

Executive Summary

The City of Newberry contracted with Clemson University's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management to develop a Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Strategic Plan.

The process for conducting this study included an information gathering and review stage, the review and development of a vision and mission plan, a facility inventory, input from citizens and stakeholders through focus group and individual interviews, and the development of recommendations.

Project Approach/Tasks Completed

- Series of meetings with Recreation Director
- Meeting with City Manager
- Reviewed previous city planning efforts
- Tour of city-owned and other (YMCA, other towns within Newberry County, etc) recreation facilities and amenities
- Conducted focus group, individual interviews, phone interviews, needs assessment survey
- Developed report

Data Collection

During January and February of 2011, a series of focus group, individual interviews, and telephone interviews, were conducted. The following individuals took part in the focus groups, individual interviews and telephone interviews:

Bennie Bennett, Wayne Adams, PK Fuller, Tom Pope, John Paul Whitaker, Scott Koewer, Karen Livingston, Gerdi Lake, Jerry Coffey, Adonis Hill, Rhett Frazier, Bob & Kathryn McCartha, John Halfacre, Jimmie Coggins, Woody & Elaine Cornwell, Joey Smith, Richard Fellers, Wayne Hiller, Bill & Judy Floyd, Margaret Brackett, Nikki Hutchinson, Laura Kay Rumfelt, Kirsten Lindsey, Peggy Barnes-Wilder, Robert Summer, Geovese McKnight, Robert Sandel, Ambria Lanteigne, Cynthia, Toland, Charles, Sims, JR Busby, Warren Epting, Keith Harmon, Keith Suber, Tim Carroll, Johnathan Sease, Brad Edwards, Hope Walker, Melissa Turco, Kay Banks, Misty West, Billye West, Joe Trainor, Mac Bell, Will Blackmon, Dr. Dawkins

In addition to input received from the focus groups and interviews, an online survey was advertised and made available through the City of Newberry's website. Paper copies were also available through the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department for those who did not have internet access. This was done to allow individuals who had not participated in focus groups or interviews to provide input. The survey yielded 43 responses which is not enough data to analyze on it's own. However, data from the surveys was consistent with input received from the focus groups and interviews.

Finally, the consultants have conducted this type of study in 20+ counties in South Carolina over the past three years. Input and data generated from those studies which have included focus groups, interviews, and survey results with thousands (3000+) of participants are also consistent with the input and data we gathered in Newberry.

Vision Plan

The South Carolina Vision Plan for Parks and Recreation has been included in this report. This plan (or a modified version of the plan) should be implemented as a management and marketing tool for the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department.

Facility Inventory

Descriptions and photographs of existing recreation facilities and parks have been included.

Recommendations

Beginning on page 17, the recommendations are broken down into four categories (some highlights are listed here):

1) Organizational Structure, Funding, and Personnel

- Designate existing agency to manage county-wide recreation programs, facilities, and services under the guidance of a county-wide recreation commission appointed jointly by city, town, and county councils (the commission should include representation from the YMCA)
- Increase recreation budget to \$1.4 million per year, 15.5 full-time staff, and 17.78 part-time staff

2) Facilities

- Develop a centralized recreation complex
- Develop trails, greenways, walking/jogging/bike paths and “complete streets”
- Repurpose/redevelop existing parks
- Develop flagship downtown park
- Recruit private sector entertainment venues including bowling alleys and movie theaters

3) Programs

- Consolidated and consistent county-wide youth athletic programs
- Before and after school and summer enrichment programs
- Arts programs
- Senior Adult Programs

4) Other

- Concentrate on safety and security of parks and recreation facilities
- Continue streetscape and corridor improvements (complete streets)
- Potential partnerships with Newberry College

Appendices include additional information that may be useful in relation to several of the recommendations.

Introduction

Municipal parks and recreation agencies produce a number of benefits for their communities. The social, personal, economic and environmental benefits associated with parks and recreation services are numerous. These benefits are realized at the individual level for all ages certainly but also on a grander scale as municipal parks and recreation contributes to overall community development.

Social Benefits

From a social perspective, leisure opportunities contribute to positive youth development as well as help build strong families. Engagement in well-designed, outcome-based recreation activities, as well as access to park space, have been shown to reduce juvenile delinquency as well as enhance the developmental process of children and youth helping build self-esteem, resiliency, and leadership characteristics. In addition, these same opportunities provide families with the chance to enjoy activities as a unit which can enhance communication and the family structure. Parks and recreation also contributes to growth in social capital. Social capital is defined as the collective value of all social networks (who people know) and the interactions that result from those networks and the things people do for one another as a result of those relationships (DeGraaf & Jordan, 2003). Related to social connectedness, perceived happiness, increased health, community solidarity, lower crime rates, higher educational attainment, and economic growth, social capital provides a community with the social solidarity necessary for a thriving community. With a wide array of recreation programs designed to facilitate social interaction as well as parks designed to enhance communities, municipal parks and recreation is a catalyst for the development of social capital.

Personal Benefits

The personal benefits associated with parks and recreation are also great. While recognized at the individual level, the cumulative benefit to an entire community can also be seen. These personal benefits are often health related at numerous levels including relaxation, stress reduction, increased satisfaction, increased self-esteem and overall greater general health. These personal benefits produce citizens who tend to be more productive, happier, and more highly engaged within their communities.

