



Office of Mayor Peter Schwartzman

White Paper on Community Center  
by Mayor Peter Schwartzman  
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Questions to consider as you review the references summarized below: (1) Do community centers add economic value to the city's where they are found/built? (2) Are community centers valued by their residents? (3) What types of activities are key to the positive impact of a community center?

In their peer-reviewed article, "The Meaning of Relationship Building in the Context of the Community Center and its Implications," Colistra, Schmalz & Glover (2017) found "Community centers represent meaningful spaces that facilitate social interaction through their diversity of programming and services. The social relationships that arise from these interactions in leisure settings can act as a source of health and well-being for users." They continue, "A substantial contribution to the community center user's health and well-being was access to information, resources, and services which were a result of partnerships and collaborations that the community center had with local organizations and institutions. It would be advantageous for community centers to collaborate with agencies that can assist visitors in other domains of life (e.g., housing, employment, family) that can indirectly impact the welfare of users. This is especially relevant for community centers that serve disadvantaged populations (i.e., low income, elderly) that may not have the knowledge or ability to access these types of services themselves."

Estes Park (Colorado) did a third-party analysis of the economic impact of a \$22 million community center they were proposing. The analysis estimated that there would be \$33 million in economic benefit (and "with 143 direct and indirect full-time equivalent (FTE) construction-related jobs") during its construction (Estes Park). Once completed (in 2018), the analysis forecast an "estimated 30 FTE employees ... responsible for \$2 million in direct and indirect economic output" (Estes Park).

A 2016 report, "The Positive Impacts of Community Recreation Centers," drive home the point that recreation centers: (1) have a "stabilizing effect on the lives of young people ... by providing safe and adequately equipped spaces for physical activities like dance, martial arts, yoga, basketball and other sports"--additionally, "community centers instill discipline, healthy exercise habits, and teamwork ... and create the perfect setting for local mentorship programs, providing guidance and leadership development"; (2) provide "a place for children to extend their learning beyond the classroom"; (3) promote "an active and healthy community" by providing "walking clubs, fitness programs, athletic opportunities, arts and crafts classes, and various cultural activities...made available to those of all ages."; (4) "increase property values ... by providing a popular destination for cultural, social, fitness and athletic activities [which make] the communities that surround them more attractive."

LaGrange County (IN) Community Center notes: "Community centers are incredibly important for a healthy, vibrant community. These community or wellness centers provide opportunities for residents to be active and to interact with other residents.... The social bonds that are created at community centers help build strong, safe and inclusive communities; social interaction, volunteerism, civic pride and aesthetics all play a role. After-school programs can help deter at-risk youth from criminal activities and can provide a constructive



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environment. These spaces are meant for all ages, ethnicities and skills levels and should promote cultural diversity and inclusion.

In the Brookings Institute's report (2021), "Why 'activity centers' are the building blocks of inclusive regional economies," argues that the best way to respond to recent challenges (economic and health) is for local "leaders .. to identify and invest in . . . activity centers: places within regions where a diversity of economic, physical, social, and civic assets cluster at a clearly defined "hyperlocal" scale. This means local leaders must know where activity centers exist within their cities, towns, and suburbs, and target economic development, infrastructure, and placemaking resources in ways that strengthen these centers, support their growth and development in more equitable ways, improve connectivity within and between them, and ensure that existing residents and businesses benefit from new investment."

An interview I did with Mayor Nowell (Saint Peter, MN; population: 12,000) found that their community center (which just celebrated its 20th anniversary) is a vital location for all residents. Community partners occupy many of its offices/rooms at low cost (including, three daycare centers which utilize its space effectively). Local school district has a representative on site as well and they hold continuing/community education classes on site. Their one gym is so popular, the Mayor said they could easily use two. Recent immigrant populations also find it a space to easily integrate themselves into the community (opportunities for cultural exchange). The community center was built as part of a reimagining of the city after a devastating tornado (in 1998).

### Works Cited:

2016 Report: <https://sportsfacilities.com/the-positive-impact-of-community-recreation-centers/>

Brookings, 2021: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-future-of-the-inclusive-economy-is-in-activity-centers/>

Colistra, Schmalz & Glover, 2017: <https://js.sagamorepub.com/jpra/article/view/7448>

Estes Park, 2015: <https://www.eptrail.com/2015/10/13/economic-impact-analysis-of-community-center-proposal/>

LaGrange County (IN), 2022: <https://www.lcycinc.org/community-center-benefits/>