



Parks, Open Space and Quality of Life

The significance of parks, trails and the preservation of open space is often taken for granted until a neighborhood finds itself without opportunities for play and social interaction. While everyone may agree that parks enhance the quality of life, with rapid development that quality of life is not always assured. It is government's responsibility to assure that open space is provided and that parks and recreational activities are equally available throughout all segments of the city.

Social Implications

"Closely associated with the physical and emotional health of our youth and with the satisfaction of normal self expression and achievement is the value inherent in parks and park programs as a preventative of delinquency and crime" (Sapora). The need to provide park and trail planning as much in advance as possible while costs are not prohibitive and maximizing use of parks is needed especially in congested areas.

One needs to look no further than Champaign's Clark Park to see how neighbors interact when they have a neighborhood park, how they get to know each other and ensure that positive activity occurs throughout their park and neighborhood. A sense of place or neighborhood pride provides an image or identity for a neighborhood thereby boosting morale by providing something the residents can point to with pride.

Parks and Physical Activity

With today's obesity issues, parks play a part in encouraging healthy lifestyles, physical activity and development. The Communicable Disease Center (CDC) notes that today's children may have a shorter lifespan than their parents due to the problems with obesity and lack of physical activity. People living near parks exercise more frequently than those who do not have nearby access to a park. CDC has called for the creation of more parks and playgrounds to help fight the obesity epidemic.

Education

Parks can provide opportunities for education through play as well as environmental education and physical education. Often times it is in a park where children first learn to take turns or to problem solve on how to climb a structure.

Mental Benefits

Parks play a part in providing opportunities for the enjoyment of nature, reduction of stress and physical and mental growth. Democratic conduct is often first learned through participation in neighborhood pick up games and playground use as well as local tennis, baseball and softball leagues.

The aesthetic appeal of parks is often a welcome visual relief for motorists, neighbors, walkers and bicyclists who admire the green open space, trees and flowers.

Environmental Benefits

Parks often serve as a mecca away from the busy-ness of everyday life, traffic and congestion. Trees reduce air and water pollution; parks help keep cities cooler and are an effective and less expensive way to manage storm water runoff than concrete sewers. Parks also provide many environmental benefits by nurturing and preserving the natural environment by providing habitat for flora and fauna.

Economic Benefits

Professor John Crompton, PhD. states in *The Impact of Parks on Property Values: A Review of the Empirical Evidence* that "the real estate market consistently demonstrates that many people are willing to pay a larger amount for property located close to a park than for a house that does not offer this amenity. The higher value of these residences means that their owners pay a greater portion of property taxes when each property which is attributable to the presence of a nearby park is aggregated".

The Trust for Public Land also shows studies in a wide range of urban areas and has documented increases in real estate value for residences located near parks, with increments in real estate value attributed to individual parks ranging into the millions of dollars. In 2005, Economics Research Associates in the report *Real Estate Impact Review of Parks and Recreation* showed that neighborhood and community parks have a potentially positive impact on surrounding residential communities. Neighborhood parks can provide up to a 20% increase in housing values for those homes facing the park. Benefits can extend to approximately 600 feet with houses nearer to the park receiving the majority of the benefit. Community parks may provide benefits up to 33% of the residential real estate value. Homes within 1,000 feet of a large community park may receive a 9% increase in home value. The positive impact of a community park may extend up to 2,000 feet.

The availability of parks and recreation facilities is an important quality of life factor for corporations choosing where to locate facilities and for individuals choosing a place to live. Parks can also become tourism draws, contributing to the economic health of local businesses and providing tax revenue for cities.

Costs of Open Space & Parks vs. Developed Land Uses

Protecting open space typically minimizes the costs of new government services including schools, water, trash removal, sewers, police and fire protection-the primary burdens on local government. Residential land is the most expensive for local government to support and may cost the public more money than it pays in taxes and charges. Demands placed on city services by parks and open spaces are minimal compared to other types of residential, retail or commercial development.

The Public Wants More Parks

In Champaign, residents visit parks on a much higher than national average and participate in recreational activities at a higher than national average (2006 survey of park preferences by ETC Institute). Residents increasingly are willing to donate their services and time to make this a reality. The Champaign Park District continually receives requests for neighborhood parks in developments without parks.

Summary

In *No Place to Play* by the Trust for Public Land they summarize an analysis of seven major cities by saying: "In many cities across the country, children don't have easy access to parks and the consequences are serious. Kids without parks lose health and recreational benefits and they may never experience the kind of casual outdoor play that made childhood memorable for older generations. However the damaging effects are felt throughout the community. Planning parks unites neighbors and spending time outdoors promotes the kind of community cohesion that fights crime, increases property values and improves the quality of life."