CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS:
A CASE STUDY OF THE STAPLETON REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Jennifer Valentine
Master's of Regional Planning, 2006
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early and consistent citizen involvement in the planning process helps ensure that a plan meets the needs of the community, creates a sense of ownership, enhances citizen buy-in and trust, educates the public, assists in avoiding confrontations by building consensus and anticipating public concerns, increases the likelihood of successful implementation, strengthens comprehensive plans, and improves overall satisfaction with the final product (Burby, 2003; Creighton, 2005). However, despite the recognized merits of citizen participation in the planning process, in many cases planners either ignore public input or fail to adequately incorporate citizen concerns into final plans (King et al., 1998 & Lowry et al., 1997).

This research seeks to determine how planners can encourage meaningful citizen participation in the planning process, specifically for large public projects. A case study is used to examine the role of citizen involvement in planning the redevelopment of the former Stapleton International Airport site in Denver, Colorado. The plan for Stapleton's transformation from an airport to a mixed-use community was created with significant citizen input, with a continued commitment to public involvement, and outreach throughout the site’s redevelopment.

Although some factors associated with the Stapleton project are fairly unique, this research affirms that early and consistent citizen involvement in the planning process can enhance public buy-in and overall satisfaction and reduce implementation barriers. In this case, the impetus for participation was largely citizen-driven. Public involvement has been sustained as a result of committed individual citizens, supportive leadership, and the formation of durable citizen groups.

This research was limited in scope due to time, resource and location constraints. In order to glean results that are more easily generalized and informative, future studies should be conducted using several cases, either similar or contrasting in nature.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I. INTRODUCTION  ~  5

A. THE PROBLEM  
B. RESEARCH QUESTION

## II. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION RESEARCH  ~  7

A. JUSTIFICATION AND BENEFITS  
B. ADVOCACY AND ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION  
C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS  
D. PARTICIPATION IN LARGE PROJECTS  
E. MOTIVATION AND SCOPE  
F. CHARACTERISTICS AND CRITERIA  
G. EVALUATION

## III. RESEARCH DESIGN  ~  19

A. CASE SELECTION  
B. CRITERIA  
C. DATA COLLECTION  
D. CAVEATS

## IV. CASE STUDY  ~  22

A. CONTEXT  ~  22  
   - DENVER HISTORY  
   - DENVER TRENDS AND SOCIOECONOMICS  

B. BACKGROUND  ~  25  
   - STAPLETON AT A GLANCE  
   - STAPLETON’S ROOTS  
   - SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS

C. THE PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION  ~  31  
   - TIMING  
   - INCLUSIVENESS  
   - FACILITATION  
   - EXPECTATIONS  
   - CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
   - PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

D. OUTCOMES  ~  36  
   - IMPACT OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT  
   - FULFILLMENT OF STATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES  
   - SUPPORT FOR PLAN


♥ ONGOING PARTICIPATION

E. SUMMARY ~ 43

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ~ 44

VI. REFERENCES ~ 46

VII. APPENDICES ~ 50
   A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
   B. PLANS
I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE PROBLEM

Early and consistent citizen involvement in the planning process helps ensure that a plan meets the needs of the community, creates a sense of ownership, enhances citizen buy-in and trust, educates the public, assists in avoiding confrontations by building consensus and anticipating public concerns, increases the likelihood of successful implementation, strengthens comprehensive plans, and improves overall satisfaction with the final product (Burby, 2003; Creighton, 2005). However, despite the recognized merits of citizen participation in the planning process, in many cases planners either ignore public input or fail to adequately incorporate citizen concerns into final plans (King et al., 1998 & Lowry et al., 1997).

Token participation and one-way flows of information are often far more common than meaningful involvement in the form of partnership, delegated power or citizen control. Arguments against more extensive public involvement schemes typically focus on the fact that creating and implementing such a program may add time and costs to the planning process; however, this initial investment is often offset by smoother interaction with the public throughout various stages of planning and ultimately uncomplicated and successful implementation (Brody et al., 2003).

The empty rituals of participation that are all too prevalent in the planning process are understandably frustrating for citizens affected by these plans and decisions; however, they also represent a significant loss for planners and society as a whole, as we are missing out on important opportunities to create better places that fulfill the needs and wants of the communities for which we are planning.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

In order to capitalize upon these missed opportunities, planners must not only understand the importance of citizen participation in the planning process, but also be familiar with the most effective tools and processes for facilitating public involvement. By examining the various public involvement initiatives and tools used in planning the redevelopment of the former Stapleton International Airport into a mixed-use community, this research seeks to determine:

- To what extent were planners and other officials able to encourage citizen participation in planning Stapleton’s redevelopment?
- What methods and strategies were used to encourage meaningful public involvement in planning Stapleton’s redevelopment?
- What special challenges and opportunities do large-scale redevelopment projects present for public participation?
- What broader lessons can be learned from this case?

By answering these questions, this paper will serve as a general reminder of the importance of citizen involvement in the planning process and help planners and
public officials think through which tools and processes may be most useful in
designing a participation program.

More specifically, this research identifies a number of challenges and opportunities
involved in encouraging public participation in large public projects. Despite the
existence of some conditions that are relatively unique to Stapleton project, many
of the types of issues encountered are common among large public projects of this
type. Similarly, these types of projects often present similar opportunities;
therefore, this case study can in some ways serve as a guide for officials involved
in creating a participation program for other projects.
II. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION RESEARCH

A brief review of key research related to public participation in the planning process follows. This review provides support for the importance of citizen involvement, discusses the planner’s role as an advocate or facilitator, and reviews several key tools and methods used in public participation programs. Special emphasis is given to methods that are considered more effective and those that are especially relevant for large public projects.

A discussion of the importance of the motivation for and scope of citizen involvement helps clarify what constitutes meaningful participation. Likewise, the next section outlines a number of characteristics common to effective programs – these attributes were used to craft the criteria used in examining this case.

A. JUSTIFICATION AND BENEFITS

Public participation is increasingly being viewed as an integral component of the planning process. Early and consistent citizen involvement helps ensure that a plan meets the needs of the community, creates a sense of ownership, enhances citizen buy-in and trust, educates the public, assists in avoiding confrontations by building consensus and anticipating public concerns, and increases the likelihood of successful implementation (Creighton, 2005; Burby, 2003). Research also shows that comprehensive plans are stronger when citizens are involved early and often in the planning process, and that there is usually greater satisfaction with the final product (Burby, 2003).

Some decisions are arguably best made by engineers, scientists or experts, namely those that are strictly technical in nature and involve minimal value judgments. However, in most cases the weighting of alternatives is driven by competing values, which should be decided by those who will be affected by the plan. In other words, “there is nothing about technical training that makes technical experts more qualified than others to make value choices” (Creighton, 2005, p.16).

Similarly, citizens possess important “ordinary knowledge” that can help planners understand local conditions and values that might not be apparent to an outsider (Innes, 1998). Seeking out citizen input can also illuminate the needs and desires of the community to ensure that facilities are well used and enjoyed (Gans, 1993).

Furthermore, the American Planning Association has created a code of ethics to guide the actions and decision of planning professionals. The first section of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Code of Ethics discusses the planner’s responsibility to the public. AICP asserts that citizen involvement is important for promoting a sense of fairness, as the public has a right to be informed about decisions that will affect their lives. AICP also stresses the importance of representing disadvantaged groups and promoting good citizenship through the participatory process (AICP, 2005).
B. ADVOCACY AND ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

Given the importance of citizen input in the planning process and the difficulties involved in ensuring meaningful involvement, the planner may occasionally need to take the role of advocate. An important starting point of the advocacy role is ensuring that citizens are included, rather than excluded, from the planning process (Davidoff, 1965). Another component includes ensuring that citizens are informed and have multiple opportunities, as well as the ability to engage in meaningful participation. This role can be especially important when affected populations are low-income, minority or have relatively low educational attainment. These groups are especially burdened by the potential demands of time and money required for participation, and may not be well equipped to grasp and respond to technical information. In such cases, planners may help facilitate a two-way exchange of information and reduce time and financial constraints (Davidoff, 1965).

It is also important to keep in mind some general guidelines for facilitating participation. In a study of over 60 localities, Burby (2003) identifies several important points to consider for effective citizen participation, as well as a few specific techniques that may work well. He notes that it is generally important to focus on the following:

1. Objectives ~ to provide information and to listen; empower citizens by providing opportunities to influence decisions
2. Timing ~ early, continuous public involvement is ideal
3. Target Audience ~ seek participation from a range of stakeholders
4. Techniques ~ provide different opportunities for dialogue
5. Information ~ provide clear information, free of jargon and technical terms
   ~ Adapted from Burby, 2003

C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS

There are a variety of methods that can be used to engage citizens in the planning process. These methods can be grouped by purpose, for example: outreach, information exchange, recommendations and agreement (EPA, 2005). Examples of each of these types of methods include, but are not limited to the following:

- **Outreach: ways to get information out to the public** ~ websites, hotlines, newsletters, listserves, brochures, fact sheets, news releases, public meetings, briefings, public service announcements and open houses
- **Information exchange: getting input from the public** ~ workshops, focus groups, small public meetings, surveys, polls, question and answer sessions, roundtable discussions
- **Recommendation: methods to solicit citizen input** ~ committees, citizen advisory groups, panels
- **Agreement: ways to facilitate agreements between stakeholders** ~ settlements, mediation, negotiations, memoranda of understanding
   ~ Adapted from EPA, 2005
Determining which methods and tools will be most effective in encouraging effective participation is a critical aspect of designing a program. The following approaches will be discussed subsequently (arguably, in most cases a combination of approaches is appropriate): advisory groups/committees, public opinion surveys, workshops, and public meetings/hearings.

**Advisory Groups/Committees**

Advisory groups are typically comprised of citizens representing various interests, who will ultimately provide recommendations to an organization or entity; however advisory committees sometimes include technical experts, namely when the decisions at hand are highly technical in nature. These groups can be particularly effective because members become more informed about and involved in the issue – their input combines the best of both worlds: a citizen’s perspective and a more complete understanding of the situation.

Advisory groups provide an opportunity to cover large quantities of information and make decisions in an orderly fashion (Williams, 1983). Members of an advisory group have the opportunity to learn about and understand the concerns of other interested parties. They can serve as a communication link back to their constituencies, and may be better able to reach consensus than the larger public (Creighton, 2005). Advisory groups are one of the most commonly used forms of participation in large projects (Williams, 1983).

Representation, expectations, timeline and communication are the most important issues in establishing and implementing an effective advisory group.

**Representation** ~ ideally, the group should represent all stakeholder interests and values – this helps establish credibility and ensures maximum effectiveness. Often these groups must be somewhat large to ensure proper representation, typically ranging in size from 25 to 100 members (Williams, 1983).

**Expectations** ~ the role of the advisory group in the decision-making process should be clearly defined, as early in the process as possible (Creighton, 2005).

