

Introduction



Background

The 2011 Aspen Area Community Plan (AACP) is intended to describe a vision for the future of the Aspen Area that will help guide community decision-making for the next 10 years. But before moving into the substance of the plan, it's important to briefly describe the setting in which we live, and provide some historical context that brought the community to this unique point in time.

The scenic mountain views, biking along a river, unparalleled skiing, rural character, extensive Wilderness Areas, a historic downtown, outstanding arts and cultural events and the sense of a small-scale community are among the many reasons why the Aspen Area has attracted national and international visitors and compelled many to make it their home.

Since the 1940s, Aspen has taken numerous intentional steps to create an ideal environment in which to live and visit. With the concept of the Aspen Idea as its foundation, ski areas were founded in the 1940s and '50s, attracting international ski racers. Dozens of small lodges and condos were built through the 1950s and '60s.

In the 1970s, Pitkin County took ambitious steps to preserve rural character, a grass roots effort began to preserve Victorian architecture, and the City of Aspen began buying open space.

All types of recreational activities emerged over the years, including hang-gliders landing on the Thomas Open Space in the mid-1970s. Another grass roots movement resulted in the establishment of Wilderness Areas in the late 1970s. Arts and cultural events proliferated with the renovation of the Wheeler Opera House in 1984. At the same time, a range of non-profit groups focused on everything from the arts to social causes to science to international affairs.

All through the 1960s, '70s and '80s, citizen planners and local government consistently linked the beauty of the natural environment and the desirability of the area as a place to live and visit, and they identified small town scale as worthy of protection. Even then, people were worried about the unintended impacts of success.

In 1966, the Aspen Area General Plan worried that "The most significant change has been ... the gradual encroachment of (housing and lodges) on the countryside."

- *The 1973 Aspen Land Use Plan was committed to "control growth and prevent urban sprawl," adding that, "Emphasis will be placed on preserving the natural environment where new development occurs."*
- *"... eliminating indiscriminate development in environmentally sensitive areas ... " was an important concept in the 1976 Aspen/Pitkin County Growth Management Policy Plan.*

- *Maintaining "Aspen's unique small town character and scale as one of its major attractions to residents and visitors," was part of the 1986 Aspen Area Comprehensive Plan: Historic Element.*

With the expansion of arts and cultural institutions in the 1980s, Aspen was truly maturing as a resort economy. It was during this same period that national economic trends resulted in a proliferation of wealthy households across the country, creating an entirely new level of demand for resort properties.

Although the 1993 Aspen Area Community Plan clearly said that, "Tourism is the economic force of the community" – that statement was no longer true by the end of the decade.

"During the late 1990s, real estate surpassed retail and lodging to become the dominant factor in the Aspen economy," according to *The Aspen Economy*, a 2008 report commissioned by the City of Aspen. "By 2007, real estate transactions approached \$1.8 billion, generating far more economic activity than the \$508 million of taxable sales (that year)."

Themes of the 2011 AACCP

This fundamental shift from tourism to real estate as the primary economy was strongly manifested during the economic boom period of 2004 – 2008, and prompted community concerns. Although the 2011 AACCP was drafted during a deep economic recession amidst little or no development, many residents remain uneasy about this fundamental shift.

Taken as a whole, the main theme of the 2011 AACCP is to focus on the elements of the Aspen Area that make it such an attractive place to live and a compelling place to visit. We seek to manage future development so that it contributes to the long-term sustainability of a vibrant and diverse tourism economy and a strong year-round community.

Public Engagement Process

One of the primary goals of the 2011 Aspen Area Community Plan process was to undertake the broadest public feedback effort possible, in an effort to gauge community consensus on a vision for the next 10 years. This initial effort was described as "direct democracy," and was intended to include everyone who "lives, works or visits" the Aspen Area.

Phase I began with extensive educational outreach, including the State of the Aspen Area Report: 2000-2008, and *The Aspen Economy*, a white paper on the history of the local economy. Educational outreach was followed by an attempt to identify shared values, explore common ground and articulate community consensus. This effort included a series of focus groups, large meetings that used instant voting technology, and social networking tools. Phase I of the public process included more than 1,000 participants, and won four awards.

The purpose of Phase II was to further articulate the community's vision and philosophy, while drafting carefully worded policies to implement community goals. This process included the joint City and County Planning and Zoning Commissions, resource experts and the public.

