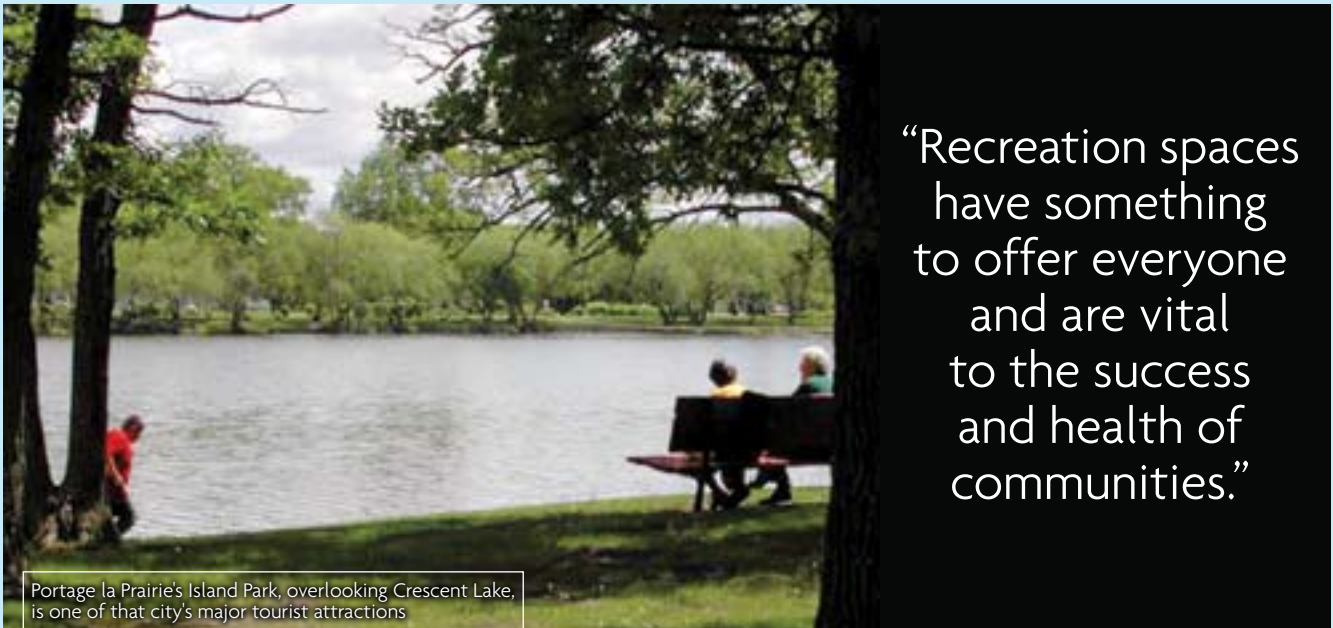


Green spaces and beyond: a broad look at the benefits of recreation space

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Portage la Prairie's Island Park, overlooking Crescent Lake, is one of that city's major tourist attractions

“Recreation spaces have something to offer everyone and are vital to the success and health of communities.”

GREEN SPACES AND RECREATION FACILITIES have something to offer everyone from toddlers and teens to adults and seniors. These community places are a cohesive force in neighborhoods, towns and cities. They are as important to the identity of a community as are museums, libraries and other valuable resources. People in large, densely populated urban areas admit that without urban green spaces they would drown in a sea of unrelieved asphalt, while smaller urban areas relate that community spaces encourage local interaction and a sense of belonging.

Green spaces have been recognized as major contributors to both the physical and aesthetic quality of communities. As well, green spaces are being held responsible for many positive contributions to larger urban policy objectives, including youth development, job opportunities, public health, and community building. Frequent physical activity is known to be an effective preventive measure that lowers health risks, thereby reducing pressure on the health care system and alleviating costs associated with health care. Also, providing space for recreational opportunities has been a successful crime prevention method and can, therefore, reduce the cost of policing.

This perspective on recreation space is increasing the attention that these valuable contributions have on the vitality of communities and their residents. Recreation opportunities allow youth to build both skills and strengths that they will use throughout their lives. Contemporary research indicates that youth that can access community-based programs are better able to increase the skills

and knowledge required for healthy development. These young people are then able to choose rewarding paths due to the provision of programs and opportunities that have built their physical, intellectual, emotional and social strength.

Recreation space also increases employment opportunities in the community and fosters economic development. Frequently recreation facilities are able to provide summer or part-time employment for youth (often their first experience with paid employment). There are also long-term positions for residents as well as valuable training opportunities related to recreation and maintenance.

When a community provides places to enjoy fresh air and exercise, it is working to increase the health of residents, build and strengthen ties among community members, and encourage participation in recreation planning and management. Community interaction and involvement contribute to individual health and well-being, security and livability of the whole community. These ties effectively increase the social capital within a town or city. They provide ways for information, values and social expectations to flow. They empower people to tackle community-wide problems, embark on collective actions, and advocate effectively for their community.

Other benefits specific to outdoor green spaces can be seen in the ability for them to increase neighborhood quality. This has been confirmed through studies that have found there is a statistically significant link between property values and proximity to green space, including parks and urban-forested areas

(Phillips, 2000; Tyvainen and Miettinen, 2000). This connection between urban parks and the quality of communities is getting more attention from community leaders and developers as they attempt to make their community more attractive to both residents and potential residents.

Tourism is another significant benefit of green spaces and recreation facilities. These places often become a major attraction for a community, and are used as a marketing tool to attract tourists, conventions and businesses. They can assist in shaping the identity of a community and give residents pride in their hometown. Organized events and programs increase the direct and tertiary positive impacts for communities.

Green spaces can also increase environmental benefits. Trees and soil are natural filters for water pollution by removing polluted particles such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, from water before it returns to waterways. Trees also can mitigate the effect of heat that is absorbed by streets and buildings. Evaporation from a large tree can produce the cooling effect of 10 room-sized air conditioners operating 24-hours-a-day (US Department of Agriculture).

Recognition of the importance of recreation spaces and investment in recreation is vital for Manitoba to build the competitiveness of its municipalities. Recreational opportunities are essential components of the health and well-being of communities. Access to a variety of recreational activities helps to attract vibrant individuals and families and encourages them to remain residents over the long-term.

Recreation spaces have something to offer everyone and are vital to the success and health of communities. They are an essential facet of neighborhoods, towns and cities and should be fostered through recognition, investment and community involvement. ♻️

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