**Timeline** ~ the life of the advisory group and/or terms of the members should probably be limited, thus minimizing the chances that the group will become a new elite or will outlive its usefulness (Creighton, 2005). The appropriate lifespan of the committee will vary based on the project (Williams, 1983).

**Communication** ~ members of the advisory group should maintain regular communication with their constituencies to ensure accurate representation. Information can be shared via briefings, newsletters, public meetings, interviews, and/or discussion with other leaders (Creighton, 2005). Pre-established review points throughout the process can be used to reevaluate representation if new issues arise (Williams, 1983).
The level of formality in advisory groups varies, and typically influences the importance of defining membership (including a selection process), procedures and rules. Advisory group members can be chosen using several different methods:

1. A third party or group chooses members to balance interests ~ e.g. a local elected body, community leader, or consultant
2. Groups select their own representatives
3. Popular election
4. Supplement membership with volunteers

~ Adapted from Creighton, 2005

Procedural issues can be discussed during the first few advisory group meetings, or a draft of guidelines can be circulated and discussed before the initial meeting to avoid dampening enthusiasm. Typically, early meetings will be used to lay out objectives, establish an agenda and address operating procedures including: voting; attendance and member substitution policies; the formation of subcommittees or steering committees; confidentiality, observers and media coverage; communication with constituencies; scheduling meetings, and recording minutes (Creighton, 2005). Initial meetings can also be used to educate members about the project and begin identifying issues and specific decisions that will need to be addressed.

**Public Opinion Surveys**

Public opinion surveys can be used to gauge public awareness, knowledge and attitudes surrounding an issue, or determine the relative importance of or interest in a project (Williams, 1983). Surveys can assess general community values or opinions surrounding a specific project.

These surveys are a versatile tool which can easily be adapted to cover different geographic areas, and are most useful when public reaction to a project is uncertain. Because mailed questionnaires take several months to conduct, telephone surveys are typically the favored survey approach. Regardless of the survey method, timing and the wording of survey questions are critical considerations. Public opinion may vary significantly depending on the project stage, recent publicity or other events. Likewise, the phrasing of survey questions can greatly impact stated preferences. Finally, one must recognize that there are inevitable variations between individuals stated and revealed preferences – in other words, public opinions and reactions may change when a hypothetical project becomes a reality (Williams, 1983).

**Workshops, Charrettes and Visioning**

The National Charrette Institute (NCI) defines a charrette as “a collaborative planning process that harnesses the talents and energies of all interested parties to create and support a feasible plan that represents transformative community change” (NCI, 2005). Charrettes are useful tools for fostering support, creating a shared vision and encouraging community involvement in the planning process.
Charrettes can be used in a variety of situations to create or design a product, but these sessions are most commonly used in regional, comprehensive or master planning, housing developments, for buildings, and most fitting for this research, redevelopment projects (NCI, 2005). NCI in particular stresses the importance of continued feedback and community input even after the charrette is complete. Expanding on this concept, the institute outlines a three-stage dynamic planning process. The major stages of the process are research/education/preparation, which includes gathering information, involving stakeholders, working out logistics, and considering feasibility; holding the charrette, which can include a range of activities related to developing plans and alternatives, making presentations, and visioning; and plan implementation, with special attention to refining the product, and maintaining information and relationships.

Some of the strategies the NCI asserts are important for successful community involvement mirror those identified in section B, including early involvement of all interested parties, and the importance of collaboration and feasibility considerations. Other charrette-specific recommendations focus on compressing work sessions, communicating in short feedback loops, focusing on details as well as the big picture, monitoring progress to confirm outcomes, and holding the charrette near the site to enhance understanding/for convenient access (NCI, 2005).

Public Meetings/Hearings

Public hearings are a requirement of governmental planning at all levels, and often serve merely as a vehicle for reactionary participation towards the end of the planning process. Often these hearings are rather formal, with a presentation of the proposed project and recorded statements from interested citizens and groups. These meetings provide the public with an opportunity to question and challenge proposed projects, but can play out quite differently based upon the degree of information-sharing and public involvement earlier in the process. Public hearings can be rather heated when they represent the sole vehicle for public participation, attracting stakeholders and interest groups who feel threatened and powerless. However, “if public hearings are used only to publicize a decision to which citizen representatives have consistently contributed, then much value can be derived from the hearing process” (Williams, 1983).

Hearings can be made more effective with a prominent announcement to ensure adequate attendance and providing information in advance so participants come in with some knowledge and understanding of the project. However, the most important step towards creating successful public hearings is providing multiple opportunities for citizen input throughout the planning process, especially at key decision points (Williams, 1983).

Finally, seemingly minor details such as room arrangement can highly impact attitudes and proceedings in public hearings. Making the switch from a traditional hierarchical courtroom setting to a more open, informal layout including
roundtables and display areas can create a much better environment for exchanging information and ideas (Williams, 1983).

D. PARTICIPATION IN LARGE PUBLIC PROJECTS

Incorporating meaningful and significant public participation is generally a laudable goal for planning processes in general, but citizen input is particularly important when planning large public or semi-public projects. Several important factors must be considered when planning for citizen participation, including program design, participant selection and timing, and the appropriateness of an array of tools and strategies (Williams, 1983).

First, the design of the citizen participation program should be tailored to fit the needs of a project and its affected parties. The design should help surmount common barriers to effective participation including apathy, distrust, unfamiliarity with the project, negative past experiences, special interests, and the real/opportunity costs involved. It should also consider who should participate, when their participation is appropriate, and how it can be made most effective. Both for logistical purposes and establishing credibility, the participation scheme should be designed and implemented as early in the process as possible. An important final consideration is deciding who will be in charge of coordinating citizen input. In many cases, an independent facilitator is best suited for this task – someone who is impartial and skilled in managing this type of endeavor (Williams, 1983).

Participant selection is another important consideration in planning a citizen input scenario, and can be especially complicated when dealing with larger projects. When a project impacts a larger area, the group of affected stakeholders is consequently larger, and it becomes more difficult to involve an adequately representative group. One possible schedule for public participation follows:

- Identify objectives of public participation in the process
- Identify information/information needed for/from the public
- Identify the source of this information
- Identify points in the process where participation will be most valuable
- Evaluate methods/tools for public involvement
- Select the most appropriate tools
- Develop a plan tied to methodology
- Implement the plan
- Continually monitor and refine the plan
- Adapted from Williams, 1983

E. MOTIVATION AND SCOPE

The motivation behind a decision to craft a citizen participation plan can be very telling and significant, especially as it is likely to shape the form of the program (Williams, 1983). For example, public relations concerns are one possible impetus for soliciting public input. In such a scenario, those who are deeply involved with
the project may use discreet investigations, surveys or polls to discover public opinion, and possibly even use these findings to guide decision-making. However, a behind-the-scenes approach has the potential to backfire, with a propensity to arouse suspicion or poorly predict the public's response to the project as it becomes a reality (Williams, 1983). This type of approach typically is not regarded as meaningful participation – in other words, “participation does not mean mere consultation or review for the sake of appearance, nor does it mean token compliance with legal requirements…all affected and interested agencies and citizens are to be involved in defining the issues to be studied, [also known as] scoping (Williams, 1983).

To expand upon Williams’ thoughts, the scope of participation in the planning process is an equally important consideration. In a classic piece of planning literature, Sherry Arnstein (1969) describes an eight-tiered “Ladder of Citizen Participation.” The ladder begins with forms of non-participation and progresses upward towards complete citizen control and power. Specifically, the levels Arnstein identifies include:

1. **Manipulation** ~ citizens may be placed on “rubberstamp advisory committees” or advisory boards in an attempt to educate them or engineer their support. This rung “signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle” by those in power (p. 218).

2. **Therapy** ~ the focus of this form of participation is curing participants of their “pathology” via group therapy instead of addressing the underlying causes or issues (p.218).

3. **Informing** ~ providing information is an important first step towards meaningful citizen participation, but the emphasis should not be on a one-way flow of information from officials to citizens. The process must also go beyond informing to bring about meaningful participation.

4. **Consultation** ~ soliciting citizens’ opinions is important, but there must also be some assurance that citizens concerns and ideas will be taken into consideration.

5. **Placation** ~ gives citizens some degree of influence through seats on a board or commission, although citizen representatives may be easily outvoted or unheard.

6. **Partnership** ~ at this level, power is actually redistributed – citizens and power holders share planning and decision-making responsibilities. Partnerships are most effective when citizen groups have adequate resources available.

7. **Delegated Power** ~ citizens have dominant decision-making authority and can assure accountability.

8. **Citizen Control** ~ citizen control = citizen power; increasingly demanded ~ Adapted from Arnstein, 1969

In addition to laying out the various levels of citizen participation, Arnstein argues for the importance of ensuring significant public input. She asserts that public participation is a way for “have-not citizens” to be “deliberately included in the future [and] induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society” (p. 216). Arnstein also notes that tokenism is
actually an extremely frustrating process for citizens, and points out the distinction between involving citizens in an empty ritual of participation and actually giving them real decision-making power (Arnstein, 1969).

More recent works reiterate Arnstein’s assertions about the importance of meaningful citizen participation, stressing the importance of a two-way exchange of knowledge and recognizing the benefits of a commitment to openness (Williams, 1983).

Similarly, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has also developed a Public Participation Spectrum outlining increasing levels of public impact in a process.

The spectrum begins with inform – the only promise made to the public is keeping them informed. The goal is providing the public with the objective, balanced information they need to understand the problems, alternatives and solutions involved.

The next level is consult – in this scenario, decision-makers also promise to acknowledge citizen concerns and relay how their input influenced the final decision. The goal is simply to obtain public feedback on alternatives and decisions.

The middle of the spectrum is involve – the promise in this level of involvement is more significant: to ensure that citizen concerns are reflected in alternatives. The goal is working with the public throughout the process to understand and consider their concerns.

The penultimate level is collaborate – decision-makers promise to look to the public for advice and ideas, and incorporate their suggestions into decisions whenever possible. The main goal of this level is forming a partnership with the public.

The final level of the spectrum is empower – decision-makers promise to implement what the public decides. The final decision-making power rests in the hands of the public.

To summarize and reiterate, there is a critical distinction between token citizen participation and meaningful input and empowerment. Meaningful participation can only occur when some decision-making power is transferred to citizens, and power-holders are truly interested in a two-way flow of information and exchange of ideas. Providing citizens with the information they need is an important start, but not enough!

F. CHARACTERISTICS AND CRITERIA

Although each planning endeavor has distinctive features, some commonalities can be found among effective public participation efforts.
1. **Decision-makers use public participation to attain a mandate for action** ~ in the planning arena, this characteristic might suggest that planners have gained approval from the affected population. In essence, planners are saying 'we realize we are planning your community, so your input is needed and valued.'

2. **The public participation process is integrated into the decision-making process** ~ public participation should occur at appropriate times to solicit meaningful engagement and input from citizens.

