

Quality of Place: A Crucial Factor in the War for Talent

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In the grappling match for today's top talent, the communities that stand out offer more than just job opportunities – they offer a genuine sense of place.

For a new generation of mobile professionals, where they live can be as important as where they work, especially with the rise of remote and hybrid options allowing them to choose a lifestyle that truly fits.

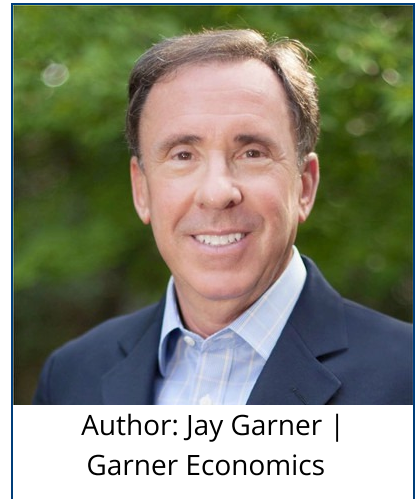
Quality of Place – the unique character, culture, and energy of a community – has become a powerful draw. Communities that invest in vibrant downtowns, green spaces, and recreational and cultural experiences are not only keeping up, they're creating destinations that attract and retain skilled professionals for the long term.

Quality of Place vs. Quality of Life

Quality of Place and Quality of Life may sound similar, but each plays a different role in economic development. While they can both address areas like health, safety, and overall satisfaction, experts say Quality of Life is about a person's subjective experience – which can vary widely depending on values, personal preferences, and individual circumstances.

Take climate for example.

“I don't like cold, but I'm sure there are some lovely communities out there,” said Jay Garner, president of Garner Economics, LLC, an economic development and site location consulting firm. “Any of the ski resorts in the winter are absolutely beautiful, but I don't want any part of it because I don't like snow, and I don't want to ski anymore. All of that is subjective. But they're absolutely gorgeous and probably have a wonderful quality of life.”



“Quality of Place can be very measured,” Garner explained. “It includes everything from a community's public safety (crime rate) to the availability of assets – like art centers, biking and walking trails, recreation opportunities, even the cleanliness of a community. All that can be measured.”

Quality of Place Starts in the “Living Room” of a Community

Where does a community begin when building its Quality of Place? According to Garner, it starts downtown.

“The central business district is the living room of the community,” he said.

“We've seen both large and small communities with vibrant downtowns that might have a 90% occupancy rate, or even more, and we've seen communities with only a 30% or 40% occupancy rate – which does not show well.”

A bustling downtown, filled with local shops, cafes, and community events, gives a community a pulse. A lively main street signals a thriving community where people want to enjoy local businesses and form connections – a magnet for professionals seeking more than just a place to work.

Southern Towns Embracing Quality of Place

Many towns are already succeeding by enhancing their Quality of Place. Greenville, South Carolina, for example, revitalized its downtown with attractions like Falls Park on the Reedy and the 28-mile Swamp Rabbit Trail, transforming it into a hotspot for young professionals.



In Fayetteville, Georgia – Garner’s own base – the community has built up its Quality of Place not only with a welcoming downtown but by becoming a film hub, home to Trilith Studios with its 34 soundstages for major productions.

In Alabama, Opelika has tapped into sports tourism with its expansive Sportsplex & Aquatics Center, drawing athletes and visitors from across the Southeast for tournaments and events. By capitalizing on unique assets, Opelika has become a destination for both sports enthusiasts and new residents alike.

These communities understand that successful Quality of Place strategies leverage local assets and invest in what makes them special – be it a scenic park, a bustling downtown, or a thriving sports scene.





Quality of Place as a Long-Term Strategy

Quality of Place is more than a tactic to attract talent – it’s a long-term strategy for building a thriving, resilient community. By investing in their unique strengths and creating spaces where people feel connected, communities can attract not only skilled professionals but also new businesses and visitors.

People are drawn to places with character, and a well-crafted Quality of Place makes residents feel like more than just inhabitants – they feel like they belong. This not only attracts talent but ensures that they stay, making Quality of Place a lasting investment in the community’s future.



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