

Benefits of Trails and Greenways

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Ten Reasons to Consider a Trail or Greenway in Your Next Project

Communities benefit in many ways from well-planned greenways and trails.

By **Bob Searns and Jeff Vogel** (October 2002)

Over the past three decades, urban greenways, as a landscape endeavor have expanded explosively. According to National Geographic, more than 500 communities in North America have greenway projects in place or underway. Greenways and the greenway movement reflect an evolving centuries-old landscape form. The roots are in the European palace gardens, boulevards, parkways and axes that inspired Olmsted and other designers to create systems of parkways in the late 19th Century.

"An emerging fourth generation of greenways will express itself as regional, inter-city and inter-open space networks."

A second generation of trail-oriented recreational greenways emerged in the 1970's along rivers, streams and abandoned rail lines. A third generation emerged in the 1980's, multi-objective greenways that become infrastructure for wildlife, flood hazard reduction, water quality protection and utility ways. An emerging fourth generation of greenways will express itself as regional, inter-city and inter-open space networks.

Ten Reasons

1. It will make projects more marketable. April 2000 survey of 2000 recent homebuyers (National Association of Homebuilders and National Association of Realtors) indicated walking/jogging and bike trails second from the top of the "important to very important" amenity list-- behind highway access. According to Gopal Ahluwalia, NAHB Director of Research, trails consistently rank in the top five important amenities in making purchase decisions. --www.nahb.com/news/smartsurvey2002.htm

A 1994 survey by American Lives, Inc. conducted for a group of large volume homebuilders showed that 77.7% of consumers surveyed ranked significant natural open space as a "must-deliver" category, 2nd behind low traffic and quiet. Plenty of walking and biking paths ranked next highest. Buyers also said they would pay extra for "wilderness areas with the flora and fauna that existed prior to the development" --*Denver Post 1/10/95*

Similar surveys show property values higher in areas proximate to trails and greenways. For example 6% more near, but not immediately next to, Seattle's Burke Gilman Trail. Ken Caryl Ranch, Colorado (4145 Homes) 9000 Acre Project, 6000 set aside as open space Dozens of miles of multi-use and primitive trails Trails link to amenities and metro-wide system 7% to 15%+ lot premiums Cited in National Geographic --*Sandy Rozeboom, Rose and Company*

2. Trails can help increase the number of lot sales while conserving resources. Redfeather Ridge by Midfirst, Glenwood Springs, CO increased the number of sellable lots by conserving open space, providing trails and by clustering housing. Number of lots increased from 64 to 149. There are countless other examples nationwide. --*Jeff Vogel, DHN Design Corporation*

3. Trails can expand and diversify the golf course community market. 23% to 25% of homebuyers in golf course communities are golfers. Many are also seeking open space and

outdoor recreation benefits. Both spouses make a home buying decision and only one may be a golfer. --*Phone discussions with Denver-area designers Opportunity to create a multi-benefit golf course with wildlife habitat, visual benefits and conservation values.*

Looking to preserve the historical aspects of the land while sustaining the natural environment, RENDEzVOUS is a prime example of integrating green areas in the master-planning phase of the project. Protecting and preserving a significant portion of the meadow made the project far more appealing to concerned citizens. The design team focused on a number of alternative residential and recreational uses, which ultimately lead to a higher marketability and overall success of the development. --*Jeff Vogel, DHM Design requirements. space. capacity elsewhere. exaction costs. facilities.*

4. Trails help meet compliance requirements. Floodplains, floodplain storage compensation, wetlands and other types of conservation areas can be enhanced as amenities with landscaping, trails and other improvements. The Mentor Graphics office complex near Portland, OR is a good example of a wetland set aside as an amenity, increasing market value of units facing the open A number of states allow marketing of wetland areas as compensation for filled wetlands. The Metropolitan Sewerage District (Louisville, KY) is exploring the creation of flood compensation "banks" where floodplain set aside as part of a development can be marketed within the watershed to compensate loss of flood storage capacity elsewhere.

5. Trails can help reduce impact fees and exaction costs. With the growth of organized team sports there is an increasing trend toward locating sports fields in community parks, regional parks and other venues. There are also indications of a growing desire to limit "park space" in residential development to more "passive" uses such as open space, trails, greenways and small neighborhood parks. These are less costly to build and maintain. This approach may also help promote a broader financing strategy and funding source allocation for the more costly active and team sports park facilities.

