An urban forest issue brief

Healthy Parks
Safer Communities

Public Health and Safety Are Tied to Green
Did you know that kids in tree-lined neighborhoods play outside 10% more and have lower rates of ADD and asthma? And the correlations don’t stop just with kids. Studies show that residents of neighborhoods with abundant greenspace enjoy better general health. The character of neighborhoods exerts significant affects on residents’ physical activity; thus neighborhood design is becoming a public health issue.

Green neighborhoods with parks and open spaces...
• Draw neighbors outdoors and encourage interaction.
• Give children nearby spaces for outdoor play.
• Encourage walking and physical activity.
• Increase property values.

Community thrives in green environments:

Public Health. People who live within one mile of a park or public open space are three times more likely to achieve recommended levels of physical activity. In fact, just having a park near one’s home is more important than the size of the park itself, with health benefits most apparent among the elderly, housewives, and people from lower socioeconomic groups. Even the very act of planting and tending trees has health benefits.1

Cleaner Air. Trees provide the oxygen we breathe. One acre of trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people to breathe each day and eliminates as much carbon dioxide from the air as is produced from driving a car 26,000 miles. So it’s not surprising that children who live on tree-lined streets have lower rates of asthma.2

Reduced Childhood Obesity. Play is essential to development, but children aren’t playing outside as much anymore. The effects of sedentary indoor lifestyles are already evident among children: startling rates of childhood obesity, the onset of childhood diabetes (at one time only an adult condition), and a shortened life expectancy.3

Recommendations:
• Encourage city planners to consider public health by installing parks nearby to where people live and work and converting underutilized properties & common spaces into green assets like parks, community gardens, or attractive stormwater management features.
• Inventory, set targets for, and track green assets like tree canopy, pervious versus impervious surfaces, and stormwater controls in cooperation with nonprofits and city agencies. Promote community-driven beautification, tree planting, and clean-up efforts.
• Support H.R. 2222 and S.3055, the Green Communities Act, to authorize $120 million in funding for community-based greening in cities.
• Support H.R. 3734, the Urban Revitalization and Livable Communities Act, which among other things makes all school parks and playgrounds accessible to children on weekends.

References: