



# *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)
- Through effective land management methods and green infrastructure investments, parks and recreation makes communities more resilient to natural disasters, reducing disaster recovery and insurance costs. More, et al (1988)

# 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

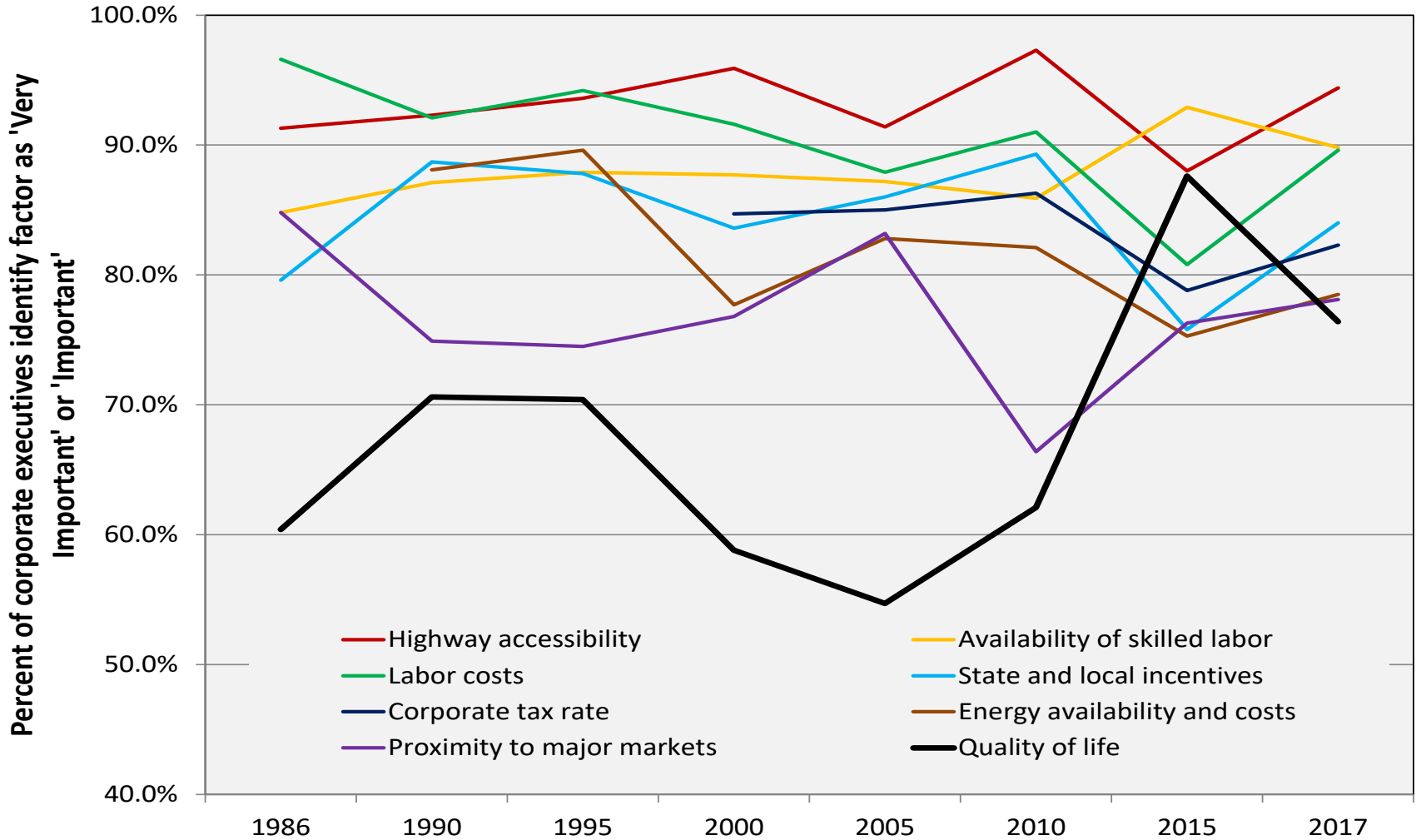
- places with landscape, climate and recreational appeal more likely to grow through creative and entrepreneurial industries. McGranahan, Wojan, and Lambert
- R&D facilities, technology companies, and corporate headquarters more likely to prioritize quality-of-life and cultural amenities in site selection. 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

# Parks & Recreation Spur Economic Activity

- 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



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