



Making the Case for Urban Parks – Public Health and Economic Development

Dear CPA members:

We want to alert you to three recent studies that make a strong case for the positive health and economic benefits of urban parks:

- **New Review Examines Links Between Parks and Physical Activity**
- **Happiness Is a Walk in the Park**
- **The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities and Walkable Community Design**

1) New Review Examines Links Between Parks and Physical Activity

Parks nationwide already provide space and opportunity for children and adults to be physically active, but a new review by Active Living Research identifies many ways to further leverage the capacity of America's parks to help more people achieve recommended physical activity levels.

Parks, Playgrounds and Active Living summarizes the growing body of evidence on how park proximity, size and features impact physical activity, especially among populations who are at high risk for being inactive and/or obese.

According to the review by Active Living Research grantee Andrew Mowen:

- Increased park proximity is associated with higher levels of park use and physical activity among a variety of populations, particularly youths.
- Having more parks and more park area (e.g., acreage) within a community is associated with higher physical activity levels.

- Lower-income populations and some racial and ethnic populations have limited access to parks and recreational facilities. These disparities partially explain lower physical activity levels among these populations.
- Within parks, people tend to be more physically active on trails, at playgrounds and at sports facilities.
- Organized park programs and supervision may increase use of parks and playgrounds and may increase physical activity, particularly among youths.
- Park renovations can increase vigorous physical activity among children and increase use of certain types of facilities, including playgrounds and skate parks.

Mowen concludes that the capacity of parks to increase physical activity levels and promote overall health among American children and adults is not fully realized and identifies areas where more research is needed.

Funding for Parks, Playgrounds and Active Living was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its Active Living Research program. More information about the program is available at www.activelivingresearch.org.

2) Happiness Is a Walk in the Park

New research shows that even just five minutes of exercise in a natural setting can significantly boost your mood. Because exercising in natural areas is not only good for your physical health--it can improve your mood and sense of well-being in as little as five minutes. So says research in the journal Environmental Health and Technology.

Exercise alone is known to make you happier. So is being in a natural setting. So scientists at the University of Essex wanted to see the effect of combining the two. They evaluated 10 different UK studies involving more than 1,200 people.

Participants had taken part in activities such as gardening, sailing and country walks, and rated their mood and self-esteem.

The research showed that both areas get a significant boost with as little as five minutes of outdoor exercise. And people with mental disorders benefitted the most. The study authors say this is the first study to quantify the amount of time needed to get a positive effect.

[Click here to listen to the podcast!](#)

3) The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities and Walkable Community Design

In addition to providing children and families with opportunities for physical activity, local parks and recreation areas can provide residents and local governments with economic benefits such as higher property values and increases in tax revenue, according to a new research synthesis from Active Living Research.

The synthesis, *The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities and Walkable Community Design*, is the first comprehensive collection of research examining the economic benefits parks, open space, and walkable neighborhoods can provide to residents and local governments and real estate developers.

The major findings of the synthesis, led by Lilly Shoup of the University of Maryland at College Park and Reid Ewing, Ph.D., of the University of Utah, are that:

- open spaces such as parks and recreation areas can have a positive effect on nearby residential property values, and can lead to proportionately higher property tax revenues for local governments (provided municipalities are not subject to caps on tax levies);
- the economic impact parks and recreational areas have on home prices depends on how far the home is from the open space, the size of the open space and the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood;
- open space in urban areas will increase the level of economic benefits to surrounding property owners more than open space in rural areas;
- open space, recreation areas and compact developments may provide fiscal benefits to municipal governments; and
- compact, walkable developments can provide economic benefits to real estate developers through higher home sale prices, enhanced marketability and faster sales or leases than conventional development.

Earlier research has found that residents of walkable neighborhoods are more physically active than people living in communities that are not walkable. Living close to parks has been associated with higher levels of physical activity for both adults and youth. This synthesis concludes that, in addition to such health benefits, "recreation areas and parks located in metropolitan areas provide economic benefits to residents, municipal

governments and private real estate developers.”

Funding for The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities and Walkable Community Design was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its national program Active Living Research. For more information on the program, visit www.activelivingresearch.org.

You received this email because you requested information from City Parks Alliance.

[Unsubscribe](#) from this list | [Forward to a friend](#) | [Update your profile](#)

Our mailing address is:

City Parks Alliance
2121 Ward Court NW
5th Floor
Washington, DC 20037

[Add us to your address book](#)

Copyright (C) 2010 City Parks Alliance All rights reserved.