3. **The public is involved in all critical steps of the process** ~ input should be solicited during problem definition, weighing alternatives, defining evaluation criteria, and other important incremental steps in order for the final decision to be considered legitimate.

4. **All affected stakeholders are targeted** ~ ensures that all voices are heard.

5. **Multiple techniques, aimed at different audiences, are used** ~ helps facilitate involvement for a range of participants.
   ~ Adapted from Creighton, 2005

While many locales have requirements for incorporating public participation into the planning process, citizens are often involved later in the process and play a reactionary role rather than being given the opportunity to propose ideas and goals for the future (Davidoff, 1965). Davidoff suggests that the relatively minor role often played by citizens and citizens' organizations in the planning process is in part due to the enhanced role of government bureaucracies and a weakness of municipal political parties. He goes on to assert that “there is something very shameful to our society in the necessity to have organized ‘citizen participation.’ Such participation should be the norm in an enlightened democracy” (p. 286).

A number of values and criteria for fair, effective and inclusive public participation have also been identified in planning and public dispute resolution literature. Several points are mentioned in multiple sources, including:

- **Influence** ~ public’s contribution should have a significant influence on decision
- **Representation** ~ seek key stakeholders, facilitate participation
- **Resources** ~ participants must have necessary information and resources
- **Outcomes** ~ inform participants how their input was used; clarity in decision-making processes and outcomes

Other items of importance in creating or facilitating effective public participation schemes include:

- **Input** ~ public should have a say in decisions that affect their lives
- **Process** ~ should communicate the interests and meet the needs of participants
- **Contribution** ~ participants help define how they will contribute to the process
- **Independence** ~ the process should be unbiased
Early involvement ~ participants should be involved as early as possible
Transparency ~ process should be open; inform affected populations
Task definition ~ nature and scope of participation should be clearly defined
Cost-effectiveness ~ process should be cost-effective
~ Adapted from IAP2, 2003 and Frewer, Row, Marsh and Reynolds, 2001

Specific criteria used to evaluate the public participation programs examined in this research are presented in section III C.

G. Evaluation

Evaluation of public participation can help determine whether the plan or process has been successful, what changes should be made to enhance participation during the rest of the process, and reveal lessons to improve future endeavors.

The first issue in any type of evaluation is defining the criteria for success, with a distinction between process criteria and outcome criteria. In terms of process criteria, a successful public participation program may be defined as one in which all voices were heard, everyone had a chance to participate, and the process was fair. However, when success is defined by outcome criteria, the end result is seen as more important than the actual process. The goal of such a program may be to reach agreement or influence a certain group – if this goal is not achieved the program is not seen as successful, regardless of proceedings.

Process criteria are often more easily planned and implemented. It is not unreasonable to hope that your public participation program will be seen as adequate, fair, open, visible and credible. However, in many cases, reaching consensus (an outcome criterion) is probably not the most realistic goal (Creighton, 2005).

Evaluation Approaches

Public participation programs can be evaluated based on measures and objectives generated by stakeholders, best practices, or social goals. Although the most appropriate approach will vary based by situation, any evaluation scheme will have the benefit of prompting upfront discussions about how affected parties define successful processes or outcomes.

Using stakeholder-generated goals to evaluate a public participation program necessitates thinking and planning ahead – key representatives are asked identify their goals, objectives and criteria for success before the process even begins. After each major activity, participants complete questionnaires, with a final round of interviews when the process is over. This approach has the added benefit of helping stakeholders clarify their objectives and goals from the outset, and arguably improves the quality of participation (Rosener, 1983). This method is appropriate if stakeholder reactions are a critical consideration. The major disadvantages to this approach are that the front-end interviews can be quite time-consuming, and evaluation results may be based on both process- and outcome-
based criteria, and therefore may not provide clear direction and lessons for future projects (Creighton, 2005).

Evaluation can also be based on best practices – this represents a process-oriented approach. One example of a set of best practices is the toolkit developed by Frewer et al. (2001). The authors identify nine criteria for evaluation, which are categorized as acceptance or process criteria:

**Acceptance Criteria**
- Representativeness ~ all key stakeholder groups should be represented
- Independence ~ the process should be unbiased
- Early involvement ~ participants should be involved as early as possible
- Influence ~ citizen input should have a significant influence on policy
- Transparency ~ process should be open; inform affected populations

**Process Criteria**
- Resource accessibility ~ make necessary resources available to participants
- Task definition ~ nature and scope of participation should be clearly defined
- Structured decision making ~ provide mechanisms for structuring and displaying the decision-making processes and outcomes
- Cost-effectiveness ~ process should be cost-effective

~ Adapted from Frewer, Row, Marsh and Reynolds, 2001

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has also identified a set of core values for public participation processes. Several of these values coincide with criteria identified by Frewer et al. The **IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation** include:
- The public should have a say in decisions that affect their lives
- Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision
- Process communicates the interests and meets the needs of participants
- Process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those affected
- Participants help define how they will contribute to the process
- Participants are given the information they need to participate meaningfully
- The process informs participants how their input affected the final decision

~ Adapted from IAP2, 2003
Although these lists represent an important set of goals, not all identified criteria are useful in every situation, and the fulfillment of these stipulations does not guarantee a successful outcome. Again, the main distinction here is whether success is defined based on the process or the outcome. Even with a successful process, intervening factors such as an unforeseen political event or a firmly divided, antagonistic public can produce an undesirable outcome (Creighton, 2005).

Alternately, evaluation can be conducted using social goals as a benchmark – this approach focuses on program outcomes. Possible social goals to consider include:

- Incorporating public values into decision-making
- Improving the quality of decisions and decision-making
- Reducing or resolving conflict among opposing interests
- Building institutional trust and relationships
- Informing and educating the public

~ Adapted from Beierle and Cayford, 2002

These are well-accepted goals of public participation in general; however, the information from a social goals evaluation may have limited usefulness in guiding future efforts.

Evaluation of public participation programs and activities is typically carried out via interviews, questionnaires and/or observation. Specific evaluation tools include hand-in or mail-in response forms, interviews, advisory committee or focus group review, checkpoint meetings, postmortems, and polls.
III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research was carried out using a case study design to examine and evaluate the methods by which citizen participation has been encouraged and facilitated in the redevelopment of the Stapleton International Airport. A discussion of the rationale for selecting this case, data sources, criteria, and limitations of this research follows.

A. CASE SELECTION

The Stapleton redevelopment project was selected for this research as an example of a case with a relatively inclusive and effective public participation scheme. Stapleton represents a bottom-up pattern of citizen participation – shortly after hearing of the city’s plans to close Stapleton International Airport in 1985, residents in surrounding neighborhoods mobilized to begin discussing and planning the site’s redevelopment. The city “bent over backwards to ensure that residents would have a say in what happened to the old airfield...[and held] scores of public meetings” (Van De Voorde, 1997, p. 2).

The Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation, a non-profit organization intended to act as a civic vehicle to work with the city administration, was formed in 1990, after the citizen-created Stapleton Development Plan had been adopted by the city council. Forest City Inc., Stapleton’s master developer, is being held accountable for complying with the design standards set out in the Stapleton Development Plan. The developer must also comply with performance and community participation standards described in the purchase agreement.

B. CRITERIA

Previous research has identified a number critical components or attributes of successful citizen participation programs. The following criteria, based on the literature, are used to evaluate the case study investigated in this research.

PROCESS CRITERIA

1. Were conflicts aired and resolved during the process?
2. Did decision-makers receive an accurate portrayal of public opinion – initially and throughout the planning process?
3. Were all interested parties invited and encouraged to participate in the planning process?
4. Were key stakeholders/publics identified and contacted early in the planning process?
5. Were participants given the opportunity to shape their involvement in the process?
6. Were clear roles and responsibilities laid out for participants?
7. Were participants informed about how their involvement would influence decisions (realistic expectations)?
8. Were involved citizens given adequate resources for effective participation (e.g. staff, information, funding)

9. Was citizen participation facilitated and made convenient?

OUTCOME CRITERIA

1. Did the program meet legal requirements for citizen involvement?
2. Is/was there widespread support for the final plan?
3. Is/was there widespread support for the final project, of what has been constructed to date?
4. Did citizen participation increase levels of public knowledge about the project?
5. Do the final plan and project meet the stated goals and objectives?
6. To what extent was citizen input incorporated into plans and decisions?
7. Were participants’ expectations met (in terms of their influence on the planning process)?
8. Did participants influence the planning process, decisions and final plan? How?
9. Did targeted or affected stakeholders/publics participate in the process? What could have been done to bolster participation?
10. Were participants informed about project outcomes and their influence?

C. DATA COLLECTION

A significant amount of information about events and processes related to the Stapleton redevelopment project is available from secondary data sources. The project’s website presents a detailed timeline of major events, key actors in the planning and redevelopment processes, significant news and awards, and the status of different phases of development.

Newspaper and magazine articles, newsletters, and the websites of related entities (e.g. the developer, city/county, redevelopment agencies and citizen groups) helped fill in a number of details, such as issues and conflicts arising during planning and development, the role of specific organizations and who was involved, and the public’s reaction at different stages of the process.

Interviews represent the final and most detailed layer of information to inform the evaluation of this case. Dialogues with individuals involved in the planning process were useful to more accurately determine the extent of and impetus for citizen involvement, participation program goals and procedures, tools and strategies used, and the dynamics of meetings and interaction between participants and decision-makers.

D. CAVEATS

The major constraints for this research were location, time and resource-related. The site of the Stapleton redevelopment project is located in Denver, Colorado – about 1436 miles (Euclidian distance) from the location in which the research was
conducted. The distance, combined with resource constraints, limited the feasibility of multiple site visits and in-person interviews.

Time was also problematic in the sense that the major planning efforts for Stapleton’s redevelopment occurred over 15 years ago. To gain the most complete picture of the planning process, it would be helpful to interview members of the Stapleton Tomorrow committee or individuals in city/county planning positions between 1985 and 1995. Unfortunately, most of these actors were no longer in their original positions; therefore any available contact information was no longer valid. A number of other key stakeholders were unresponsive. Most of the individuals interviewed have played a more significant role in more recent planning and development efforts, and had a limited perspective.

Limits on time and resources necessitated limiting the research to a single case study. Future endeavors should consider examining a number of cases or using a comparative case study research design that may be more informative and produce results than can be better generalized to locations outside the study area.

Correspondingly, some aspects of the chosen case do create a limited ability to apply specific results to other projects. However, a significant proportion of the findings from this research are general enough to be useful in guiding the design and implementation of future public participation efforts. See the Conclusions and Recommendations section for a detailed discussion of lessons learned.
IV. CASE STUDY

A. CONTEXT

DENVER’S HISTORY

Denver, Colorado was established on November 22, 1858, by a group of prospectors, following William Greeneberry Russell's gold discovery earlier that year. The town was named after James W. Denver, Governor of the Kansas Territory. The Federal Government did not formally establish the Colorado territory until further gold discoveries spurred a huge influx of about 100,000 people to Colorado between 1858 and 1860.