Phase III was the final adoption process, including the joint P&Zs, the public-at-large, the Aspen City Council and the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners.

Many parts of the 2011 AACP focus on affirming the Aspen Area's unique ideals, which has the dual effect of sustaining a viable tourism economy. The following are some of the central themes of this plan:

- *Rediscovering and reinvigorating the Aspen Idea.*
- *Protecting the natural ecosystems and scenic settings of mountainsides and riparian areas.*
- *Managing development pressures.*
- *Replenishing our lodging inventory to encourage a diverse visitor base.*
- *Promoting a unique and interesting downtown for a diverse visitor base.*
- *Exploring residential design concepts that reaffirm our small town heritage.*
- *Exploring physical planning and design concepts for the West of Castle Creek Area*
- *Improving and linking alternative methods of travel, including commuter trails and transit.*
- *Continuing to acquire open space and improve recreational opportunities.*
- *A renewed focus on environmental stewardship, from water and air to reducing greenhouse gases.*
- *Preserving historical architecture, helping us tell the unique story of our past.*

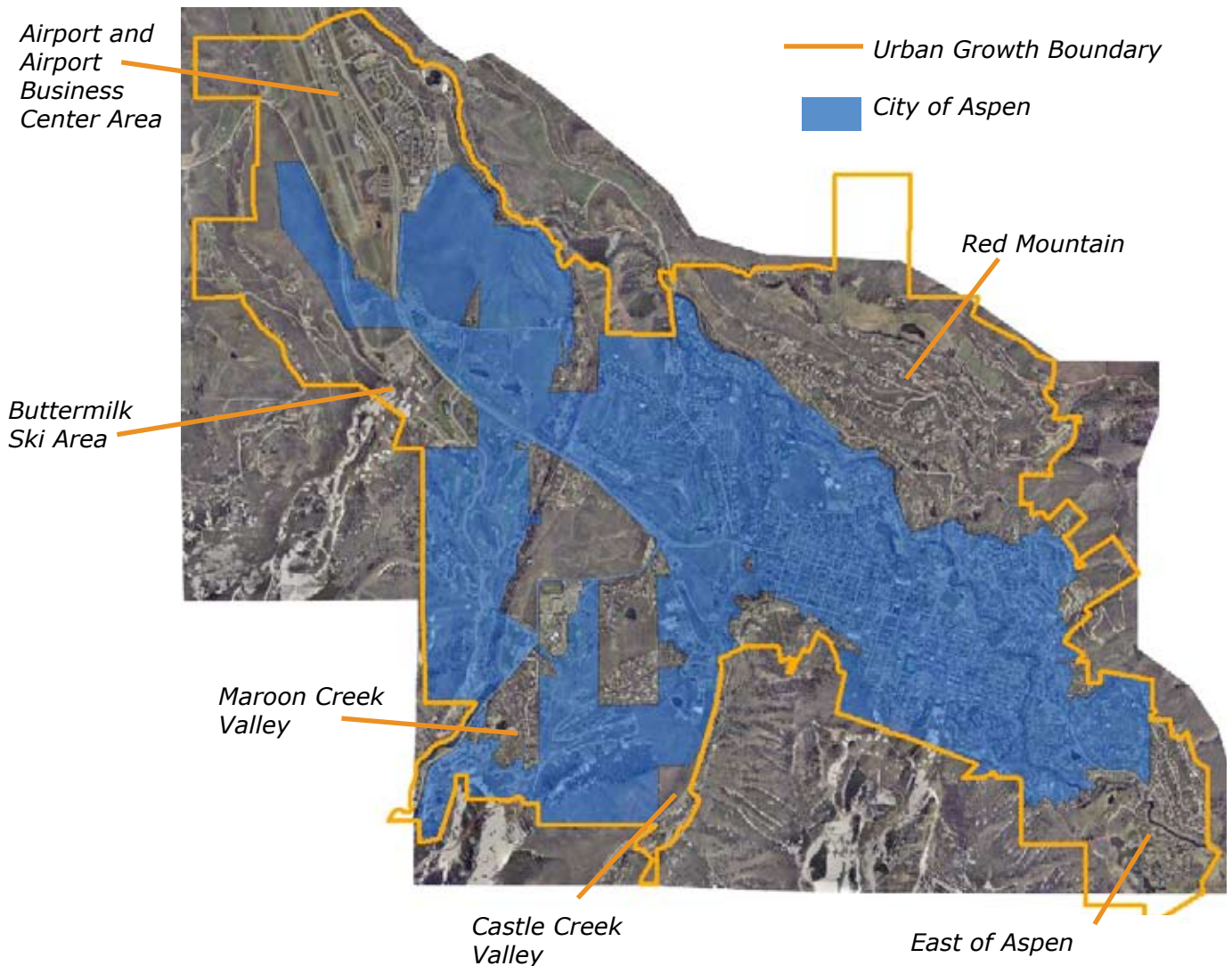
Providing a critical mass of affordable housing remains a long-standing goal of the community, so those who work here can have an opportunity to make Aspen their home, and become vested members of a strong year-round community. The plan includes an emphasis on the livability and quality design of Community Workforce Housing. The 2011 AACP acknowledges problems in the City and County housing mitigation strategies, and seeks to re-examine such requirements to ensure that new development fully offsets its impacts. For the first time, the 2011 AACP calls for all new development to provide housing for all the new employees that are generated. At the same time, the plan focuses on the need for additional local-serving business.

