

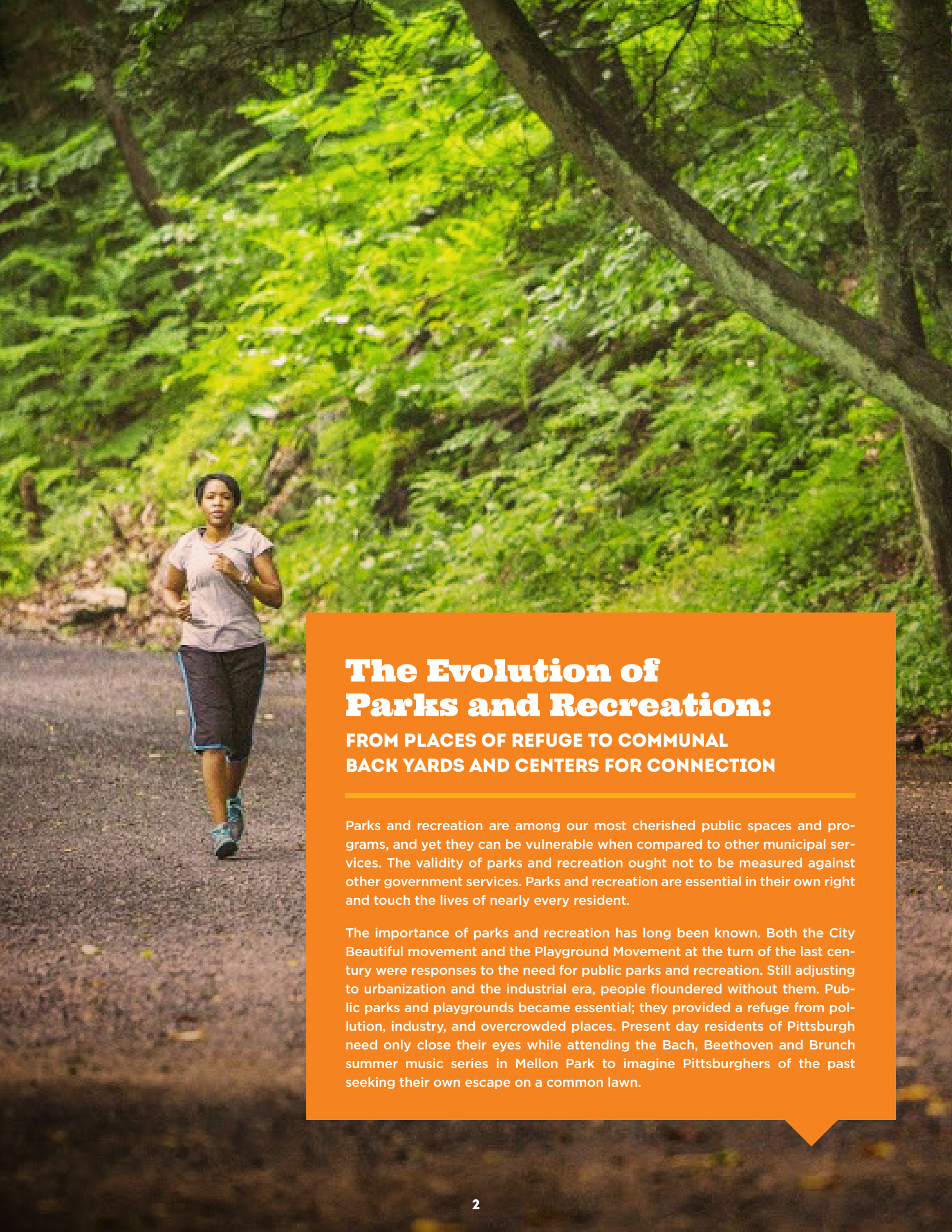


FROM “NICE TO HAVE” TO “NEED TO HAVE”

A CASE FOR LOCAL PARKS AND RECREATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

* UPDATED JANUARY 2017 - FEATURING NEW CASE STUDIES (P. 12-13)

**good for you.
good for all.**
PENNSYLVANIA PARKS & RECREATION

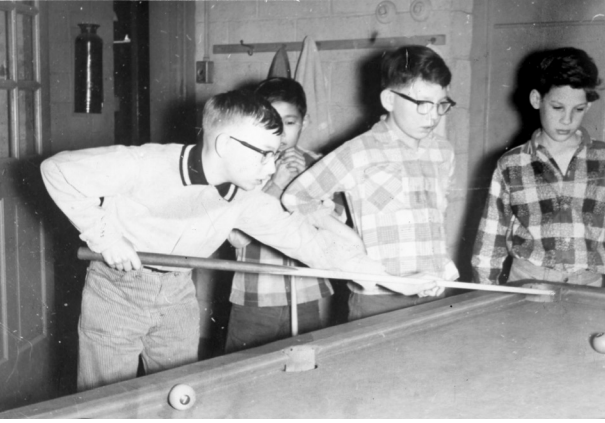


The Evolution of Parks and Recreation:

FROM PLACES OF REFUGE TO COMMUNAL BACK YARDS AND CENTERS FOR CONNECTION

Parks and recreation are among our most cherished public spaces and programs, and yet they can be vulnerable when compared to other municipal services. The validity of parks and recreation ought not to be measured against other government services. Parks and recreation are essential in their own right and touch the lives of nearly every resident.

The importance of parks and recreation has long been known. Both the City Beautiful movement and the Playground Movement at the turn of the last century were responses to the need for public parks and recreation. Still adjusting to urbanization and the industrial era, people floundered without them. Public parks and playgrounds became essential; they provided a refuge from pollution, industry, and overcrowded places. Present day residents of Pittsburgh need only close their eyes while attending the Bach, Beethoven and Brunch summer music series in Mellon Park to imagine Pittsburghers of the past seeking their own escape on a common lawn.



We have needed parks and recreation for centuries.

