

Stapleton United Neighbors (SUN) Board of Directors
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re: Stapleton Potential Name Change

September 19, 2017

Dear Ms. Allshouse, members of the SUN Board of Directors, and other Stapleton community leaders,

When I moved to Stapleton three years ago, I did not know this history of its name other than the fact that it was named after the old airport. When I found out about Benjamin Stapleton and his history, I was appalled. I know there was no malicious intent when Stapleton as a neighborhood was named and that it wasn't meant to offend – it takes the place of the old airport, so naming it after that airport made absolute sense.

Over the last several years, however, we have all been made aware of the history of Benjamin Stapleton and his ties and activities with the KKK. Both we as a community and I personally no longer live in ignorance of the history of this name. With the tragedies in Charlottesville and South Carolina and the current national dialogue regarding race, Stapleton faces a unique opportunity to make a statement that our community does not stand for racism or symbols of racism in any form, and is instead a welcoming, diverse, inclusive place to live for all.

Changing a name is never easy, especially when it is entrenched and part of a community, but it's not impossible. Two institutions have faced similar tasks recently and chose to take action:

1. In February of this year, [Yale University renamed its Calhoun College](#) (opened in 1933) because of historical ties to white supremacy and slavery. It was renamed in honor of African-American alumna Grace Murray Hopper, [who ironically said](#), “Humans are allergic to change. They love to say, ‘We’ve always done it this way.’ I try to fight that.”
2. In a more personal example, I attended Whitman College for my undergraduate studies. The Whitman mascot had been the Missionary for more than a century, since the school was named after missionary Marcus Whitman by his friend. After decades of discussion about changing the mascot, [school leaders finally said](#), “the mascot was considered noninclusive and imperialistic, and incorrectly implied that Whitman was a religious school.” The mascot is now the Blues after a local mountain range, chosen after a naming contest.

Statues in the South, mostly erected during the 1940s through the 1960s as a statement against the Civil Rights movement, [are being removed](#) for the oppression, racism, and intolerance they represent. In the U.S., the wind is blowing towards inclusivity.

There are many arguments for changing the name.

First and foremost, the Stapleton Green Book, on which our community was based, is full of references to diversity of all kinds and often mentions Stapleton's goal to be an inclusive community.

Section IV has an entire section on Social Equity, which opens with (*emphasis added*):

Equity, diversity and opportunity are fundamental to the objectives of the redevelopment program. Stapleton redevelopment shall provide broad access to social, cultural and economic opportunities for all segments of the community. ...

Principle 1

Create a community that accommodates a diversity of people – ages, incomes, races, occupations and lifestyles – and reinforces and enhances the cultural, ethnic and racial diversity of adjacent neighborhoods.

Sections 8-2 and 8-3 state:

Through its history, the Stapleton site has changed dramatically. It is about to change again. Stapleton’s closure and reuse is not an isolated event. **The entire region continues to change and mature. The challenges we face today are more complex than those of the past. Stapleton’s next life needs to be part of a meaningful response to the economic, social and environmental demands of the 21st Century. Stapleton presents many opportunities to the Denver community. The choices are ours to make. ...**

[If we succeed in our goals, we will create] communities that can work in the 21st Century, combining the best of the old and the new. The communities created at Stapleton will excel in training and educate people. **They will be better prepared to support diversity, encourage participation and local control and satisfy the needs of the people.**

If our own guidebook touts diversity, local control, and change and maturing to face 21st-Century challenges, how can we *not* consider replacing a name that embodies racism for some of our own residents?

According to [numbers released in July 2016](#), Stapleton is 78% Caucasian. In a [2014 Front Porch article](#), Stapleton’s lack of diversity was examined, so this is not a new issue. Several members of the Citizen’s Advisory Board noted that Stapleton’s image in the greater Denver area was of an upper-class, gated community.

Councilman Chris Herndon...[said], “The perception of Stapleton runs the gamut...The vision of Stapleton is to be an inclusive community and there are some facets where we’re doing a really good job with inclusivity and there are certainly other factors we can do better on. When people look at the demographics of Stapleton along the lines of race, Stapleton is not a reflection of the city and county of Denver, so there are people that think from a race standpoint Stapleton is not as diverse as it could be...”

