

**From the desk of the Parks & Recreation Director  
Jeffrey Temple**



## The Benefits of Parks

As we continue to work on the Lawton Park Development project, it's a good time to talk about what parks are supposed to be and how they improve the quality of life in our community. Parks serve as the heart of our communities and are one aspect of recreation that effects every citizen. As such, these recreation areas should always be a high priority for our community planners. The importance of parks and recreation goes beyond adding green space to beautify the community. Every one of us who are proud to call Lawton home benefit by having a nearby park or play space. Creating recreation areas is one way to cater to the needs of both mind and body.

We are blessed with many wonderful park spaces in Lawton and they create a natural space for us to congregate in a safe social setting. Our parks provide a safe place for kids to play and parents to bring their little ones, a place to be free from the confines of the office, classroom, shop or home. Parks provide a safe place for physical activity in addition to elevating property values in the vicinity. For our community to reap the benefits of parks and recreation areas fully, these places must have attractive designs and play areas for everyone.


One aspect of the benefits of local parks is community health and wellness. The National Parks & Recreation Association (NRPA) promotes park development to improve the health and wellness of all citizens. The NRPA has identified the critical role parks play in supporting health and wellness, a few are listed below:

- Both youth and adults that live close to parks experience higher physical activity levels.
- Adolescents are less likely to be overweight if they have ease of access to multiple recreation facilities than adolescents who do not.
- Increasing access to recreation facilities helps prevent childhood obesity.
- Organized parks programs and supervision may increase the use of parks and playgrounds, along with increased physical activity among youths.
- Park renovations can increase physical activity among children, and increase the use of facilities, including playgrounds and skate parks.

(Source link: <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/role-of-parks-and-recreation-on-health-and-wellness/>)

The NRPA also supports local parks as an economic benefit to communities. In a [recent survey conducted by the NRPA](#), they found that parks improvements were just as important to citizens as infrastructure improvements. The key findings from the survey include:

- Ninety-four percent of adults agreed that it is important for their local government to invest in infrastructure improvements that promote economic activity in their community.
- Three out of four adults that responded to the survey said it was “very” or “extremely” important for their local governments to invest in park improvements, trails, transportation, and schools.



For many years, parks were thought of simply as places for sports, recreation, preservation of open space and social gatherings. However, the role of parks has become much greater as the scope and impact of parks increasingly influences quality of life, economic development, health and many other aspects of life. The importance of parks in Lawton, as in other cities, has grown as we have begun to understand that parks exist as just one element in a larger context of our quality of life. Developers and large companies want to move to areas where residents are willing to invest in their own communities. So those parks and greenways not only increase property values, but also help foster development that benefits residents with more money for schools and better quality of life. After all, those major employers know their employees value education and lifestyle amenities.

One of the goals of the PROPEL funded Park Development project is to take ideas and input from community members and work those ideas into a master plan that we will follow for years to come. The Park Development Master Plan will effectively improve our quality of life but will work only if the community is involved. The next six months will be a critical time to engage in this process and you can do so by going to the project website at [lawtonparksplan.com](http://lawtonparksplan.com) where you can sign up for project updates and public event notices, such as visioning sessions.

For more information on this or other quality of life programs, call the City of Lawton Parks & Recreation Department at 581-3400 or visit [lawtonok.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation](http://lawtonok.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation).