The first known public open space in the United States was The Boston Common, opened in 1634, nearly 400 years ago¹. They enrich our lives and connect us to nature, recreation opportunities, and to each other. The roles of parks and recreation, however, are evolving. John Alschuler of consulting firm HR&A advocates for “next century parks”, those that are no longer designed as places to escape from urbanity, but rather, become a reflection of our communities and a part of them. If City Beautiful and the Playground Movement established parks and playgrounds as places of refuge, 21st century parks and recreation have become integral parts of the community fabric.

Parks and recreation are integral parts of vibrant suburban and rural communities as well. Various “best small town” and “best places to live” lists (*Country Living*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, www.livability.com, *Men’s Journal*) reveal the important role of parks and recreation in quality of life. Nine out of 10 images used for the www.livability.com “10 Best Small Towns” ranking featured natural amenities or people recreating. For the *Men’s Journal* list, 46 of 50 communities listed are designated as Bicycle Friendly Communities (League of American Bicyclists).

In Pennsylvania, emphasis placed on parks and recreation has ebbed and flowed over the years. In 1980 – 70 years after the Playground Movement – the year’s statewide recreation plan called for more recreation facilities and programs near or where people live. Thirty-four years later, the Technical Advisory Committee that drafted Pennsylvania’s 2014-19 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) again made local parks and recreation a priority. For the first time in decades, local parks and recreation were listed among the priority areas emphasized in the statewide plan (Priority: “Local Parks and Recreation”).

THE CURRENT STATE OF PARKS AND RECREATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

What is the state of parks and recreation in Pennsylvania? “It’s nice to have if it can be afforded”² is an apt summation. While 91 percent of Pennsylvanians live in municipalities with local parks³, the associated expenses are commonly perceived as discretionary. As a result, many parks and recreation departments struggle to maintain services and facilities. Common issues faced across the state include layoffs, deferred maintenance, increased user fees, reduced services and programs, and fewer grant opportunities.

THE STATE OF PARKS AND RECREATION BY THE NUMBERS

- Parks and recreation spending is often viewed as discretionary by local municipalities. Statewide, municipalities dedicate an average of just three percent of their total expenditures to culture and recreation, with **17 percent** of municipalities reporting no such expenses from 2008-12.⁴
- Municipalities are maintaining services at best and failing to provide “safe and clean” recreation experiences at worst. This is significant, as **75 percent** of residents surveyed ranked safe and clean as very important qualities in trying to pick a spot for outdoor recreation.⁵
- Whether urban, suburban or rural, Pennsylvanians value local park and recreation facilities and view maintenance of existing facilities as a priority.⁶ Among providers, **64 percent** believed that maintenance

was the most important funding priority for recreation and conservation. Nonetheless, deferred maintenance, layoffs, and reduced services are common challenges.

- Despite the maintenance challenges faced by local communities, people do use local park and recreation facilities and services. **Nine out of 10 residents** who participate in outdoor recreation reported visiting a local park, trail, or recreation area in the 12 months leading up to being surveyed. Many of these same residents may “vote with their feet” by frequenting those parks and facilities that are best maintained.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN PARKS AND RECREATION

As previously noted, just three percent of total Pennsylvania municipal expenditures are dedicated to culture and recreation. And as costs are going up, municipal spending has declined. From the five year period 2003-07 to the period 2008-12, overall municipal spending in this category declined 12 percent.⁷ Generally, the larger the population, the higher the percentage of municipal expenditures earmarked for parks and recreation services.

Pennsylvania parks and recreation service providers know all too well that their services face substantial cuts in times of budgetary shortfalls given the reliance on general funds and the perception held by some that parks and recreation services are less essential than some

¹244 years later, Frederick Law Olmstead would begin construction on Boston’s “Emerald Necklace,” the first known greenway, to connect many of the city’s open spaces, including The Boston Common.

²“Developing Financial Support for Recreation and Parks,” A Resource Guide for Recreation, Parks and Conservation

³Center for Rural Pennsylvania’s Summary Profile of Local park data collected by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (While 91 percent of residents live in municipalities with parks, just 65 percent of all municipalities have local parks. This reflects that the majority of the population lives in urban and suburban areas that contain parks.)

⁴Center for Rural Pennsylvania’s Summary Profile

⁵2014 SCORP resident survey

⁶The majority of 2014 SCORP resident survey respondents were white, older, and lived in suburban or rural locations, whereas 80 percent of PA residents live in urban areas. Thirty-two percent of the SCORP resident survey respondents identified maintenance as the top overall funding priority (representing a 10 percent jump from the 2009 survey). Their prioritization of maintaining existing facilities aligns with the feedback received from the 2012 Urban Recreation Initiative focus groups, which identified maintenance as the chief problem facing urban park and recreation systems.

other local government services. But what of the vital nature of parks and recreation? The following section details some quite vital services offered via parks and recreation throughout Pennsylvania.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Many people do believe that parks and recreation are vital in Pennsylvania. A 2004 handbook for Pennsylvania municipalities referred to park and recreation services as “a basic component of a community’s infrastructure, along with streets, water, and sewers.”⁸ The 2014-19 SCORP, while focused on outdoor recreation, has uncovered some great information on the state of parks and recreation in general. The research team conducted a random sample resident survey completed by 2,240 people, as well as a provider survey, gathering the feedback of 1,037 elected officials, appointed officials, and directors of parks and recreation agencies.⁹ Seven out of 10 recreation enthusiasts surveyed believe that recreation services should be a core function of state and local governments. Some of the following services commonly offered through local parks and recreation begin to paint a picture of their essential nature.

Nutritious meal programs - Parks and recreation programs are the second largest feeder of children in America (next to schools), according to the National Recreation and Park Association. In Pennsylvania, 21 percent of children and 14 percent of adults live in food insecure households. In other words, 1 in 5 children here struggles with hunger, making meal programs a vital service of parks and recreation.¹⁰ Summer can be a particular trying time for hungry children. Nationally, only 1 in 7 free lunch-eligible children benefit from Summer Nutrition Programs, in part



due to funding cuts to the local programs that provide the platform.¹¹ It is clear that parks and recreation can play a role in feeding hungry children as part of summer meal programs, but with the status quo are probably not positioned to fully meet demand. Still, parks and recreation providers throughout Pennsylvania do their best to keep children satiated year-round with standard daily meal programs and innovative efforts such as the Power Packs Project in eastern Pennsylvania, which sends school children home with food for the weekends.

PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAMS ARE THE SECOND LARGEST FEEDER OF CHILDREN IN AMERICA

The role of parks and recreation in providing nutritious meals is not limited to serving children. Some programs serve a population of older adults. Citiparks in Pittsburgh serves lunches to those ages 60 and older at 14 senior centers throughout the city. The meals are served five days a week and made possible through a partnership with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services/Area on Aging.

Swim lessons - Drowning is the third leading cause of death from unintentional injury worldwide. Many park and recreation programs offer swim lessons to local residents of all ages who otherwise may not learn how to swim. The Lancaster Recreation Commission, for example, partners with the local aquatic club to teach swimming and water safety skills to children and teens. This is imperative in urban environments where 70 percent of African American and Hispanic children can’t swim.¹² Additionally, municipally-run swimming pools offer a safe, supervised environment for swimming. Nearly half of all drowning incidents occur in natural waters, versus 16.3 percent occurring in swimming pools.¹³

Programs and facilities that contribute to improved health

- The contribution of parkland and recreation programs that facilitate physical activity cannot be overestimated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites physical inactivity and obesity as risk factors for cancer, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, joint and bone disease, and depression. By 2030, the combined medical costs associated with treating preventable, obesity-related diseases could increase by up to \$66 billion per year in the United States, with a loss in economic productivity of up to \$580 billion annually.¹⁴ This is why programs ranging from physicians’ “park prescriptions” to Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* have gained traction. Programs and spaces that get peo-

⁷ Center for Rural Pennsylvania’s Summary Profile

⁸ Community Recreation and Parks: A Handbook for Municipalities

⁹ Provider survey respondents represented predominately rural, small governments (55 percent with populations less than 5,000). Nearly all appointed and elected officials represented townships and boroughs.

¹⁰ www.feedingamerica.org

¹¹ “Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation,” Food Research and Action Center

¹² Lancaster Recreation Commission 2013 Annual Report

¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

¹⁴ “F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America’s Future 2010,” Trust for America’s Health, 2012.



ple moving contribute to our health and wellness and can reduce medical spending. The mere availability of municipal park and recreation facilities to those who organize league play and to those who recreate independently is an essential offering of a healthy community.

Programs that position children for success – Parks and recreation’s role has evolved in response to community needs. The Lancaster Recreation Commission offers a number of programs aimed at positioning children for success and whole living. The Commission partners with the school district and other pre-kindergarten providers to ensure that the content taught in pre-k programs prepares children for kindergarten. The Commission’s program is offered to local families free of charge. Their commitment to children’s health and wellness is further evidenced in clever special programs. Last year’s “After School Crunch,” for example, coordinated a synchronized “crunch” of over 400 fresh, local apples by students in 12 local elementary schools.

Programs that position families for success – The Lancaster Recreation Commission additionally offers services that are of value to the entire family. In addition to the pre-k program, it offers full-day childcare year round, before and after school programs, and programs for children ages 5-13 throughout the summer and on school holidays. These enriched environments are great for

kids and save parents from the hassle of disrupted work schedules.

Other examples of vital services within parks and recreation are:

- Bike safety and free helmet programs (the Lancaster Recreation Commission facilitates such a program in partnership with a private donor).
- Access to fresh, local, nutritious foods through farmers markets (Pittsburgh’s Citiparks runs seven markets in various city neighborhoods. In Dayton, Ohio, the 2nd Street Market operates year-round in a block-long historic building; the market is owned and operated by Five Rivers Metro Parks).
- Lancaster’s “Independent U” program serves adults with developmental disabilities to learn work skills.

In addition to the vital nature of many park and recreation programs, and the innate desire for parks and open spaces, it is worth noting some of the most popular facilities in the realm of parks and recreations. According to Resources for the Future’s 2009 *The Parks and Recreation in the United States - Local Park Systems* “Backgrounder”:

“Playgrounds are the most popular kind of facility in city parks, followed closely by tennis courts and ball diamonds. The facilities that are more costly to build and operate—recreation centers, swimming pools, and golf courses—are less

common. And the facilities that have become more popular in recent years, such as skate parks and dog parks, are far fewer in number. In addition to these facilities and developed areas, most cities provide nature-based parks with trails and undeveloped lands.”

THE VALUE OF CLOSE-TO-HOME RECREATION

In California, scholars and conservationists have been deliberating the relevance of John Muir’s legacy a century after his death. While Muir’s work to preserve wilderness led to many of the treasured and protected spaces we have today, critics wonder if his ethic “sends the message that only awe-inspiring parks are worth saving, at the expense of smaller urban spaces”.¹⁵ They also assert that his vision of wilderness is “rooted in economic privilege and the abundant leisure time of the upper class.”

Surely, these assertions are debatable, but the dialogue draws attention to the value of local parks and recreation. Pennsylvania’s 5,600+ local parks are poised to fill a vital role in connecting people to the outdoors. Local parks and recreation are the “go-to” for many residents. According to the 2009-2013 SCORP, they account for the largest portion (43 percent) of away-from-home outdoor recreation activity. Simply put: local parks provide close-to-home nature and recreation. And it’s always free or affordable.



¹⁵ “LA Times, “John Muir’s Legacy Questioned as Centennial of his Death Nears,” November 13, 2014

THE BENEFITS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

"Never underestimate the benefit of a scraped knee."

- INSTITUTE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Do you remember the sensation of a scraped knee from childhood play? Or maybe it was your elbow, chin, or a finger. You may recall the rawness, the thrill, or the lesson learned. That scrape is part of your story and part of who you've become. Maybe that park or playground was, too.

