

The 2023 Global Fest event in Aurora, Colorado. Photos from Jose Luis Ramos, Monarca Group

Exploring Equity in Aurora Commercial Buildings

NREL, Monarca Group, Tufts, and the Aurora community investigated which commercial buildings support the community and how.

Buildings are where we live, work, play, worship, and more. Commercial buildings play a critical role in providing spaces and services which support us. Reducing energy and emissions in these buildings provides a cleaner and safer space for our community. Building Performance Standards are a policy tool to help drive emission and energy reductions, but we need to make sure it is done equitably.

Aurora Buildings Research

NREL and Monarca Group investigated the commercial buildings in Aurora and used the findings to equitably prioritize outreach across Aurora to integrate community perspectives into the State of Colorado's BPS. The findings informed outreach to identify common challenges and opportunities for upgrading commercial buildings and created a list of buildings which Aurora community prioritized.

Key Findings about Aurora Commercial Buildings

The next sections will review key findings about the commercial buildings in Aurora.

Property Type

Strip malls are the most common property type across equity priority and non-equity priority communities. However, the condition of strip malls in disadvantaged communities are worse off. This is valuable information to share with the State as they set equitable targets.

Building Vintage

Most of the poorest condition buildings in Aurora which are in equity priority communities and were built before 1970.

Disadvantaged (DAC) Census Tracts

We found that about 32% of the poorest condition buildings were not located in DAC census tracts, thus we need other tool to prioritize these buildings for upgrades.

Lease Type

The most common lease types in all of Aurora are triple net leases, but they are most common in middle-to-low condition buildings.

Key Findings from the Surveys

The research teams surveyed community members, business owners, and property owners to investigate common barriers and opportunities for commercial buildings in Aurora.

Community Members

Community members said AC, heating, and window upgrades are most important. 62% of community members said they needed to leave their house to cool off and that libraries, malls, local businesses, parks and pools are the most valuable places to go.

Business Owners

32% of business owners said they are concerned about the livability or safety of the buildings they operate in, and half of the business owners said they must keep their business at uncomfortable temperatures to afford energy bills. Additionally, business owners said that social media, community leaders, websites, and people who physically visit their businesses are the best ways to get information about energy assistance programs or incentives.

Commercial Building Property Owners

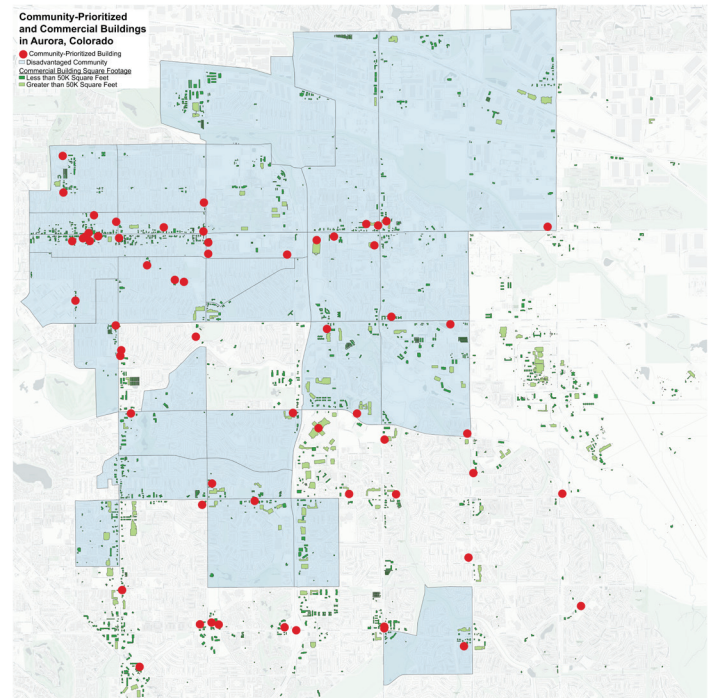
50% of property owners said they have recently gotten an audit due to the State of Colorado's BPS. The top concerns and barriers to making energy upgrades were project financing, unaware of environmental benefits, and difficulty navigating the financing process. Lastly, property owners said the most valuable support they could receive from city or states are 1) assistance in reporting energy, 2) free energy assessments, 3) tenant outreach and education support, and 4) assistance in developing retrofit plans, including lifecycle costs analyses.

This information is invaluable to shaping the equitable implementation of buildings policies!

Community-Prioritized Commercial Buildings

Aurora community, NREL, and Monarca Group identified which buildings support the community by surveying community members, business owners, and commercial building owners. Additionally, we found that the community services which commercial buildings provide is a useful way to understand how people think about buildings.

The map below shows all commercial buildings in Aurora. The light green buildings represent the buildings greater than 50,000 square feet (must comply with State of Colorado's BPS), the dark green buildings are the buildings less than 50,000 square feet, and the red dots are the community-prioritized commercial buildings.



Next Steps

NREL and Monarca Group are in Atlanta, Georgia sharing the lessons from Aurora and replicating this work!

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