



CASE STUDY: Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) & Economic Development in Roanoke, Virginia

Background:

In September 2014, the City of Roanoke passed a HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) resolution to further the City's efforts to bring health and wellness to residents, employees, and visitors. While Roanoke prides itself in its long-standing commitment to furthering the health and well-being of the community, the HEAL Resolution facilitated a renewed energy and promise to further advance healthy policies and practices in the community. The HEAL initiative in Roanoke is a collaborative effort involving city departments, community groups, foundations, health care providers, organizations, and individuals. They work to facilitate the development and implementation of a comprehensive HEAL strategy that is incorporated into the City's culture.

Economic Benefits of HEAL:

Roanoke prides itself in its embrace of and enthusiasm for active lifestyle amenities through environmental design changes. It has developed over 70 parks, more than 16 miles of greenway, and 25 miles of bike lanes. The City has also advanced its HEAL work through supportive programming such as healthy happy hours, an annual health fair, and youth activities including middle and high school youth sessions on health and wellness. The programming is offered by the City's Parks and Recreation Department, Public Library, and other public and private organizations.

The City's Department of Economic Development also actively promotes the City's health and wellness amenities as an effort to spur new business. Involved in an average of twenty business location or relocation projects each year, the Department of Economic Development reports that about one third of all businesses actively inquire about outdoor activities and environmental sustainability when negotiating City contracts. In 2016, Deschutes Brewery announced plans to invest \$85 million in the East Coast brewery, distribution,



and hospitality center in Roanoke. The City's outdoor amenities and healthy lifestyle practices significantly contributed to the company's decision as they sought to expand business in an environment that promotes health and well-being for its workers, residents, and visitors.

Healthy lifestyle practices and outdoor amenities have also increased the city's tourism industry as visitors participate in City-run races, festivals, and events such as the Kids to Parks Day, the Go Outside Festival, and the Blue Ridge Marathon. The Roanoke Valley Greenways initiative has facilitated the expansion of outdoor trails for biking, walking, hiking, and running. These amenities contribute to the wider City initiative to make the region a better and healthier place to live thus increasing tourism and attracting economic investment as local businesses seek areas closer to the greenways.

The City has partnered with non-governmental organizations and agencies to improve health and wellness across the City. Partners and collaborators include The United Way of Roanoke Valley, Healthy Roanoke Valley, New Horizons Healthcare, the Virginia Department of Health, Carilion Clinic, YMCA of Roanoke Valley, LEAP for Local Food, Feeding America Southwest Virginia, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension. The City has also partnered with local businesses to spur collective investment in City infrastructure and public spaces. Desiring a safe place for employees and residents to walk and exercise, local businesses contributed to a sidewalk infrastructure project in the City's Industrial Park. The Park has become a prominent place in the community that draws visitors and businesses.

HEAL Moving Forward

Through initiatives like HEAL, the City can facilitate access to healthier food options and improve access to places to be active. These amenities will continue to draw more business owners, workers, residents, and visitors to a community that promotes health and wellness through city infrastructure and culture changes.

Roanoke is a member of the HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign of the Mid-Atlantic. The HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign provides free technical assistance to local government leaders to help them create healthy, prosperous communities by adopting policies and practices that improve their communities' physical activity and food environments. HEAL is a project of the Institute for Public Health Innovation, in partnership with the Maryland and Virginia Municipal Leagues and funded by Kaiser Permanente, founding partner. For more information, visit the HEAL website at www.healcitiesmidatlantic.org and contact HEAL staff at 202-747-3455 or jgroenfeldt@institutephi.org.

For information or question on the City of Roanoke, please contact Aisha Johnson, Assistant to the City Manager of the City of Roanoke, Aisha.Johnson@roanokeva.gov.



Image 1: Runners at the Roanoke Duathlon. Image 2 (above): Bike Vendors and stands at the Annual Go Outside Festival.

