

## Chapter 1 – History of Auburn

### 1.1 The City – An Overview

The Green, White, and Stuck Rivers once converged on the valley floor, where the Southern Coast Salish people (now collectively known as the Muckleshoot Tribe) lived on the river and vicinity's bounty. Eventually, others also settled the valley, which was made accessible by military roads in the 1850s and railroad in the 1880s.

Many of these settlers, including Americans from the East and Midwest, as well as immigrants of European and Japanese descent, took advantage of the river in a different way than the Muckleshoot; these newcomers farmed a valley rendered fertile from regular flooding. Farming thrived for many decades in Auburn and its surrounds, following incorporation in 1891. However, agriculture was not the only driver of the economic engine.

Construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad's Auburn Yard facilities in the early 1910s ushered in the City's first population boom. Businesses serving the burgeoning railroad worker population expanded and business prospects continued through the 1920s. The favorable business environment came to an abrupt halt when the Great Depression hit in 1929.

World War II and the associated war effort, with plentiful employment for non-draftees, brought the City out of its economic slump, though not for the City's and surrounds' substantial Japanese-American population. For the Japanese-American residents, war did not bring economic stability, but far away federal internment camps and lost homes, farms, and businesses instead. Many of the City's Japanese-American residents never returned.

Those who did return were veterans starting families. Along with an influx of middle class workers moving away from larger cities, Auburn's population once again ballooned and would grow at an unprecedented pace until the late 1960s. This time around, the development pattern was significantly less centralized. While some businesses set up shop or expanded in downtown Auburn, many more stores, beginning with automobile dealerships, moved into the surrounding farmland along Auburn Way and other auto-oriented corridors.

The surrounding farmland was also prime (and affordable) real estate for industrial redevelopment. With construction of the Howard Hanson Dam in 1962, catastrophic flooding was no longer a regular threat. Access to State Route 18 and State Route 167, constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, also added to the appeal. As a result, large employers such as Boeing, as well as a plethora of warehousing and distribution centers and various light industrial enterprises, began to supersede farms in the valley.

The “Boeing Bust” in 1971 slowed, but did not stop, redevelopment of the once-agricultural valley. While population growth slowed in the 1970s, an accelerated local and regional economic recovery beginning in the 1980s set the foundation for rapid residential development on Lea Hill and West Hill in the 1980s through 1990s (then unincorporated) and in Lakeland Hills in the 1990s and 2000s.

Not just a regional destination for businesses and homes, construction of the SuperMall (now The Outlet Collection), Emerald Downs Thoroughbred Racetrack, and Muckleshoot Casino in the 1990s provided attractions for leisure in Auburn. Since 2000, the portfolio of attractions has been expanded with Green River Community College (now Green River College), which was annexed into City limits during the Lea Hill and West Hill annexations in 2008, the construction of the downtown Auburn Transit Center, and ongoing revitalization of downtown Auburn that aims to be the enduring business, government, and cultural focal point of the City. Further, with a population that has increased from less than 300 at incorporation to more than 74,860 currently, Auburn continues to be a place where diverse cross sections of people live, work, and play.

## 1.2 The City – A Timeline

### The First Settlers

**Pre-1850s: Semi-nomadic** Southern Coast Salish tribal groups, such as the Skopamish, Smahkamish, and Stkamish, lived in winter villages along the Green, White, and Stuck Rivers, which is present-day Auburn. In these winter villages, such as Ilalko, which was located where the Green and White Rivers once converged (near where 8<sup>th</sup> ST NE crosses the Green River today), the tribal groups relied upon stored foods and local resources. In the spring and summer, the Southern Coast Salish hunted, fished, clammed, and gathered berries and other plant life.

**1853:** Military roads traversed the White River Valley, the first east-west overland routes from eastern Washington Territory to Puget Sound. Shortly thereafter, Americans from the Eastern and Midwestern United States, as well as many European and Japanese immigrants, began to settle the area, lured by the “free” and fertile land.

**1854-56:** The Treaties of Medicine Creek and Point Elliott were negotiated with Puget Sound-area Native Americans and signed, establishing reservation lands and the right to off-reservation resources. The Southern Coast Salish tribal groups living along the Green, White, and Stuck Rivers were not associated or recognized as a single tribe and were to be relocated onto the Nisqually Reservation. Following the treaties, a series of clashes, commonly known as the Puget Sound Treaty Wars or Indian Wars, occurred between Native Americans territory-wide and non-Native settlers.