These are among the many benefits of parks and recreation, which extend far beyond character development and memory making. The return on investment ranges from personal to community-wide, from health-related to economic. The \$273 million High Line public park in New York City, for example, is said to have generated billions in private investment. The High Line's astounding return includes increased property values, reduced vacancy rates, new businesses, and increased tourism in New York's Chelsea neighborhood. One adjacent parcel sold for \$800 million. This isn't the first Big Apple public park to turn heads. According to Building Design + Construction online magazine:

"The power of placemaking as an economic development engine has been a known phenomenon for well more than a century. In fact, 140 years before the 'High Line effect' there was the 'Central Park effect.' Its creator, Frederick Law Ol-

msted, was able to prove through a 17-year study that the values of property surrounding his grand new park grew substantially—by a collective \$209 million in 1873 dollars—in the years following its completion."

How is a High Line park (or the legacy of Central Park) relevant in Pennsylvania? It may be relevant (and scalable) in our cities, where 80 percent of Pennsylvania residents live. (See the Social Equity / Local Economy Key Benefits of this case for more on how Three Rivers Park in Pittsburgh has spurred adjacent real estate development.) And in our small towns, perhaps it's just the concept of rethinking the role of parks and recreation and the array of benefits. In Ohiopyle (pop. 59), the Stewart on the Green playground and adjacent general streetscape improvements have helped to draw visitors from the area's main attractions (the Youghiogheny River and local trails) to the center of town. Within 1-2 years of completion, a miniature golf course and zip-line adventure park opened on nearby parcels.

Who benefits from parks and recreation? The beneficiaries range from young children to older adults. We tend to refer to the age range as

from "1-100," although we know that infants and centenarians skirting the edges are out there enjoying parks and recreation.

This case statement does not provide an exhaustive explanation of the benefits. Instead, it distills what we know of why parks and recreation "make life better"¹⁶ and why they are a "need to have" in Pennsylvania. Parks and recreation are for all of us, and all who use them experience a range of benefits. Even those residents who never use them experience the benefits because their communities are enhanced through parks and recreation (recall the "best small towns" and "best places to live" lists referenced earlier).

THE "THREE PILLARS" OF PARKS AND RECREATION BENEFITS

The National Recreation and Parks Association has established the "Three Pillars" of **health, conservation, and social equity** as the standard for articulating the value of parks and recreation. We follow the same system in articulating the value realized through parks and recreation, and have added "local economy" benefits alongside social equity.

¹⁶ Phrase borrowed from the "Parks Make Life Better!" public awareness campaign in California.



HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS

Benefit: Improved health and wellness* for all

** Wellness includes physical health improvements in the face of poor nutrition, hunger, obesity, and chronic disease as well as reduced stress and anxiety levels, improved focus and productivity, and other holistic health measures.*

Why We Care:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites physical inactivity and obesity as risk factors for cancer, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, joint and bone disease, and depression. The Aspen Institute's Sports for All, Play for Life report states, "Childhood is the ideal time to prevent obesity, and none of the key strategies holds more promise in reducing obesity rates among children aged 6-12 than participation in after-school physical activity programs, according to a 2014 analysis published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine". Fewer than half of children ages 6 to 11 meet the U.S. Surgeon General's recommendation for engaging in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Park and recreation programs and access to park and recreation facilities play a role in physical activity for kids and people of all ages.
- The benefits extend beyond physical health. "Intuitively, it probably doesn't seem surprising that kids who run around in the woods are less fidgety when they do have to pay attention. Or that the smell of a pine forest is so pleasant that it soothes anxiety. But even if the mechanisms aren't entirely clear, a steadily growing stack of scientific evidence suggests that time in nature is really good for you," writes Laura Smith of Slate.com. The article covers everything from the D.C. Park Prescription program to the Japanese practice of "forest bathing"

(the practice of visiting forests with the intent of improve one's health).

- Pennsylvanians view parks and recreation as part of health and wellness. Nearly 4 out of 5 respondents to the SCORP resident survey agreed or strongly agreed that parks, trails and open spaces are an essential part of our health care system. This was the strongest response out of 21 attitudinal questions in the survey.

Benefit: Lifelong learning and enrichment that contribute to increased knowledge, character development, confidence building, and improved interpersonal relationships

Why We Care:

- The National Recreation and Park Association reports that a youth community gardening program implemented across 20 park and recreation agencies resulted in more than 70 percent of participants reporting working better with others and making friends more easily by the end of the program.
- Youth participants of a 2010 three-day self-supported kayaking trip along the Allegheny River shared how the Paddle Without Pollution program impacted them. Some of the skills were specific, as told by one of the participants: "Before this, all I knew about fire and setting up tents was that it is all hard. Now that I'm watching people do this and I do this myself, I'm thinking 'this isn't so bad; I can do this.'" Other gains were more deeply embedded. One youth shared, "I didn't trust myself, but now I do," and another: "It made me think 'I'm strong, I'm brave, I can do anything.'"

Benefit: The fulfillment of basic needs, like nutritious meals and safe places to play and learn

Why We Care:

- Providing children and teens with a safe place to play was the top reported benefit of parks and recreation among Pennsylvania service providers who responded to the SCORP provider survey.
- Parks and recreation, the second largest feeder of American children, aid in reducing hunger and increasing access to nutritious food options. And not all programs are centered around providing meals. With the previously mentioned youth gardening program, 51 percent of participants reported eating more fruits and vegetables after participating.

Benefit: Parks and recreation provide a refuge from our busy lives and a community “commons” that connects people to nature and to each other

Why We Care:

- *An American Journal of Epidemiology* study found that residents in distressed neighborhoods of Philadelphia where vacant lots were converted to parks and green spaces reported significantly less stress and more exercise after the parks were in place.
- In Philadelphia’s “Find Your Path” video, a parks and recreation employee shared, “...And this is how important [this] is to me: all the people I know are from here.” Parks and recreation are the connectors of people.





