Promoting Parks and Recreation's Role in Economic Development

Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University

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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.

- Investments in improving a community’s quality of life can support a virtuous cycle of growth.
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

Does your local EDO use parks-related images or data in their marketing materials?
How Can You Contribute?

- 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
Engage Key Stakeholders!

- Economic development organizations
- Civic boosters (e.g., chambers, CVBs)
- Other municipal departments
- Shapers of the built environment (e.g., developers)
- Other P&R organizations
- Importantly, Park and Rec departments need an engaged citizenry.
Provide Evidence of Your Value

- Track and measure impacts
- Identify key metrics
  - # of bike commuters,
  - # of park workers being hired for their first job, and/or
  - # of companies and company employees that use parks and recreation facilities.
- Collect compelling anecdotes
Thank you

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