

7 PARK
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A HEALTHY KALAMAZOO

Healthy communities clearly improve the physical and mental well being of adults, and youth. With childhood obesity being a persistent problem across the country, children are facing many of the same medical problems as their parents. Maintaining vibrant parks and open spaces are important factors in addressing this problem.

Exposing young people to the joys of outdoor activities in open spaces such as parks helps lower stress, improves physical and emotional health, reduces hyperactivity, and builds stronger immune systems. It also can help mold future generations into individuals who are concerned about the environment, and therefore are committed to revitalizing and enhancing the urban park system.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Parks support community engagement by providing residents with a venue for participation in and attachment to their communities.

Parks also provide a sense of place and offer essential life-enhancing qualities that aid community and individual well-being.

By better understanding community benefits of parks, decision makers can develop constituencies that can sustain their urban park systems over time.¹





PLACES FOR VOLUNTEERING

The Kalamazoo Department of Parks and Recreation provides opportunities throughout the year to volunteer, whether it be cleaning a park or assisting with a recreation program. In addition to being personally rewarding, volunteering is an excellent way to expand your professional network.

By working with others toward a common goal, you form relationships and connections with other residents who care about keeping our parks beautiful and programs

successful. These relationships often pay dividends down the road when you are looking for a trusted source to ask for advice, provide support or brainstorm around an idea. The connections you make with fellow volunteers can become friendships that last far beyond the volunteer opportunity that brought you together.

DRIVING ECONOMIES

Cities hold the economic key to the future of the global economy. Nations that foster livable cities that support vibrant populations and highly skilled workforces will be winners in the intensely competitive global marketplace of the future.

World-class workforces now have unfettered location options world-wide and are actively choosing to live in urban centers that support their needs.

Knowledge workers, workers in creative industries, families and young people all will choose urban areas that offer a diverse economic base and amenities like vibrant parks that contribute to an excellent quality of life.²





ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Access to parks provides children with learning opportunities that are crucial to their future success and healthy development. Yet, most of today's youth are less connected to nature than ever before.

Free time outside playing and exploring their natural surroundings has been replaced with greater interaction with the digital world. In many communities, children simply do not have access to parks that are clean and safe. The impact on children is great - their creativity and capacity to learn suffer. ³

CRIME REDUCTION

Approximately 93,000 young people are held in juvenile justice facilities across the United States. Seventy percent of these youth are held in state-funded, post-adjudication, residential facilities, at an average cost of \$240.99 per day per youth.⁴

At a cost of about \$61 to taxpayers, Kalamazoo Parks & Recreation can provide an 8-week summer camp for a child where they can participate in fun activities like arts & crafts, physical activity (swimming, kickball, disc golf, etc.), drama, and interact and socialize with other children. Keeping children engaged and occupied will help keep them on a positive path.

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SUPERVISED PROGRAMS

Team sports, clubs, classes, exercise groups-parks that offer these are much more likely to be used than those that don't. ^{5,6}

Classes at skate parks have been shown to increase their popularity- especially among girls, who might not otherwise use them. ⁷

Without programming and distinctive features to attract visitors, park use declines. ⁸ Lack of programming may be one-reason parks in lower-income neighborhoods are less likely to be used than those in neighborhoods where incomes are higher. ⁹

HEALTHY HABITS

Nearly 80 percent of the American population lives in urban areas. Parks of all sizes play an important role in preserving and supporting healthy environments.¹⁰

A network of parks and open spaces that include protected natural lands, ecological reserves, wetlands, & other green areas is critical to providing healthy habitats for humans, wildlife and plants in these densely built places.

Natural landscapes are vital to preserving regional ecosystems amid growing cities.



FOOTNOTES

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