In [the most recent Front Porch article](#) discussing the possibility of changing Stapleton’s name, the same Councilman Herndon mentions that “he receives very little correspondence on the issue of the name, particularly compared to the volume he receives on crime and traffic. The conversations he’s had with people don’t coincide with what activists have characterized as ‘this overwhelming desire to change the name.’” To that, I again point out that 78% of Stapleton is white, so the name wouldn’t bother the majority of them. It’s not a top-of-mind problem. Indeed, [in a recent survey](#), it *doesn’t* bother most

Stapleton residents. For those in the 22% who are *not* white, however, it does bother many of them. Enough of a percentage responded that they were **somewhat or completely uncomfortable with the Stapleton name** that changing it should be given all due consideration. They have a valid reason to be bothered by it. And if it bothers even a portion of our neighbors, again, how can we *not* consider replacing a name that embodies racism for some of our own residents?

For those of us of a particular faith, **the command to love our neighbors is one of the strongest** in [Christianity](#), [Judaism](#), [Islam](#), [Hinduism](#), and [other world religions](#). At my own church, our pastor [preached on this issue recently](#). He initially had two thoughts on the name change: “1) Would changing it make any difference; and 2) there must be bigger issues to tackle,” but ultimately concluded with, “If my neighbor says this hurts them, then I can do no other than side with the commandment ‘Love does no wrong to a neighbor.’” We don’t examine changing the name for the majority of people *not* bothered by it, we examine changing the name for those *for* whom it’s an issue.

From a practical standpoint, I see it as an enormous opportunity for Stapleton, its leaders, and its residents. Should we change the name and openly state the reasons why, media outlets will certainly cover the story at both the local and national level, resulting in an enormous amount of free publicity for the area and the positive message behind it that all are welcome in our community. Perhaps this would even help with Stapleton’s diversity problem – more people of color might move here if the area weren’t named for a white supremacist (even secondhand and tacitly). More importantly, if the community itself takes action and says, “This isn’t who we are. We welcome you,” that makes a strong statement of inclusivity.

Some have argued that small businesses will be hurt by having to rebrand. In answer to that, look to [Yale’s story](#). They are [not chiseling Calhoun’s name off the residence hall](#) or removing all traces from him on campus, but they’re taking steps in the right direction. Stapleton could start small. Change the name now, and slowly work on the rebranding over time. Many of the early Stapleton signs are aging and due to be replaced soon anyway – they could be replaced with the new name.

Our own Northfield High School held a [contest in 2014](#) to come up with a new mascot. Suggestions were sent in by the community, and the design committee narrowed it down to three choices to be presented to the greater community for a vote (representing aviation, an animal, and a bird). Whitman College did the same thing (representing geography, flora, and fauna). There’s no reason Stapleton can’t take this action as natural categories bubble up. There are already some creative suggestions on Nextdoor and Facebook.

Most of our neighbors don’t mind the name, it’s true. Many are unaware that it’s troublesome for other members of their community. An increasing number of us *are* aware. Now saying the name *Stapleton* in reference to my home makes me cringe. There is a [robust discussions on this issue](#) on the Nextdoor social media site that I encourage you to read if you haven’t yet, as well as [a new poll](#) that shows the community split right down the middle. I believe that with more discussion and education on the matter, more community members would be in favor of changing the name. And again, how can we *not* consider replacing a name that embodies racism for almost 50% of our own residents?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., famously addressed the issue of the white majority and the oppressed minority in his [letter from the Birmingham City Jail](#) in April 1963 (*emphasis added*):

m i n d e e f o r m a n

First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been **gravely disappointed with the white moderate**. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is **not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action;" who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season**.

Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

I am Caucasian, so in theory, this isn't my problem. But it *is*. For it affects my neighbors. And if I don't speak up, who will? So many of us have "Hate has no home here" or other inclusive signs in our yard. Does that only apply to immigrants and refugees, Mexicans and Muslims, or do we really mean it for *everyone*?

Naming something after someone, even secondhand, is an honor to that person. Benjamin Stapleton's past actions and involvement with the KKK should not be honored. What we do today is a gift to our neighbors and our future. The question shouldn't be why *should* we change the name, but why *shouldn't* we? Let's make the right choice.

Any true change requires patience, persistence, passion, and positivity. It won't happen overnight. It won't. But if we start today, it will happen sooner than if we start tomorrow...

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me with any comments or questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mindel Jorman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M' and a decorative flourish at the end.