**1856/74:** Following the clashes, the Muckleshoot Reservation was recommended for establishment in 1856. An 1874 executive order issued by Washington Territory Governor Isaac Stevens established the Muckleshoot Reservation for the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, which included the riverbank-dwelling Southern Coast Salish tribal groups.

**1883-84:** The Northern Pacific's Transcontinental Railroad line between Seattle and Tacoma began operation allowing people to travel to Auburn and the White River Valley from across the region and country by rail.

### **1890s**

**1891:** The Town of Slaughter, named after Lieutenant William Slaughter, who was killed in the Puget Sound Treaty Wars, was incorporated. At the time of incorporation, the town was home to a wooden boardwalk Main Street that had two restaurants, saloons, a few of specialty stores, and the Ohio House Hotel, often-called "Slaughter House" by the locals. The town's name, liked Lieutenant Slaughter, was short-lived.

**1893:** The Town of Slaughter was officially renamed the City of Auburn when it was officially incorporated. That was not the only major change that occurred in that year. The Auburn area's industries around the time of incorporation included charcoal and terra cotta kilns, lumber mills, dairies, berry and other produce farms, and above all, booming hops farms. In quick succession, there were hops-destroying aphid plague in 1891 and the Panic of 1893, which brought down prices for hops and brought about the hops industry's eventual collapse. As a result, many hops farms became dairy farms. Without access to loans, the Panic of 1893 also resulted in foreclosures and abandoned properties. However, agriculture as a whole survived the nationwide economic depression of 1893 and continued to thrive in the Auburn area.

### **1900s**

**1900-10:** The first full decade since incorporation saw modest population growth, from 740 to 960 people.

**1902:** The Puget Sound Electric Railway, more commonly known as the Interurban, inaugurated service with speeds of up to sixty miles per hour and up to thirty-six daily roundtrips between Seattle and Tacoma at its peak. The Interurban provided Auburn and the White River Valley, and its people and produce, a fast and frequent connection to Seattle and Tacoma. In addition, it fostered the growth of businesses serving railroad workers and commuters traveling through the City.

**1903:** Dairy farming's continued prominence culminated in the opening of the Borden Condensed Milk Company (formerly Borden's Pioneer Milk Company) facility near 4<sup>th</sup> and D ST NW. During this

period, Borden was Auburn's second-largest employer, second only to the railroads. In addition to Borden, many other dairy-related companies were located in Auburn.

**1906:** The problems of a growing population, associated development, and heavy rains culminated in a record flood this year. During the flood, as in years past, debris choked the White River and diverted its northward course southward, into the Stuck River. The record flood resulted in a decision to permanently seal off the White River channel and divert all water into the Stuck River, in an effort to curb flooding of the White River. Over the ensuing years, though the diversion dam was built and former channel of the White River was filled and developed, seasonal flooding did not cease in the valley.

### **1910s**

**1910-20:** Downtown Auburn evolved from wooden boardwalks to concrete sidewalks and from horse-drawn carts to automobiles. Businesses grew in numbers and diversity to keep pace with the population. Since Auburn Yard's arrival in 1910, the City had expanded more than three-fold, from 960 to 3,160 people.

**1910-13:** The Northern Pacific Railroad constructed Auburn Yard, its western freight terminal, which included a 24-stall roundhouse, car repair shops, and a yard office. The construction and subsequent operation of Auburn Yard ushered in the City's first population boom.

**1917:** The railroads were nationalized as the United States joined the Allies in World War I. This translated into better wages for railroad workers and employment of women as railroad machinist and cleaner. While the higher wages continued into the 1920s, most women were laid off and those remaining transitioned into railroad clerical positions.

### **1920s**

**1920-30:** Though the majority of the 1920s were prosperous, Auburn's population of 3,906 just after the Great Depression's onset reflects an increase of only about 24%, a modest amount compared to the large increase between 1910 and 1920.

**1921:** Auburn General Hospital (now MultiCare Auburn Medical Center) opened in downtown Auburn, providing modern medical services to the City's growing population.