In addition to housing, the 2011 AACP also focuses closely on the day-to-day lives of year-round residents and commuters. That includes a new chapter called the Lifelong Aspenite, which focuses on services ranging from day care to education, from public safety to senior services. This new chapter invites collaboration between a wide range of government entities, taxing districts, non-profits and other organizations.

Planning Area

The Aspen Area Community Plan is the Comprehensive Plan for the area within the Aspen Urban Growth Boundary. The map below depicts the planning area. The City is shaded in blue, and the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) is outlined in orange. The portions that are not shaded are located in unincorporated Pitkin County. The UGB includes Red Mountain, East of Aspen neighborhoods, the Airport Business Center, the Airport, Buttermilk Base area, and portions of the Castle Creek and Maroon Creek valleys.

While the boundaries of the planning area are limited, we recognize that the Aspen Area is an integral part of the Roaring Fork Valley. We are dependent upon our commuting workforce, second homeowners, tourists, and those who live here full time. As a result, this plan recognizes the interconnectedness of all those people who make Aspen work as a community and as a resort.



Accomplishing Goals

It's important to remind ourselves that the Aspen Area community has achieved many ambitious and impressive goals over the years. Sometimes the process has been long and controversial, and just as often those achievements have ultimately become a norm for the community, taken for granted as a shared value. Here are just a few examples:

- **Red Brick Center for the Arts:** A former school on Hallam Street, today's Red Brick Center for the Arts was purchased for \$3.6 million by voters in August 1992. The tally was 526 in favor, and 523 opposed.
- **Pedestrian Malls:** The two downtown pedestrian malls that are widely enjoyed and appreciated today were controversial subjects. One City Council action denied design funds in 1975 – finally approving full design and construction funds in 1976.
- **Housing and Day Care:** In 1990, there was extensive debate on establishing a .45% sales tax for affordable housing and day care. It was a close vote, with 53% in favor. In 2008, opinions had changed – it was reauthorized with 66% in favor.
- **Historic Heritage:** The Aspen City Council established the Commercial Core Historic District in 1974, ultimately resulting in the preservation of structures like the Elks and Brand buildings. It was controversial at the time, but now we now take for granted that such buildings will be protected forever.
- **Mass Transit:** Paid parking was the subject of widespread ire, and even picketing outside City Hall, but Council approved it as part of the Aspen Transportation Implementation Plan in July 1993. Paid parking was part of the reason why RFTA ridership doubled in the mid-1990s.
- **Backcountry Preservation:** In 1994, Pitkin County adopted Rural and Remote Zoning, along with a new Transferrable Development Rights (TDR) program amidst extensive debate. Today, it's accepted as a program that has preserved more than 5,840 acres outside of the Urban Growth Boundary.

Achieving important public policy milestones is never without lively debate and discussion. We hope the 2011 Aspen Area Community Plan includes important new policies that will ultimately become critical turning points for the community over the next 10 years. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy.

We hope this plan captures the broad outlines of our aspirations as a community, and that it will help steer us into a future where our challenges come only from our continued success.

Good Local Governance

As part of this aspirational plan, it's worthwhile to reflect on some of the most critical principles of "good governance."

It's helpful to recognize that the word "governance" did not originally refer to some kind of governmental structure as we know it today. The word "governance" comes from the Greek *kubernao*, meaning "to steer."

