

# THE CHARGING STATION

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF A<sup>2</sup>ZERO AND  
THE ANN ARBOR OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATIONS



## IN THIS ISSUE:

- WELCOME.....1
- LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....1
- GET TO KNOW THE GBC.....2
- THE GBC’S IMPACT.....4
- SPOTLIGHT.....6
- ANNOUNCEMENTS.....7
- UPCOMING EVENTS.....7

## ABOUT THE EDITOR



DeAndre' J. Calvert supports community engagement and advancing equity programs. As the Engagement Manager, DeAndre' manages OSI's engagement team, A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Community Collaborators, and commercial decarbonization through the Green Business Challenge. Interested in learning more? Reach out to DeAndre' at [dcalvert@a2gov.org](mailto:dcalvert@a2gov.org).



## WELCOME

Welcome from the City of Ann Arbor’s Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI). In this issue of the Charging Station, OSI is delighted to share details about the Green Business Challenge and the impact sustainable practices can have on our business community. If you are interested in learning more about any of the organizations featured in this issue and how you can get involved, more detail can be found on our website: [www.a2gov.org/sustainability](http://www.a2gov.org/sustainability). As always, thank you for your interest in sustainability activities in Ann Arbor!

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Equity and justice are at the center of A<sup>2</sup>ZERO and staff in OSI are continuing to ground our work in these critical principles. In that light, we’d like to take a moment to honor the geographic and historic space we share. We acknowledge that the land the City of Ann Arbor occupies is the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabe and Wyandot peoples. We further acknowledge that our city stands, like almost all property in the United States, on lands obtained, generally in unconscionable ways, from indigenous peoples. The taking of this land was formalized by the Treaty of Detroit in 1807. Knowing where we live, work, study, and recreate does not change the past, but a thorough understanding of the ongoing consequences of this past can empower us in our work to create a future that supports human flourishing and justice for all individuals.

# GET TO KNOW THE GREEN BUSINESS CHALLENGE

GOING GREEN JUST GOT EASIER

The Green Business Challenge (GBC) encourages our businesses to engage in more sustainable behaviors by providing technical assistance, guidance, and recognition to local businesses that voluntarily become more sustainable and lower their environmental footprint. The core focuses of the program are **energy efficiency, renewable energy usage, waste reduction and material reuse, water reduction, and alternative transportation**. Launched in May 2024, the Green Business Challenge presents a new framework to recognize, support, and celebrate local businesses working to advance sustainability in the community. Co-created by the Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations and Ann Arbor SPARK, this new program will help local businesses:

1. Lower operating costs
2. Create a stronger brand
3. Reduce their environmental impact.
4. Build a more sustainable culture
5. Enhance employee and customer satisfaction



The GBC has five certification levels — certified, bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. The certification level that a business achieves is based on the number of points they accumulate across seven areas of sustainability - energy, water stewardship, circular economy, mobility, resilience, education, and supply chain. Some areas have more points than others, but all areas are important to fostering greater business-related sustainability. In addition to the formal certification levels, there are also recognition opportunities for those entities that improve their performance year-over-year, regardless of their status. Businesses are also able to earn “innovation” points for undertaking novel practices or implementing policies not explicitly listed in the framework.

Four of the seven areas have a “baseline,” which is a requirement that businesses must achieve before earning points in that category (circular economy, energy, resilience, and water stewardship).

# GET TO KNOW THE GREEN BUSINESS CHALLENGE

GOING GREEN JUST GOT EASIER

More details about the GBC, including technical fact sheets, the registration portal, links to technical assistance, events and upcoming activities, and more can be found on the Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge website [a2gbc.org](http://a2gbc.org). All seven areas have a point of contact in the Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations that businesses can reach out to with questions or for support. Those interested are also welcome to contact [sustainability@a2gov.org](mailto:sustainability@a2gov.org) with more general questions.

The Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations believes that businesses are key players to reaching Ann Arbor's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030.



*Buses (along with billboards) in Ann Arbor have been adorned with messaging that promote the benefits of the Green Business Challenge.*

**Businesses are essential to meeting our audacious climate and sustainability goals - we all have to work together to achieve a just transition to carbon neutrality by 2030. And businesses provide such an interesting and critical forum for collaboration, innovation, and advancement of sustainability practices.**



*Plaques made for high-earners in the first pilot of the Green Business Challenge, made locally from recovered wood.*

**THINK YOUR BUSINESS CAN STAND UP TO THE CHALLENGE?**  
**Learn more and join at [osi.a2gov.org/a2gbc!](http://osi.a2gov.org/a2gbc)**



# IMPACT OF THE GBC

## COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND GROWTH

The A2 GBC has made a significant impact in its inaugural year, demonstrating its value as a catalyst for sustainability within the local business community. By providing businesses with tools, resources, and recognition, the program has fostered a culture of environmental responsibility and innovation.