SOCIAL EQUITY / LOCAL ECONOMY KEY BENEFITS

Benefit: More desirable communities and enhanced sense of place

Why We Care:

- Not only do more desirable communities appeal to established residents, but they attract new residents (retirees, knowledge workers, and others) and businesses as well. The National Association of Home Builders found that 65 percent of home shoppers surveyed felt that parks would seriously influence them to move to a community. New economy businesses may pay particular attention to outdoor recreation as contributing to employees' quality of life. According to Area Development Magazine, "Another top quality-of-life concern is outdoor recreation...". Location impacts a company's ability to retain employees in the midst of a move as well as to recruit competitively.
- A November 2014 www.efficientgov.com article, "How to Attract New Homeowners: Improve Parks & Rec", addresses the importance of having places to play and learn. The article highlights the value of integrating play places throughout our communities. In Chicago, the city wants every child to live within a seven minute walk of a new park or playground. And the city's "People Spots" are temporary parklets intended to increase foot traffic into business districts. The Philadelphia Parklet Program operates similarly.

Benefit: Provide safe and affordable recreation and learning opportunities for all

Why We Care:

- Pennsylvania State Parks have always been "free to all". So are most local park and recreation facilities. Free and affordable recreation and learning opportunities make it possible for all Pennsylvanians, despite financial circumstances, to connect and thrive.
- As stated in the 2014-19 SCORP, "Elected officials are mandated to solve their community's most pressing problems...If parks are understood to be a response to these pressing issues, it is more likely that elected officials will prioritize the recreation investments needed for parks to thrive". Elected officials perceive crime to be a problem and parks and recreation to be a safe place to recreate. Parks and recreation are, essentially, an antidote to some of our most pressing problems.
- Local park and recreation programs offer free or affordable alternatives to pricy summer camps, daycares, and recreation options. Pennsylvania's 5,600+ local parks and the many recreation programs offered here are an important part of providing safe and affordable recreation, learning, and enrichment in local communities.

Benefit: Increased property values and municipal tax revenues

Why We Care:

- Parks can positively impact real estate values, making a better community for all. A 2001 survey by the National Association of Realtors found that 50 percent of voters would be willing to pay 10 percent more for a house located near a park or protected open space. Such increases in property values are demonstrable in Pennsylvania. According to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, municipalities with parks have higher average housing values (\$206,331) compared to those without parks (\$183,045).¹⁷ In Southeastern Pennsylvania, open space adds \$16.3 billion to the value of the housing stock.¹⁸
- In Pittsburgh, a trailside condominium development has advertised the trail and scenery as the unique selling point: “Biked 20 miles along the river. Saw One Eagle, Two Red-Tailed Hawks...Zero Cars. This is Living.” A recent study commissioned by the nonprofit Riverlife confirms that “trails sell¹⁹”. The study found that since 2001, property values along the 13-mile Three Rivers Park have jumped by 60 percent compared with 32 percent in the rest of the city. The report states, “The pattern in Pittsburgh and in other cities across the country is clear: properties with close proximity to high quality park infrastructure increase in value more than properties that do not.” Not only do parks affect property values, but they additionally spur development. The same study found that the \$130 million invested in Three Rivers Park has helped to produce nearly \$4.1 billion in development on and near the riverfront. Along with these increased property values come increased tax revenues.



Benefit: Reduced vacancy and crime rates

Why We Care:

- According to the City Parks Alliance, in areas where urban parks have been used as redevelopment tools, surrounding vacancy rates have dropped by as much as 40 percent.
- In Kansas City, the police department reported a 74 percent crime reduction when a portion of a scenic byway located in a city park hosted car-free weekends in 2008. In Los Angeles, the City Night Lights violence reduction program resulted in a 15.4 percent reduction in gang-related crime in the 32 participating communities from 2013 to 2014 during program hours.

Benefit: Increased tourism, including extended and return visits

Why We Care:

- Long distance trails often pass through parks. Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) trail users, for example, pass through Ohio State Park, Youghiogheny Park, Cedar Creek Park, and Dead Man’s Hollow conservation area in a 56-mile stretch of the GAP. The parks provide reasons for trail users to extend their visit, relax in the park, and explore the nearest town. Continuing north toward Pittsburgh, cyclists might linger at the Historic Pump House, taking in the seasonal Sunday Heritage Market or walking the adjacent labyrinth overlooking the Monongahela River. In Pittsburgh, the trail passes through South Side Riverfront Park, where retail shops and restaurants with outdoor seating front the park and trail. At \$50 million in direct economic impact attributed to Great Allegheny Passage trail user spending, the interactions between trails and parks are worth considering. Trails are conduits to parks, and parks are conduits to trails (established parks can make it easier to acquire trail right of way and develop trails).
- In Phoenix, AZ, the Maricopa Trail and Park Foundation is working to complete the Maricopa Trail. The trail will connect 10 county parks in a 242-mile loop, exposing trail users to municipally-run nature centers, a county library, food vendors, restrooms, special events, local communities, and interpretive programs. Their motto is “Linking communities with pathways to the parks”. The trail is viewed as a connector of county parks and other assets.
- The annual Dam Show at Austin Dam Park in the PA Wilds draws nearly a dozen bands and a large crowd to a three-day show in a town of less than 600 residents.
- The economic return on ball fields may be one of the most unexpected benefits of local parks and recreation. A case study later in this case details the tourism impact of sporting tournaments. Teams and families travel for the tournaments and treat the trip as a vacation.

¹⁷ Center for Rural Pennsylvania’s Summary Profile

¹⁸ Return on Environment, The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania

¹⁹ Three Rivers Park Economic Impact Analysis, 2014



CONSERVATION KEY BENEFITS

Benefit: Healthier ecosystems through improved air, water and soil quality, and protected plant and animal wildlife

Why We Care:

- A whopping 90 percent of 2014 Pennsylvania Resident Online Survey respondents listed the trails, natural areas and waterways category (out of 10 choices) as what they value most in a community.²⁰ Green infrastructure that protects flora and fauna and our natural surroundings is important to these and other Pennsylvanians who value conservation.
- Close-to-home recreation and learning opportunities means less driving to other places to recreate, reducing a community's carbon footprint

Benefit: Reduced public infrastructure expenditures (water and sewer runoff, air pollution, etc.) as a result of natural green infrastructure solutions

Why We Care:

- A study conducted by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission found that parks and other open spaces in Southeastern Pennsylvania naturally filter out pollutants and replenish the water supply, saving municipalities nearly \$61 million annually as a result. The annual benefit generated by natural flood mitigation services is estimated at \$37 million. And trees on open spaces provide another \$17 million in air pollution removal and carbon sequestration.²¹

Benefit: Open space preservation for current and future generations

Why We Care:

- Richard Louv's 2008 best seller *Last Child in the Woods* struck a chord with people who want future generations to be able to enjoy time spend outside in nature. His concept of "nature deficit disorder" alarms those who intuitively know the value of open space. Parks and open space provide a community commons and contribute to an improved environment and healthier communities. Open space is vital now and will remain so for future generations.
- Economic activity associated with protected Southeastern Pennsylvania open space results in more than 6,900 jobs and \$299 million in annual earnings and generates \$30 million per year in state and local tax revenue.²²

Benefit: Citizens become stewards through education and interpretive programs that raise awareness of the value of conservation

Why We Care:

- Citizen stewards feel invested in the natural resources that surround them, and feel a responsibility to protect and conserve. This stewardship can ensure that the many benefits of parks and recreation remain into perpetuity. In the words of Paul Nordell, of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, "You have a personal relationship with the area you're cleaning up. Once you get a little river mud on your hands, you never think the same way again. It's a matter of personal ownership."

²⁰ 2014 Pennsylvania Resident Online Survey

²¹ Return on Environment, The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania

²² Return on Environment, The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania



CASE STUDY: STANDING IN THE GAP

READING RECREATION COMMISSION'S GIRLS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Reading Recreation Commission Executive Director Daphne Klahr tells a story of a 10-year-old named Geneva.

"I don't go anywhere. I don't do anything," the girl said, describing a limiting existence and her life's dream to go to the beach. Daphne began to wonder how Geneva would ever hold her own with young women who have been afforded more opportunities.

With that thought, Klahr went on to create the Girls Leadership Program, an urban-focused after-school club that serves Reading School District students in grades 6-12. The program started at a single recreation center in 2013 and has grown to include over 100 girls in four locations during the 2016-17 school year.

The program received PRPS's 2014 Excellence in Recreation and Parks Award with good reason. It empowers girls to become leaders while also broadening their horizons. Participants gather weekly for a custom, evidence-based curriculum and so much more. They've visited area hospitals, Hawk Mountain, the Reading Symphony, and even New York City. The girls interact with women in leadership and complete a community service project. One girl, who had the opportunity to attend a donor reception, told the donors that prior to the program she had no confidence, no friends, and wasn't doing well in school. "This program changed my life," she said, "and it's all because of you."

The Commission measures success by how the students assess themselves as leaders and individuals at the start and

the end of the program. They also track results. As shared by Klahr, one girl became the first in her family to attend college. Another went from being a discipline problem with poor grades to being accepted into a college-prep program. And yet another decided to run for class office because she felt she had the ability to be a leader.

What does it take to run Reading Girls Leadership? Each club operates on a budget of \$9,000 a year, sourced through a mix of small grants and private donations. The Commission didn't wait for those outside funds to launch the program, however. "When you have a good idea, and a good plan, and you're passionate about it the money will follow."

The program is just one of many essential services that the Reading Recreation Commission provides in a distressed urban environment. The City of Reading is home to nearly 90,000 residents. It is Pennsylvania's fifth largest city, situated approximately between Philadelphia and the state capital of Harrisburg. The Commission – a community partnership between the City and Reading School District – was once referred to as "standing in the gap" that exists for many Reading kids. Klahr spoke about the future of urban recreation services: "Kids aren't just coming to the rec center to play pool and do a craft." She added, "We definitely act as a social services agency. We teach life skills, serve 22,000 meals and snacks a year, and provide coats for kids." They're standing in the gap and doing their part to lessen it.



CASE STUDY: A NINE PARTNER INITIATIVE AIMED AT PUBLIC HEALTH

STEP OUTDOORS TIOGA COUNTY

What began over 15 years ago with a handshake agreement to better coordinate outdoor events has blossomed into one of Pennsylvania's strongest collaborations. At the time, the Wellsboro Department of Parks & Recreation, Hills Creek State Park, and Pennsylvania College of Technology, North Campus agreed to meet regularly and coordinate efforts. The partners ultimately had the opportunity to participate in the Steps to a Healthier PA program.

All of these years later, the program has been rebranded as Step Outdoors Tioga County, a health and recreation initiative that sets out to reconnect local residents with the outdoors. Pete Herres, Executive Director of the Wellsboro Department of Parks & Recreation, emphasizes the idea of “reconnecting” residents because in such a rural area, residents have an inherent relationship with the outdoors, but may have become removed from it, especially as an outlet for a healthy lifestyle.

So now, led by the Tioga County Partnership for Community Health, a central purpose of Step Outdoors is to improve the health of local citizens by getting them outdoors and getting them active. One new initiative, Walk Works, is building walking routes in locations with the greatest need, determined by local health data.

In addition to convenient access, Step Outdoors aims to remove other barriers to getting outside. The nine partners, including local, state, and federal agencies; the local healthcare community; and even the county's convention and visitors bureau, work together to establish and promote a calendar of year-round, free events. They also host skate nights and cross country ski days, handing out skates and skis at no charge.

The partnership promote races, trail challenges, and other outdoor activities, most of which they were already hosted by project partners. Because of this, Step Outdoors is offered at minimal costs to taxpayers. The local foundation community has helped to bridge any gaps, providing funds for equipment purchases and other start-up costs.

What would Herres want other parks and recreation professionals to know about the success and challenges of the program? It works because participants are able to “check their identity at the door” when coming together for meetings. “What happens then is we become many organizations banded together under the heading of ‘Step Outdoors.’ We look at each other's strengths and work to build off of them. You have to work to foster good relationships. With strong relationships, the programming side comes very easily.”