The Colorado gold rush fueled Denver’s rapid growth in the late 19th century. This growth was facilitated by the construction of a railroad network that made Denver the banking, minting, supply and processing center for Colorado and nearby states. Largely as a result of the railroad construction, Denver's population grew from 4,759 in 1870 to 106,713 in 1890, when it emerged as the second largest city in the West (Noel, 1997).

Denver was originally founded as a supply town for the Rocky Mountain mining camps, but soon became a regional agricultural center and manufacturing hub for ranch and farm equipment. Denver's growth was stunted by the depression of 1893 and the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, which had required the Federal Government to purchase more silver, and increased the amount of money in circulation, and public officials began encouraging economic diversity. After 1900, Denver's growth slowly resumed, thanks to the emergence of brickyards, stockyards, canneries, leather, rubber goods and breweries (Noel, 1997).

World War II mobilization prompted the construction of Lowry Airfield, Fitzsimons Army Medical Center and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (SDP). Denver's post-World War II growth was mainly sparked by oil and gas firms' decisions to locate their headquarters in the city. During the 1970s energy boom, the first high-rise buildings sprang up in downtown Denver, as well as suburban subdivisions, shopping malls and a secondary office core in the Denver Tech Center. However, the area’s dependence on crude oil caused major problems during the 1980's oil bust and Denver fell into a major depression, experiencing population loss and the highest office vacancy rates in the country (Noel, 1997).

The city’s growth resumed once again during the 1990s, and the city/county of Denver, which is defined by the same land area, gained population for the first time in decades, rising to over 500,000. Renewed growth and popularity of the downtown came as a result of a number of new housing projects and attractive destinations, including an aquarium, baseball field and amusement park (Noel, 1997). The 1990's also emerged as a time of change and renewal for several large plots of land in Denver. An announcement to close and relocate the Stapleton International Airport in 1985 set the stage for the construction of the nation's largest urban infill development.
Denver Trends and Socioeconomics

Redevelopment

The total land area of Denver (the city and county are defined with the same border) is 154.63 square miles, or 98,963 acres. The site of the Stapleton Redevelopment project covers 4,700 acres, which translates to nearly 5 percent of the city’s total land area (see images below to locate Denver in the context of the State of Colorado, and Stapleton in relation to Downtown Denver and the Denver International Airport).

In addition to Stapleton, four other major redevelopment projects are underway in and around Denver, including Gateway (4,416 acres), Lowry (1,866 acres), Central Platte Valley (1,100 acres), and Fitzsimons (578 acres). These five projects in combination total about 12,660 acres, or nearly 13 percent of the city’s total land area, that is involved in a major redevelopment project (Denver Facts).

Population and Race

Between 1960 and 2000, the population of Denver grew by 12 percent; however this aggregate statistic hides the periods of growth and decline the city experienced during these four decades (see Figures 1 and 2 below). The city experienced moderate growth in the 1960s, with a population increase of about 4 percent. Between 1970 and 1990 Denver lost just over 10 percent of its population. But between 1990 and 2000 Denver lost just over 10 percent of its population.

The city rebounded at the end of the 20th century and saw a striking growth rate of 19 percent between 1990 and 2000. However this growth rate is actually quite low compared to other counties in the Denver-Boulder CMSA that experienced population growth rates between 20 and 191 percent. The entire CMSA grew nearly 30 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Denver Facts).
Again, comparing Denver with other counties in the Denver-Boulder CMSA brings to light some significant differences. Most strikingly, Denver has a much higher percentage of African American, American Indian and Hispanic populations than other counties in the CMSA. In 2000, the population percentages by race were as follows: 65.3 percent white, 11.1 percent African American, 1.3 percent American Indian, 2.8 percent Asian, and 19.5 percent other. Nearly one-third of the population identified themselves as Hispanic, alone or in combination with other races (*Denver Facts*).

**Other Indicators**

In Denver, households are almost evenly divided between family and individual households (at 49.9 and 50.1 percent, respectively); however these statistics represent an interesting change over the past two decades towards a less family-oriented city. In 1980, 56 percent of households were classified as family households with the remaining 44 percent individual households (*Denver Facts*).

Denver has actually seen a decline in its population's overall educational attainment in the past decade, with 78.5 percent of the population having completed high school as of 2000 (down from 79.2 percent in 1990). However, the percentage of residents with a college degree increased from 29 percent in 1990 to 35 percent in 2000. As of 2000, Denver's median household income was $39,500, with 11 percent of families below the poverty level, down from 13 percent in 1990 (*Denver Facts*).

In 2001, there were 468,392 jobs in Denver, representing exactly one third of the metro area's employment. Unemployment rates fell between 1980 and 2000 (from 5.0 to 3.8 percent) but were back up to 4.5 percent by 2002 (*Denver Facts*). The average value of an owner-occupied housing unit in Denver in 2000 was $170,943. Just below 5 percent of units were vacant, 50 percent were owner-occupied, and the remaining 45 percent were renter-occupied. The average rent in the city was $605/month in 2000 (*Denver Facts*).

**B. BACKGROUND**

**STAPLETON AT A GLANCE**

![Figure 1](Denver Population)

![Figure 2](Percent Population Change (1990-2000))
Throughout the years, the Stapleton site has played a significant role in Denver’s history – emerging as a promising municipal airport in the late 1920’s, growing into a bustling international airport in the 1950’s and 1960’s, and most recently, undergoing a major transformation into the nation’s largest redevelopment project. The timeline below presents many of the major events in Stapleton’s history over the past 85 years.

**TIMELINE**

1920’s ~ Mayor Stapleton advocates for the construction of an airport; the site is selected

1928 ~ Denver City Council approves the purchase of the 640-acre plot of land for the Denver Municipal Airport

1929 ~ Construction of Denver Municipal Airport complete; airport opens

1931 ~ Amelia Erhart visits the airport

1938 ~ Airport’s first control tower opens

1944 ~ Facility is renamed Stapleton Airfield to recognize Mayor Stapleton

1950’s ~ Air traffic increases significantly, Stapleton acquires additional land from the Rocky Mountain Arsenal for expansion

1964 ~ Facility is officially renamed Stapleton International Airport

1980’s ~ Tension between Stapleton and surrounding neighborhoods mounts with increasing air traffic and expansion

1985 ~ Airport has grown to 4,700 acres

1987 – 1989 ~ Voters approve the annexation of a parcel of land in Adams County to the City and County of Denver for the proposed Denver International Airport, and endorse the plan in the 1989 election

1989 ~ Stapleton Tomorrow Committee is formed, decision to build Denver International Airport is finalized

1990 ~ Stapleton Development Foundation is formed

1991 ~ Stapleton Tomorrow finishes a concept plan for Stapleton’s redevelopment; this plan is adopted as a component of the Denver Comprehensive Plan

1993 ~ Mayor Webb appoints a Citizens Advisory Board to oversee the creation of a redevelopment plan; the Stapleton Development Foundation enters an
agreement with the City and County of Denver to provide funding and guidance for redevelopment planning and programs for the Stapleton site

1995 ~ Stapleton International Airport Closes

1996 ~ The Stapleton Development Corporation is formed, and begins working through the Stapleton Development Foundation’s plan; SDC puts out a request for proposals for early projects

1997 ~ Rezoning plan is approved (to change the site’s zoning from airport to mixed-use)

1999 ~ Forest City, Inc. is selected as the site’s master developer

2000 ~ The Stapleton Foundation for Sustainable Urban Communities is officially created (formerly the Stapleton Development Foundation)

2001 ~ Forest City purchases land from the city and the first construction of Stapleton redevelopment project begins; Stapleton parks plan announced

2002 ~ Stapleton visitor’s center, model homes, and Quebec Square Regional Retail Center open; first residents move in; construction begins on East 29th Avenue Town Center, Botanica on the Green Apartments and affordable senior housing

2003 ~ Anchors open at East 29th Avenue Town Center; Stapleton's first elementary school opens; Forest City moves to new offices in East 29th Avenue Town Center; Active Living Partnership at Stapleton receives grant from RWJF to promote active lifestyles

2004 ~ First apartment residents move in; first high school opens; construction begins on Northfield at Stapleton retail center and Denver School of Science and Technology; Forest City Stapleton receives Environmental Achievement Award

2005 ~ Forest City Stapleton receives Best in America Living Award; Stapleton receives the DRGOC Metro Vision Award; Northfield anchor opens

STAPLETON’S ROOTS

Stapleton’s first life began in the late 1920’s with the purchase of the original 640-acre tract of land and construction of what was then considered a modern, state-of-the-art airport. The driving force behind the airport’s construction came mainly from Mayor Benjamin F. Stapleton, who believed the city needed a major hub for its growing aviation industry. Many sites were initially considered for the airport, including Stapleton, which was located six miles east of Downtown Denver. Mayor Stapleton favored the site because it was situated away from developed areas and the land was cheaper than sites closer to the downtown. The Denver City Council approved the purchase of the 640-acre plot of land on March 25, 1928, and the airport opened in October of the following year.
Upon its completion in 1929, the Denver Municipal Airport was considered the most modern facility in the country and was seen as a way to ensure Denver’s growth and prosperity in the future. The airport was an instant success, attracting a high-profile visit from Amelia Erhart in 1931 and boasting the opening of its first control tower in 1938. In August of 1944 the facility was renamed Stapleton Airfield to recognize the efforts of Mayor Stapleton in making it one of the best and most widely used airports in the nation. However, the facility was not officially renamed until 1964 when it was coined Stapleton International Airport (Stapleton History).

By the late 1950s, air traffic had increased significantly, and the airport felt the need to expand its runways and facilities. Denver acquired additional land from the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, and by 1985 the airport had grown to cover 4,700 acres. Concurrently, Denver neighborhoods were spreading eastward towards the airport, setting the stage for problems and complaints as air traffic increased in the 1970s and 1980s. The decision to seek out a location for a new airport was fueled by Stapleton’s inability to accommodate growth due to limited runway space and separation, a lawsuit from nearby residents over noise complaints, and threats from nearby Adams County to block further airport expansion (Stapleton History).

Early in 1985, representatives from Denver and Adams County announced their agreement to relocate commercial airline operations to a new site northeast of Stapleton. Two years later the Colorado General Assembly gave Adams County voters the authority to determine whether a 35,500-acre parcel of land could be annexed to Denver as the site of the new airport. Adams County voters approved the annexation in 1988 and Denver voters supported the plan in the May 1989 election (Stapleton History).

SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS

The characteristics and composition of the neighborhoods surrounding the Stapleton site are a critical consideration for this research, as these residents have been intricately involved in the redevelopment process over the past twenty years. Forest City Spokesman Tom Gleason noted that one of the major goals of the project is creating a “seamless connection” between Stapleton and surrounding areas and gradually dissolving barriers, both physical and social. The aim is to extend both the grid street network and the character of adjacent neighborhoods (Gleason interview).

