



## An urban forest issue brief

# Healthy Parks Safer Communities



### Public Health and Safety Are Tied to Green

Did you know that kids in tree-lined neighborhoods play outside 10% more and have lower rates of ADD and asthma? And the correlations don't stop just with kids. Studies show that residents of neighborhoods with abundant greenspace enjoy better general health. The character of neighborhoods exerts significant effects on residents' physical activity; thus neighborhood design is becoming a public health issue.

### Green neighborhoods with parks and open spaces...

- Draw neighbors outdoors and encourage interaction.
- Give children nearby spaces for outdoor play.
- Encourage walking and physical activity.
- Increase property values.

**Green neighborhoods are healthy neighborhoods.**

### Community thrives in green environments:

**Public Health.** People who live within one mile of a park or public open space are three times more likely to achieve recommended levels of physical activity. In fact, just having a park near one's home is more important than the size of the park itself, with health benefits most apparent among the elderly, housewives, and people from lower socioeconomic groups. Even the very act of planting and tending trees has health benefits.<sup>1</sup>

**Cleaner Air.** Trees provide the oxygen we breathe. One acre of trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people to breathe each day and eliminates as much carbon dioxide from the air as is produced from driving a car 26,000 miles. So it's not surprising that children who live on tree-lined streets have lower rates of asthma.<sup>2</sup>

**Reduced Childhood Obesity.** Play is essential to development, but children aren't playing outside as much anymore. The effects of sedentary indoor lifestyles are already evident among children: startling rates of childhood obesity, the onset of childhood diabetes (at one time only an adult condition), and a shortened life expectancy.<sup>3</sup>

### Recommendations:

- Encourage city planners to consider public health by installing parks nearby to where people live and work and converting underutilized properties & common spaces into green assets like parks, community gardens, or attractive stormwater management features.
- Inventory, set targets for, and track green assets like tree canopy, pervious versus impervious surfaces, and stormwater controls in cooperation with nonprofits and city agencies. Promote community-driven beautification, tree planting, and clean-up efforts.
- Support H.R. 2222 and S.3055, the Green Communities Act, to authorize \$120 million in funding for community-based greening in cities.
- Support H.R. 3734, the Urban Revitalization and Livable Communities Act, which among other things makes all school parks and playgrounds accessible to children on weekends.

### Tree Benefit Facts

Serving Size 1 Million City Trees (2" caliper)  
Recommended Servings Per City about 40%

#### Costs

Volunteer Service \$0      Trees \$250 million

#### Annual Value\*

**Energy Conservation** 30% less usage

Cost Savings \$10 million

**Stormwater** 350 million gallons captured

Cost Savings \$3.5 million

**Clean Air** 1,000 tons less air pollutants

Cost Savings \$5 million

**Public Revenue** 11% more for goods

Cost Savings varies by city

**Property Value** 1-10% higher

Cost Savings varies by city

**Lower Crime** 50% less violent crime

Cost Savings priceless

**Total Cost Savings \$18.5 million**

ROI within 14 years not including public revenue, property, and crime benefits.

\* Annual Values are based on studies from the Center for Urban Forest Research, Center for Urban Horticulture, Lawrence Berkeley Lab, and the Univ. of Washington, and vary by city. Approximate values are indicated where the differences vary less significantly by city.



#### References:

1. Cohen, Deborah et al. "Contribution of Public Parks to Physical Activity," American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 97, No. 3, March 1, 2007, pp. 509-514.
2. Lovasi, G.S. et al. "Children living in areas with more street trees have lower prevalence of asthma," Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, May 1, 2008. pp. 647-649.
3. Ginsburg, Kenneth. "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds." American Academy of Pediatrics, January 1, 2007.