To date, 23 companies are registered for the GBC. These companies range from small tech companies with no office space, like APT Solar, to large companies managing multiple facilities, such as Zingerman's. Of the registered companies, two have already achieved certification: Zingerman's and Cinnaholic both received a bronze level certification in 2024. Interest in the program continues to increase due to new benefits for registrants, special events, and word of mouth.

The GBC launched with a toolkit resource designed to help business owners identify ways to get started in developing a sustainability plan, and details a points-earning structure for implementations, where points go towards official GBC certification. The toolkit lists local partners, like the Ann Arbor Washtenaw 2030 District, and sustainability implementations that are within reach, like installing smart thermostats, for example.

In partnership with the GBC, Ann Arbor SPARK introduced the Sustainable Future Forum (SFF), a new signature event as part of the a2Tech360 series. The goals of the event were to feature innovators developing and providing climate and sustainability-centric products and solutions, to promote the GBC, and celebrate the first-year participants. More than 100 people registered for the inaugural event with participants self-identifying as entrepreneurs (36%), business service providers (22%), and general tech (19%) as the top three professions.



## GREEN BUSINESS CHALLENGE

### Spring 2024 Toolkit



*The Spring 2024 Green Business Challenge Toolkit.*

### Introduction

The Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge (A2 GBC) is a recognition and certification program that honors and supports local business actions to advance sustainability. By providing recognition, technical support, and peer learning opportunities to our local businesses we can make notable progress towards our community's goal of achieving a just transition to community-wide carbon neutrality by 2030 (known as A<sup>2</sup>ZERO), while simultaneously honoring the sustainability actions of our local businesses and solidifying Ann Arbor's position as a national leader in sustainability.

A2 GBC has four certification levels—bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. The certification level that a business achieves is based on the number of points they accumulate across seven areas of sustainability - energy, water stewardship, circular economy, mobility, resilience, education, and supply chain. Some areas have more points than others, but all areas are important to fostering greater business-related sustainability. In addition to the formal certification levels, there are also recognition opportunities for those entities that improve their performance year-over-year, regardless of their status. Businesses are also able to earn "innovation" points for undertaking novel practices or implementing policies not explicitly listed in the framework.

# IMPACT OF THE GBC

## COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND GROWTH

Doug Moeller of Cinnaholic said, "A2 GBC is a great way to find new ways I could help my business become more sustainable and to reduce waste. I was not aware of some of these resources, so having this tool and support allowed us to improve even more."

With the success of events like the Sustainable Future Forum and the establishment of ongoing meetups, GBC has created a strong network for collaboration and idea-sharing.

The GBC was built, launched as a pilot, and is now ready to scale. While the program has made notable strides, there are clear opportunities for growth, including additional staffing, tailored resources for diverse business types, and diversified support for small businesses. By addressing these needs and building on its momentum, the GBC program is well-positioned to amplify its contributions to Ann Arbor's A<sup>2</sup>ZERO goals, continue Ann Arbor's example of what sustainability looks like community-wide, and create a lasting positive impact on the regional ecosystem.



*Dr. Missy Stults recognizing GBC participant NetZero Lawn Care at the Sustainable Futures Forum.*

Stay warm with **free advice** on how to weatherize, decarbonize, and cozy-ize your home from the A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Home Energy Advisor, along with **financial support** from the A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Home Energy Rebates!

**[Learn more at osi.a2gov.org/rebates.](https://osi.a2gov.org/rebates)**



# SPOTLIGHT: FRESH COAST CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

## REFRESHING SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

Through the Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA) funding awarded to Ann Arbor SPARK, GBC participants have access to sustainability plan development and concierge consulting services from Ann Arbor's Fresh Coast Climate Solutions. At program launch, business owners expressed concerns that they did not have the time needed to dedicate to researching sustainability practices and plan development.

