



## Parks & Recreation Make “Dollars and Sense”

An overview of the benefits that Parks and Recreation make on local economies

By John Rainey and Michael Clark, CPRP, AFO

**W**e all know that parks, recreation, and open space opportunities contribute multiple benefits that enhance the quality of life in our communities. But a thriving parks and recreation system can be more than “fun and games.” It can also be measured in “dollars and cents.” Savvy community planners are recognizing the positive impact that Parks and Recreation has on a community’s economic health and fiscal wellbeing.

Many community leaders think of these amenities as discretionary expenses that add little real value to a community’s economic health. They may consider infrastructure improvements and business incentives as greater contributors to economic development. But in a 2001 study titled “To Keep the Tax Bills Down... Should the Community Build Homes or Parks,” John Crompton, PhD, suggested that, contrary to popular perceptions, development of parks and open

space is more fiscally beneficial to a community than residential development. He cited evidence that “the public costs associated with residential development may exceed the revenue that it generates.” Whereas, public parks, dollar for dollar, are a greater long-term value, as well as contribute more revenue than originally thought. Add to this other substantial benefits:

- Attracting and/or helping retain business investment
- Attracting jobs
- Attracting tourism and/or retaining retirees
- Preventing and/or reducing crime
- Increasing tax revenues (for schools)

### Attracting Business

Companies in today’s growing knowledge economy (i.e. technology and service sectors) can choose to locate their businesses almost anywhere. But to attract and retain

“ The benefit of parks extends to every corner of our communities. Parks, beaches and other recreational facilities contribute \$730 billion a year to the U.S. economy, support nearly 6.5 million jobs, and contribute to higher property values. Access to quality parks and recreational spaces also improves public health for children and adults.”

*U.S. Representative Albio Sires\**

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From the **The LEADING EDGE Newsletter** — Spring/Summer 2015

highly-skilled workers, they look at communities with high quality of life and recreational opportunities. Among the factors businesses cite for choosing one community over another is education, housing, low crime rates, parks and recreation, and access to greenery and open space.

### Attracting Tourists

Out-of-town visitors can be attracted by recreational opportunities – cultural events, festivals, races, golf tournaments, sports competitions, hiking trails, and open space environments for biking or equestrian opportunities to name a few. These visitors generally spend money in the community, which helps support jobs in the local economy and boosts tax revenues. In fact, some communities, such as the Roanoke (VA) Economic Development Department, have not only brought parks and recreation amenities into the fold of business attraction tools, but created standalone positions dedicated to that effort. Other communities “reward” their parks agencies with a piece of the tourism tax benefit. In Rock Hill (SC), the town’s parks and recreation department receives a percentage of the lodging and meals tax as a direct offset to the general operations of their enterprise/ tourism-based facilities (velodrome, softball complexes, BMX park, etc.).

### Attracting/Retaining Retirees

Senior citizens are the fastest growing segment of our population, and the ability to attract and/or retain this group can have a significant impact

on a community’s economic health. Income from pensions and/or social security is spent locally. Along with proximity to family, seniors look for parks and recreational amenities as key factors in choosing a place to live. Communities with recreation centers or Senior Centers that offer exercise classes and entertainment programs are much more likely to attract retirees.

### Preventing/Reducing Crime

Cities with park and recreation amenities and programs for youth development can play an important role in reducing crime. Providing adult-supervised healthy alternatives can help youths develop and grow into fully functioning adults. Youth programs can help reduce juvenile delinquency while enabling youth to develop self-confidence and positive feelings while reducing negative behaviors. Recreation centers offer a safe place for youth and keep them occupied and engaged in positive, healthy activities.

### Increasing Tax Revenues

A community with a healthy balance of parks and recreation amenities

is likely to experience increased revenues from a variety of sources. Increased property values are well-documented results of parks and open space improvements. Increased fee revenue and sales taxes from concomitant businesses have been shown in numerous locales. Homebuyers are attracted to purchase homes where parks and open space are a community priority. “Parks provide intrinsic environmental, aesthetic, and recreation benefits to our cities. They are also a source of positive economic benefits. They enhance property values, increase municipal revenue, bring in homebuyers and workers, and attract retirees. At the bottom line, parks are a good financial investment for a community.” \*\*

GreenPlay provides services for park, recreation, open space, and related agencies by organizing consultant teams that address the needs of administrators and their communities. Also, GreenPlay can help communities evaluate their “Level of Service” (LOS) using a component based method for LOS analysis employing GreenPlay’s

“ In the future, livable communities will be the basis for our competitiveness and economic strength. Our efforts to make communities more livable today must emphasize the right kind of growth—sustainable growth. Promoting a better quality of life for our families need never come at the expense of economic growth. Indeed, in the 21st century it can and must be an engine for economic growth. ”

—Vice President Al Gore

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proprietary process called GRASP® (Geo Referenced Amenities Standards Process). In addition, GreenPlay can help public agencies find ways to fund needed facilities and programs through Alternative Funding Mechanisms or Cost Recovery Programs. Contact us for a preliminary consultation to learn how we can help you achieve your goals.

**Sources:**

\**New Jersey.Com.*

\*\**American Planning Association.*

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Other sources include:

Portland Parks and Recreation, Grove City Parks and Recreation, and the Project for Public Spaces.

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