



Leveraging Smithville's Outdoor Recreation Assets as Local Economic Drivers

Memorandum Provided to City of Smithville
As Part of the Parks and Recreation Master Planning Efforts

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Smithville's outdoor recreational amenities are recognized not only as community assets but also as assets for the city's economy. Between Smithville Lake, the city's numerous parks, popular recreational programming, and expanding trail network, the city is well-positioned to attract more residents, customers, and visitors.

Nature-based placemaking is a growing movement in which communities have become more deliberate in using their outdoor recreational assets to improve the physical, social, cultural, and economic networks of their cities.¹ Communities across the country harness these placemaking efforts, recognizing the economic and fiscal benefits they can achieve for their municipalities while fostering quality cities and towns. The coming ten years provide the City of Smithville with a range of economic development opportunities related to parks and recreation to consider. The following chapter illustrates these opportunities and concepts to guide future decision-making.



The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance on Smithville's Parks and Recreation Master Plan from an economic development perspective. This content can be used directly in the Master Plan document as appropriate.

¹ Pennsylvania Downtown Center; Nature-Based Placemaking (<https://padowntown.org/programs/nature-based-placemaking-program>)

Fundamental Principles of Nature-Based Placemaking as it Relates to Economic Development

Nature-based placemaking efforts offer a range of potential benefits. The following concepts are key to local economic development considerations and relate to the opportunities in Smithville.

Turning Nature Visitors into Local Customers

Nature-based placemaking efforts target and help connect visitors to natural assets with nearby commercial districts and local businesses. By promoting and connecting these communities with natural and designed outdoor assets, visitors become customers as they shop and dine in the communities during their visit to and from the outdoor recreation opportunity.

Smithville's nature visitors include those traveling from across the metropolitan region to spend time boating and fishing at Smithville Lake, hiking the 24 miles of trails alongside the lake, mountain biking on the 11 miles of the single-track loop, equestrian riding via 26 miles of trails, and camping at Smith Fork Park. Regional MetroGreen trail systems are currently proposed to connect into Smithville via greenways proposed alongside streams and waterways. The anticipated trail network stretches over 40 miles collectively across five different trails. These regional trail connections expand beyond the municipality's boundary tapping into larger regional systems bringing runners, walkers, and bikers from outside of Smithville into the city's Historic Downtown Subdistrict.

Lengthening Visits to Create More Opportunities to Capture Dollars

Often, as visitors spend more extended periods of time in commercial districts, their spending increases. A lunchtime stop may turn into strolling along and shopping in local boutiques, followed by dinner or a snack. Successful commercial districts encourage customers and visitors to stay longer.

Smithville's Historic Downtown Subdistrict is filled with renewed interest in the Downtown. New retailers and restaurants are opening in Downtown, providing a higher concentration of establishments for patrons. Recent beautification efforts include the renovated Downtown streetscape and new Main Street Trail connecting the Downtown with Smithville Lake. The city's Downtown draws attention from prospective developers to breathe new life into dilapidated properties. The community supports interest in enhancing the Downtown as a higher density mixed-use district in the coming years with more places to shop, dine, and live.

Developing Brand Identity and a Unique Local Character

Placemaking efforts foster more vital senses of place and brand identities specific to each community. Leveraging community brands to be associated with nature assets leads to stronger associations and enhanced visitor traffic.

The city's namesake of Smithville Lake creates associations of the lake with Smithville despite its spanning geography into other nearby municipalities. In recent years, focused efforts towards city branding and strategic planning leverage the city's small-town feel amongst its expanding recreation opportunities.

Smithville Lake and Value of Visitors

Smithville Lake has been identified as potential for being a key driver of the city's local economy. Exploring strategies that can connect Smithville Lake with enhanced sales revenue sources will better support existing businesses in Smithville. These strategies can also help attract new establishments and spur investment through private sector development, resulting in fiscal benefits for the city at-large.

