

Stakeholder and Community Survey Results

In October 2010, a survey inquiring about the current status and future vision for the south Thornton study area was distributed to over 450 individuals in the community. Nearly 400 postcards were sent out to every property and business owner in the study area, and selected e-mails were sent as a follow-up to key business owners in the area. Only a 10% response rate was achieved, with 46 individuals responding, though the survey did glean some positive information to be considered as part of the overall planning effort. Respondents included:

STaRS Survey Respondents	
Commercial Property Owners	5
Business Owners	23
Community Agency / Organization (e.g. medical, educational, church, etc.) and Government	8
Other	10
Total	46

The following summarizes the responses to the survey based on type of survey respondent.

Commercial Property Owners

Of the 46 respondents to the survey, just 5 were commercial property owners. One of those owners owned property east of I-25 in the study area, while the other 4 owned property west of I-25 in the study area.

When asked why they originally purchased property on south Thornton, the following reasons were given:

- Owned established business in the area
- Inherited a business in the area
- Wanted an investment opportunity close to the hospitals
- Traffic counts and demographics

Four respondents said they plan to continue owning property in south Thornton (one skipped the question), adding that they feel there is an upside to doing so if the area is developed properly. One respondent also noted that they are working to improve their property right now. The respondents covered a wide range of ownership timeframes, with owners ranging from 5-10 years to over 40 years.

When asked what type of businesses occupied their properties, respondents indicated the following:

Commercial	4
Retail	2
Medical	2
My property is Currently Vacant	2
Restaurant	0
Rental Residential	0
Other: Bar	1

75% of respondents noted that they also own the business that occupies their building.

When asked about the health of Thornton over the past ten years overall, the following results emerged:

In general, over the past 5-10 years, do you think the south Thornton area has:	
Improved	1
Stayed the same	1
Declined	2

The development of Sportsmans Warehouse and Ultimate Electronics were noted as things that have improved the area, while a poor economy and loss of significant retailers were noted as reasons for the decline.

Commercial property owners were also asked questions about specific improvements and/or declines in the south Thornton area. The following chart demonstrates specific areas where improvements/ declines have been seen:

Which of the following specific factors, over the past five years, have improved, stayed the same or declined in the south Thornton Area?			
	Declined	Stayed the Same	Improved
Beautification	1	3	0
Cleanliness	1	3	0
Business Climate	3	1	0
Vacancies	4	0	0
Property Values	4	0	0
Lease Rates	4	0	0
Number of retail Establishments	3	0	1
Number of Restaurants/ Entertainment Venues	1	3	0
Employment Opportunities	2	2	0
All Other Responses	0	11	1

The survey asked commercial developers to provide three descriptive words to define your vision for south Thornton. Key words that emerged:

- Redeveloped
- Hopeful
- Identity
- Optimistic
- Purpose
- Growth
- Unity
- No more pawn shops, tattoo shops, and dive bars

Commercial developers identified the following as important actions to make the south Thornton area a strong and vital community:

How important are the following actions to allow south Thornton to be a strong and vital community?				
	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not important
Attract new businesses and help existing businesses	4	0	0	0
Improve retail shopping opportunities	2	1	1	0
Develop new destination attractions	2	0	1	1
Encourage design standards for	1	0	3	0
Better marketing efforts and information	1	2	1	0
Improve the cleanliness	2	1	1	0
Improve the pedestrian experience	2	1	1	0
More restaurants and entertainment venues	1	2	1	0
Make the area safer	1	3	0	0
All Other Responses	3	7	3	2

When asked to select ONE MOST IMPORTANT item from the list above, commercial property owners selected:

1. Attract new businesses and help existing businesses grow (3 responses)
2. Improve the pedestrian experience (1 response)

Ideas and suggestions for tackling these challenges for south Thornton include:

- Don't make it so hard for owners to get new businesses into existing properties. Thornton should be willing to back off on some issues (like landscaping) and consider how each property can be rented as it is. There are too many things an owner must do to bring an existing property into compliance. That's one reason there are so many vacancies in Thornton.
- Thornton has taken an aggressive, proactive approach to improve areas of Thornton. I hope it continues, as partnerships with cities and property owners are important for things to move forward in a productive way.

Commercial property owners were asked what, in their opinion, was the single biggest opportunity that the city/community can capitalize on in south Thornton. The following comments were received:

- There is a lot of under-developed property/land that could be razed and rebuilt.
- Target large sites for redevelopment and/or improvement in order to attract better quality retailers and commercial users in order to reduce vacancy and improve the appearance of the neighborhood. Reduced vacancies will result in better appearance in addition to a momentum change for the better for future quality businesses to invest here.
- Remove/redevelop blighted property and develop vacant land.

