

August 28, 2011

Planning Commission  
555 South 10<sup>th</sup>  
Lincoln, NE 68508

Commissioners,

On August 17, 2011 I testified before the Planning Commission during the first public hearing on the update of the Comprehensive Plan. I asked that the Planning Commission retain the current level of service (LOS) for regional and community parks. The current Comprehensive Plan calls for a LOS of 2.5 acres for Regional Parks and 2.9 acres for Community Parks per 1,000 Lincoln residents. The draft plan proposes to reduce the LOS for Regional Parks to “*no set LOS goal*” and to reduce the LOS for Community Parks to 1.3 acres. The combined effect of the proposed changes for Regional and Community Parks would cut the guaranteed LOS from 5.4 to 1.4 acres which would be a 75% reduction in Regional and Community Parks LOS in new development areas.

During my presentation I noted that Lincoln’s parks and trails were listed as a major factor in Livability.com’s ranking Lincoln as the #1 city to live in for college graduates. At the end of my presentation Commissioner Esseks asked me if I would provide the Commission with examples of studies that that can demonstrate the relationship between really good parks and trails and the attraction of people that invest and work in the community. I appreciate the opportunity to share that information with you.

**Example #1.** Gallup and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. “Why People Love Where They Live And Why It Matters – A National Perspective.” 2010.

- *This study was conducted over three years in 26 cities across the United States where Knight Foundation is active. It was designed to find out what emotionally attaches people to a community - what makes them want to put down roots and build a life there.*
- *In today’s challenging economic climate, community leaders are seeking new ways to attract and retain people, develop prosperous economies, add intellectual capital, and create jobs. This report provides a fresh perspective about the current driving factors of passion and loyalty in a community. Most importantly, it represents the voice of the residents themselves. Gallup gathered insights from nearly 43,000 individuals and the resulting picture will help community leaders to answer important questions such as: What makes residents love where they live? What draws people to a place and keeps them there?*
- *The study provides empirical evidence that the drivers that create emotional bonds between people and their community are consistent in virtually every city and can be reduced to just a few categories. Interestingly, the usual suspects — jobs, the economy, and safety — are not among the top drivers. Rather, people consistently give higher ratings for elements that relate directly to their daily quality of life: an area’s physical beauty, opportunities for socializing, and a community’s openness to all people.*

- Remarkably, the study also showed that the communities with the highest levels of attachment had the highest rates of gross domestic product (GDP) growth. Discoveries like these open numerous possibilities for leaders from all sectors to inform their decisions and policies with concrete data about what generates community and economic benefits.
- The link between local GDP and residents' emotional bonds to a place has remained steady despite declines in the economy over the three years of the study. Communities with residents who are more attached to a place show stronger growth even in tough economic times.
- People's perception of their community's performance in social offerings, openness and beauty has a greater impact on their emotional bonds to a place than their demographic characteristics.
- Perception of the local economy is not a leading reason residents create an emotional bond to a place.

**Example #2.** National Park Service. "Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails and Greenway Corridors." 1995.

- Greenway corridors provide a variety of amenities, such as attractive views, open space preservation, and convenient recreation opportunities. People value these amenities. This can be reflected in increased real property values and increased marketability for property located near open space. Developers also recognize these values and incorporate open space into planning, design, and marketing new and redeveloped properties.
- Natural open space and trails are prime attractions for potential home buyers in 1995. According to research conducted by American Lives, Inc. for the real estate industry, 77.7 per cent of all home buyers and shoppers in the study rated natural open space as either "essential" or "very important" in planned communities. Walking and bicycling paths ranked third. A community design which offers quiet and low traffic was the top ranked feature. A research spokesperson commented that consumers are increasingly putting a higher premium on interaction with the environment through inclusion of natural, open space and nature paths. The findings of this most recent study differ greatly from the 1980's preferences, which included tennis courts, swimming pools, and golf courses. (San Francisco Chronicle, January 8, 1995)
- **Increased Property Values - Quantified**
  - The effect on property values of a location near a park or open space has been the subject of several studies. Statistical analyses have been a common method of attempting to measure this effect. These analyses attempt to isolate the effect of open space from other variables which can affect property values, such as age, square footage, and condition of homes. Isolating the effect of open space can be difficult and results have been varied. Nevertheless, many studies have revealed increases in property values in instances where the property is located near or adjacent to open spaces. Most studies have addressed traditional parks or greenbelts (large open space areas), though a few studies are available for greenways.
- **Increased Property Tax Revenues**
  - An increase in property values generally results in increased property tax revenues for local governments. Many arguments made for park and open space

*investment claim these acquisitions pay for themselves in a short period of time, due in part to increased property tax revenues from higher values of nearby property.*

**Example #3.** New Yorkers for Parks and Ernst & Young. “Analysis of Secondary Economic Impacts, New York City Parks, Capital Expenditures.” 2003.

- *Can park investment be a wise economic strategy as well as a way of building our neighborhoods? In the summer of 2002, our two organizations – the advocacy group New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) and the real estate services practice of the accounting firm Ernst & Young, LLP (E&Y) – tried to answer the question by studying the economic impact of investment in parks on real estate values. NY4P selected 6 parks from all 5 boroughs as case studies and 30 neighborhood parks for a citywide survey. NY4P conducted site surveys of the parks, researched the history of capital investment in each one, and examined other community factors. E&Y assessed each park’s relationship to local real estate value by analyzing tax assessments, sale prices and turnover rates of the commercial and residential properties in the immediate area in comparison to the broader marketplace. The 6 case studies provided detailed perspectives of how public and private forces shaped the investment strategy to redevelop these parks. The citywide survey of 30 parks offered a look at the effect of the City’s current approach to investment. The result of this effort is a 300+ page analysis of park investment and its impact on local community.*
- *The final report documents cases of commercial real estate value increasing by up to 225%, residential real estate value by up to 150%, turnover rates dropping to less than 1%, and instances where increased use and concessions have generated returns that have paid for the park improvements. These effects were not isolated to a single borough or scenario – residential and commercial areas of different income levels and demographics across the City have been wise financial investments for City planners and private developers.*
- *Statement specific to Prospect Park: The results have been clear not only to the park, but to the neighborhood. Over the past 5 years, multi-family units in the immediate proximity to the park have outperformed the broader local market by approximately 40% on average on a cost per square foot basis. According to PPA President Tupper Thomas, real estate near the park has tripled in value through the 1990s.*

**Example #4.** More, Thomas A., Thomas Stevens and P. Geoffrey Allen. August 1982. “The Economics of Urban Parks.” Parks and Recreation.