How Smithville Lake Can Generate Economic Impacts

Visitors to Smithville Lake bring spending dollars that can support local businesses. Smithville Lake is a distinguished natural asset in the community that draws regional visitors from across the metro area to recreate and explore. While Smithville Lake provides ecological benefits to the region, there are also opportunities for Smithville to capture enhanced market share of visitor spending.



The average day trip visitor in the Kansas City metro area spends \$54 during their trip: \$22 at retail establishments, \$20 on food and beverages, and \$12 on recreation and entertainment.² While it is unlikely for Smithville to capture all this spending for every visitor, targeted initiatives and placemaking efforts can increase Smithville's share of the shopping, dining, and recreating spending. This spending can significantly impact local businesses.



The first step in estimating Smithville Lake visitors' economic impact is to understand the estimated annual attendance to Smithville Lake and the proportionate split between Smithville residents and non-local visitors. Smithville's Parks and Recreation Department should work collaboratively with Clay County to acquire estimated seasonal and annual visitation.

² VisitKC. 2018 Economic Impact Study & Visitor Profile: Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics Company - Longwoods International. (<https://visitkcfiles.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/2018-economicimpact.pdf>)

Potential new commercial development may occur in or near Smith Fork Park as the city expands its municipal boundaries towards Smithville Lake. Commercial uses with strong synergies to the lake's recreational attributes and opportunities to capture the market share of the lake's visitors can create additional economic and fiscal benefits for the city. These benefits occur both during the construction of any new development and stabilized commercial activity operations in the area. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map include a dedicated Smith Fork Park Overlay District to create flexibility for allowable uses in this area.

Continuing to enhance physical placemaking and experiential programming will encourage more visitors and repeat visitors to stop in Smithville, enjoy Smithville Lake, and spend their dollars at local businesses.

The coming ten years will bring opportunities to enhance the physical parkland to allow for more recreational uses, improved levels of services and amenities, and ultimately draw higher volumes of visitors. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan articulates the desired programming to meet current and prospective users' needs. Expanding the Smith Fork Park Campground's overnight accommodations will also encourage and introduce higher volumes of overnight visitors with more opportunities to capture their trip spending dollars.



Attracting New Residents to Smithville

Smithville Lake attracts more than regional visitors. **Approximately one out of three surveyed residents live in Smithville because of the proximity to Smithville Lake**, indicating this outdoor recreation amenity is a strong contributor to the residential market of the city. As Smithville's residential base grows so does the city's fiscal revenue and tax base – bringing more dollars to the city to fund desirable amenities like parks and programming for all.

Source: City of Smithville Comprehensive Plan Community Survey (2020)



Insights into Best Practices

Public-private partnerships have a track record of success in communities that leverage outdoor recreation and parks to drive their local economy. Fostering collaborative relationships with nonprofit organizations and commercial entities to offer targeted programming and experiences and retail uses supplements city efforts and generates a more robust network of possibilities. Communities across the country have partnered with establishments such as REI and L.L. Bean to offer immersive outdoor experiences for new visitors at places like Smithville Lake.

Downtown Smithville

The Economic Benefits of a New Riverwalk Park in Downtown Smithville

Incorporating a well-design and well-visited Riverwalk Park in Smithville's Downtown will encourage people to lengthen their visits in the downtown area. As customers extend their time downtown, the opportunities for businesses to capture dollars from these customers increase. For example, a group of customers coming to a local restaurant for lunch may decide to take a leisurely stroll after dining along the Riverwalk. After the short meander, one of these customers may choose to pick up a coffee or treat before leaving Downtown.

Furthermore, proposed regional trails are expected to interest at Hwy 169 and Main Street, a vital gateway to Smithville's downtown area. Connecting the regional trail network through Downtown to the Main Street Trail out to Smithville Lake will encourage more trail users to explore the downtown area and stop in local businesses. As the trail network extends for miles before reaching downtown Smithville, cyclists, runners, and enthusiasts will enjoy picking up a snack, drink, or meal during their recreation. Enhancing the quality of place Downtown continues to impact customer experience and favorable perceptions of the area, favorable to attracting more visitors and customers to the commercial district. The proposed Riverwalk Park and Main Street Trail demonstrate public and private investment, a best practice in downtown revitalization strategies, to encourage more private investment in the downtown area.