Commercial property owners were also asked what they thought was the single biggest detractor from success in south Thornton:

- Dying businesses.
- I own a construction company. I talk to a lot of General Contractors who say that Thornton is a nightmare to build new projects or remodel existing buildings. They try to avoid working in Thornton.
- The amount of vacant and shuttered stores and buildings.
- Area needs one or more “full service” shopping centers to focus neighborhoods in the city.

Finally, commercial property owners were asked what outcome from this plan would be most helpful in allowing them to realize their goals:

- Improved business activity and clean-up of the underdeveloped areas.
- Help me keep my properties leased so I don't lose them to the bank.
- The proactive approach that Thornton is taking will help all property owners and increase real estate and sales taxes in the process, which is good for everyone.
- Not sure.

Finally, commercial property owners were asked about competition:

Which of the following communities and/or business districts provides the most competition to the south Thornton area?	
Other competitive areas of Thornton	2
Northglenn	2
Westminster	3
Commerce City	0
Denver	0
Other	0

Business Owner Survey Results

Of the 46 survey respondents, half (23) were business owners. 15 of those owners have businesses located east of I-25, 6 owners have businesses west of I-25, and one was located outside of the study area. Only about 16 respondents actually completed the survey.

When asked why these individuals located their businesses in south Thornton, the following responses were received:

- Business was available for sale at a good price.
- Convenience – close to my home.
- Thought the area needed to be served.
- Size of property, proximity to I-25, proximity to vendors and client base.
- Ideal marketing analysis for expansion opportunity.
- It was an up and coming area 48 years ago.
- There was a huge need for my product in the north and the commercial square footage price was very good. I got twice the space I would have in a new location.
- Purchased an existing business in 1971.
- Affordability, joined an existing business.

87.5% of respondents (14) said they plan to continue operating their business in south Thornton, with 2 respondents noting they do not plan to continue operating in south Thornton. Comments generated on this question include:

- Selling is not an option in present economic conditions.
- Maybe. Recent tax audit has me considering other locations outside Thornton.
- We continue to perform acceptably.
- Depressed demographics.
- I want to retire and would like to sell my property.

6 respondents said they own the property where their business is located, while 6 said they do not. The types of businesses represented by the respondents includes:

STaR's Survey Respondent Types	
Retail	4
Medical	3
Restaurant	1
Commercial	1
Industrial	1
Rental residential	0
Other	0

Reasons given for the business decline include:

- Not too many new stores.
- Crime (shoplifting, vandalism, graffiti) has increased.
- Economy – city not investing in area to draw residents.
- Housing has become low end.
- The businesses and residences in south Thornton have not maintained a professional or clean façade.
- Little redevelopment in the area. No modernization.
- Poor economy, business closures, more vagrant traffic.

On the positive side, a few respondents noted some new buildings and new business popping up in the area recently.

Respondents were asked about specific factors in the past five years that have changed in south Thornton:

Which of the following specific factors over the past five years have improved, stayed the same or declined in the south Thornton area?

	Declined	Stayed the Same	Improved
Beautification	5	8	3
Cleanliness	9	3	3
Business Climate	9	4	3
Vacancies	11	3	0
Property Values	9	4	0
Lease Rates	4	6	3
Number of Retail Establishments	7	5	3
Number of Commercial Businesses	7	5	3
Number of Restaurants/Entertainment Venues	7	4	4
Employment Opportunities	11	2	2

APPENDIX D

Business respondents were asked to provide three descriptive words to define your vision for south Thornton:

- More business
- Crime free
- Modern improvements
- Potential
- Low-income
- Safer community (3)
- Clean (2)
- Revitalize
- Growth
- More jobs
- Destination
- Neighborhood
- Contemporary
- Stability
- Increased retail shopping
- Green
- Vibrant
- Prosperity

The survey asked business owners how important the following actions are to allow south Thornton to be a strong and vital community:

How important are the following actions to allow South Thornton to be a strong and vital community?				
	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Attract new businesses and help existing	11	1	1	
Increase jobs	6	5	2	0
Improve retail shopping opportunities	8	5	2	0
Develop new destination attractions	5	3	3	2
Encourage design standards for...	6	1	5	1
Encourage residential development	4	3	5	1
Better marketing efforts and information	5	5	2	1
Improve the cleanliness	6	5	1	1
Improve the pedestrian experience	3	8	2	0
More restaurants and entertainment venues	4	6	3	0

One respondent noted the need to become more developer friendly, proactive and interactive.