**1921/1923/1925:** The state legislature adopted laws prohibiting non-citizens from land ownership and use of land through sharecropping, leasing, or renting. The laws disproportionately affected the large population of Japanese farmers and other non-white ethnicities in the Auburn area. While in 1925, the State Supreme Court ruled that minority American-born citizens could hold title to land

formerly belonging to his or her parents, many were forced to make changes. Some of the Auburn area's significant Japanese population returned to Japan and others changed to commercial professions less/not dependent upon land cultivation. Many others toiled on land they had previously owned.

**1928:** As the automobile became the preferred mode of travel, the Interurban ceased service and regular passenger rail service to Seattle and Tacoma by rail would not return for 72 years.

**1929:** The Great Depression set in, downsizing or closing many Auburn businesses; a lack of financing impeded the establishment of new businesses to take their place. The crash was manifested in general unemployment and poverty, and more viscerally, in the homeless encampments of jobless laborers around the Auburn area.

### **1930s**

**1930-40:** Growing to 4,211, Auburn's population was more or less stagnant throughout the 1930s.

**1930:** Public utility districts, such as water and sewer districts beyond City limits, authorized by the State, laid the groundwork for unincorporated areas around Auburn to absorb some of the exponential population growth in the 1950 and 1960s.

### **1940s**

**1940-50:** Growing to 6,497 people, Auburn's population gain in the 1940s was almost twice that gained between the two decades from 1920 to 1940. There was marked population and business growth post-World War II.

**1941:** Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered into World War II. With the labor pool decreased by the drafting of young men and increased government spending for the war effort, unemployment plummeted. The employed now counted amongst its ranks older children helping with the harvest. The employed also included for the first time since World War I, women working in retail and manufacturing, both within the City and at Boeing's factories in nearby cities.

**1942:** The entirety of the sizable Japanese-American population in the Auburn area, along with other Japanese-Americans living on the West Coast, was relocated by the federal government to distant internment camps for the duration of the war. Many families lost homes, farms, and businesses. Most never returned.

**1943:** The U.S. Army Air Force depot, including multiple warehouses (and an administrative building in 1956), opened where General Services Administration (GSA) Region 10 headquarters is now located.

**1943:** The Auburn Ave Theatre, a former bus terminal, opened its doors in downtown Auburn. The theatre provided a venue for cinematic escape from wartime realities and since the 1970s, has become a venue for live music and theatre performances.

**1945:** The end of World War II brought veterans and a baby boom to Auburn. Transportation improvements also brought middle-class workers who wanted to relocate from larger cities to a slice of suburbia. Existing businesses expanded and brand new businesses opened in Auburn, catering to the growing population – and the automobiles they used to get around. Though much of Auburn and the area around it remained primarily agricultural, change was apace.

**1948:** Scarff Motors relocated to 501 Auburn Way N, then the outskirts of town. The move prompted other car dealerships to follow suit, mirroring Scarff Motors' lead northward into the farmlands around Auburn. The resultant cluster of car dealerships along Auburn Way N, as they continue to exist today, earned Auburn the moniker "Little Detroit of the West", and strong car sales contributed sales tax revenue to fund City services.

**1949:** A 7.1-magnitude earthquake felt from Seattle to Chehalis also changed the commercial landscape, damaging brick and masonry facades in downtown. Many of these facades were rebuilt in more modern styles reflecting preferences of the era.

## **1950s**

**1950-60:** Growing to 11,933, Auburn's population had almost doubled in the 1950s. Growth in population and businesses continued and spurred annexations that pushed City limits just north of 40th ST NE and south to the foot of the Muckleshoot Reservation plateau and almost to the White River.

**1956:** Lakehaven Utility District was established, providing water and sewer service to the West Hill area of the City, then located in unincorporated King County. The presence of these services spurred westward growth.

## **1960s**

**1960-70:** At 21,653, Auburn's population had once again almost doubled since 1960. Expansion of City limits continued in the 1960s, incorporating the slopes of West Hill, portions of the Muckleshoot Reservation plateau, and areas past the White River to the King-Pierce County line.

**Early 1960s:** Water District 111 was established, providing water service to the Lea Hill area of the City, then located in unincorporated King County.