CASE STUDY: HEALTHIER PEOPLE + PLACES
**PITTSBURGH CITIPARKS “BUILDING THE BODY,
STRETCHING THE MIND”**

We live in healthier places* because of parks and recreation. With 15 percent of the population 65 and over, Pennsylvania comprises one of the nation’s oldest populations, making programs that help to extend health and wellness into old age all the more important. Citiparks in Pittsburgh commits itself to active aging by offering a variety of programs to older adults.

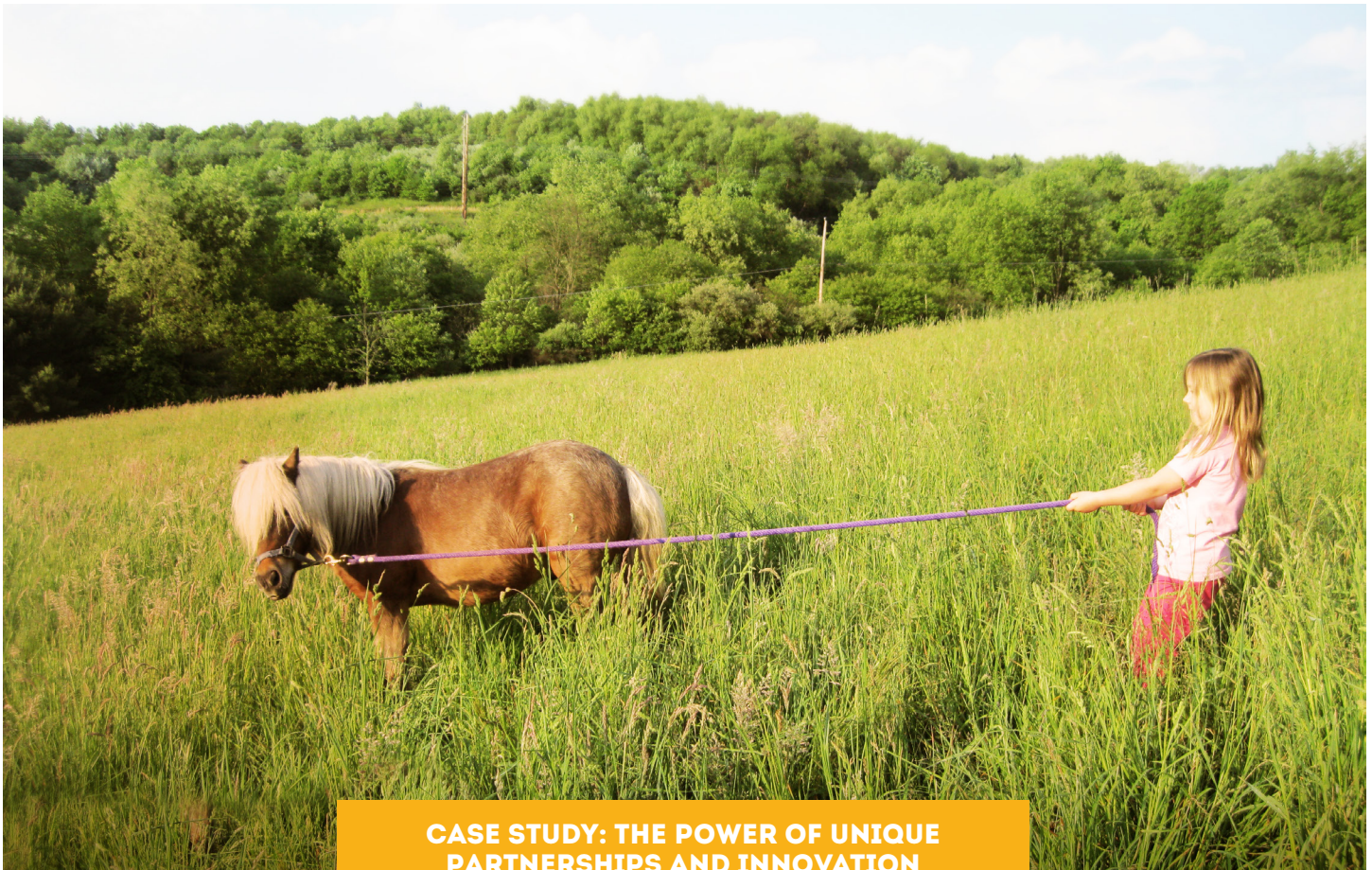
The department’s Healthy Active Living program keeps an eye on holistic health and wellness, working to ensure that all persons 60 and older live an active and healthy life. This includes physical activity, lifelong learning opportunities, nutritious meals offered five days a week, and more.

Seasonal Senior Games competitions encourage physical activity, social interaction, and friendly competition. The games range from track and field to table tennis and Wii bowling. The action isn’t limited to these times, of course. These and other games are available year-round in the city’s 14 senior centers.

The active living program helps residents to “stretch the mind” through a partnership with the Community College of Allegheny County. Some of the classes offered include computers, healthy cooking, exercise, the arts, and Tai Chi. The program recognizes the importance of a diverse community by offering a variety of cultural experiences designed to enhance learning and cross-cultural competencies and awareness.

No community is healthy when a segment of its residents struggle. The Healthy Active Living program has supports in place to assist seniors in need with rent rebates, pharmaceutical purchases, transportation, and energy assistance, all via an information referral program. We state in another case study (Philadelphia) that parks and recreation staff and volunteers are often the “face of the community”. It’s easy to see how this is so with such vital programs in place designed to help Pittsburgh residents to thrive.

** The health of our communities is measured not just by physical health. Other measures include emotional, environmental, and economic health.*



CASE STUDY: THE POWER OF UNIQUE PARTNERSHIPS AND INNOVATION

RURAL MONROE COUNTY COMMUNITIES FILL UNMET NEEDS

Thirty-five percent of the state’s municipalities do not have local parks, affecting just 9 percent of PA residents. This and other data analyzed by The Center for Rural Pennsylvania suggest that the Pennsylvania communities that lack for established park and recreation programs are predominantly rural. Many other rural communities have parks, but no formal park and recreation programs, and very little budget.