When asked to choose the ONE MOST IMPORTANT item from this list to the future of the South Thornton area, business owners selected the following:

1. Attract new businesses and help existing businesses grow – 5 responses
2. Increase jobs – 1 response
3. Develop new destination attractions, such as a hotel, museum, others – 1 response
4. Better marketing efforts and information about what exists – 1 response
5. Improve the cleanliness – 1 response
6. More restaurants and entertainment venues – 1 response
7. Make the area safer – 1 response

Ideas and suggestions for tackling this issue include:

- Increase police presence in neighborhoods where youth crime is prevalent.
- Look at what other depressed areas have done to turn the area around.
- Green up the place, allow for tasteful signage.
- Lower taxes and offer tax incentives.
- Increase police patrols and watch for kids smoking pot at the bus stop.
- Encourage design and upkeep standards for existing businesses as well.

Business owners were asked about the single biggest opportunity, in their opinion, that the city/community can capitalize on in south Thornton:

- Accessibility – ease of access to I-25 corridor, Thornton Parkway and bus routes.
- Make it attractive to current and potential customers.
- With a growing Hispanic population, there could be an opportunity to create a more tourist-friendly area.
- Adding trendy, upscale shopping and restaurants in south Thornton. Bring people back into the hub of the city.
- Make it safe and clean!

According to business owners, the single biggest detractor from success facing south Thornton is:

- Youth crime (shoplifting, vandalism, graffiti).
- Need for urban development.
- Housing declining.
- Unincorporated Adams County just south of 88th.
- Dirty, unkempt.
- Lower income area.
- Growth is all in the north, south Thornton is in the wake.
- Areas that look run down need improvement.
- Marketing and attracting the “North” to come to the “South”.
- Existing businesses investing in modernization.
- The city took most of the Thornton activity and moved it to the north so most people not living here never venture to the south.
- The economy.

Finally, the survey asked which outcomes from this plan would be most helpful in allowing business owners to realize their goals in south Thornton:

- Greater policing of the neighborhood.
- New development.
- More residents who are not just renting and living paycheck to paycheck with little disposable income.
- The area must be more attractive to customers.
- Fill up empty buildings.
- Provide small units for businesses to lease or buy. Make it a multiple small business center. Capitalize on its easy access to both the north and the south.
- Increased need for medical services – medical complexes are a huge benefit.
- More businesses!
- I don't see a vision for the south area.

Business owners were also asked about competition. Westminster was listed as the community which provides the most competition to the south Thornton area.

Community Agency/Organization and Government Responses

Because of the small number of responses, the community agency/organization and government responses are being tabulated together. In total, 8 individuals responded, primarily from churches and schools. The majority of organizations represented have locations east of I-25.

Some reasons for locating in south Thornton include:

- A new church looking to revitalize the area spiritually, likely including children's ministries and after school activities.
- Educational needs of the community.
- All organizations plan to continue operating their organization in south Thornton. Two respondents own the building where they are located, three do not.

65% of these organizations thought that the south Thornton area had declined over the past five to ten years. Comments about these changes include:

- It is evident there has been a push to improve the area, but there is still a ways to go.
- Empty buildings, change in demographics, apartments.
- Older residents moving out, houses becoming rentals.

Specific areas where there have been changes were noted:

Which of the following specific factors, over the past five years have improved, stayed the same or declined in the south Thornton area?			
	Declined	Stayed the Same	Improved
Beautification	2	0	1
Cleanliness	2	0	1
Business Climate	1	2	0
Vacancies	3	0	0
Property Values	2	1	0
Lease Rates	1	2	0
Number of Retail Establishments	2	1	0
Number of Commercial Businesses	2	1	0
Number of Restaurants/Entertainment Venues	1	2	0
Employment Opportunities	2	1	0

APPENDIX D

These organizations were asked to use three descriptive words to define their vision for south Thornton:

- Thriving
- After-school programs
- Revitalize
- Reawakening
- Community outreach
- Refresh
- Reinvention
- Family mentorship
- Renew
- Metamorphosis

How important are the following actions to allow south Thornton to be a strong and vital community?				
	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Attract new businesses and help existing	11	1	1	0
Increase jobs	6	5	2	0
Improve retail shopping opportunities	8	5	2	0
Develop new destination attractions	5	3	3	2
Encourage design standards for...	6	1	5	1
Encourage residential development	4	3	5	1
Better marketing efforts and information	5	5	2	1
Improve the cleanliness	6	5	1	1
Improve the pedestrian experience	3	8	2	0
More restaurants and entertainment venues	4	6	3	0

Other comments included:

- City involvement with community-minded organizations (like churches).
- Reduce gangs and graffiti.

When asked to select just one item from the list MOST IMPORTANT to the future of south Thornton, the most frequent responses included:

- Increase jobs.
- Make the area safer.
- Other: Improve the pedestrian experience.

Ideas and suggestions for tackling these issues for south Thornton include:

- Rethink what is really important and alternative ways to get things accomplished.
- Improve school buildings and renovation.
- Form communities of people committed to improvement of the area.
- Engage, rather than alienate, Hispanic people.