In early December, Fresh Coast Climate Solutions began working with Ann Arbor SPARK and the City of Ann Arbor's Office of Sustainability and Innovations to provide sustainability support to local businesses and other organizations engaged in Ann Arbor's Green Business Challenge (GBC). Fresh Coast is an Ann Arbor-based sustainability consulting firm, focused on reversing climate change

by helping clients achieve bold, equitable, and impactful solutions. The Fresh Coast team has decades of experience working with diverse clients—municipalities, private sector businesses, industry associations, and non-governmental organizations—to advance sustainability strategies and solutions. The team supports clients on climate/carbon, water, biodiversity, sustainability programs, supply chain, cleantech, and other areas and is passionate about moving the needle toward a more sustainable future.

Fresh Coast works with entities, selected by SPARK and the City, to: 1) develop a sustainability plan that aligns with business objectives and GBC criteria and 2) implement actions to enhance the business's sustainability and score in the GBC.

Fresh Coast is already working with three local businesses - Net Zero Tree Care, C'Mon Betty, and Ann Arbor SPARK – and anticipates working with at least twelve more between now and June 2025.

With each organization, Fresh Coast: 1) conducts several conversations and a survey with management team members to understand business operations and sustainability goals, 2) identify and prioritize key areas to advance sustainable business strategies with regard to GBC and industry best practices, 3) provide a public facing sustainability plan outlining time-bound sustainability goals, and 4) provide an internal action plan with actionable steps to achieve sustainability impacts related to GBC.



# FRESH COAST

Climate Solutions



### **COLIN DEAN, PROJECT MANAGER**

Colin is an associate at Fresh Coast Climate Solutions. He has over four years of experience in project management as a Captain in the United States Army. He served two overseas tours and held numerous leadership roles as an Army Officer. Colin is committed to public service, and truly enjoys building teams and developing others. He is motivated to transition from the active-duty Army and give back to the community in a new way.



### **PAUL GRUBER, PROGRAM AND ENGAGEMENT LEAD**

Paul has worked for 20 years with interdisciplinary teams in private, not-for-profit, and public sectors to advance environmental, social, and governance goals. He enjoys helping teams find new value in start-up businesses, new products and business strategies, public-private partnerships, and forward-thinking research.



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Calling all Food Lovers and Home Cooks:** Contribute to the A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Community Cookbook: Contribute to the A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Community Cookbook! OSI is compiling a community cookbook! Do you enjoy cooking from scratch with local, seasonal ingredients, have creative ways of using up food scraps, or have a tasty plant-based recipe you love? Contribute recipes and sustainable food tips by March 1 to the A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Community Cookbook at [osi.a2gov.org/cookbook](https://osi.a2gov.org/cookbook).

**Ambassador applications now open!** Join the 7th Cohort of A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Ambassadors to gain increased knowledge, tools, and resources to discuss sustainability broadly and specific actions you and your community can implement to advance carbon neutrality. Learn more and apply by February 19 at [osi.a2gov.org/ambassadors](https://osi.a2gov.org/ambassadors).

**New Energy Rebates Available:** The Office of Sustainability and Innovations is pleased to announce an expansion to our [Home Energy Rebate program](#) and our [Home Energy Advisor service](#):

- New rebates of \$500-750 for induction cooktops and ranges, and rebates of \$300-500 for heat pump dryers.
- The rebate dollar amounts for weatherization (insulation and air sealing) and cold-climate heat pumps have increased substantially, and now include duct modifications when needed for heat pumps. Residents who have already applied for and received rebates for these measures will be seeing increased reimbursement as we work to make sure our program remains equitable and impactful.
- Rebates are now newly available for individual Ann Arbor residents living in multi-family buildings. Rebates for whole multi-family buildings and complexes will be rolling out in the weeks to come.
- The process for applying for rebates has been streamlined and simplified. The process is as easy as ensuring you meet the requirements, reserving a rebate, completing your work, and then completing the application and receiving your funds.

In addition to these changes to our rebate program, we have also added an easy way to obtain a brief “consultation” from our [A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Home Energy Advisor](#). If you have a home-related question, need contractor connections, bid reviews, technical advice or anything else relevant to home energy, simply click on “sign up here” on the webpage and schedule a Consult Call.

**Electric Lawn Care Equipment Discount Program and Electric Leaf Blower Rebates:** Designed to help lower the cost of transitioning from gas to electric lawn care equipment in accordance with Ann Arbor’s new leaf blower ordinance, these discounts and rebates will be available beginning Mar. 1, 2025. For more information, including rebate and discount amount as well as eligibility, visit [osi.a2gov.org/leafblowers](https://osi.a2gov.org/leafblowers).

