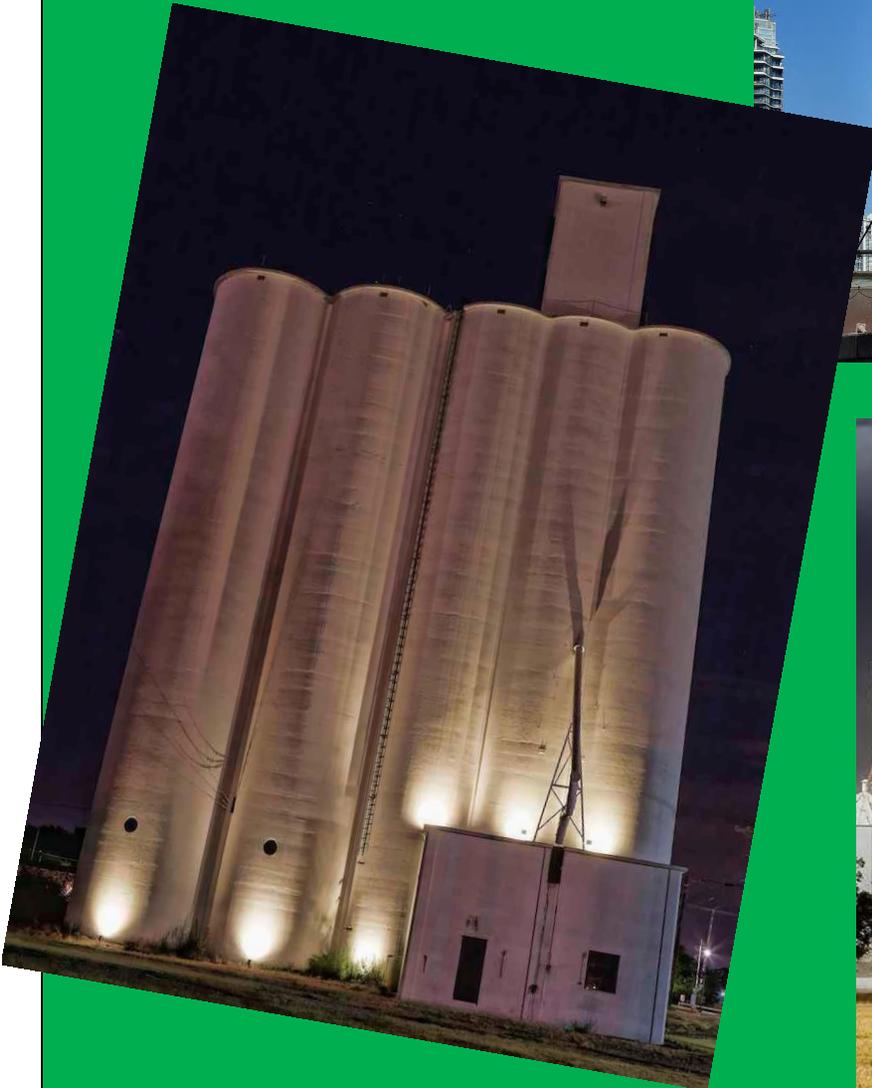


*Grain Silos east of Downtown Auburn*



*Grain silos cloaked in vines*

*Silo Painting Art*



# City of Auburn, IL

## BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS

The following information is provided to aid in budgeting for future projects, although many factors will affect the actual cost of the work.

First, the improvements outlined in this report are broad-brush, Concept Plans. The scope of this study did not include investigation of critical aspects such as: determining location and condition of underground utilities, surveying for topography and drainage, research of property ownership, assessing the integrity of structures and other matters that could substantially affect the construction work and cost.

The scope of a construction project will greatly affect costs as well, as there is economy in greater quantities. The following information therefor is provided as a range of unit costs.

Some of the items that may affect cost, but require more investigation are also listed.

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| <u>Entrance “Community Pride” Sign</u>          |                     |
| Sign with relocated electronic panel            | \$50,00-\$60,000    |
| Sign with new electronic panel                  | \$80,000-\$105,000  |
| <u>Highway City Signs and Street Name Signs</u> |                     |
| Embellishment with backing, frame               | \$750/ea.           |
| <u>Directional Wayfinding Signs</u>             |                     |
| Large custom frame with sign panels             | \$1,500—\$2,500     |
| <u>Community Welcome Station</u>                |                     |
| Terrace gathering area                          | \$ 5,000—8,000      |
| Benches, picnic table                           | \$1,000-\$2,500/ea. |
| Improve grounds                                 | \$500-\$1500        |
| <u>Tree Planting Program</u>                    |                     |
| Large Shade trees, installed                    | \$600/ea.           |
| Medium-size ornamental, installed               | \$400/ea.           |
| <u>Silo Embellishments</u>                      |                     |
| Lighting  |                     |
| Painting  |                     |
| Artist’s fees                                   |                     |