When asked about the single biggest opportunity that the city/ community can capitalize on in south Thornton, responses included:

- A unified community of businesses, churches, people.
- Empty buildings.
- Growth in number of young families who need services. Provide low-cost home improvement loans. Help young families purchase, rather than rent, small starter homes in south Thornton.

The single biggest detractor to success for south Thornton, according to these respondents, include:

- Individualism.
- Empty buildings.
- Competition from gangs.

When asked what outcome would be most helpful in allowing these organizations to realize their organizational goals:

- When organized business supports and contributes to the outreach and impact of the community, everyone benefits.
- A working relationship between community organizations and the city.
- Improving schools and residences will improve overall value of property, making the area more desirable for investment.

When asked how their organization could contribute to achieving that outcome, the following responses were received:

- As we grow, we will likely be able to have some after-school programs that minister and mentor teens to reduce juvenile crime.
- In any manner we could.
- Provide meeting space, organization, marketing to parents and community members.

Finally, organizational respondents were asked about competition:

Which of the following communities and or business districts provides the most competition to the south Thornton area?	
Other competitive areas of Thornton	1
Northglenn	2
Westminster	0
Commerce City	0
Denver	0
Other	0

Other Respondent’s Responses

10 respondents provided feedback on south Thornton in the survey, even though they do not live or work in the area. Their responses are summarized below.

When asked about changing conditions in south Thornton, 45% of respondents thought south Thornton in general had stayed the same over the past five to ten years. 27.5% thought south Thornton had declined and 27.5% though south Thornton had Improved during the same time period.

Comments on this question included:

- Updating of existing business and addition of some additional business and services.
- Too many empty building.
- See a lot of “gang-bangers”, don’t feel safe.
- No changes in the retail.

Which of the following specific factors, over the past five years, have improved, stayed the same or declined in the south Thornton area?			
	Declined	Stayed the Same	Improved
Beautification	1	4	2
Cleanliness	1	4	2
Business Climate	2	5	1
Vacancies	5	2	0
Property Values	5	2	0
Lease Rates	2	5	0
Number of Retail Establishments	4	1	2
Number of Commercial Businesses	3	2	2
Number of Restaurants/Entertainment Venues	2	4	1
Employment Opportunities	4	2	1

Respondents were asked to look to the future and use three descriptive words to define their vision for south Thornton. The most commonly listed words included:

- Updated (3)
- Thriving
- Community
- Bigger
- Clean and Maintained (3)
- Safer
- Changing
- Welcoming
- Prosperous
- Historic
- Better
- Fertile
- Availability
- Improvement
- Brighter (2)
- Alive

APPENDIX D

How important are the following actions to allow south Thornton to be a strong and vital community?				
	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Attract new businesses and help existing	7	0	0	0
Increase jobs	5	2	0	0
Improve retail shopping opportunities	3	4	0	0
Develop new destination attractions	4	1	0	2
Encourage design standards for...	4	3	0	0
Encourage residential development	2	5	0	0
Better marketing efforts and information	2	3	1	1
Improve the cleanliness	5	2	0	0
Improve the pedestrian experience	1	5	1	0
More restaurants and entertainment venues	4	3	0	0

When asked to select one item from the list above MOST IMPORTANT to the future of the south Thornton area, the following ranked most highly:

1. Attract new businesses and help existing businesses grow
2. More restaurants and entertainment venues
3. Increase jobs
4. Develop new destination attractions, such as a hotel, museum, others
5. Make the area safer

Ideas and suggestions for tackling these important issues for south Thornton:

- Funding and support from the city for those that can help offer the most positive impacts for the community
- Thornton needs to be a destination. It does not have anything to attract people from the outside.
- Incentives for new and existing businesses in Thornton
- Attract new business
- Extreme police presence – similar to cruising crackdown in Westminster a few years ago. Making penalties “stick.”

When asked about the single biggest opportunity that can be capitalized on in south Thornton:

- Perception of quality of life, cleanliness and environment for new business.
- It is in the best interest for the entire city to make this area vital.
- Attracting the types of business that people would come to Thornton to use.
- Attract more patrons.
- Location.
- I think we can develop areas that are failing such as strip malls, etc.

The single biggest detractor from success facing south Thornton, according to respondents, include:

- Age, cleanliness.
- Money.
- Not a nice neighborhood in some areas.
- Outdated.
- Dingy, ugly, unsafe.
- If we have all this property and don't have a vision and actually make changes.

When asked what outcomes from this plan would be most helpful in helping south Thornton realize their vision:

- Perceived view by residents and visitors of the community.
- Bring more business and create more jobs and opportunities.

Finally, respondents were asked about competition:

Which of the following communities and or business districts provides the most competition to the south Thornton area?	
Other competitive areas of Thornton	3
Northglenn	3
Westminster	5
Commerce City	0
Denver	2