Recreation Planning—A Catalyst for Economic Development in Hanna City and Dunlap

Studies show that well-planned parks and recreation systems can serve as a catalyst for economic development. This past spring, Hanna City and Dunlap hosted a University of Illinois Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism community recreation planning class. The exhibition was part of the Rural Peoria Coalition of Municipalities and Township’s (RPCCMT) public engagement effort to improve the vitality of smaller towns through community-driven projects. RPCCMT recently obtained its nonprofit status and identified recreational planning as its first project. The project illustrates ways RPCCMT plans to support mutually beneficial community development initiatives for rural communities.

U of I students from Professor Lara Browning's recreation planning studio, along with U of I Extension community and economic development Educator Kathie Brown worked alongside community leaders from Dunlap and Hanna City to develop an outdoor recreation plan for each community. The plans are assisting in creating a strategic vision for recreational services.

Just as water, sewer, and public safety are considered essential public services, parks are vitally important in establishing and maintaining the quality of life in a community. Access to parks and recreation facilities and active transportation infrastructure can increase property values, foster job creation, and provide a foundation for place-based economic development. Dunlap is a great illustration. With approximately 175,000 bicyclists traveling on the Rock Island Trail in a given year, a great deal of economic opportunity presents itself for small businesses in Dunlap.

The connection between the city and U of I, facilitated by University of Illinois Extension, Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit, demonstrates the benefits for both students and community members when they engage in complex issues together. "The students gain so much from these interactions. They talk to people from all walks of life – neighborhood residents, local engineers, and architects – people they don't usually hear from as a part of their classwork," says Kathie Brown. "I think that’s the piece where Extension can enrich the campus experience in so many ways, because of this collaborative engagement with the community."

Planning goals identified through the spring semester project are already being implemented in both Dunlap and Hanna City. Additionally, Leah Haymon a member of the recreation planning studio is working this summer with Hanna City and Peoria Park District. The community plans are available on our website.

Village of Hanna City Recreation Plan Final Report
Village of Dunlap Recreation Plan Final Report