

Parks, Open Space, Trails, Greenways and Recreational Programming offer many amenities to a community. These amenities include:

Quality of Life Benefits

- Makes neighborhoods more attractive places to live
- Strengthens community pride
- Improves physical health – opportunities for exercise and recreation
- Improves mental health
- Can reduce violence and crime

Economic Benefits

- Attracts and retains businesses
- Attracts home buyers (when parks are within 2000 feet of the home)
- Attracts retirees
- Reduced costs for public services
- provides “free” natural services like flood control & filtration of pollutants
- Higher assessments, thus higher property tax revenue for local government (when parks are within 2000 feet of the home)
- Increased tourism

Environmental Benefits

- Offer natural environmental protection
- Improved water quality– absorbs storm runoff, reduces runoff and filters out sediment, nutrients, pathogens, pesticides, metals and other contaminants
- Reduce air pollution – natural air filters
- Moderates temperatures – reduces heat island effects
- Energy conservation (within the parks these are applicable for cabins and offices)
- Tree cover can reduce building energy use in the summer by providing shade
- Trees also contribute to reduced winter energy use by providing a wind block
- Habitat
- Increased natural areas provides for habitat diversity
- Contributes to connecting natural areas which provide for healthier wildlife

The following pages provide more information about these benefits.

The following is an excerpt from:

“No Place To Play: A Comparative Analysis of Park Access in Seven Major Cities.”

A Research Report By The Trust For Public Land. Published November 2004.

Are Parks Important?

Sure, parks are nice. But are they important? Do parks contribute to a community’s health and vitality in the same way traditional urban infrastructure does? Recent studies say yes. Parks have a far-reaching impact on neighborhood economics, health, education, and safety.

- According to the Centers for Disease Control, Americans living closer to parks are more likely to exercise regularly, leading to weight loss, increased energy, and better overall health.
- Economic surveys conducted by private and public sector agencies confirm that parks increase residential and commercial property values.
- Studies show that urban parks deliver significant environmental benefits, filtering pollutants from the air and helping to control storm water runoff during rainy seasons.
- Teachers report that parks enhance education by serving as destinations for local field trips and outdoor classrooms that illustrate natural and life science lessons.
- Police departments document sharp declines in juvenile arrests after recreational facilities open in low-income neighborhoods.
- Urban planners agree that well-maintained parks improve communities by increasing neighborhood cohesion. After parks open, neighbors are more likely to interact, take pride in their communities, and form neighborhood watch and other local improvement groups.

Parks aren’t an “extra” that can be ignored in tough economic times. As a part of the urban infrastructure, they’re as essential as roads, bridges, and utilities.

A TPL white paper, “Parks for People: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space,” presents additional research describing the importance of park space in urban areas.

The white paper is available at www.tpl.org/pforp.

The following information is taken from:

“The Health Benefits of Parks. How Parks Help Keep Americans and Their Communities Fit and Healthy.” By
Erica Gies.

Published by The Trust for Public Land in 2006.

Parks, playgrounds, greenways, trails, and community open spaces help keep Americans and their communities fit and healthy.

All people need physical activity to maintain fitness and health. Physical activity increases strength, flexibility, and endurance; relieves symptoms of depression and anxiety; improves mood; and enhances psychological well-being.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only 25 percent of American adults engage in recommended levels of physical activity, and 29 percent engage in no leisure-time physical activity at all. This sedentary lifestyle is contributing to an increased incidence of obesity along with obesity-related diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, congestive heart failure, and stroke.

A landmark report by the U.S. surgeon general found that people who engage in regular physical activity benefit from reduced risk of premature death; reduced risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and non-insulin-dependent diabetes; improved maintenance of muscle strength, joint structure, and joint function; reduced body weight and favorable redistribution of body fat; improved physical functioning if they suffer from poor health; and healthier cardiovascular, respiratory, and endocrine systems.¹

As one solution to the increased incidence of obesity, the CDC has called for more parks and playgrounds. Studies have shown that when people have access to parks, they exercise more.

Despite the importance of parks and other recreational open spaces to health, many Americans do not have adequate access to parks and open space. This is particularly true in American cities, where parkland is often inequitably distributed, putting certain populations at risk for health problems associated with inactivity...

Fortunately, strong evidence shows that when people have access to parks, they are more likely to exercise, which can reduce obesity and its associated problems and costs.

A group of studies reviewed in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine showed that “creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach” produced a 48.4 percent increase in the frequency of physical activity.¹³ The same studies showed that easy access to a place to exercise results in a 5.1 percent median increase in aerobic capacity, along with weight loss, a reduction in body fat, improvements in flexibility, and an increase in perceived energy.¹⁴

A national study by the RAND Corporation looked at the correlation between physical activity in adolescent girls and proximity to parks and schools. Researchers found that girls who live close to parks participate in more physical activity than those who live farther away.¹⁵

Low-density, automobile-dependent patterns of development can discourage health promoting incidental physical activity, such as walking or cycling to school or work or to run errands. Conversely, incorporating parks and greenways into communities can support increased exercise and healthier lifestyles. Parks, greenways, and trails make transportation corridors to shops, schools, and offices more attractive and pedestrian friendly. Greenways support dedicated exercise programs; incidental exercise; and healthy, human-powered transportation. To the extent that greenways decrease the number of cars on the road, they reduce air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and the accidents and stress that are by-products of driving.

Exposure to nature in parks, gardens, and natural areas can improve psychological and social health. Surgical patients recover faster with windows that look out on trees. Horticultural therapy has evolved as a form of mental health treatment based on the therapeutic effects of gardening. Children who suffer from attention deficit disorder (ADD) can concentrate on schoolwork better after taking part in activities in green settings. Residents in housing projects with views of trees or grass experience reduced mental fatigue and report that they are better able to cope with life's problems.

Parks provide children with opportunities for play, and play is critical in the development of muscle strength and coordination, language, and cognitive abilities.

Parks also build healthy communities by creating stable neighborhoods and strengthening community development. Research shows that residents of neighborhoods with greenery in common spaces enjoy stronger social ties. Neighborhoods with community gardens are more stable, losing fewer residents over time.

Parks increase "social capital." That is, when people work together in a community garden or to create a park from a vacant lot, they get to know one another, trust one another, and look out for one another. The accomplishment of creating a new park helps people to believe that they can effect change.