



**Good Practice Story Title:** Aspen's Climate Commitment: Pioneering Sustainability in the Rockies.

**Destination:** Aspen, Colorado

**Country:** United States of America

**Submitting Organization:** Aspen Chamber Resort Association & City of Aspen

**Category:**

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

**Destination description:**

Aspen is nestled in the heart of the White River National Forest at the confluence of the Roaring Fork River, Hunter Creek, Maroon Creek, and Castle Creek, and encircled by the peaks of the Elk Mountain Range in the central Rocky Mountains. Located 18 miles east of Independence Pass on the Western Slope of the Continental Divide, this authentic mountain town offers an abundance of recreational opportunities set against a breathtaking landscape. Originally inhabited by the Ute Indian Tribe, Aspen became a mining town during the silver boom of the late 1800s. The average daily population in Aspen is 20,871. Generally, the heaviest days for visitation during the summer occur during July and early August. Aspen is approximately 3.66 square miles with an elevation of 7,908ft. Aspen is well known as a world-class year-round destination with outdoor adventures from biking to fly-fishing, world-class winter recreation, a plethora of arts &

culture events and anything else from the riverbed to the sky. We encourage everyone to engage their mind, body & spirit when in Aspen. We have multiple organizations dedicated to creating world class events, educational opportunities, and performances; ranging from classical music to theatre performances and a little bit of everything in between. After 300 million years of geologic activity, Mother Nature gave us the Maroon Bells, wine-colored peaks towering 14,000 ft. above sea level. The reflective Maroon Lake, nestled in the valley at the base of the peaks, beckons the outdoor adventurer seeking beauty, hiking and adventure. Aspen is both extremely family and pet friendly and has over 400+ miles of hiking and biking trails- that hardest part is deciding what to do first!



### Summary of Good Practice Story:

Aspen, Colorado, a small ski resort town in the Rocky Mountains, has been committed to mitigating climate change for decades. The community has already begun to witness the effects of climate change, with 30 more “frost free days” (days without temperatures below zero) a year since 1980, as one stark example. Upholding Aspen’s longstanding value of stewardship, the City of Aspen has accelerated its commitment to addressing climate change with new policies, programs, and initiatives that holistically address the community’s sources of greenhouse gas emissions: energy, buildings, transportation, and waste.

In 2022, the City established new science-based targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions - 63% reduction by 2030 and 100% reduction by 2050 - and updated the [Aspen Sustainability Action Plan \(ASAP\)](#) to reflect the new goals and supporting action items. This Good Practice Story highlights four key programs that are helping the City, and the community, reach its climate goals and realize a sustainable future: the Building IQ policy, organics diversion policy, electric vehicle strategy, and a new program to provide technical assistance and recognition to businesses in the community for sustainable practices. Through these programs, Aspen has much better data on building energy use, has seen marked results in reduction of organic material going to the landfill, has kept up with EV drivership, and has created a new program to connect with businesses, and visitors, in sustainability.

### Issues faced:

Aspen is a unique resort community, population ~7,000, that is known globally as a luxury destination. If not managed carefully, luxury destinations can use natural resources at a higher rate than other destinations. Aspen’s climate action plans need to be comprehensive and collaborative to involve both visitors and the community. However, due to decades of progressive policy, environmentally-focused community members and visitors, and local resources and support for climate work, Aspen is taking its science-based targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions seriously.

Business-as-usual operations will not achieve a sustainable future for Aspen, so intentional, measured action is needed. According to Aspen’s greenhouse gas inventory, conducted in 2020, the community’s emissions come from three main sectors: energy/buildings, transportation, and waste. The City has a dedicated plan to address each of these sectors, the [Aspen Sustainability Action Plan](#), and has made significant progress on four key projects within these three sectors within the last year.

### Solution:

The solutions that the City of Aspen has implemented are a holistic approach to addressing climate change and touch on the key sectors of our greenhouse gas emissions: energy/buildings, waste, and transportation. These projects are:

- Building IQ - a policy and program that requires commercial and multi-family businesses to track and report their energy use
- Organics diversion policy - a policy and program that makes it unlawful to dispose of organic materials in the landfill
- Electric vehicle charging strategy - a roadmap for ensuring that the City is providing sufficient charging stations for public use as the community transitions to electric vehicles
- Colorado Green Business Network of Aspen - a new program that provides technical assistance and recognition to businesses in the community for sustainable practices.





### Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

#### Building IQ

Buildings account for 57% of the community's greenhouse gas emissions in Aspen. In response, in 2018 the the City of Aspen began to develop a policy and program that would help gather more data on buildings and eventually work to reduce their emissions. In 2022, Aspen City Council passed the Building IQ ordinance, which requires certain buildings to benchmark (track and report annual energy and water usage to the City) and requires the development of a building performance standard (a framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in existing buildings over time). To support buildings in the community, the City of Aspen partnered with a local nonprofit, the Community Office of Resource Efficiency (CORE), to benchmark community buildings and provide bespoke scorecards and support to buildings to reduce their energy and water use. In its third year of implementation (as of May 2024), the Building IQ program has helped 120 buildings benchmark, with an over 98% compliance rate, uncovering essential insights for policy making, and most importantly, connecting many building owners to critical data, technical expertise, and grants and rebates to address emissions in their buildings.

