

# Introduction

**T**oo often we hear that communities cannot afford to “grow smart” by conserving open space. But accumulating evidence indicates that open space conservation is not an expense but an investment that produces important economic benefits. Some of this evidence comes from academic studies and economic analysis. Other evidence is from the firsthand experience of community leaders and government officials who have found that open space protection does not “cost” but “pays.”

This casebook presents data and examples that can help leaders and concerned citizens make the economic case for parks and open space conservation. Some communities protect open space as a way to guide growth and avert the costs of urban and suburban sprawl. In others, new parks have invigorated downtown businesses and neighborhood economies.

Some communities work to conserve economically important landscapes, such as watersheds and farmland, or they preserve open space as a way to attract tourists and new business. And many communities are learning that conserved open space contributes to the quality of life and community character that supports economic well-being.

Too many community leaders feel they must choose between economic growth and open space protection. But no such choice is necessary. Open space protection is good for a community’s health, stability, beauty, and quality of life. It is also good for the bottom line.

By  
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*Opposite:* Chattanooga Riverwalk,  
Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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