In rural Monroe County (in the Pocono Mountains), a county open space plan led to the formation of six regional park and recreation commissions, three of which have flourished. The largest of them is the Stroud Region Open Space & Recreation Commission (SROSRC), which exemplifies multi-municipal partnership as well as cross-sector collaboration. The Commission includes three municipalities and two school districts. The group addressed tension between open space and development interests by forming an Economic Development Committee to bring stakeholders together. Out of this process came an open dialogue and education around the economic benefits of open space, parks, and recreation.

The committee launched the Greenway Ambassadors program, a public-private partnership intended to position the Stroud Greenway as a valued community asset that connects people and places, natural spaces to neighborhoods,

and visitors and small businesses. A Wednesday evening launch was attended by over 100 people on the banks of the local creek and lawn of the ESSA Bank & Trust. What better way to join nature and commerce?

Other active partners included the Pocono Medical Center, East Stroudsburg University and various small businesses. Ambassador businesses received “Connecting Neighborhoods to Nature” packets that were given out upon request (thereby establishing a personal interaction between the ambassadors and those who wanted more information).

The ambassador program was just one of the many ways that the Commission (and other nearby commissions) has helped to fill unmet needs in a rural area. The Commission renovated two 1930s bathhouses, led trailhead development projects, and secured grants to build a pedestrian bridge that linked critical trail connections (a top priority in the county greenways plan).

Looking for more on regional park commissions in rural areas? Also check out the HJP Park & Open Space Commission (one of the other regional commissions established in Monroe County). The three partnering municipalities have teamed up to establish a 238-acre regional park, complete with open space, trails, and a variety of recreation facilities.



CASE STUDY: VITAL NATURE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

FILLING ESSENTIAL NEEDS IN PHILADELPHIA

“This is where I live, and this is where I work, and this is where all my little friends come from. And this is how important [this] is to me: all the people I know are from here.” This quote was shared by a City of Philadelphia Parks and Recreation employee in the “Find Your Path” campaign video. The backdrop was a local playground. Words on a page can’t properly convey how vital parks and recreation are to her life and to the lives of those around her. Parks and recreation professionals anywhere can tell you that their staff and volunteers tend to be the “face of their community” as a result of the many interactions between those providing the services and those using them.

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation plays a major role in providing safe, affordable recreation opportunities in Pennsylvania’s largest city. With over 100 neighborhood parks and squares, and more than 80 parks “friends” groups, parks are an essential part of Philadelphia city life. The city’s LOVE Your Park Week, held each May, is a weeklong celebration of the local park system. Just as parks and recreation are viewed as vital for the many services they fill, it has become vital that residents are engaged as the stewards of parks

and recreation. LOVE Your Park Week includes a citywide service day and promotes the work of friends groups. As the www.loveyourpark.org site states, “Together we believe that community engagement in neighborhood parks – whether it be weekly gardening days or concert nights in the summer – is key to maintaining our City’s parks as anchors in our neighborhoods for safe, welcoming and family-friendly recreation.”

The existence of park spaces without scheduled recreation programming or community engagement won’t meet community needs, and can even result in liability. With robust parks and recreation programs and local resident involvement (spurred with programs such as LOVE Your Parks Week), parks become safe havens and can even improve safety. A 2011 study on this topic supports this notion. “In the aggregate, we find neighborhood parks with more activity generators tend to have less crime...The more activity generators a park has, the more legitimate users are attracted to the park.”²³ In short: parks and recreation are valued assets when we promote them, program them, and use and steward them as a community.

²³ The Role of Neighborhood Parks as Crime Generators,” Elizabeth Groff and Eric S. McCord, 2011

CASE STUDY: LOCAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

SOFTBALL DIAMONDS BRINGING IN THE BIG BUCKS IN PA'S CENTRE REGION



A 2009 *New York Times* article (“Girls’ Sports Pack Economic Punch”) on the economic impact of youth tournaments highlights a national trend and economic opportunity. From the article:

“As the popularity of youth tournaments has intensified over the past decade, a peculiar trend has emerged: girls’

sporting events tend to attract more relatives and generate more revenue for tourism than similar events for boys. And that is drawing increased attention from economic development officials.”

It’s not surprising that the Centre Region Parks and Recreation Authority has positioned its five municipalities to reap the benefits of girls’ softball tournaments. The cooperative authority has provided parks and recreation services for residents since 1966. (A sign of the strength of their partnership is that after 45 years working together, they recently signed on for another 50 years.)

The Authority recently renovated an existing complex of softball fields and has invested in an entirely new complex. In 2014, with just one complex hosting tournaments, 57 of 192 participating teams stayed in area hotels, filling 313 rooms.

Director Ronald Woodhead shared the Authority’s projections for 2015. With a new facility and state and national tournaments scheduled, they anticipate over 1,000 room stays during a six-month period. Hotel room rates vary in the State College. If one estimates \$100/room, that’s \$100,000 in lodgings. This does not account for families staying in other lodging facilities ranging from local campgrounds to B&Bs.

Certainly, the impact won’t be limited to lodging providers. Other significant areas of spending may include dining, shopping, and visiting area attractions. Just imagine how many Penn State Berkey Creamery visits will take place during and largest of the tournaments, a 60-team competition through USSSA. With the tournaments staggered from May through October (most during the summer months), this influx of visitor spending comes at a time that Penn State University is between spring and fall semesters.

Next Century Parks and Recreation: Best Return on Investment

John Alschuler of HR&A, referenced earlier in this document, advocates for “next century parks”, ones that are integral parts of our communities, no doubt with robust recreation programming and modern facilities. After Alschuler spoke to an Austin, TX neighborhood association, they wrote, “...parks today and in the century ahead can deliver the best return on investment to the public, in every sense, when they’re designed as active spaces that serve lots of people living in an urban core”.²⁴ No doubt, this could be argued in any community – urban, suburban, or rural. The return on investment is demonstrable in our health and wellness, social equity and local economies, and in terms of environmental impact.

We know from “most livable” lists, from residents surveys, from research and case studies, and intuitively that parks and recreation are essential municipal services that provide return on investment by every measure.

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