**1961:** The General Services Administration (GSA) Region 10 headquarters moved to Auburn, taking over facilities constructed as a depot for the U.S. Army Air Force in the 1940s and 1950s. GSA continues to be a large employer in the City.

**1962:** The Howard Hanson Dam was completed, significantly decreasing the size and frequency of seasonal flooding in the valley. With significant seasonal flooding no longer a threat, the one-time agricultural valley attracted, in addition to the already-present GSA, large employers such as the Federal Aviation Administration (1962) and Boeing (1966), as well as a plethora of warehousing and distribution centers and various light industrial enterprises.

**1964:** The Auburn portion of State Route 18 opened, eventually connecting downtown Auburn and the Lea Hill area to Interstate 5 to the west and Interstate 90 to the northeast. Access to the interstate highway system continued the momentum of redeveloping the one-time agricultural valley into an industrial breadbasket.

**1965:** Green River Community College (now Green River College) opened on Lea Hill. Located in unincorporated King County, the school provided adult education courses for both the growing City and burgeoning Lea Hill area.

**1965:** Downtown Auburn hosted its first Veterans Day Parade, now one of the largest in the nation. The parade honored veterans and active military personnel, both of which continue to comprise a sizeable portion of the City's population.

**1966:** Les Gove Park opened. Over the ensuing years, the park evolved into a recreational and educational campus encompassing a library (1964), the White River Valley Museum (1970), senior center (1977), the Parks, Arts, and Recreation Administration Building (1977), and a gymnasium (2011).

**1969:** Auburn Municipal Airport opened, capitalizing on the Boeing boom and serving general aviation purposes.

## **1970s**

**1970-80:** Auburn grew to a population of 26,417, which paled in comparison to preceding years. The factors affecting the growth rate were the "Boeing Bust" and the slow recovery that followed and less-than-rosy local and national economic climate through much of the 1970s. However,

continued redevelopment of the valley into warehousing and light industry and the Auburn General Hospital (now MultiCare Medical Center) expansion provided some relief in a dismal economic period. Nevertheless, the City expanded northward to S 277<sup>th</sup> ST and for the first time, across the Green River by annexing the Auburn Golf Course at the base of Lea Hill.

**1971:** Citing noise and environmental concerns, federal funding for developing supersonic transport was suspended. The subsequent “Boeing Bust” led to layoffs for over 2/3s of Boeing's 100,000-plus workforce in the Puget Sound region, which included workers at Boeing's Auburn manufacturing facility. Boeing and the region slowly rebounded through the late 1970s.

**1972:** The Auburn portion of State Route 167 (a.k.a. the Valley Freeway) opened, providing a north-south route paralleling Interstate 5 through the valley. Capitalizing on the east-west connection provided with the earlier-completed State Route 18, the valley continued to be redeveloped with warehousing and distribution centers and light industrial enterprises taking advantage of the Auburn's convenient access to the region and beyond.

**1975:** The half-century old building that had housed Auburn General Hospital (now MultiCare Auburn Medical Center) since the 1920s was replaced with a larger and more efficient building.

**1979:** Microsoft moved from Albuquerque, New Mexico to Bellevue, Washington. The move reinvigorated the region by attracting other technology companies to the region, which diversified an economy that was rebounding from a surplus of skilled and educated workers laid off by Boeing.

## **1980s**

**1980-90:** Growing to 33,102 by 1990, the City's population grew in the 1980s at a rate similar to its growth in the 1970s, which is significantly slower than between the end of World War II and 1970. During the 1980s, while the City became an employment hub, it also became more suburban, with many of its residents commuting to employment beyond its borders.

**1981:** The City adopted its first floodplain regulations. While construction of the Howard Hanson Dam in 1962 eliminated significant seasonal flooding of the valley, areas along river banks were still subject to flooding during significant storm events.

**1983/87:** Burlington Northern-Santa Fe (BNSF) relocated most of its operations from Auburn Yard, at one time one of the City's largest employers, to its Seattle and Tacoma facilities. Several years later, BNSF demolished most of the buildings related to operations at Auburn Yard.

**1988:** City Council adopted the Lakeland Hills Plan for the King County portion of the Lakeland Hills area in the City. The plan set the stage for a planned residential community as demand for housing grew with the local and regional economy.

