



American Planning Association

Making Great Communities Happen

11 Reasons Why City Parks Make a Difference



During the Great Recession, Kissimmee, Florida (pop. 64,000) did something many found unbelievable – spent \$35 million to renovate a major park as an economic development initiative. The mayor decided that to revitalize downtown, it was imperative to redo the park, which included repositioning lakefront property and improving adjacent streets.

People asked him why, in the middle of a financial crisis, the city would spend substantial funds on a parks project. David Barth, a principal at design firm AECOM, said the mayor’s response was, “Because we’re in a recession.”

Barth explains. “Here’s a small community that saw the economic possibility of redeveloping a park.” The result has been that people first find the park and then they find downtown. In essence, both entities have become bigger draws, a situation that contributes to Kissimmee’s financial wellbeing and bodes well for its future. Restaurants have opened downtown, and the city is on more solid footing due to the park’s refurbishment.

The American Planning Association offers [11 papers](#) written by nationally recognized park and open space experts with data showing how cities across the country benefit from parks.

How Cities Use Parks

1. [Community Revitalization](#)
2. [Community Engagement](#)
3. [Economic Development](#)
4. [Create Safer Neighborhoods](#)
5. [Green Infrastructure](#)
6. [Help Children Learn](#)
7. [Improve Public Health](#)
8. [Arts & Cultural Programs](#)
9. [Promote Tourism](#)
10. [Smart Growth](#)
11. [Climate Change Management](#)