

# Brownfields Success Story

## Flying High Again Aurora, Colorado

In the early 1950s, a former Navy test pilot named Robert M. Stanley was searching for a new home for Stanley Aviation. Aurora, Colorado seemed a perfect fit. He had found an old landfill and wastewater treatment plant on the southeast edge of Denver's Stapleton Airport. The location was strategically situated near Lowry and Buckley Air Force Bases in a community undergoing a post-World War II redevelopment boom.

In 1954, Stanley built a 22-acre campus anchored by a new, 100,000-square-foot manufacturing facility. Known for its innovative design and manufacturing of ejector seats for American military aircraft, Stanley Aviation thrived for the better part of 50 years. By the mid-2000s, however, the once-largest employer in Aurora began to stagnate and, after 2009, the property sat idle and vacant.

Stapleton Airport didn't survive either, eventually being replaced by Denver International Airport. But while the Stapleton property was redeveloped into a sustainable, mixed-use community of roughly 18,000 residents, the City of Aurora looked for a partner to remediate and redevelop the former Stanley property, which was riddled with asbestos and soil contaminants.

### The Challenge

With support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the City of Aurora headed up an area-wide planning process for land surrounding the Stanley site. Indeed, the site was identified in the subsequent 2013 brownfield area-wide plan as a "catalyst site" for its potential to help revitalize the surrounding area. But the city still needed to find a redevelopment partner that shared in the community's vision.

Enter Mark Shaker, a social worker by trade, who inquired about opening a beer hall in the area. Through a series of unusual and unplanned events, Shaker eventually decided to redevelop the entire property.

### Cleanup and Redevelopment

In addition to remediating existing soil and groundwater contamination, a large amount of asbestos was removed from the site. Drywall and other contaminated building materials and roughly 40,000 square feet of asbestos asphalt in the parking lot were taken to a landfill.

To finance the cleanup, the developer took out two low-interest loans from EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) grant recipients. In 2015, the City of Aurora used its RLF grant to provide an \$825,000 loan for asbestos abatement. The



**EPA Grant Recipient:**  
City of Aurora, Colorado

**Grant Types:**  
EPA Area-Wide Planning Grant,  
EPA Revolving Loan Funds

**Former Uses:**  
Municipal Landfill, Wastewater  
Treatment Plant, Airplane  
Manufacturing Facility

**Current Use:**  
Retail Marketplace



After 55 years and four owners, the once-booming, 100,000-square-foot Stanley Aviation manufacturing facility sat vacant in 2009.





This view from the Stanley Marketplace shows the beer garden and homes in Denver's neighboring Stapleton development.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also used its RLF grant to provide a \$774,000 loan for soil cleanup.

After extensive remediation and more than two years and \$30 million worth of redevelopment and construction, the Stanley Marketplace opened to great fanfare in 2016. The Marketplace features 54 independently owned Colorado businesses—including restaurants, breweries, yoga studios, clothing stores, barbershops, hair salons and even a daycare center—underneath its main roof, with collaborative office space located on the second floor. Five hundred workers are employed by these businesses. The redevelopment has also become home to various arts and other festivals, features an 18,500-square-foot event center and is home to a 7-acre urban farm located on remediated garden plots.

“Maintaining the integrity of the original building for the Stanley Marketplace was a really big win for the city,” says Aurora Development Project Manager Jennifer Orozco. “It kept a cultural asset in the neighborhood and built it into something even bigger and better. And the site is amazing. There’s just so much activity there now.”

## The Benefits

As hoped, the success of the venture has spurred additional developments near the property, including plans for a new apartment complex and public park. But Stanley Marketplace has more than just opened businesses; it’s also opened communities to each other.

More than 20 percent of Aurora residents were born in another country, and more than a third of Colorado’s African population resides in Aurora. A large number of refugees from Nepal also call the city home. Planning efforts—including three new major roads connecting Northwest Aurora’s immigrant and refugee communities to the new urbanism in Stapleton—specifically sought ways of breaking down physical barriers. The removal of cultural barriers has followed.

“It’s been a physical connection between the two neighborhoods, yes; but it’s also bringing two populations together,” Orozco says.

Chad Argentar, Aurora’s economic and business development supervisor, adds, “You can physically see a difference between the old and the new developments, but the lines—from a functional standpoint—are really blurred. There literally had been a fence up between the two neighborhoods and the two cities. Stanley Marketplace has successfully broken down those barriers.”

“Five years ago, there was no economic activity at the Stanley Aviation site. Now we probably have well over \$100 million invested in the area.”

*Chad Argentar,  
Economic and Business  
Development Supervisor,  
City of Aurora, Colorado*

### For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at [www.epa.gov/brownfields](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields) or email Danny Heffernan at [Heffernan.Daniel@epa.gov](mailto:Heffernan.Daniel@epa.gov).

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The Stanley Marketplace offers a variety of food and drink options, such as shops with ice cream, breakfast and sandwiches, and wine and spirits.



Community meetings were held as part of a brownfields area-wide planning process for the former Stanley property.