

Official NE Denver Neighbors for Racial Justice Statement on #ChangeTheNameStapleton

Mission

We are inclusive NE Denver neighbors who are passionate about racial and economic justice, working in our immediate community while forming alliances within the Denver, Colorado, national, and international Black Lives Matter activist network. We are open to personal growth and accountability as we dismantle the structures of white supremacy. We strive to compassionately allow each other to make mistakes; unified in our intentions and our actions to create a safer and more loving and just community.

#ChangeTheNameStapleton

NE Denver Neighbors for Racial Justice was founded to unify neighborhoods in northeast Denver. We focus on local issues and welcome members regardless of where they reside, because our issues are often not unique. The group was started, largely, by members who reside in the neighborhood located at the site of the former Stapleton Airport.

Mayor Stapleton was not only a member of the Ku Klux Klan, but he served as a major supporter. Between the 1920s and 1950s, the Klan boasted many members who controlled both houses of the Colorado State Legislature, and Governor Clarence Morley was also a member. Indeed, we understand that the Klan enjoyed control of the Office of State, the Supreme Court of Colorado and seven judicial seats on the District Court of Denver. As mayor, Stapleton was a central figure in the Klan's domination of our Colorado institutions. He appointed many members to prominent positions in our local government, including the Chief of Police. It is reported that Stapleton discontinued his membership in the Klan when it became politically expedient to do so, but there is no record of him directly denouncing the Klan, nor is he known for actively working to reverse the damage done to our government institutions during the Klan era in Denver. Mayor Stapleton's political opportunism and avoidance of personal responsibility with regard to issues of racial justice are not qualities that deserve the honor of having a neighborhood named after him.

Given this history, we, the NE Denver Neighbors for Racial Justice, are releasing our official statement regarding the #ChangeTheNameStapleton initiative. There is a movement throughout the United States in which symbols of hatred and oppression are being removed from places of stature; #ChangeTheNameStapleton is a proud part of this movement. We are focusing our efforts to influence the Stapleton United Neighbors (SUN) Board, Forest City, and Mayor Hancock. It is our hope that this movement will continue to gain momentum in Denver and that these stakeholders will come to see dropping the name as a positive step forward, and that local businesses and organizations will follow.

In 2015, Forest City VP Tom Gleason responded with the following email message to a *Front Porch* request for Forest City's perspective on the Black Lives Matter flyers: "Forest City and the Stapleton Development Corporation have agreed over the years that the Stapleton name would be used in a limited role as a 'locator' (given that it was nationally and internationally known as Denver's airport for many decades) while we built the inclusive and diverse community envisioned by the citizens of Denver, Aurora and Commerce City who created The Green Book. Over that period of time, we have built eight new neighborhoods on the former airport along with new schools, parks and retail centers—all with new names and without the name of the former airport."¹ This statement disingenuously implies that the Stapleton name is being phased out; however, the exact opposite has occurred. As the years go by, while parks, pools, etc. have been given names other than Stapleton, Forest City continues to use "Stapleton" as their brand and in their marketing. The longer we as a community use this name, the more businesses and public spaces will adopt it, and the more entrenched it will become. To date, since the first residents moved into the Stapleton neighborhood, 140+ businesses have adopted his name.

As a first step, we request that the SUN Board to remove this name from their organization. SUN is the registered neighborhood organization for the area located at the site of the former Stapleton Airport, and it is comprised of volunteers who discuss key issues with residents, represent their interests, engage in proactive problem-solving, and organize neighborhood-building activities. We appreciate that our neighbors are volunteering their time and believe their intentions to be genuinely good. However, after years of inaction related to this issue, we will not back down until the Stapleton name is removed from the organization that represents the neighborhood where many of us reside. If we do not, they are making us complicit in honoring a white supremacist. We offer them our support in removing the name.

We also request that Mayor Michael Hancock remove the name Stapleton from the city streets—Stapleton Drive North and Stapleton Drive South—and that he remove the name Stapleton from the city's Stapleton Recreation Center.

At a SUN meeting in 2015, a Jewish resident shared memories of the KKK marching down his street on the sabbath. More recently, we heard from a Denver resident whose grandfather was forced to relocate outside of Denver, due to death threats received from the KKK. These incidents took place during the term of Mayor Stapleton. This is not mere history. This is still living memory. Willful avoidance of or indifference to this issue is tacit approval for the symbolic violence inherent in the continued use of this name. It is time to do the right thing. It is time to move forward and to truly begin building the "inclusive and diverse" neighborhood promised by the Green Book. All Denver residents are called to join us in this effort.

¹ <https://frontporchne.com/article/black-lives-matter-calls-stapleton-name-change/>