

Evaluating a Land-Use Decision

Who decides how land should be used—developers, landowners, environmentally conscious citizens, the government? In practice, all of these people and more have some say in land-use decisions.

You live in the imaginary town of River City. After a period of very fast growth, the city has become short of housing. Rental and real estate prices have skyrocketed as a result. To relieve the problem, a developer has proposed a new housing development called Appaloosa Meadows. Appaloosa Meadows would be built in an undeveloped area on the outskirts of town. The developer points out that the project would provide jobs as well as affordable housing to thousands of people who need it. The developer has promised to maintain the highest environmental standards, to donate park land to the city, and to include abundant open space in the development.

Opposing the proposed development is STAMP (Stop the Appaloosa Meadows Project), a large coalition of citizens and environmental groups. Citing a recent study, STAMP argues that development would destroy an important habitat for the tufted warbler (a rare songbird), pollute local waterways, and increase congestion on streets already clogged with traffic. Also, STAMP contends that the developer has a poor environmental record and should not be trusted to protect the environment. STAMP proposes that the city purchase the land and set it aside as a wildlife preserve.

The developer stands to make millions of dollars from the project. The city budget would benefit from the tax revenue that a large subdivision would generate. In addition, more housing requires building more schools and providing more municipal services such as trash collection. Purchasing the land for use as a wildlife preserve would cost the city money that could potentially result in higher taxes. But, as STAMP points out, natural resources in the area could be harmed—perhaps seriously—by the Appaloosa Meadows project. The issue will be discussed and debated in River City at an upcoming meeting of the city council. All parties hope that the matter can be settled at the meeting.

In this activity, you will take on the role of a person involved in a land-use decision. You will try to imagine how that person might react to the issue, and you will develop arguments to support your case. Finally, you will develop an opinion about the decision that was made at the city council meeting and the process that was followed to reach the decision.

Evaluating a Land-Use Decision *continued*

OBJECTIVES

Explain why specific individuals and groups might take certain positions on land-use issues.

Compose a position statement outlining the reasons supporting a given stand on a land-use issue.

Model a public debate about a land-use issue.

Evaluate arguments for and against housing development in an undeveloped area to reach a decision on the issue.

MATERIALS

- paper
- pencil

Procedure

1. Your teacher will divide the class into four to six groups. Each group will be assigned a different role. The groups will include land developers, local merchants, city council members, members of an outdoor sports club, homeowners who live near the proposed development, and representatives from STAMP. All members of a group will play the role assigned.
2. With your group, discuss how individuals in the role you are playing might view the Appaloosa Meadows proposal. Brainstorm possible ways that this development could affect your interests. Then, make a list of reasons why this development might either benefit or damage the interests of your group.

3. Draft a brief position statement reflecting your group's opinion about the issue. The statement should clearly state your group's position on this land-use issue. It should also include the reasons to support the group's position.

Evaluating a Land-Use Decision *continued*

4. Select one group member to represent the group's interests and positions in a debate. The selected student will be responsible for expressing the views of the group during a mock city council meeting held to debate this issue.
5. During the debate, take notes about the positions of other groups on this issue. Determine the reasons behind the stands they take. Evaluating the strength of their arguments will help you come to a decision about your vote for or against building the Appaloosa Meadows housing development.
6. Following the debate, participate by casting a vote for or against the development of Appaloosa Meadows.

Analysis

1. **Describing Events** How difficult was it for your group to reach a consensus on the development of Appaloosa Meadows? How difficult was it to identify reasons that supported your stand?

2. **Explaining Events** Describe your impressions of the debate. Which groups' interests were best represented? Did the arguments of particular individuals seem to sway opinions among those participating?

3. **Classifying** Did members of certain groups tend to vote along certain lines? Which groups were most likely to vote for the development, and which groups were most likely to vote against it?

Evaluating a Land-Use Decision *continued*

Conclusions

- 4. Drawing Conclusions** Describe the final outcome of the vote. How large or small was the margin of victory for the winning side?

- 5. Interpreting Information** What effect do you think the debate had on individual decisions?

- 6. Evaluating Results** Did any arguments you heard during the debate change your initial position on this land-use issue? How did you vote?

- 7. Defending Conclusions** Briefly state one or more of the most persuasive reasons supporting the decision you made on this land-use issue. How important do you think these particular reasons were to other students who cast the same vote that you did?