The surrounding neighborhoods include Northeast Park Hill, North Park Hill, East Montclair, Original Aurora and Montbello. Although it would be interesting to compare the demographics of Stapleton to those of the surrounding neighborhoods, the Stapleton Foundation does not yet have complete demographic information for Stapleton residents.

However, Alisha Brown, the Stapleton Foundation’s Neighborhood Connections Program Officer estimates that about 80 percent of Stapleton’s residents are white middle and upper middle class. She suggests that the remaining 20 percent of residents represent a mix of ethnicities with moderate to low incomes (Brown
Even these rough estimates illustrate that Stapleton’s racial and socioeconomic makeup is much different than that of the surrounding areas. These differences have historically been and continue to be an important consideration for planning and development of the site. Figures 3 and 4 (below) compare the average household income and racial composition and of the five neighborhoods surrounding the Stapleton site with the city and county of Denver. A more detailed discussion of the socioeconomics and demographics of the neighborhoods follows.

Northeast Park Hill had a population of 7,549 in 1999, and was a predominantly black neighborhood with a growing Latino population. The ethnicity breakdown shows that this neighborhood’s Black, Hispanic and White population percentages were 70.4, 23.8 and 4.2, respectively. In contrast, the city of Denver (which already differs considerably in racial makeup from the Denver-Boulder CMSA or the state of Colorado) has population ratios of 11.1 percent Black, 31.7 percent Hispanic and 51.9 percent White. This neighborhood also has a higher percentage of seniors aged 60 – 69 but fewer adults between the ages of 25 and 39, possibly suggesting that grandparents are raising their grandchildren when parents are not in the household. Northeast Park Hill has a high percentage of family households, but a significantly higher percentage of female headed households (both with and without children) than the City of Denver (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

Homeownership rates in this neighborhood are lower than the city average, while the percentage of rental households is slightly higher. The average price of a home sold in Northeast Park Hill in 1998 was $97,403, which is approximately 77 percent lower than the city average of $172,730. Average home values in this area are about 23 percent lower than those in Denver overall ($135,000 compared to $165,800). Likewise, the neighborhood’s average household income in 1995 was $30,440, which is significantly less than the city’s average of $42,426. Adults in Northeast Park Hill have much lower educational attainment levels than those in Denver, especially for college degrees and among the Latino population. Finally, 82 percent of students in the area’s elementary school are eligible for free or reduced lunch, compared to 60 percent of students in all Denver Public Schools (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

North Park Hill is also a predominantly black neighborhood, with a racial breakdown of 56.7 percent Black, 11.0 percent Hispanic and 12.5 percent White.
However, the breakdown of births by race for 2001 suggest that gentrification is taking place in this area, as the percentage of White and African American births are larger and smaller than that of the overall population, respectively. This area has a relatively high percentage of children between ages 10 and 14, but a smaller percentage of young adults (age 18-29) than the City of Denver. North Park Hill houses a much higher percentage of families than Denver as a whole (67 percent compared to almost 50 percent in the city). Like Northeast Park Hill, this neighborhood has a relatively high percentage of female headed households, with 21.8 percent; however this percentage is still one of the lowest in Northeast Denver (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

North Park Hill has a high rate of home ownership – 83 percent in this neighborhood compared to 52.5 percent for Denver as a whole and very low vacancy. Similarly, the Black and Latino home ownership rates are also quite high – nearly double the city's percentages. The median household income for all racial groups in North Park Hill is higher than in Denver and significantly higher for whites, which may suggest recent gentrification in the area ($62,000 for Whites in North Park Hill compared to $44,022 in Denver). However, median housing values in the area are slightly lower than the city's average and a relatively high percentage of children in the area's public schools are eligible for free or reduced price lunch (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

All racial groups in this neighborhood have higher educational attainment than the averages for Denver. The percentages of Whites and Latinos with college degrees in North Park Hill are significantly higher than in Denver overall, at 14.7 percent and 70.2 percent in North Park Hill compared to 7.8 percent and 47.8 percent, respectively (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

Northeast Park Hill and North Park Hill have a combined land area of about 4,058 acres, comprised mainly of single and multi-family residences. There are also a few industrial and commercial uses at the north end of the neighborhood (SDC).

East Montclair is located on the eastern edge of Denver near the Aurora city line. The neighborhood is bordered to the north and south by the Stapleton and Lowry sites, respectively. East Montclair is comprised mainly of single and multi-family residences, and is divided by the Colfax Avenue commercial corridor. This historic “Main Street” corridor is currently the target of revitalization efforts in Denver, Aurora and Lakewood. (SDC).

This neighborhood has a relatively small percentage of Black and White residents and a large Hispanic population, compared to the city of Denver. This area has a high percentage of children, especially under age five. The population breakdown for adults is similar to Denver, but East Montclair has a much smaller percentage of seniors, most notably individuals over age 70. The percentage of family households is higher than Denver, but lower than surrounding areas like North and Northeast Park Hill. The area has a high percentage of single parent households, both male and female headed (Neighborhood Resource Directory).
In contrast to North Park Hill, this neighborhood has a relatively low rate of homeownership, and renter households actually outnumber owner households. The rate of black homeownership is quite low, while white homeownership is fairly high, compared to Denver. In 1998, East Montclair had one of the lowest average home sales prices, of $93,746 and a similarly low average household income. Again, a large percentage of children in this area’s public schools are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the elementary school is predominantly Hispanic (62 percent) and Black (33 percent). The small percentage of White students (4 percent, compared to 22 percent in Denver overall) suggests gentrification, an older white population or that white children are enrolled in private school (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

Original Aurora is located due south of the Stapleton site, and is also composed mainly of single and multi-family residential uses (SDC). This neighborhood is one of the largest Latino communities in the Denver metro area, with a racial breakdown of 57.6 percent Hispanic, 23.2 percent White and 14.7 percent Black. The area also has a high percentage of young children, with those under age 5 comprising 11.7 percent of the population. The percentage of young adults in Original Aurora is also quite high, while the presence of baby boomers (aged 40-59) is relatively low (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

This area also has a high percentage of female-headed households, with and without children. The home ownership rate is extremely low in Original Aurora (33.6 percent) while the percentage of rental households is quite high (66.4 percent). The black home ownership rate is also especially low in this area, at 13.3 percent (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

Educational attainment in Original Aurora is low, with 52.3 percent of residents having high school diplomas. The extremely low percentage of Latinos with a high school degree suggests a large immigrant population. Overall, only 6.5 percent of residents have a college degree, with higher rates among blacks and whites and lower rates among Latinos (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

The median household income in this area is also very low, averaged at $31,000, and poverty rates are among the highest in the Denver metro area (26.7 percent overall) with higher rates for blacks and Latinos. Likewise, the median housing value in Original Aurora is among the lowest in the area, at $109,000, which explains the large immigrant population. All the area’s elementary schools have high percentages of students eligible for free or reduced price lunches, and are predominantly Hispanic in racial makeup (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

Montbello is the largest of Denver’s neighborhoods, both in population and land area, with 5,600 single family homes and 1,250 multi-family units (SDC). Montbello is a predominantly Black and Hispanic neighborhood with a small, declining White population. The percentage of Hispanic births in the area is much higher than in the city of Denver and higher than other racial groups (48.8 percent). Overall, Montbello is a very young neighborhood, with an especially large percentage of the population between ages 5 and 9 (10.5 percent, compared to 6.2 percent in Denver). Furthermore, the percentage of the population over age
This neighborhood has a high percentage of family households (80.7 percent) and families with children (47.5 percent). Similarly, the percentage of married couples with children is double that of Denver and also higher than the statewide percentage. There are very few vacant homes in Montbello, and home ownership is quite high for all races (71.9 percent overall). For most schools in the area, the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced price lunch is fairly high, and the racial makeup is predominantly Black and Hispanic (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

The percentage of residents with a high school degree in Montbello is similar, although slightly lower than Denver overall; however educational attainment is much lower in terms of college degrees. Overall, 12 percent of residents have completed higher education, compared to 34.5 percent in Denver. The percentage for Whites is also comparatively low – 14.6 percent in Montbello and 47.8 percent in Denver. Household incomes are above city averages for all races, and are especially high for Blacks, indicating the presence of a black middle class neighborhood. Likewise, poverty levels in Montbello are lower than the Denver averages. Finally, median housing values are lower than Denver overall ($137,000 in Montbello and $165,800 in Denver), meaning this neighborhood is more affordable than many others in the area (Neighborhood Resource Directory).

C. THE PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The planning process for Stapleton’s redevelopment will be organized and discussed using the set of criteria identified in the Research Design section (III B).

Timing – Were key stakeholders and publics identified and contacted early in the planning process?

Some stakeholders, namely the residents in neighborhoods surrounding the former airport, were self-selected early participants in shaping Stapleton’s future. Complaints about airplane noise and continued airport expansion from Park Hill residents provided “one of the key political pretexts for shutting down Stapleton” (Van De Voorde, 1997, p.2). Likewise, “the city has been talking about how to redevelop Stapleton since at least 1989, six years before the airport was mothballed to make room for DIA” (Van De Voorde, 1997, p.1).

Shortly after the decision to build a new airport was solidified in 1989, a group of citizens began a broad community planning exercise known as Stapleton Tomorrow. In November of 1989, Mayor Federico Peña formalized the Stapleton Tomorrow Committee, a group of 35 citizens that conducted a large-scale examination of possible schemes for Stapleton’s redevelopment. The formation of the Stapleton Tomorrow committee was an important first step in garnering public input and participation; however, more significantly, the group also sought input from other affected parties. Stapleton Tomorrow focused their efforts to secure
participation mainly on other citizens, as actors in the government and business arenas were already represented and involved.

**INCLUSIVENESS – Was participation and input solicited from all affected parties?**

Over a two year period, Stapleton Tomorrow worked to gather thoughts and opinions about Stapleton’s redevelopment from a range of Denver residents. Stapleton Tomorrow found that residents’ major concerns included job creation, the preservation of open space, and ensuring ample recreational and cultural opportunities (Stapleton website). Denver civic leaders shared the group’s vision of a “sensitively designed new Stapleton, woven as closely as possible into Denver’s urban fabric” (Peirce, 2004, p.1).

The Stapleton Development Plan was adopted by the Denver City Council as an amendment to the City’s Comprehensive Plan. This plan is the product of collaboration between the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation, a Citizen’s Advisory Board and the City and County of Denver. Throughout the formation of the plan, over one hundred community presentations and meetings were held to solicit input and participation from the community. The Development Plan builds on the goals and objectives outlined in the Stapleton Tomorrow Concept Plan developed in 1991. The overarching goals of the plan are economic opportunity, environmental responsibility and social equity.

The Stapleton Development Plan was designed to represent the community’s goals and provide direction for the project’s redevelopment over a span of several decades. The Plan organized development into eight districts, each with a distinct center and an emphasis on “the integration of employment, housing, public transportation and walkable scale” (Stapleton Development Plan, 1995). See Appendix Section B for specific goals of the Stapleton Development Plan and Denver Comprehensive Plan.