- *An analysis of property surrounding four parks in Worcester, Massachusetts, showed a house located 20 feet from a park sold for \$2,675 (1982 dollars) more than a similar house located 2,000 feet away.*

**Example #5.** Kimmel, Margaret M. 1985. “Parks and Property Values: an Empirical Study in Dayton and Columbus, Ohio.” Thesis. Oxford, OH: Miami University, Institute of Environmental Sciences.

- *In the neighborhood of Cox Arboretum, in Dayton, Ohio, the proximity of the park and arboretum accounted for an estimated 5 percent of the average residential*

*selling price. In the Whetstone Park area of Columbus, Ohio, the nearby park and river were estimated to account for 7.35 percent of selling prices.*

**Example #6.** Hammer, Thomas R., Robert E. Coughlin and Edward T. Horn IV. July 1974. "Research Report: The Effect of a Large Park on Real Estate Value." Journal of the American Institute of Planners.

- *In the vicinity of Philadelphia's 1,300 acre Pennypack Park, property values correlate significantly with proximity to the park. In 1974, the park accounted for 33 percent of the value of a plot of land (when the land was located 40 feet away from the park), nine percent when located 1,000 feet away, and 4.2 percent at a distance of 2,500 feet.*

**Example #7.** Correll, Lillydahl and Singell. May 1978. "The Effects of Greenbelts on Residential Property Values: Some Findings on the Political Economy of Open Space," Land Economics.

- *A study of property values near greenbelts in Boulder, Colorado, noted that housing prices declined an average of \$4.20 for each foot of distance from a greenbelt up to 3,200 feet. In one neighborhood, this figure was \$10.20 for each foot of distance. The same study determined that, other variables being equal, the average value of property adjacent to the greenbelt would be 32 percent higher than those 3,200 feet away.*
- *A study of the impacts of greenbelts on neighborhood property values in Boulder, Colorado, revealed the aggregate property value for one neighborhood was approximately \$5.4 million greater than if there had been no greenbelt. This results in approximately \$500,000 additional potential property tax revenue annually. The purchase price of the greenbelt was approximately \$1.5 million. Thus, the potential increase in property tax alone could recover the initial cost in only three years.*

**Example #8.** Nelson, Arthur C. April 1985. "A Unifying View of Greenbelt Influences on Regional Land Values and Implications for Regional Planning Policy." Growth and Change.

- *The amenity influence of greenbelt land on property values also applies to privately held greenbelt land, according to a study of the Salem metropolitan area in Oregon. In this case, the greenbelt was comprised of rural farmland. Greenbelt zoning had been applied to this prime farmland beginning in 1974 in an effort to contain urban sprawl and preserve farmland. The study found that urban land adjacent to the greenbelt was worth approximately \$1,200 more per acre than urban land 1,000 feet away from the greenbelt boundary, all other things being equal. However, rural land values within the restrictive zoning actually decreased in value by \$1,700 per acre.*

**Example #9.** Lacy, Jeff. August, 1990. "An Examination of Market Appreciation for Clustered Housing with Permanently Protected Open Space." Center for Rural Massachusetts Monograph Series. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts.

- *A recent study of market appreciation for clustered housing with permanently-protected open space in Amherst and Concord, Massachusetts, found that clustered housing with open space appreciated at a higher rate than conventionally-designed subdivisions. Appreciation was measured as the percent increase in open market sales price. The study compared one clustered development and one conventional*

*subdivision in each community. The clustered homes studied in Amherst appreciated at an average annual rate of 22%, as compared to an increase of 19.5% for the more conventional subdivision. This translated into a difference in average selling price of \$17,100 in 1989 between the two developments. In both Amherst and Concord, the homes in the clustered developments yielded owners a higher rate of return, even though the conventional subdivisions had considerably larger lot sizes.*

## **In Summary**

One has to look no further than the draft Comprehensive Plan itself to find justification for maintaining the current level of parks LOS:

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- *The community should capitalize upon both the environmental and economic benefits that the natural resource features provide.*
- *Well managed environmental resources generate and reinforce business opportunities.*

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- *Prevent the Creation of a “Wall-to-Wall City” through the Use of Green Space Partitions. As cities and villages expand, establishing corridors and districts of green should be part of the growth process. This often requires the advance delineation of these areas and the means for securing their ongoing protection and maintenance.*

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- *Guiding Principles for Parks, Recreation and Open Space.*
  - *Parks and open space enhance the quality of life of the community’s residents and are central to the community’s economic development strategy—the community’s ability to attract and retain viable businesses, industries, and employees is directly linked to quality of life issues, including indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities.*

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- *It is important that the community continue to acquire parkland and conserve open space areas commensurate with expanding development and population growth, with the responsibilities for acquisition and development of parkland and conservation of open space shared among many cooperating partner agencies and organizations.*

I urge you to hold on to the standards that have helped to make Lincoln the great city that it is.

Thank You,

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