In the spirit of this plan, a community can find its path through collaboration and leadership not only through the processes of local government, but from the private sector and a wide range of groups and individuals.

Good governance is transparent, participatory, educational, inclusive, collaborative, civil, consensus-oriented, responsive, effective and efficient, follows the rule of law, and is accountable.

Transparency means that the process of decision-making and implementation is carried out so the public can readily engage in debate, and that reliable information is freely available. Modern technology should be used to help convey and illustrate facts and information.

Informed participation is made possible by our constitutional rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression. Providing reliable information and *education* allows for informed debate and discussion.

Inclusiveness means ensuring that the public feels they have a stake in decision-making, and does not feel excluded. Participation can evolve into *collaboration* across public and private sectors that can serve the whole community.

Good Local Governance , cont.

Civility sets the tone of productive community discourse. Civility means encouraging active debate on the issues, but discouraging personal affronts. To be *consensus oriented* means weighing different interests to reach a broad agreement on what is in the best interest of the whole community.

Good governance requires that institutions and processes are *responsive* to the needs of the public within a reasonable timeframe. *Effectiveness and efficiency* means producing results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources.

The *rule of law* means a fair legal framework that is enforced impartially. It also means there is predictability and fairness in government review processes.

Accountability is key to effective local government, and cannot thrive without transparency and the rule of law. The private sector and local organizations must also be accountable.

Good governance is an ideal that can be difficult to achieve in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality.

Purpose of the Plan

Simply put, the 2011 AACP is intended to reflect community aspirations. As we encounter new challenges and changing conditions in the future, this plan is intended to be used as a compass, to help steer us in the right direction.

The 2011 AACP is not intended to provide an exact road map to follow for the next 10 years, step-by-step. It is simply impossible to anticipate all the twists and turns that will face the Aspen Area in the future.

At the same time, this plan recognizes that community goals are often inextricably linked: sometimes they complement each other, and at times they come into conflict. Preserving a healthy and beautiful natural environment, providing recreational opportunities, maintaining historical architecture and providing arts and cultural events are all shared community values that are also foundations for an unparalleled resort experience. But there are fundamental conflicts as well.

A community plan is not intended to be a tool that easily reconciles all community goals in every instance. Instead, it is a broad, aspirational plan with an articulated vision for the future that serves as a reminder of what’s important to the community. As a community we are constantly in a state of weighing and balancing a variety of competing goals.

Going Forward

The Aspen Area has a long history of planning for our future – from the first growth management codes in the 1970s to the first Aspen Area Community Plan in 1993. This update continues our tradition of comprehensive city-county planning.

Without implementation, comprehensive plans are meaningless. Annual performance review is critical to the continuing viability and relevance of this plan.

How to Use the Plan

The Aspen Area Community Plan shall be adopted by ordinance in the City of Aspen in conformance with Section 4.8 of the Home Rule Charter of the City of Aspen. It shall be adopted by resolution by the Pitkin County Planning and Zoning Commission in conformance with Section 30-28-108, C.R.S. There are subtle differences in the application of the plan in the City of Aspen and Pitkin County:

City of Aspen

In the City of Aspen the AACP shall be used as both a guiding and regulatory document as described below.

The Use of Guiding Provisions in the Plan:

The entire AACP should be considered a guiding and philosophical document to assist the City Council, appointed boards and commissions, City staff, and the citizens of the City of Aspen, in establishing priorities for future legislation, work plans, budgets, and the further development of future community goals. The guiding "Vision" and "Philosophy" statements contained in the AACP should be considered as aspirational and goal setting tools to assist the Aspen community in achieving its long range objectives and ambitions for the continued health and vitality of the Aspen area, its residents, and guests.

The Use of Regulatory Provisions in the Plan:

The Land Use Code of the City of Aspen, Chapter 26 of the Aspen Municipal Code, currently requires applications for certain land use development to be consistent with the Aspen Area Community Plan. Provisions of the AACP that are intended to be regulatory and therefore subject to the consistency standard of review contained in the Land Use Code are expressly identified as such in the "Policy" or "Action Items" sections of each Chapter of the Plan. Each regulatory provision has been written with sufficient specificity so that proponents of new development are afforded due process of law; reviewing bodies do not retain unfettered discretion in approving or denying development applications; and, decisions by reviewing bodies can be clear for reasoned judicial review.