Insights into Best Practices

Best practices for communities to leverage nature-based assets to support local economies recommend physical linkages between the assets and areas of concentrated businesses. Smithville's newly constructed Main Street Trail exemplifies this strategy. Walkers, bikers, and runners enjoy the 1.3-mile paved multiuse path on Main Street from Liberty Road to Litton Way, connecting Downtown Smithville to Smith Fork Park and thus Smithville Lake.

Downtown Events at Courtyard Park Bring Customer Spending to Local Businesses

Popular events that draw people Downtown can significantly help support the local businesses in the area. Events are held in Smithville's Downtown and Courtyard Park throughout the year, including the popular Lighted Christmas Parade, Hot Summer Nights Concert Series, Farmers and Makers Market, and Yoga in the Park series. Downtown events such as these generate economic impact by:

- Attracting more customers to the area.
- Introducing new visitors to Downtown Smithville.
- Introducing new customers to local businesses.
- Encouraging spending at local businesses.
- Fostering brand identity of an active and vibrant community.

Potential future considerations to continue to generate higher levels of economic and fiscal impacts in the future include:

- Hosting events during times that businesses are open or partnering with the business community for temporary hour adjustments to capture customer spending.
- Partnering with businesses to offer targeted promotions to event attendees.
- Curating vendor selection to reduce competition between spending at the designated event rather than nearby businesses. Collaborate with nearby businesses to participate as vendors.



How Downtown Events Generate Impacts

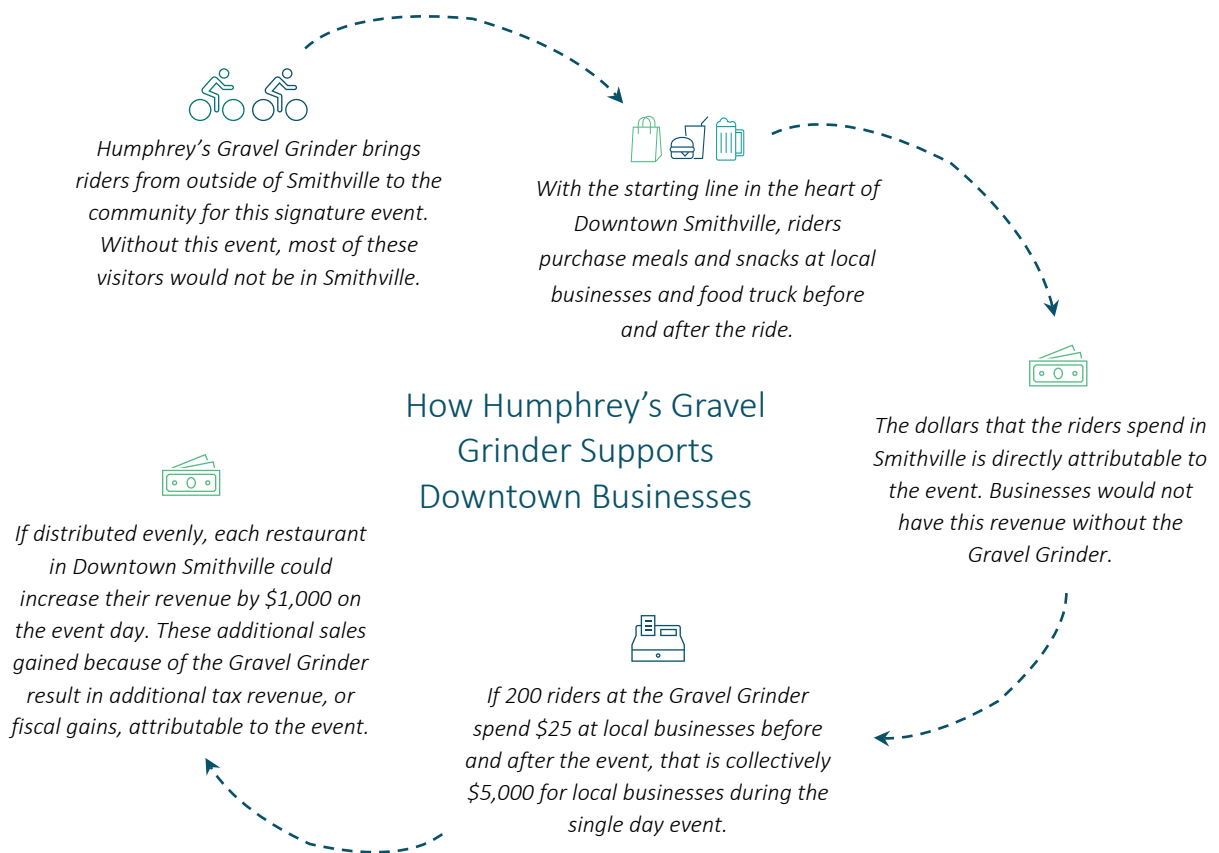
Knowing the impact of events and programming strengthens partnerships, communicates value, and enhances operations. Downtown events and programming generate three different types of impacts:

- **Economic Impacts** include the impact on businesses, including sales and revenue, jobs and employment, and salaries and wages.
- **Fiscal Impacts** include the impact on property tax, sales tax, personal and corporate income taxes, and licenses and fees paid to the municipality and state.
- **Community Impacts** including many factors such as vibrancy, amenities, safety, aesthetics, entertainment, and preservation.



Spotlight: Smithville's Gravel Grinder

Since 2018, Smithville's Parks and Recreation Department hosts the annual and semi-annual Humphrey's Gravel Grinder, a bike race and ride spanning routes ranging from 50 miles to 200 miles. The event continues to grow in registration, attracting riders from throughout the Kansas City metro area and even nearby states.



Measuring Impacts

Quantifying and communicating Smithville's recreational assets' economic value helps inform future decisions and highlights the value qualitative experiences of recreation have on the city at-large.

Tools for Measuring Impacts: Economic Impact Assessments

Economic impact studies articulate the economic value generated due to a specific occurrence, development, or condition. These studies, often paired with fiscal and community impact assessments, are a beneficial tool to help quantify results and guide decision-making. The following scenarios exemplify opportunities that may be beneficial to conduct economic impact assessments related to Smithville's parks, trails, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

- Impact of Festivals and Events
- Impact of New Recreation Assets
- Impact of Stabilized Operations of Recreation Centers
- Impact of Outdoor Recreation Businesses
- Impact of Policy Changes

Recommended Metrics for Quantifying Impacts

The following metrics are vital in helping to measure future economic values of Smithville's recreation:

- **Participation levels** such as user counters installed on popular trails.
- Demographics of users, particularly capturing **percentages of Smithville residents, nearby visitors, and regional visitors**. Event registration through digital portals such as Eventbrite can help the city quickly understand visitors' geographic locations via zip code. Intercept surveys can also inform the city of demographics and similar data.
- **Investment dollars spurred by public improvements**. Documenting the private sector investment dollars because of the public improvements allows the city to assess return on investment. Smithville's Main Street program will likely annually track public improvement and private investment dollars as part of the Reinvestment Statistics data reporting process.
- **Spending profiles of non-local users**. Intercept surveys of non-local users or attendees can provide insight on spending profiles for different types of visitors. The city can use these profiles to understand the specific spending potential of each visitor. Visit KC, the regional economic development organization devoted to tourism in the metro area, provides regional spending patterns of daytime and overnight visitors that may be used to supplement intercept surveys.

When to Measure Impacts

Undertaking an economic impact assessment can vary in intensity. Impact assessments should be prioritized for situations when it is valuable to express the economic and fiscal benefits of an event, facility, or policy to inform future decisions as well as the convey the value generated to constituents.