Economic Development & Local Parks

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Purpose of Paper

• Go beyond traditional economic impact analysis to assess the role of parks in the practice of economic development

• Research funded by National Park and Recreation Association
Approach

• Largely qualitative
• Examine practices, bring together key informants
• Culminated in a workshop in OKC
  • Chamber of commerce
  • Economic development
  • Site location consultant
Parks & Recreation Spur Economic Activity

• Economic impacts
  • Park systems can be significant employers
  • Spending generates positive indirect and induced impacts

• Local parks shape perceptions of quality of life and build a sense of place.

• Resiliency impacts

• Investments in improving a community’s quality of life can support a virtuous cycle of growth.
Parks & Recreation Impacts

- On-site business activity (e.g., concessions) and tourism-related spending
- Increased property values/taxable values that result from proximity to well-maintained parks
- Increased physical activity that improves the physical and mental health of residents and lowers health care expenses (Trust for Public Land)
Parks & Recreation Spur Economic Activity

• quality-of-life characteristics (including those from parks and recreation) make a community attractive to potential businesses and their workers.

• investments in quality-of-life can create a virtuous cycle whereby places attract workers, which attract employers, which in turn attract more investments and jobs. (Reilly & Renski)

• particularly important for more small and rural communities that lack large markets, talent pools, or well-developed identities.
Parks & Recreation
Spur Economic Activity

• places with landscape, climate and recreational appeal more likely to grow through creative and entrepreneurial industries. McGranahan, Wojan, and Lambert

• R&D facilities, technology companies, and corporate headquarters more likely to prioritize quality-of-life and cultural amenities in site selection. Reilly & Renski

• competition for talent drives technology firms to amenity-rich communities. Salvesen & Renski

• quality-of-life factors matter more to the residential location decisions of the firm’s employees than to the company’s actual site location. Salvesen & Renski
76% of corporate executives say quality-of-life factors are ‘Very Important’ or ‘Important’ to their site location decisions (2016), up from 55 percent in 2005.
Importance of Site Selection Factors

Source: Area Development Magazine
Parks & Recreation Spur Economic Activity

- Interviews with site selection consultants
- Talent attraction and retention considerations determine how companies prioritize quality-of-life.
- Firms that hire primarily from the local labor force are less likely to prioritize QoL
Content Analysis

• Reviewed economic development marketing materials in 133 communities:

• 72% use images of urban parks and public spaces, outdoor amenities (e.g., mountains, lakes, trails), OR recreational and cultural facilities (e.g., aquatics facilities, amphitheaters).

• 70% make specific reference QoL considerations OR presented parks-related data and information (e.g., number of parks, acreage of park lands, miles of bike trails, or average driving distance to state or national parks).

• 32% give credit to, or cited, the community’s park and recreation department in their marketing materials.
Quality-of-Life Supporting Role in Site Location Decisions

• QoL most important to firms that prioritize talent attraction and retention
  • *Short-term*: relocation of key staff
  • *Long-term*: ability to attract/retain highly educated, skilled workers

• Companies that want places that reflect their corporate culture or values.
  • Small- and medium-sized, entrepreneurial or family-owned
  • Emphasis on outdoor recreation and lifestyle
Where Does QoL Fit in the Site Location Process?

1. Identify candidate cities
   - Basic quality of life measures
     - Cost of living
     - School quality
     - Housing costs
     - Crime rates

2. Reputation and marketing
   - Outdoor & rec. assets
   - Experience of other similar companies
   - Availability of specific sites & facilities

3. Site visits and finding the right fit
   - First impressions and ‘Curb Appeal’
   - Cultural fit with company needs
   - Validating marketing messages
Examples

- Business attraction
  - Place making
  - Product development

- Business retention and expansion
  - Engaging existing companies and workers

- Talent attraction
  - Positive experiences can influence recruitment
  - First introductions to a place often occurs as visitors

Falls Park, Greenville, SC
References