Applications for land use development that are required by the land use code to be consistent with or in compliance with the AACP shall include an analysis section entitled "Consistency with the Aspen Area Community Plan." The application should address those provisions in the AACP that are identified as regulatory and provide an analysis explaining how the proposed development will be consistent with the AACP.

An application for land use development shall not be denied by any reviewing body on the grounds that the proposed development fails to comply with any provision of the AACP that is not specifically identified as regulatory.

Pitkin County

Pitkin County recognizes the AACCP as an advisory document as described below:

All land use applications are subject to the Policies in the Land Use Code, including one (section 1-60-20) that says "It is... policy....to ensure that the use and development of land...and any actions committing such land to development or change in use should consider Pitkin County's Comprehensive Plan." The County Land Use Code specifically requires consideration of Comprehensive Plans as a criterion of approval for certain types of land use reviews, (including special review, location and extent review, Code amendments, rezoning, activities of local and state interest, and growth management exemptions). Reference to Comprehensive Plans in the Land Use Code as a basis for reviewing and taking action on a land use application has the force of law, and where such reference is made, Plans (including the AACCP) may be used accordingly.

How to Read the Plan

The Aspen Area Community Plan is divided into nine different chapters. Each chapter contains:

Vision

The Vision for each chapter is the first item you will read. These are short statements intended to outline community aspirations.

Philosophy

The Philosophy is a longer explanation of the Vision statement. It addresses each topic area in more detail and often provides a brief overview of historical context.

What's Changed Since 2000

Outlining recent history relevant to the chapter.

What's New in the 2011 Plan

Summarizing new policy direction, compared to the 2000 AACP.

Linkages

Outlining ways chapters and topics are related to one another.

Policies

Policies are based on the Vision and Philosophy statements for each chapter, and are intended to direct decision-making. For the City, the vast majority of Policy Statements are guiding in nature, but there are some Policies that can be used to regulate development (see the "How to Use the Plan" section for more detail). Reference to "guiding" or "regulatory" Policies is specific to the use of the Plan in the City of Aspen. In the County, policy categories are for descriptive purposes only. Each policy falls into one of seven categories that are intended to identify the underlying purpose of each policy. For City purposes, categories 1 – 6 are "guiding" and category 7 is "regulatory." Each category is outlined in detail below:

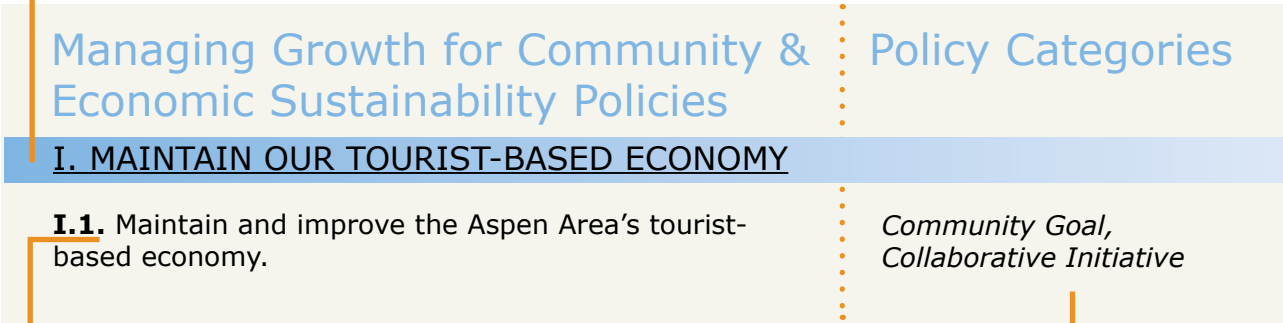
- 1. Community Goals** – These statements articulate our broad community aspirations. They help guide decision-making on a variety of topics.
- 2. Collaborative Initiatives** – These statements suggest collaboration between a variety of groups, including the city, county, non-profits, other government agencies, businesses, etc. Additional work may result from the collaboration, but the first step is working with interested and affected parties.
- 3. Incentive Programs** – These statements do not direct regulatory code changes, but look to implement new voluntary programs and policies.
- 4. Work Programs** – These statements describe potential departmental work programs. They may require work from one or more departments. They do not direct code changes, but may direct internal city/county policy changes.