Economic Benefits

Many communities are very interested in the economic benefits that municipal parks and recreation can provide, particularly given the fact that tax dollars are spent on providing the services. A huge benefit is the fact that parks and recreation services and facilities have been shown to help in the recruitment of new business as owners and employees look for communities with a wide variety of leisure opportunities as they recognize leisure's contribution to quality of life. Park space and trails can also have a direct impact on property values which obviously can be of benefit to the municipality as with increased property values come increased tax revenues. However, this can also serve as a benefit to individual property owners who see their property values increase as a result of parks development. As mentioned earlier, the related personal benefits of an active lifestyle also have economic implications as healthcare costs are reduced for those who more often get out and move – whether it be in a park or in a recreation program. Reductions in crime, money spent on recreation equipment, and tourism brought about through parks and recreation services also contribute to the economic health of a community. However, the economic impact of large events produced by community parks and recreation may be one of the most telling economic benefits. A large youth sports tournament as well as festivals and other special events can bring in tens of thousands of dollars in external monies to a community through the participants' support of local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and retail shops.

Environmental Benefits

It should seem obvious that there are environmental benefits to retaining greenspace in a community. As mentioned above, greenspace can have a positive impact on property values due to the value that individuals give to open space as well as the beautification that often results from the preservation of the space. The simple presence of park space can also instill a strong environmental ethic in young and old alike which can have a carryover effect on other environmentally related projects and efforts within the community.

American Planning Association

The American Planning Association has published a number of briefing papers that outline how communities use parks. The list includes community revitalization, community engagement, economic development, creating safer neighborhoods, green infrastructure, helping children learn, improving public health, providing arts and cultural programs, promoting tourism, smart growth, and climate change management. Some key points include the following:

- Parks that serve as central walking, resting, and meeting places can revive failing or threatened commercial areas.
- Community residents and the city, working together on a neighborhood park project, can turn around a distressed residential area.
- Parks are one of the quickest and most effective ways to build a sense of community and improve quality of life.
- Parks have a positive effect on real property values, increase municipal revenues, attract and retain affluent retirees, attract knowledge workers and talent to relocate to an area, and attract homebuyers.
- Green residential spaces are gathering places where neighbors form social ties that produce stronger, safer neighborhoods.
- Creating an interconnected system of parks and open space is manifestly more beneficial than creating parks in isolation.
- City parks offer children a sense of place, self-identity, and belonging as an antidote to social alienation, vandalism, and violence.
- City parks engage children in informal, experiential learning through play and shared experiences with peers, laying the foundation for effective formal education and provide valuable resources for closing the educational gap in communities.
- Parks provide people with contact with nature, known to confer certain health benefits and enhance well-being and provide physical activity opportunities that help to increase fitness and reduce obesity.
- Cities need to provide all types of parks to provide their various citizen groups with a range of health benefits.
- Parks provide sites for special events, festivals, and sports tournaments that can attract tourists and be sources of economic benefits for smaller cities.
- Parks have voter support to direct public funds toward growth management strategies and can enhance mixed development and redevelopment strategies.

Tourism Overview

- Often characterized as the largest business sector in the global economy (200 million employees and generates \$3.6 trillion annually)
- Tourism ranks as either the first or second largest industry in 47 out of 50 states
- In South Carolina, tourism contributes approximately \$11 billion to the economy and tourism related businesses employ about 10% of the workforce
- In 2006, tourism generated about \$1.1 billion in state and local tax revenues
- However, SC only captures about 57% of the average tourism expenditure when compared to national tourism data
- Tourism in South Carolina has suffered from fragmentation and a lack of comprehensive coordination and planning

South Carolina Tourism Action Plan & Upstate Regional Plan

- SC completed the statewide plan in 2006
- Sets aggressive goal of growing the tourism industry into a \$40 billion per year industry by 2020
- According to the plan, more inland tourism product must be developed to reach this goal
- According to a report by the World Tourism Organization, “sun and sand resort” tourism has matured and flattened out while experiential tourism (adventure, nature, heritage, culture, and eco-tourism) are and will continue to grow
- Heritage/cultural and eco/adventure tourists tend to stay longer and spend more

The tourism industry can and will grow over the next 8-10 years. Because Newberry already has a widely recognized attraction in the Opera House that has induced some investment in restaurants, lodging, and other tourism infrastructure and its easily accessible location, the city and county is very well positioned to realize greatly increased tourism activity. In addition to the cultural offerings already in existence, improved and expanded recreation facilities and amenities can be leveraged to attract sports tourism activities. Further marketing and promotion of the Firehouse as a meeting location can also yield an increase in visitation.

Conclusion

Municipal parks, recreation, and tourism has a great deal to contribute to both individual and community development. The experiences that tax dollars are used to support reap rewards far greater than those that are monetary. While the economics of parks, recreation, and tourism, both the costs as well as the economic rewards, will always be recognized as an important part of the cost-benefit equation, research has consistently identified an array of additional benefits, both tangible and intangible that parks and recreation agencies can contribute to their communities.