## **1990s**

**1990-2000:** Growing to 40,314 by 2000, the City grew steadily in the 1990s, at a pace similar to the 1970s and 1980s.

**1990:** The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) was adopted in response to rapid growth in the Puget Sound Region's population and employment. The GMA mandated that local jurisdictions conduct comprehensive planning in accordance with statewide goals and the City subsequently updated its Comprehensive Plan for consistency. See Chapter 3 of this Comprehensive Plan for more information regarding the GMA.

**1990:** The Downtown Auburn Design Master Plan was adopted and subsequently updated in 2001. See Chapter 6 of this Comprehensive Plan for more information.

**1991:** The Auburn Adventist Academy Plan was adopted. See Chapter 6 of this Comprehensive Plan for more information.

**1992:** The Auburn North Business Area Plan was adopted. See Chapter 6 of this Comprehensive Plan for more information.

**1995:** The previous Comprehensive Plan was adopted, which included substantial amendments to the 1986 plan for consistency with the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) and King County Countywide Planning Policies. The Comprehensive Plan has been updated in annual increments since 1995.

**1995/1996:** The Muckleshoot Casino, Supermall (now The Outlet Collection), and Emerald Downs opened, adding regional entertainment and shopping destinations to the City.

**1996:** Burlington Northern-Santa Fe reopened the Stampede Pass to freight traffic. BNSF trains once again rumbled through the valley, creating challenges for travel east-west across a valley transformed from farms to a home for regional attractions, warehousing and light industry, and more than 10 times the number of people when Auburn Yard was constructed. Several grade-separation projects between City streets (S 277<sup>th</sup> Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW, and M Street SE) and railroad right-of-way are constructed as a result in the ensuing decades.

**1998:** Keeping pace with the local and regional economic boom, City Council adopted the Lakeland Hills South Plan and annexed the Pierce County portion of the Lakeland Hills area, which had been established as the Lakeland Hills South Planned Unit Development (PUD). Subsequently, this area expanded and was mostly built out in the 2000s. Unlike the King County portion of Lakeland Hills, the Lakeland Hills South PUD also established commercial areas within the planned residential community.

## **2000s**

**2000-10:** Growing to 70,180 in 2010, the City's population nearly doubled in the 2000s, though a portion of the growth stems from annexation of the Lea Hill and West Hill areas.

**2000/2001:** Completion of the Auburn Transit Center and commencement of Sounder commuter rail service to Seattle and Tacoma kicked off renewed interest in maintaining downtown Auburn. As "the physical and cultural heart of the Auburn community", policy was aimed toward its renewal, as espoused by the updated Auburn Downtown Plan adopted in 2001.

**2002:** Auburn General Hospital (now MultiCare Medical Center) expanded again, with a four-story patient tower added to its downtown Auburn facilities.

**2005:** The City adopted its first Critical Areas Ordinance. While already regulating critical areas, such as wetlands, streams, and landslide hazard areas, the ordinance clarifies more specifically how critical areas are regulated within the City.

**2006:** In recognition of its ecological and economic development value, approximately 114 acres of wetland on the east side of State Route 167, between 15<sup>th</sup> Street NW and W Main Street, were set aside and the Auburn Environmental Park was established. Construction of a bird tower and wetland boardwalk trail followed. An associated zoning district between the park and the Interurban Trail was established with the intent of attracting medical, biotech and "green" technology businesses, including those in the fields of energy conservation, engineering, and water quality.

**2008:** The City annexed the Lea Hill and West Hill areas from King County, bringing in a substantial residential population along with Green River Community College (now Green River College).

**2008:** The Northeast Auburn/Robertson Properties Special Area Plan was adopted. See Chapter 6 of this Comprehensive Plan for more information.

## **2010s**

**2012:** The S Division Street promenade opened, serving as the catalyst for redeveloping the four Auburn Junction blocks south of Main Street between the two A Streets. The Auburn Junction blocks are currently redeveloping with a four-story commercial-residential mixed use building and a five-story senior housing community.

**2013:** The M Street underpass project was completed.

**2014:** The City's first significant mixed used transit oriented development (Trek) breaks ground. Imagine Auburn visioning process.

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