- 5. Data Needs** – These statements clearly identify the need for new data gathering. Data gathering may ultimately support code changes, budget priorities, work programs, and initiatives.
- 6. Proposed Code Amendments** – These statements are guiding, and provide direction for future code changes. These code changes range from exploring the creation of a development pacing system to updating affordable housing mitigation levels. These policies will require follow-up and prioritization by appointed and elected officials.
- 7. Regulatory** – These statements are regulatory in nature. Any development application submitted subsequent to the adoption of the 2011 AACP, which is required to show consistency with the Aspen Area Community Plan, will have to show consistency with these policy statements.

A series of Action Items are located at the end of the plan, following the chapters.

Below is an example of how to read the Policies in each chapter:

*Each chapter includes a number of Policies that are divided into sections, identified by a band of color. Maintain our Tourist-Based Economy is the first section in Managing Growth for Community & Economic Sustainability. Each section is labeled with a roman numeral, in this case **I**.*



*This is the first Policy under the Maintain our Tourist-Based Economy policy section. Each Policy is numbered based on policy section, in this case **I.1**. All policies are in **Bold**.*

Each Policy is divided into categories, which are identified immediately to the right of each Policy.

How to read the plan, cont.

Action Items

A series of Action Items are located at the end of the plan, following the chapters.

The Action Items represent a set of tools to implement the Vision, Philosophy, and Policies. They are in no way an exhaustive list of everything that could be done to further community goals, but they provide a possible road map toward implementing the community's shared vision and philosophy. The Action Items are found in their own section, toward the end of this document. In the Action Item section, the policies are re-printed, with a list of directly associated Action Items.

Each Action Item identifies a department or agency that should be responsible for the implementation of the Action Items. In addition, each Action Item is identified as something that should be pursued immediately (labeled with an "I"), or in the long-term (labeled with an "LT"). Each Action Item also includes the entities that are responsible for implementing the plan. The list on the following page identifies the entities referenced in the plan.

Below is an example of how to read the Action Items that are in the Appendix.

*Each chapter includes a number of Policies that are divided into sections, identified by a band of color. Maintain our Tourist-Based Economy is the first section in Managing Growth for Community & Economic Sustainability. Each section is labeled with a roman numeral, in this case **I**.*

*This is the first Policy under the Maintain our Tourist-Based Economy policy section. Each Policy is numbered based on policy section, in this case **I.1**. All policies are in **Bold**.*

This Action Item is identified as a Long Term ("LT") Action Item, and Planning Staff ("P") is listed as the responsible department.

Managing Growth for Community & Economic Sustainability Policies and Action Items

I. MAINTAIN OUR TOURIST-BASED ECONOMY

I.1. Maintain and improve the Aspen Area's tourist-based economy. (Community Goal, Collaborative Initiative)

I.1.a Establish a collaborative working group including major institutions, the public sector, ACRA, the retail sector, the SkiCo and larger lodges, to develop a community-wide strategic resort analysis and plan to maintain sustainability for the tourist economy. (LT - P)

I.1.b The working group should conduct market research and brand development, including examining what other resort communities are doing to attract visitors. (I - P, SE)

This Action Item is identified as an Immediate ("I") Action Item, Planning and Special Events Staff ("P, SE") are listed as the responsible departments.

Entities Referenced in the Plan

- A – Airport
- ABC Group – Airport Business Center Neighborhood Group
- ACRA – Aspen Chamber Resort Association
- AO – City Attorney’s Office
- APCHA – Aspen/Pitkin County Housing Authority
- ARD – Aspen Recreation Department
- Aspen K-12 – Aspen School District
- Asset – City Asset Department
- AVH – Aspen Valley Hospital
- B – Building
- CDOT – Colorado Department of Transportation
- CI – Canary Initiative
- City Manager – City Manager’s Office
- CMC – Colorado Mountain College
- County Manager – County Manager’s Office
- CR – City and County Community Relations
- EH – Environmental Health
- EOTC – Elected Officials Transportation Commission
- E/SW – Engineering and Stormwater
- Fire – Fire Department
- HHS – Health and Human Services
- HPC – City Historic Preservation Commission
- KF – Kids First
- L – Landfill
- LE – Law Enforcement
- LPHA – Local Public Health Agencies / Boards of Health
- LM – County Land Management Department
- P – Planning
- PH – Public Health
- P/OS – City and County Parks and Open Space Departments
- PW – County Public Works Department
- RFTA – Roaring Fork Transit Authority
- SE – Special Events
- SkiCo – Aspen Ski Company
- SrS – Senior Services
- Streets – City Streets Department
- T – City Transportation Department
- U – City Utilities