



# DIVE INTO DURAND

**Recreation as  
Economic Development  
August, 2018**







## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Outdoor recreation, such as public swimming pools, serve as a catalyst for economic development. Available public outdoor recreation opportunities shape perceptions of a community and create a sense of place that improves overall quality of life. Investments in improving a community's quality of life can create a cycle that attracts workers, which attracts employers, which in turn attracts even more investment and jobs. Quality of life considerations, such as the multi-generation recreational and fitness opportunities in a public amenity like a pool, play an important role in site location decisions. For many companies, quality recreation amenities can be the pivotal factor of the decision-making process. With a historically tight job market, quality of life factors are incredibly crucial for talent attraction and retention, which can lead to multiple layers of economic growth in a rural community with tremendous potential, like the City of Durand.

## **Quality of Life**

### **Provides a Competitive Edge**

### **for a Community's Economic Survival**

**“76% of corporate executives say quality of life factors are ‘very important’ or ‘important’ in their site-location decisions.”**

Increasing competition for talent makes firms much more likely to locate in amenity rich communities. These firms find that quality-of-life factors, such as public recreational facilities like swimming pools, matter more in decisions of where a firm's employees live, than to the company's actual site location. This means that quality-of-life factors are more significant in selecting a city or region, than a specific work site.

Site selectors also focus on both the short and long term influences of a community's quality of life. In the short term, quality of life factors are important to firms relocating their headquarters, or significant numbers of skilled or educated workers. To retain these workers, companies must consider factors such as recreational amenities, like a public swimming pool.

Small and medium sized entrepreneurial, or family owned companies, are even more likely to seek communities that provide a high availability of recreational amenities. Over the longer term, companies need locations that will not only make their current workers and their families happy, but what will make their locations attractive to future workers.

Millennials, who are the largest age demographic purchasing homes, are replacing retiring baby boomers in the workforce, and are placing a premium on work-life balance. To encourage future growth in Durand, public amenities like the swimming pool will be an important element for recruiting millennials and providing recreational opportunities for those baby boomers who are retiring in place.

**“Rural America is seeing more and more young people leave their communities, with many never coming back. However, young families in their 20’s and 30’s are choosing to live in rural communities, and commute, for more affordable housing and for quality outdoor recreation. With them they bring higher incomes, education, and training. A key for growth in rural communities is for leadership to make sure prospective residents choose their community, over one down the road.”**

Many rural communities, such as Durand, are experiencing out-migration loss as young people and families leave for new opportunities in larger communities. This decision is often based on economic and educational opportunities. However, one trend that has robustly emerged is that families in their 20’s and 30’s are moving to rural communities across the Midwest due to affordable housing, smaller school class sizes, and outdoor recreation opportunities. This in-migration is especially true of rural communities within an hour or less of larger cities with universities. Studies show that the high quality of life available in these small communities offsets long commutes.

It’s important to note that this age range of young families moving to rural America fits within the millennial demographic. The generation of millennials is the largest group purchasing homes in America and they place a high priority on amenities, like a community with a public swimming pool. Having public recreation amenities will encourage in-migration that will purchase homes, invest in downtown buildings, and contribute to the volunteerism that is needed for rural communities to thrive, grow, and be competitive for future generations.





## FINAL WORDS

Closing the Durand pool will have a detrimental impact for recruiting in-migration to the community, of individuals who will purchase and build homes, engage in entrepreneurial activities, and support existing local businesses. A decreased quality of life will also contribute to out-migration, including a lack of aquatic fitness for the baby boomer demographics that are aging in place.

In 2015, the Assessment and Project Study for the Durand Municipal Pool recommended an option to save the pool that would be cost effective. By creating an inner shell in the existing pool, the study concluded that the swimming pool would not only be repaired but the lifespan of the structure would be lengthened. The inner shell would also provide opportunities to have a zero depth entry and ramp for accessibility of all age demographics and abilities.

Other proposed work with this option would be to replace infrastructure components such as pool heaters, pool filters, chemical controllers, pump, and necessary piping to make additional investment in the pool, which would increase the life of the pool for future generations. Understanding the value of the pool for both community health and as a tool for economic development, the Durand Swim Club is proposing continuation with fundraising efforts to rehabilitate the pool.

With current trends of in-migration millennials to rural communities, the City of Durand and community stakeholders can take advantage of perfect conditions to “dive in” for saving this important community economic development asset.