

# What's a park worth to the economy?

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A new framework developed by University of Waterloo researchers demonstrates the significant economic health savings and benefits from urban park investments.

In the first case study of its kind in Canada, researchers looked at Peterborough's new [Quaker Foods City Square](#) park, which cost taxpayers \$6.4 million, and have estimated the [economic value](#) of physical and [mental health benefits](#) that could come from it at more than \$4 million per year. The framework considers the health savings

associated with improved mental health and better air quality, the avoided economic burden of physical inactivity and higher life satisfaction.

The study demonstrates the value of developing and enhancing urban parks as a strategy to improve [population health](#) and well-being, and as a means of cost savings to the medical system.

"Investments in urban parks are among the soundest financial decisions a community can make," said Jeffrey Wilson, professor in the School of Environment, Enterprise and Development. "When you consider the population health benefits, the value of lessening climate-related impacts and the role of parks to support [economic development](#), we see how parks provide a large payback."

The park was developed on land previously used as a parking lot to revitalize the downtown core of Peterborough. The study's estimated benefits of this new space represent only a portion of the park's value, as the researchers considered only a few benefits attributed to park use and vegetation cover.

Future research could calculate other benefits such as respite from hot temperatures, relief from noise pollution, increased biodiversity and [social benefits](#) resulting from stronger feelings of community cohesion, higher levels of community engagement, and reduced isolation. The researchers also identified other factors, such as socio-demographic, cultural variables, and urban design features, that could be included to increase the rigour of the results and further quantify the return on urban park investments.

"Dollars drive decisions," said Wilson. "It can be challenging for [decision-makers](#) to support the development and expansion of urban parks because there are competing land use pressures, and municipalities

are responsible for park operation and maintenance costs. However, this study offers concrete evidence that the [health](#) system savings alone justify the financial investment."

**More information:** Jeffrey Wilson et al, The Economic Value of Health Benefits Associated with Urban Park Investment, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20064815](#)

Provided by University of Waterloo

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