

Realizing The Value Of Public Open Space

Have you ever wondered what the value of Tubbs Hill might be? There was a time when this hill became one of the most talked about controversial issues in the community. Tubbs Hill was once privately owned and it was all but sold to an electric company that would have changed the landscape of the entire waterfront corridor as we know it today. There was talk of a shopping mall at the base of the hill and Tubbs Hill was, at one time, platted for housing development. Scott Reed, in his book, "A Treasure Called Tubbs Hill", describes in detail the enormous efforts that were put forth to acquire Tubbs Hill for the people of this community forever. It is difficult to place a value on any of our public open space because we take for granted the enormous benefits that we enjoy every day.

1. Health & Environment Benefits

Activities ranging from walking and sight-seeing to sports for youth and adults promotes health and fitness. Going outdoors and accessing these spaces is known to reduce stress, reduce blood pressure and improve one's physical health. Tubbs Hill, as an example, provides habitat for wildlife, and its many trees and vegetation helps to improve the quality of air we breathe and it is a great place for kids and families to connect with nature. Parks and open space in general helps to improve water quality, protect groundwater and provide vegetative buffers.

2. Social Benefits

Hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors access Tubbs Hill and the city's park system every year. The availability of this great resource is a reflection of the quality of life for us in North Idaho and Kootenai County. You have probably seen community survey results that cite the importance of open space with regard to how livable a community is. It probably would not surprise you that in most surveys, 8 out of 10 people rate a quality park system either very important or extremely important to their quality of life. People of all ages and abilities in our community, have these areas available to them regardless of economic status.

3. Economic Benefits

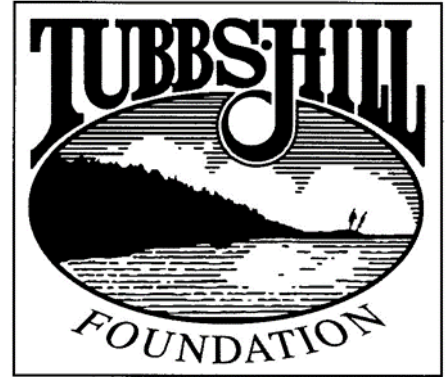
Combining the economic impact of parks and open spaces with health and environment and social benefits creates a value that is not measurable. Parks and open spaces, like Tubbs Hill, improve a community's tax base and increases property values. An increase in private property value due to the proximity to parks, open space and trails, increases property tax revenues and improves the local economy. Many studies have been done on what is known as the 'Proximate Principle'. The Proximate Principle identifies the value of parks, open space and trails in relationship to their proximity, or closeness, to neighborhoods. Size, location and design of the open space also factors in to the equation; done right a

community's tax base gets stronger as time goes by. People want to live near nice parks and trails and be able to access and enjoy open space and they will pay more to be closer. Thus the tax base the community relies upon to provide services becomes stronger. Other major economic bene-

fits of parks, open space and trails is recognized in the 'new money' that is brought into the community as a direct result of the great facilities. Sporting events, fund raisers and social gatherings bring millions of new dollars to Coeur d'Alene and surrounding areas every year. A few years ago, and this was not an in-depth scientific study, I estimated the new dollar income to our community to be upwards of 10 to 12 million dollars annually. That is based on the number of events and estimated length of stay per visitor. The dollars cited do not go directly to the city but to businesses throughout the city; restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, gas stations, shops and souvenir sales are the primary beneficiaries. Parks, open space and trails also add jobs to the community. Jobs are not always directly related to the open space but can be realized through the many activities created from the open space, parks and trails system. A large event that attracts thousands of participants and spectators can have an impact on local business that may add staff support to accommodate the influx of people to the event. A new study will be released this spring on the full economic impact that the Centennial Trail has on the community. This study is being done through an economics professor at the University of Idaho.

What would our community be like if Tubbs Hill and the community's parks and trails were all removed from the equation? What if there was no vision to acquire and develop the open space? What if there are no sporting events, or places to walk, run or ride safely? What if you had no place to engage nature, wildlife and incredibly scenic views, or no places to gather for family and group picnicking? What would the tax base really look like if these things were gone? What would the impact be on local businesses? What would your community be like without these assets? It would be a different place with a different quality of life, for sure. We are in a great place, let's not take it for granted. All over Kootenai County from Coeur d'Alene to Post Falls to Hayden to Rathdrum good decisions are being made to promote this quality of life; these assets are yours, hang on to them. By Doug Eastwood

Doug Eastwood is the former Director of Parks for the City of Coeur d'Alene. He is one of the original Friends of Tubbs Hill, along with Art Manley, Scott Reed and Ron Edinger.



Friends of Tubbs Hill