Further investigation would be necessary to determine if input and participation was solicited from all affected parties; however, it is rarely possible to identify and seek out every person or group who may feel impacted by a project. In the case of the Stapleton redevelopment, it seems that the major stakeholders were involved in early planning efforts. The project received input from: Stapleton Tomorrow, a representative citizens’ group; Denver residents, via community presentations, meetings and surveys; and various leaders from the City and County of Denver. More specific interested parties were given opportunities to make comments and contributions via a number of community meetings.

**FACILITATION OF PUBLIC INPUT – Were opportunities for involvement convenient, and were adequate resources provided?**

Soon after the Stapleton Tomorrow citizen group was formed, a group of civic and business leaders joined together to form the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation in April of 1990. This non-profit group was created to work with the city and maximize public benefits from Stapleton’s redevelopment, and made community involvement a key component of the redevelopment process. The Foundation’s
efforts and objectives were supported by about $4 million in funding from some of the city’s largest private companies and charitable foundations. The Stapleton Foundation raised the funds necessary to fund the planning process, which entailed resident interviews, private consulting, research and staffing.

In January of 1993, Denver Mayor Wellington Webb appointed a Citizens Advisory Board to oversee the creation of a redevelopment plan, which was composed of 42 members representing various perspectives, interests and organizations. In June of 1993, the Foundation entered an agreement with the City and County of Denver to provide funding and guidance for redevelopment planning and programs for the site. This agreement allowed the city and county to focus their efforts on building the new airport, while the Foundation was able to establish a “well-paced, thorough, and broad-based effort” (Stapleton Foundation).

As noted under the previous criterion, over 100 community meetings and presentations were held during the planning process for Stapleton’s redevelopment. The large number of meetings gave interested parties many opportunities to contribute and arguably provided a variety of times, dates and locations to facilitate participation.

CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES – Were participants given clear roles and responsibilities, a realistic picture of the extent of their influence?

The mission, specific responsibilities, and scope of influence and involvement in planning Stapleton’s redevelopment were apparent for some groups, but somewhat ambiguous for others. It is unclear whether the ultimate influence of the Stapleton Tomorrow committee (having their concept plan integrated as a component of the Denver Comprehensive Plan) was planned at the outset. The group was originally formed to gather ideas and solicit citizen input regarding priorities for Stapleton’s redevelopment. Most likely there were no specific upfront guarantees about how their input would be used, but it seems that the general mission of the group was relatively clear. Therefore, the group seemed to have fairly clear roles and responsibilities, even if the extent of their influence was uncertain, although not misconstrued.

The expectations and responsibilities of the organizations and entities formed to implement the Stapleton Development Plan were more apparent. The Stapleton Foundation, for example, was responsible for a number of key tasks, including: raising $3 million to fulfill its mission; controlling the management and funding of the redevelopment process; advising the city on a long-term management structure; suggesting projects for the initial phases; conducting public meetings, presentations and workshops to provide updates and solicit community input; creating the Stapleton Development Plan; and continuing to work towards upholding the principles of this plan. The Stapleton Development Foundation eventually morphed into the entity that is today known as the Stapleton Foundation for Sustainable Urban Communities, which was officially created in March of 2000 (Stapleton Foundation).
In the mid-1990s, the Center for Resource Management (CRM) joined the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation and several national consultants in creating a Master Plan for the Stapleton site. Specifically, CRM helped draft sections of the plan addressing sustainable design, governing principles and green building criteria. CRM continues to be involved with Stapleton, negotiating demonstrations on the site to showcase energy efficient new technologies and increasing the development’s prominence as a model of sustainable development (CRM).

CONFLICT RESOLUTION – Were conflicts aired and resolved?

Although many hope to minimize conflict in the planning process, it is critical to expose and begin resolving disagreements early to avoid last minute implementation problems.

In August of 1996, the newly formed Stapleton Development Corporation began to work through the “controversial plan” created by the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation. This corporation is also a city-created non-profit organization, and serves as Stapleton’s de facto development arm, with a budget of about $8.1 million in 1997 (Van De Voorde, 1997). Many considered the Foundation’s plan too fragmented and political, one that tried to be all things to all people. In November the Corporation began their request for proposals for early projects including the redevelopment of the terminal facility, improvements to the RTD transit center and a campaign to revamp Stapleton’s image (Front Porch).

Andy Barnes, President and CEO of the Stapleton Development Corp. (as of March, 1996), noted that the corporation was beginning with the terminal in deciding which buildings would be retained, as this area was a likely location for the urban center. Barnes estimated that predevelopment work would cost about $1 million and described 1996 as a year to ramp up, hiring general counsel, a community relations director and finance people, and creating an organizational chart. The corporation submitted a rezoning plan to the city (to change the zoning from airport to mixed-use development), and the decision was approved in 1997 (Front Porch). These early planning and negotiation efforts set the stage for a smooth and successful implementation process.

Alternatively, finances have been one of the greatest sources of conflict in the Stapleton redevelopment project, both in working out the original sale of the property and disagreements over funding infrastructure improvements and other projects. In the late 1990’s, Stapleton Development Corporation members were growing frustrated about “the city’s foot-dragging on the question of when and how to transfer the Stapleton property title to SDC” (p.2) and some board members have been characterized as “pulling their hair out…because the city [wouldn’t] let them do anything” (Van De Voorde, 1997, p.2).

However, some believed the delays were more a result of the SDC citizens’ advisory board, a group set up to represent the concerns of Park Hill residents. Denver city councilman Ted Hackworth claimed that SDC was unable to make decisions “because of constantly bringing neighborhood concerns in,” concerns from a group that seems to be “constantly demanding more” (Van De Voorde,
But despite complaints from some parties, early and consistent citizen involvement has had a largely positive influence on the planning process for Stapleton’s redevelopment.

Ultimately, the redevelopment took advantage of tax increment financing to help fund the project and speed up development. The use of this financing tool has been a point of contention among residents and economic developers in the region throughout the project’s history. The Stapleton Development Plan estimated the cost of infrastructure projects and improvements at $288 million (in 1994 dollars), and suggested that financing should be obtained through infrastructure fees, local tax and assessment districts, private capital, state and federal transportation funding, grants, general municipal revenues, tax increment financing, Airport System revenues, connection fees and special districts (Stapleton Development Plan, 1995).

The Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) has been a major actor in the financing of the Stapleton Redevelopment Project. DURA typically plays the role of assisting the City and County of Denver in preventing and eliminating slums and blighted areas. However, as the only entity in the city with the power to fund urban revitalization through tax increment financing, DURA has also played a crucial role in Stapleton’s redevelopment. Colorado state law permits DURA to use the new taxes generated by the redevelopment project to finance infrastructure and other public improvements, typically by using bonds or developer reimbursement.

Stapleton’s supporting infrastructure was completed for a cost of $346 million, with a TIF investment from DURA of $294 million. In the case of Stapleton, the financing came in the form of a developer reimbursement, with Forest City advancing the money and DURA repaying their costs as taxes are generated. After 25 years, the tax scheme will return to normal. Tracy Huggins, Executive Director of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority claims that “the use of TIF as a financing tool is a “win/win” proposition. It benefits both the neighborhood, which gets roads, parks and schools, and the taxing entities, which get new, permanent sources of tax revenue that wouldn’t have existed without the redevelopment” (Front Porch, Summer 2000, p.7). The use of TIF’s to spur economic revitalization is somewhat typical in brownfield redevelopment efforts (Bartsch and Collaton, 1997).

However, there has been some controversy surrounding the use of TIF’s in Denver, namely a report released in January of 2005 by the Front Range Economic Strategy Center founded by the Denver Areas Labor Federation. This report claimed that the use of tax increment financing to fund 24 projects in the area is costing taxpayers almost $30 million a year. This report was the first of three scheduled for release by the center, with later reports examining economic gains and the quality of jobs and housing created.

Public officials in the area responded with strong disagreement. John Huggins, Denver’s Economic Development Director noted, “without TIF’s, there would be no development at Stapleton…downtown would still be a ghost town after 5 p.m. 
and virtually no one would be living there...would we be better off if Stapleton and Lowry were nothing but barren patches of land, surrounded by fences? I don’t think so” (Rebchook 1).

Similarly, Tracy Huggins, Executive Director of DURA claims that the role of these developments in generating revenues is less important than “cleaning up blighted areas, saving historical buildings, replacing parking lots with retail centers…and creating jobs” (Rebchook 2). However, Chris Nevitt, Executive Director of the Front Range Economic Strategy Center, countered that his group is not against TIF’s, noting that they are a powerful tool that the city should be using. Nonetheless, they would like to see TIF’s more “transparent and accountable to the public” and noted that they realize there are hidden costs and would like to see the costs and benefits of this strategy weighed (Rebchook 1).

In the case of Stapleton, although tax increment financing has been somewhat controversial, it has also largely enabled and hastened the development process. The use of this tool has resulted in the cleanup of a formerly blighted site, promoted beneficial public-private partnerships, and encouraged economic development in a formerly under-served area. The controversy surrounding Stapleton’s financing actually had the additional benefit of generating discussion and media attention of the project.

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE – To what extent was the public informed about major developments and decisions?

The size and visibility of the Stapleton project created, and many would argue, merited, relatively extensive media attention and discussion about major developments and decisions (Schindler interview). Newspaper coverage of the project’s redevelopment was somewhat predictably concentrated around more noteworthy events and decisions, and included opinion editorials, business analyses, and articles simply designed to provide development updates. More specifically:

- Between 1993 and 2005, there have been nearly 5,000 articles in the Denver Post discussing the Stapleton site.
- The Denver Business Journal has featured 48 headlines mentioning Stapleton between 1996 and 2006, with references in the text of 375 articles.

Overall, the development process seems to have been relatively public, and a significant amount of information has been made available to the public.

**D. OUTCOMES**

The outcomes of the citizen participation plan and of actual public involvement will be assessed using the criteria outlined in the Research Design section of this paper. More specifically, the fulfillment of the plan’s objectives will be evaluated by comparing the project’s progress to the eight priority areas outlined in the Stapleton Development Plan.
IMPACT OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT – What was the extent of the public’s impact on the project?

In 1991, the Stapleton Tomorrow citizen group created a concept plan for the area’s redevelopment, stressing the importance of economic development, creating benefits for surrounding neighborhoods, preserving and enhancing environmental quality, utilizing high urban design standards, providing educational and cultural opportunities, and generating revenue to support the new airport’s objectives.

Although this plan was the product of a representative citizens’ group, it also incorporated ideas solicited from the general public through a number of meetings and targeted surveys. The Stapleton Tomorrow concept plan was adopted in June of 1991 as a component of the Denver Comprehensive Plan (Stapleton website). The adopted plan is currently being implemented, and more specifics about its fulfillment are outlined below.

FULFILLMENT OF STATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES – Were the plan’s goals and objectives met?