**Sustaining Ann Arbor Together Grant Awarded to SunBundle:** The next recipient of the Sustaining Ann Arbor Together grant is SunBundle, a non-profit with the goal of empowering fitness and fostering wellness education within underserved communities by up-cycling athletic gear. With this grant, they will establish branch organizations in five different university campuses across Michigan and build and deliver 1,000 care-packages in the next calendar year. If you’re interested in learning more about the Sustaining Ann Arbor Together grant, please visit [a2gov.org/sa2t](https://a2gov.org/sa2t).

**Join the Sustainable Energy Utility waitlist!** The City is currently registering interest in the Ann Arbor Sustainable Energy Utility. If you are interested in enrolling or getting more information as it becomes available, please [fill out this form to join the waitlist](#).

**2025 Clean Fuel and Charging Infrastructure Request for Proposals Now Open:** The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy has announced the first in a series of Requests for Proposals, offering \$5 million in initial funding to support the deployment of non-public Level 2 alternating current electric vehicle charging stations at existing multifamily housing units. Individual grant awards are capped at \$300,000. Applications will be accepted and processed on a first come, first serve basis until funding is exhausted. For more details, including the [Request for Proposal](#), [Online Application](#), and [Sample Grant Agreement](#), visit the [Clean Fuel and Charging Infrastructure Program Webpage](#).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Food Literacy for All 2025** | Every Tuesday February 4 – April 22, 6:30PM | Virtual | Free

Launched in 2017, Food Literacy for All is a community-academic partnership course at the University of Michigan. Structured as an evening lecture series, Food Literacy for All features different guest speakers each week to address challenges and opportunities of diverse food systems. The course is free and open to the public. This year the course theme is Food and Care. The sessions are co-led by Dr. Bénédicte Boisseron (University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, Afroamerican & African Studies) and Shiloh Maples (Community organizer and seed keeper). [Learn more and sign-up for the online sessions here.](#)

### **A Hopeful Horizon for Climate Action: Bridging Communications, Cognition, and the Science of Hope** | Friday, Feb 14, 3:30 – 4:30PM | Rackham Amphitheatre | Free

The Global CO2 Initiative and its affiliated student organization, the Michigan Carbon Capture Club, are excited to welcome Molly Kawahata to the stage at the University of Michigan on Friday, February 14, 2025. Molly will speak about the transformative power of hope in the fight against climate change. The talk, "A Hopeful Horizon for Climate Action: Bridging Communications, Cognition, and the Science of Hope," is free and open to the public, but attendees must [register online](#).

### **University of Michigan Zero Waste Week Policy Panel: Creating a Circular Future** | Thursday, Feb 20, 6 – 7:30PM | Annenberg Auditorium, 735 S State St, Ann Arbor | Free

Join us for a discussion on zero waste policy including Ann Arbor's circular economy strategy, the effort to overturn Michigan's ban on local plastic policy and more. We'll be joined by experts working in the policy space including: Missy Stults, Sustainability and Innovations Director, City of Ann Arbor, Lisa Disch, Ann Arbor City Council Ward 1 Representative and Sue Shink, Michigan State Senator. [Learn more and submit any question you have ahead of the event online](#), or email them to [umich@zerowaste.org](mailto:umich@zerowaste.org).

### **Sustainability Forum: Circular Innovation in Ann Arbor's Food and Beverage Sectors** | Wednesday, Feb 26, 6 – 7:30PM | Downtown AADL Branch, 4th floor multi-purpose room | Free

Anyone who has been to Ann Arbor knows just how extraordinary its food and beverage scene is! In addition to providing wonderful products to residents and visitors, many local food and beverage businesses are adopting sustainable practices to reduce their environmental impact. Join us at the downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library for the second session of the 2025 Sustainability Forums series to learn about the work Ann Arbor's Office of Sustainability is doing to advance sustainability within the local food business community, as well as hear from the local food entrepreneurs who are reducing landfill waste and advancing a more circular, regenerative food system!

### **A Film Screening of A Letter To The West Side** | Saturday, Feb. 8, 6PM | Michigan Theater | Free

In celebration of Black History Month, the Ann Arbor Housing Commission invites you to journey through the heart of Ann Arbor's West Side – a historically Black community whose stories of resilience, innovation, and unity shaped the city we know today. Through the powerful documentary, we pay tribute to the trailblazers and celebrate the vibrancy of the once-thriving Black local businesses and schools, and shed light on the systemic challenges that led to the loss of the neighborhood. Admission is free but seating is limited, [RSVP online here to reserve your spot](#).

For more information on our upcoming events, please visit [www.a2gov.org/sustainability/events](http://www.a2gov.org/sustainability/events).

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