#### Organics Diversion Policy

Organic material comprises approximately 40% of Aspen's municipal solid waste, a significant percentage for a material that can be easily diverted from the landfill. To address this, in 2021, the City of Aspen's climate team started developing a policy and program with the purpose of reducing the amount of organic material going to the landfill. This development began with deep community engagement and feedback to understand the community's, including businesses', interests, barriers, and assistance needs in reducing organic waste. In 2023, Aspen City Council passed an ordinance banning organic material from being disposed of in the landfill as trash, the roll-out of which to be done in three phases, beginning in October 2023 with businesses with a Retail Food License in Aspen city limits. In addition, Council approved the use of City funds to purchase bear-proof organics containers for all Retail Food License businesses to get them started.

#### Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy

Aspen has some of the highest numbers of electric vehicles for its population size in the state. One of the most impactful action items that a municipality can take to encourage a community transition to electric vehicles is to ensure that public charging stations are available to residents, businesses, and visitors alike. Furthermore, zero tailpipe emissions that are charged on Aspen's 100% renewable energy grid help the City secure its climate goals. In order to create attainable frameworks for charging infrastructure, Aspen developed the [Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure Masterplan](#) and the [Aspen Community Electric Vehicle Readiness Plan](#). Stakeholders in the community and across community organizations supported the developments of these plans, and innovative collaboration on infrastructure upgrades in the City continue to leverage dollars and best practices for installing new charging stations in strategic places around town.

#### Colorado Green Business Network of Aspen

In 2023, the Aspen Chamber and Resort Association (ACRA) and the City of Aspen began to discuss creating a voluntary program that provides technical assistance and recognition for businesses integrating sustainability into their operations. After looking at various options, in early 2024, ACRA and the City of Aspen partnered to offer a local application of a Colorado state program called the [Colorado Green Business Network \(CGBN\)](#). This program, developed by the state of Colorado but flexible in local application, supports businesses in inventorying existing sustainability practices and identifying further actions, and recognizes businesses for their sustainable operations and business practices. The Colorado Green Business Network of Aspen will formally launch in August 2024, but the City and ACRA have been working with four pilot businesses ahead of the launch date to bring them through the program with support from the State of Colorado representative in order to ensure the teams are fully prepared for the full launch in summer.



### **Achievements and Results:**

#### **Building IQ**

Tracking energy and water use empowers the community to understand where there are impactful opportunities to reduce emissions from buildings. Through the community partnership of the Building IQ program, Aspen will realize healthier buildings and air, become more energy and water efficient, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In its third year of implementation (as of May 2024), the Building IQ program has helped 120 buildings benchmark (comprising 19% of the entire community's building square footage), with an over 98% compliance rate, uncovering essential insights for policy making, and most importantly, connecting many building owners to critical data, technical expertise, and grants and rebates to address emissions in their buildings. Furthermore, the City of Aspen has been working with stakeholders through the building performance standard (BPS) stakeholder committee to develop next level policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in buildings.

#### Organics Diversion Policy

Implementation of the organics diversion policy beginning in October 2023 and the City of Aspen began receiving data in April 2024 from the local landfill on compost collection: for the first four months of 2024, compared to 2023, organics collection is up 70% year to date - from 510 tons in the first four months of 2023 to 869 in the same time period in 2024. The compliance rate for this ordinance is at 100%, with over 100 retail food establishments composting their organic waste. For comparison, before the ordinance, less than 20% of businesses were composting their organic waste. The City anticipates seeing a decrease in the greenhouse gas emissions from waste due to this ordinance, which will only increase over time as more businesses, and eventually residents, must comply and divert their organic materials from the landfill.

#### Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy

Following the plans as shared in the methods section above, Aspen currently has 19 electric vehicle plugs and has a goal to install at least 35 public charging plugs total by 2026. Significant progress has been made, and the City has three new chargers planned for installation in 2024 - two stations at the local Koch Park, and one charging station at a historic building that is home to early childcare centers. These plans have helped create a framework for budgeting, infrastructure planning, and staff resources in order to reach the City's goals. Furthermore, residents, business owners, and visitors alike will have more electric vehicle charging plugs as a resource for when they transition their vehicles to electric.

#### Colorado Green Business Network of Aspen

In the early stages of development of the Colorado Green Business Network of Aspen, ACRA and the City of Aspen were hopeful that local businesses would be interested in both aspects of the program - the technical assistance and the recognition. ACRA helped recruit four pilot businesses who were interested in being the first to go through the program, provide feedback on the process, and help support the formal launch of the program in August 2024. This has been immensely successful and helpful, with all businesses noting areas that they can further integrate sustainability into their operations, and finding better ways to celebrate and document the things they are already doing - this will help elevate the sustainability practices of businesses around Aspen and make it more obvious to residents and visitors alike that sustainability is an important part of doing business in Aspen.

### **Lessons Learned and Advice:**

Building IQ and the organics policy have demonstrated the profound importance of meeting building and business owners where they are, understand what support they need, and unique experiences they might have that



programs need to account for. The electric vehicle charging strategy has demonstrated a need to combine forces with other infrastructure projects (such as gutter replacements) to maximize budget and efficiency. Finally, the Colorado Green Business Network of Aspen has demonstrated the power of collaboration with businesses and municipalities to create more change than either could do alone.

For all four key programs discussed in this Good Practice Story, the lessons learned are the same: all success starts with good process and engagement, collaboration is key, and you can't manage what you don't measure. All four programs allow us to track success (and areas for improvement) over time, and our key community stakeholders continue to provide meaningful and helpful feedback to ensure our initiatives are meeting community and visitor needs.

### **Recognitions and Additional References**

[Aspen Sustainability Action Plan \(ASAP\)](#)

[City of Aspen Building IQ](#)

[Organic Waste Diversion](#)

[Electric Vehicle Charging Masterplan](#)