Because citizens played such a significant role in creating the vision for Stapleton’s redevelopment, evaluating the extent to which their plan was carried out is an important component of determining the extent and impact of public involvement. A detailed discussion of the fulfillment of the stated goals of the plan is presented below:

Goals of the Stapleton Development Plan

1. Generate significant economic development
2. Produce a positive impact on existing neighborhoods and businesses
3. Enhance environmental quality throughout the site and surrounding areas
4. Create a positive identity unique to Denver and the surrounding region
5. Promote high standards of urban design
6. Generate revenues through appropriate asset management to help fund DIA
7. Create substantial educational and cultural opportunities and support systems
8. Provide balanced transportation options and spacious parks and open space

General Outcomes – Goals 1, 3, 4, 5 and 8

In an interview, Rich McClintock, Program Director of Livable Communities Support Center, noted that Stapleton seems to be on track in terms of achieving the goals it originally outlined in the Stapleton Development Plan. However, he admits that “there is still a long way to go” (McClintock interview).

He identified the best achievements to date as: the development’s ability to effectively market the idea of urban living to attract strong interest from builders and future residents; the creation of a widely used and highly regarded system of
open space and parks; and successful efforts to improve environmental quality of the site through cleanup and remediation efforts, green building practices and habitat creation and preservation. Stapleton needed a massive overhaul to transform runways into parks and open space and create an environment suitable for housing and retail. Over 4 million tons of recycled materials have been extracted from Stapleton and marketed for use in the region, as a result of an agreement between the Recycled Materials Company of Arvada and the City of Denver (The Front Porch).

He noted that economic development, in contrast, has been much slower and more challenging, especially office and industrial development. McClintock revealed that the implementation of urban design standards has been successful in the development, but the design of streets and transportation networks has been a major issue. The large arterials surrounding the site were designed to serve the airport; modifying these roads to better serve pedestrians and bicyclists has been a challenge (McClintock interview).

**Retail and Surrounding Businesses – Goals 1 and 2b**

Quebec Square was designed to serve residents both in Stapleton and the previously underserved surrounding neighborhoods. Jason Longsdorf noted that about 75 percent of the patrons of Quebec Square are in fact residents of adjacent neighborhoods, simply due to the huge latent demand (Longsdorf interview).

The plan for Stapleton also tried to take into account the surrounding uses, including existing and projected residences, office space, industrial uses, retail, various institutions and lodging. At the time the Stapleton Development Plan was written, over 4,000 hotel and motel rooms were located within a half mile of Stapleton’s border, meaning the site was not likely to need or want additional lodging facilities. However, these hotels and other establishments faced the question of how best to adapt to the airport’s move.

Since Stapleton International Airport ceased operation, many of the larger hotels located on Quebec Street have replaced airline passengers with meeting and convention traffic by taking advantage of their spacious meeting rooms, enabling them to retain their occupancies and rates (Moore, 1996). In contrast, smaller hotels are still struggling with what they are and what they will become and have faced the issue of how many new facilities Denver International Airport will be able to support (Moore, 1996).

Therefore, it seems that new retail has been and continues to be constructed to meet the needs of the residents of Stapleton and other nearby neighborhoods. The fate of surrounding businesses is less clear, namely due to their original orientation towards serving the airport.

**Image, Impressions and Diversity – Goal 4**

Individuals living in and around Denver have somewhat mixed feelings and impressions about Stapleton. In a telephone interview, Longsdorf noted that some
of his co-workers claim that he “sold out and moved to the suburbs,” although Stapleton is only six miles from Downtown Denver and was designed with much smaller lots and a more urban feel than typical suburban developments.

Longsdorf believes this is probably just a hasty reaction formed without taking into consideration the fact that Stapleton is an infill development, and associating new development with “sprawl” and “all things bad.” For many others, the general response to hearing that Longsdorf lives in Stapleton is just general curiosity and interest. People want to know what the development is like and are interested in the types of housing available, possibly considering moving there.

Longsdorf noted that while the racial diversity in Stapleton is “ok” the income diversity “isn’t great yet.” He believes the developers have had some problems selling the lower income housing and apartments, and are hesitant to build units that are seemingly not in demand. However, there is apparently more diversity and interaction at Quebec Square. This retail center was designed to be used by residents of Stapleton and the surrounding neighborhoods. So while Stapleton residents appear to be predominantly white, middle-upper income, a large portion of the residents of surrounding neighborhoods are minorities and lower income.

However, Forest City has made an effort to incorporate minority firms in the construction process and as tenants of Stapleton’s new retail centers. About 17 percent of the developer’s expenditures for professional services and supplies and 34 percent of its direct construction dollars has been with minority firms. Furthermore, the homebuilders at Stapleton are using a combined 63 minority subcontractors, and 10 of the 20 retailers in the East 29th Avenue Town Center are minority or woman-owned businesses (Rebchook, 2005).

Although the development is apparently struggling to achieve racial and income diversity, it seems that a thriving gay and lesbian community has taken root in Denver’s newest neighborhood. Spokesman Tom Gleason noted that the emergence of a gay and lesbian community at Stapleton was actually part of the development’s original plan, claiming “we tried to…create a diverse community…the gays at Stapleton are definitely a part of that diversity” (Ensslin, 2004).

Longsdorf notes that one of the things that could use improvement is the neighborhood’s diversity. He mentioned that the developers have not done a good job of mixing in the lower priced homes and apartments. The rental units are mostly located on the edge of the development, and although this may be the most natural place to locate apartments for economic reasons, putting them in a more central location would have helped mix different races and income levels. However, he believes the developers may be learning from this mistake. They surrounded the second pool with rows of town homes, which seemed to be the first real attempt to locate lower income housing close to the town center.

*Schools – Goal 7*
The Denver School of Science and Technology opened on January 4, 2005, with a freshman class of 125 students. The school hopes to have about 425 students in grades 9-12 by 2007. All students living in Denver are eligible to attend the DSST charter high school. Forest City, Stapleton’s developer, donated the $3 million piece of land on which the school is sited.

The second of five schools planned for Stapleton, containing Kindergarten through eighth grade, is expected to open in August of 2006. The groundbreaking for this public school, located at Montview and Central Park Boulevard, occurred in late February of 2005. At around 105,000 square feet, this school will accommodate 750 students, and middle school students living in Stapleton will be assigned to the school. Forest City contributed $500,000 towards the construction of this $19 million school (Rocky Mountain News).

Longsdorf noted that the demand for the new schools in Stapleton is divided somewhat evenly between children from Stapleton and surrounding neighborhoods; however as the number of residents in the development increases this split may change (Longsdorf interview).

**Transportation – Goal 8a**

Currently, Quebec Street poses the biggest challenge in ensuring pedestrian and bicycle safety in Stapleton and surrounding areas, as many people need to cross this major arterial to access the retail in Quebec Square. This road is difficult for pedestrians to cross with ease and safety, and will most likely need to be widened in coming years. Residents from surrounding neighborhoods seem most burdened with this crossing, as the town center was designed to serve both Stapleton and adjacent areas. Forest City has been working with the Stapleton Transportation Management Association and the Active Living Project at Stapleton to work towards a safer situation. The ALPS is pushing for countdown timers at the pedestrian crossings on Quebec Street (Malpiede interview).

Martin Luther Kind Junior Boulevard is another poor arterial, which connects to Quebec Street but has no eastern connection. Jason Longsdorf, a Stapleton resident, noted that the traffic situation should improve some with the opening of the Syracuse and Central Park connection (Longsdorf interview). He also noted that there is good connectivity between Stapleton and surrounding areas, as the city’s grid street network was extended throughout the development. However, some Stapleton residents are apparently unhappy with this setup, as it tends to increase the amount of through traffic on residential streets. Longsdorf estimates that about 50 percent of the traffic in and around Stapleton is comprised of Stapleton residents, with the remaining traffic produced by surrounding neighborhoods or the major retail center.

**Parks/Greenways – Goal 8b**

“When the citizens of Denver created the master plan for the redevelopment of Stapleton, they described a vision for converting the 4,700-acre property into an urban community of mixed-use neighborhoods in which residential and
commercial development would be enhanced by the establishment of more than 1,100 acres of new parks and open space. Most of that open space would have to be ‘created’ from the very un-natural landscape of an international airport” (Front Porch, 4/05, p.5).

The 45-acre Greenway Park opened in 2004, and includes a number of amenities, such as a skate park, climbing wall, a Pavilion, outdoor seating, a playground, a water and sand feature for children, tennis courts, and a three-acre off-leash dog park (Front Porch, 12/04). Dennis Piper, Director of Parks and the Environment for the Stapleton Development Corporation, noted several obstacles the Foundation faced in the Greenway Park project. First, reaching an agreement with Denver Parks and Recreation on design specifications for irrigation was challenging. The vision and plan for Stapleton is a sustainable, healthy community; therefore in planning this park the Foundation was pressing for a more water efficient drip irrigation system. However, Mr. Piper felt that Denver Parks and Recreation was rather “reluctant to change the way they have always done things” (Piper interview).

Second, the grading for the Greenway Park project had to be redesigned a number of times due to changes in adjacent development plans. Mr. Piper noted that “designing parks without fixed edge elevations is asking for trouble (and added expense).” Finally, some adjacent residents have expressed dissatisfaction with the aesthetics of the regional detention pond. Although photo simulations have been provided, residents are “impatient about the time it will take for the vegetation to mature” and aesthetics to improve.

Fortunately, the Greenway Park project has also enjoyed some early successes. The park is well used by all of the expected user groups and regularly receives high praise from community members. One caveat Mr. Piper noted, the off-leash dog park is “perhaps too successful” and showing signs of overuse despite special provisions for the soil and drainage. Another component, the Design/Build Sand and Water Play Sculpture, has become a major attraction for young children and parents, as expected. Mr. Longsdorf noted that the use of the parks and greenways in and around Stapleton is divided somewhat evenly between residents of Stapleton and surrounding neighborhoods (Longsdorf interview).

In terms of social interaction and physical activity, Longsdorf believes the Stapleton developers have successfully fulfilled their objectives. He noted that the pocket parks facilitate neighborly interaction and moderate physical activity such as walking outside, kids running around playing, and informal kickball games for adults and families.

**Summary**

Overall, the project fares well in terms of fulfilling stated objectives. More specifically, the goals of generating economic development and promoting high standards of urban design may come with time. Additional town retail centers are currently under construction, and it will take time for Stapleton to develop a more seasoned and authentic look (i.e. with mature trees).
The other goals with mixed results – positively impacting surrounding businesses and providing balanced transportation – are probably the least predictable and most challenging items. For many surrounding businesses, their struggle is more a result of the airport’s closing than the site’s actual redevelopment. Many of these businesses (namely hotels) were largely supported by the airport, and were no longer viable after its closure. Finally, in terms of providing balanced transportation, there have been a number of efforts to facilitate walking, bicycling, and transit use in and around Stapleton. The major challenges have been addressing walkability concerns for larger streets and intersections. Although progress has been slow in some areas, improvements have been made towards providing a variety of transportation options.

