

Aspen, Bellingham, and Austin Honored for Energy Efficiency Innovation

by Don Knapp, Sep 28, 2010

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From left to right: David Crockett, Award presenter and Sustainability Director of Chattanooga, TN; Pharr Andrews, Climate Protection Coordinator, City of Austin, TX; Lauren McDonnell, Project Coordinator for the Canary Initiative (collaborating with City of Aspen, CO); Jeb Brugmann, ICLEI's founding Secretary General

Congratulations to ICLEI's three Sustainability Leadership Award winners in the Energy Efficiency Implementation Innovation category. Energy efficiency is a key to fighting climate change and achieving energy independence, and in 2010 we're in the midst of an explosion of programmatic innovations among local governments (thanks in part to federal stimulus funding) to spur efficiency across their communities.

Read on for details on the energy efficiency successes from these three winners at our Local Action Summit: **City of Aspen, CO; City of Bellingham, WA; and City of Austin, TX** (in the small, medium, and large community categories, respectively).

City of Aspen, CO's zGreen Program

In 2007, the City launched its zGreen program to recognize businesses, events, and citizens for their environmental efforts through third-party certification. To become ZGreen certified, participants must make changes to their operations or lifestyles in a variety of ways, including taking actions to improve air quality. Actions from several different categories may be chosen, including transportation, reducing air emissions, energy conservation, waste reduction, water conservation, and purchasing.

Citizens must commit to five new environmental actions out of a possible 100 on an online checklist and are given instant feedback on how selected actions will shrink their carbon footprint, conserve energy, and reduce PM-10 emissions, one of Aspen's priority air quality concerns.

Commitments made through the program to date will reduce particulate matter levels in Aspen by an average of 173,435 grams over two years. In addition, other municipalities are now consulting ZGreen staff, looking to the program as a model for their own communities. Lauren McDonnell, Project Coordinator for the Canary Initiative, accepted the award at the Summit awards ceremony.



Bellingham, WA, City Council Member Jack Weiss and ICLEI's Jeb Brugmann

City of Bellingham, WA's Whatcom County Community Energy Challenge

The City of Bellingham has been a lead partner and a key funder in the development of the Whatcom County Community Energy Challenge (CEC), a pilot effort that helps realize the massive energy savings potential in the small commercial and residential sectors of a community. By aggregating customers for loan products and contractors/installers, the City is achieving the economies of scale needed to make numerous small weatherization project efforts cost-effective from a conservation perspective and worthwhile from a business perspective. The financing program is the

first of its kind in the nation, using ARRA funds for a loan loss reserve. The City has also played a lead role in implementing the education and outreach campaign for the program.

Over two years, the CEC will reduce energy use in 150 local businesses, perform 1,800 home energy assessments, and improve energy efficiency in 900 of those homes. The program will also boost economic activity by generating construction work in excess of \$10 million and save more than \$1 million in energy expenditures, as well as creating at least 35 new green collar jobs. Actions initiated through the program will prevent the emission of more than 7,000 tons of CO₂ per year -- equivalent to eliminating the use of nearly 800,000 gallons of gasoline.

City of Austin, TX's Free Home Energy Work Program

Austin Energy is the only utility in the country to administer a federal weatherization program on behalf of a local government. The City's Free Home Energy Work program serves low-income, elderly and disabled customers—the neediest population with the highest energy burden. It follows a holistic approach, addressing any issue in a home that may impact the energy, health or safety of the dwelling and its occupants.

The Program also creates green jobs with an emphasis on recruiting small and minority contractors, and helps to preserve Austin's older housing stock by retrofitting homes for long-term energy reduction.

Since the program's inception, more than 14,235 households and apartments have been served, saving more than 19 megawatts of electricity. Austin achieved the nation's first "conservation power plant" in 2006 through its energy-efficiency programs and in 2007 began a new goal to achieve another conservation power plant by 2020.