6. Homebuilder and homebuyer may realize direct economic and tax benefits. "Market appreciation rates for cluster housing with associated open space can be equal to those for conventionally developed housing types." A study, in Amherst and Concord, Massachusetts, found that clustered housing with open space appreciated at a higher rate than conventionally designed subdivisions. The clustered homes in Amherst appreciated at an average annual rate of 22%, compared to an increase of 19.5% for the more conventional subdivision. The home-buyer, speaking in dollar terms through the marketplace, appears to have demonstrated a greater desire for a home with access and proximity to permanently protected land, than for one located on a bigger lot, but without open-space." --*Jeff Lacy. August 1990*

"An Examination of Market Appreciation for Clustered Housing with Permanently Protected Open Space." A study of the enhancement value of 8,535 acres of wetlands In Massachusetts's Charles River Basin found that properties abutting the wetlands were valued \$400 more than non-abutting properties, and that each acre of wetland added \$150 in value to adjacent properties. A survey of 15 appraisers and realtors yielded the estimate that each acre of wetlands contributes \$480 to the value of an abutting parcel of property. --*Thibodeau and Ostro (1981)*

A number of communities have explored setting aside open space in a land trust. Developer may realize an upfront tax benefit for the contribution of marketable acreage and future homeowners may be able to realize a tax benefit as a result of participation in the upkeep of the open space conserved as a non-profit land trust. RENDEzVOUS project is an example. --*Jeff Vogel, DHM Design*

7. Trails promote physical activity, fitness, and health. Studies in association with The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that 64% of the U.S. population is clinically overweight with over 31% obese. This condition is directly tied to lack of physical activity resulting in increased heart disease, cancer, diabetes, anxiety, depression and other costly health problems.

Providing nearby trails and walkways offers a significant option for regular physical activity that can lower rates of obesity and health care costs. This strengthens the market for communities and business centers with such amenities with an anticipated growing demand by both homebuyers and employers who want to reduce health care costs. --*USA Today 10/9/02*

Increased participation in moderate physical activity by the 88 million inactive Americans could reduce medical costs by \$76 Billion --*Pratt et al, 2000*

8. Trails help improve a company's image. Companies that build projects with well planned and executed trail amenities, conservation and open space benefits, stand a better chance of being recognized as environmentally-friendly developers which may help facilitate and reduce public-relations costs of project approvals.

9. Trails enhance the marketability of the locale (town, city, resort destination). Pittsburgh faced with mass exodus of skilled workers and professionals after failure of steel market in late 1970's redeveloped its riverfront with trails and greenways that spun off adjacent development. It has since seen a re-emergence of its economy and has moved up in rank to one of the top 5 best cities in the U.S to raise a family (Readers Digest). Chattanooga, TN implemented a similar renaissance. --*City of Pittsburgh, Mayor's Office*

A 2002 reader survey by the Kansas City Star ranked creation of a regional trail and greenway network at the top of the list in 15 desired public investments over and above police buildings, zoo, stadium improvements, etc. --*KC Star 1/20/2002*

10. Trail and greenways tend to compete better in tight economies. During the last economic slowdown in Denver in the 1980's the most successful projects incorporated trails and greenways. Examples include Highlands Ranch, Stonegate and Green Valley Ranch that outperformed other communities in the metro area. --*S. Robert August Company, Denver, CO*

Trail and Greenway Tips and Emerging Issues

- Incorporate trail and greenway planning early on in the process.
- Protect views, vistas, habitat, cultural and historic icons/artifacts
- Know your market & offer meaningful open space.
- Emphasize trees and landscape character.
- Fit the larger context and link to regional system.
- Avoid inferior products.
- Avoid, hide unsightly utilities/road cuts, etc.
- Avoid costs that may exclude target market segments.
- Address operations and maintenance costs.
- Address, pest-wildlife, privacy, crime and security issues.

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For more resources on the [economic benefits](#) of trails and greenways, see the Resources & Library area of www.AmericanTrails.org.

About the Authors

Robert Searns plans and develops trails, greenways, open space, and youth/ volunteer stewardship projects. He was Project Director of Denver's Platte River Greenway and developed the national award-winning Mary Carter Greenway in Littleton, CO. He has a 30-year track record working with communities to implement and manage their projects. He is also an instructor and author, a member of the Board of American Trails, and serves on the Editorial Board of the International Urban Water Journal.

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Jeff Vogel's career started well when, upon graduating from ASU, he was awarded the 1990 Urban Planner of the Year. From golf resorts to small mixed-use communities, Jeff's knowledge of landscape architecture and community planning is extensive. His interests have lead him to more project work in master planned communities (residential, mixed-use, and resort), where his team is focusing their efforts on offering unique places that are mindful of the environment and have lasting value.

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