The table below summarizes the fulfillment of the goals and objectives outlined in the Stapleton Development Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Fulfillment/Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Generate significant economic development</td>
<td>Mixed Results +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Positively impact existing neighborhoods</td>
<td>Fulfilled Goal +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Positively impact existing businesses</td>
<td>Mixed Results +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enhance environmental quality</td>
<td>Fulfilled Goal +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Create a positive, unique identity</td>
<td>Fulfilled Goal +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Promote high standards of urban design</td>
<td>Mixed Results +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Generate revenues to help fund DIA</td>
<td>Fulfilled Goal +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Create educational and cultural opportunities</td>
<td>Fulfilled Goal +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Provide balanced transportation</td>
<td>Mixed Results +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Provide spacious parks and open space</td>
<td>Fulfilled Goal +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SUPPORT FOR FINAL PLAN – What was the level of support for the final plan?

The Stapleton Development Plan’s goals and objectives are well aligned with the core goals outlined in the 1989 Denver Comprehensive Plan (see Appendix Section B). The Mayor and City Council created this plan to guide smaller-scale projects, and all new developments should be consistent with the overall concepts outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. The Stapleton Development Plan was designed to address each of the ten core issues identified in the Denver Comprehensive Plan, and describe how they can be furthered on the Stapleton site. This plan was also designed to address specific national and international environmental, economic and social challenges, and consider the community context. Many elements of this plan came in response to concerns about environmental degradation and resource consumption, economic insecurity, stagnant wages and economic shifts, and social challenges like racism, suburban isolation and central city decline.

The Stapleton Development plan recognized that Denver was experiencing resurgence in the economic climate and overall quality of life, but still faced a number of problems, including poverty, job loss, demographic changes, loss of a sense of community, growth, and environmental pressures. The plan also took into account the local market conditions, including land availability and absorption,
utilized market summaries to plan more effectively, and set the project in the larger regional context, considering its relationship to downtown and other developed areas. The Stapleton Development Plan recognized other development efforts in the City and County of Denver, including downtown, Central Platte Valley, Lowry, Gateway Area, the Denver Tech Center, Cherry Creek and other developing areas.

The plan recognizes downtown as the region’s “most significant employment, entertainment and cultural center” with “a growing number of housing units…that support retail, restaurant and entertainment facilities.” Central Platte Valley is planned as a mixed use development designed to support, not compete with, downtown. The plan for this area includes regional and sports entertainment attractions, parks, housing, locations for downtown events, support services for downtown businesses and transit facilities to enhance access to downtown. The Central Platte Valley Plan is designed to help increase Denver’s tax base significantly (Stapleton Development Plan, 1995).

City and county officials showed their support and approval of the Stapleton Development Plan by adopting it as a component of the Denver Comprehensive Plan. Given the amount of citizen input in crafting the plan, strong public support seems almost inevitable.

ONGOING PARTICIPATION ~ Have key stakeholders and groups continued to participate in the planning and development process?

The Stapleton Foundation has made numerous efforts to integrate the development with surrounding neighborhoods, in response to requests by community members in early visioning sessions. The Foundation has created a Community Roundtable, which Alisha Brown described as “a forum for the leaders of various neighborhood groups to discuss difficult issues without either side taking offense” (Brown interview).

The Stapleton Foundation participates in ongoing efforts to form partnerships with organizations in the surrounding neighborhoods to plan activities and programs that are beneficial both to Stapleton and neighboring areas. A few of these initiatives include ESL classes, a job outreach program, an affordable housing program, collaborations with area schools and various transportation programs. Ms. Brown noted that the most challenging aspect of working with the neighborhoods surrounding the Stapleton area has been changing preconceived notions related to race and income disparities. Ongoing efforts to weave the communities together have centered upon shared goals and mutually beneficial programs, such as traffic calming and neighborhood physical activity groups (Brown interview).

E. SUMMARY

Large public projects are highly visible and often necessitate more citizen involvement than smaller, private endeavors. Mitzi Schindler, Director of Public Relations for University of Colorado Health Sciences Center (UCHSC) believes that
significant public input was necessary in planning Stapleton’s redevelopment in large part because the land was publicly owned. However, the efforts to include the public in early visioning sessions for Stapleton’s redevelopment extended well beyond any formal requirements and even exceeded many precedents. This participatory spirit has continued throughout the phases of development thanks to a citizen advisory board and ongoing outreach efforts to residents of Stapleton and surrounding neighborhoods.
V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Although few projects will replicate the scale of the 4,700 acre Stapleton redevelopment project, smaller yet still highly visible and significant projects are likely to share similar challenges and opportunities. Likewise, such projects can certainly benefit from public participation programs that are well-designed and employ the most appropriate and effective methods to facilitate meaningful citizen involvement.

An evaluation of this case guided by the criteria presented and discussed in previous sections shows that the Stapleton redevelopment could serve as a relatively good model of a successful public participation program, particularly for other large redevelopment projects.

In determining the lessons that can be derived from this case study, it may first be useful to consider a few common reasons that many citizens are not more actively and meaningfully involved in the planning process. There are a number of possible scenarios, including:

1. Citizens are not aware that the issue, plan or project might affect them
2. Citizens realize that they might be affected, but are unaware of opportunities to influence the planning and decision-making processes
3. Citizens realize that they might be affected and are aware of opportunities to get involved, but opt not to participate because:
   a. They do not believe their participation will make a difference
   b. The benefits of getting involved do not seem to outweigh the costs – there are too many barriers to participation
   c. The level of interest is too low

In most cases, the first two scenarios can be addressed by employing a more extensive stakeholder identification, outreach and education effort. However, many planners and public officials avoid such endeavors, believing the involvement of additional parties will only complicate the process. In light of earlier discussions of the benefits of early and consistent citizen involvement in the planning process (see section II A), these decision-makers must begin reformulating their perceptions.

Addressing the third scenario is somewhat more problematic. Creating behavior change in this situation requires changing deeply held attitudes and beliefs or addressing a variety of diverse and often complex barriers to participation. In one situation citizens recognize that a proposed project or decision may impact them and are aware of opportunities to participate in the planning process, but have no reason to believe their input will matter. Whether this impression has been formed in response to negative past experiences or a more general skepticism about government, it is the responsibility of planners and decision-makers to clearly and accurately convey how public input will be used.

In another situation, the barriers to participating in the planning process seem to outweigh the costs. These barriers may include a lack of reliable transportation or
childcare, inconvenient locations or meeting times, or sizeable opportunity costs. While it may be difficult to address potential barriers of all affected parties, making reasonable efforts to schedule meetings and hearings at convenient times and locations should be a standard practice. For example, efforts could be made to schedule these gatherings after regular business hours, in central (preferably transit-accessible) locations, and potentially even provide childcare.

The final situation – public apathy about a project – could stem from the previously discussed perceptions and barriers, but could potentially be quite difficult to address. Quite the opposite was true for Stapleton – residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the former Stapleton International Airport made their intentions to be involved in planning the site’s redevelopment known very early in the process. In this case the public was aware that the project would affect them, and pushed to help create opportunities to shape the planning process. Though such strong self-advocacy may not be present in all cases, one of the most important lessons that can be taken from this case is that empowered citizen groups can have a profound and positive impact not only on the planning process, but on the project itself.

The Stapleton redevelopment, although still a work in progress, is a thriving and well-regarded project. Perhaps its success should come as no surprise. Those who were most affected by Stapleton’s redevelopment were given the opportunity to convey their vision for the site’s reuse. It seems citizens really do possess important ordinary knowledge (Innes, 1998) about the needs and wants of the community that, when incorporated, can help create a more functional, well-received and live-able place.
VI. REFERENCES


Brown, Alisha. Neighborhood Connections Program Officer. Telephone Interview.


Gleason, Tom. Spokesman for Forest City, Inc. Telephone interview.


International Association for Public Participation (IAP2, 2003). Main site: http://www.iap2.org/.


Longsdorf, Jason. Stapleton resident and City of Denver Public Works planning specialist. Telephone interview.


Malpiede, Angie. Transportation Management Association Director. Email interview.

McClintock, Rich. Program Director, Livable Communities Support Center. Email interview.


Piper, Dennis. Director of Parks and Environment, Stapleton Development Corporation. Email interview.


Schindler, Mitzi. Public Relations Director, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. Telephone Interview.

The Stapleton Development Corporation (SDC) website. URL: http://www.stapletoncorp.com/index.htm

The Stapleton Foundation for Sustainable Urban Communities. URL: http://www.stapletonfoundation.org/


VII. APPENDICES

A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Stapleton

1. Who or what was the main driving force behind assembling the Stapleton Tomorrow Committee?
2. I have read that Mayor Pena appointed the 35 member group – did he use certain criteria, or did these appointments basically formalize and validate a group of citizens that had already assembled?
3. Were all interested parties given an opportunity to contribute to the Stapleton Tomorrow planning efforts? What efforts were made to create a representative, inclusive group?
4. What resources (if any) were provided to aid the Stapleton Tomorrow committee in planning (e.g. information, funds, expertise, staff time...)?
5. What were the expectations, roles and responsibilities laid out for the committee at the outset?
6. The Stapleton Tomorrow concept plan was ultimately incorporated into the Denver comprehensive plan – did the city make any promises about how the committee’s input would be used?
7. The Stapleton website mentions that the Stapleton Tomorrow committee polled Denver residents about their preferences for the site’s redevelopment. Can you tell me how this was done (phone, mail), what kinds of questions were asked, and an estimated response rate?
8. How well do you think Stapleton Tomorrow’s vision has been carried out? Are there any major differences, additions or omissions that stand out?
9. Has the group been given any opportunities to provide feedback since construction began?
10. What was the initial public reaction to the announcement that Stapleton would be closing (especially from surrounding neighborhoods)?
11. Aside from the Stapleton Tomorrow group, was citizen input sought out? If so, how?
12. What were some of the major obstacles or points of contention encountered during the early planning efforts?
B. PLANS

Specific objectives for the development include:

1. Generate significant economic development
2. Produce a positive impact on existing neighborhoods and businesses
3. Enhance environmental quality throughout the site and surrounding areas
4. Create a positive identity unique to Denver and the surrounding region
5. Promote high standards of urban design
6. Generate revenues through appropriate asset management to help fund DIA
7. Create substantial educational and cultural opportunities and support systems
8. Provide balanced transportation options and spacious parks and open space

Figure 5: A Section of Stapleton’s Land Use Plan
Denver Comprehensive Plan Core Goals:

1. Stimulate the economy
2. Beautify the City and preserve its history
3. Protect, enhance and integrate a city of neighborhoods
4. Educate all of Denver's residents with excellence
5. Clean the air, now
6. Meet expanding transportation needs, efficiently, cleanly, economically and innovatively
7. Help the disadvantaged help themselves
8. Revise land use controls, streamline the procedures
9. Celebrate the City’s arts, culture and ethnic diversity
10. Share resources and responsibilities in the metropolitan area