

From: [City Council](#)
To: [Mary Gourley](#)
Cc: [Oriana Hart](#); [Erik Billing](#); [Torran Korman](#); [Elissa Overton](#); [Ana Kwong](#)
Subject: FW: Public Comment: Agenda Item 14, Sept. 15 City Council Meeting
Date: Sunday, September 13, 2026 8:39:07 PM
Attachments: [the commons research.html](#)
[the commons research.pdf](#)

Please see public comment as it relates to an agenda item that will be on a city council meeting.

BCC: Email BCC to City Council, City Attorney

City staff that received this email are listed in the CC distribution line as noted above.

City Staff: Please Post to City Website

Thank you

Mary Gourley

City Manager

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From: Christine Koenig [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, September 13, 2026 12:54 PM
To: info <info@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Cc: Mary Gourley <mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Subject: Public Comment: Agenda Item 14, Sept. 15 City Council Meeting

Dear Honorable Mayor McLewis and Councilmembers:

My name is Christine Koenig, and I'm writing in support of Agenda Item 14 and The Commons concept at the Gravenstein Highway North campus.

I’m a journalist and communications specialist who enjoys researching topics I am passionate about and want to support. I've gathered information on small towns that have successfully built shared spaces like this — combining a library, senior center, and community programs under one roof.

For example, about an hour away, Middletown, in Lake County, also created a combined library and senior center that they’ve found to be highly successful for public engagement and critical emergency resilience.

Nationally, the data backs up what the Sebastopol Commons Committee found: libraries and community hubs routinely return \$2 to \$10 for every dollar invested, and communities with stronger social ties see measurably less crime — one study found a 21% drop in murders and a 20% drop in vehicle theft tied to higher social connectedness.

The U.S. Surgeon General has called our loneliness epidemic a public health crisis on par with smoking, and spaces exactly like this one are the recommended remedy.

A concept that is small but genuinely well-supported by data is a ping pong or game room. Research shows it's one of the most effective low-barrier ways to bring generations together — no special skill required, no physical contact, and adaptable pace, so a teenager and a senior can play the same table.

A 2018 University of Leeds study even found regular group table tennis significantly lowered loneliness in older adults. In 2000, when I was a writer at the Chicago Tribune, the City set up between 300 and 500 free public ping-pong tables in outdoor plazas, parks, and office lobbies across the city. It was successful in breaking down social barriers because people who never knew each other could play together in public spaces.

The Commons is a chance to build something here that pays for itself economically while directly addressing loneliness, safety, and connection here in Sebastopol. I urge the Council to move forward on this site. Thank you.

Christine Koenig

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Small towns that built a commons, and the case for doing it

A working reference of comparable projects and program ideas, plus the supporting research behind them — specifically how shared community spaces build intergenerational connection, respond to the national loneliness epidemic, reduce crime, and strengthen local economies. Sources are linked and written out for further reading.

Towns that built a commons

Case studies of libraries, senior centers, and community spaces brought together under one roof.

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Middletown, Lake County

Built a combined library and senior center in one 12,377 sq ft facility, funded through USDA Rural Development and county support. The closest geographic and scale comparison to Sebastopol.

Read the funding announcement

<https://mikethompson.house.gov/newsroom/press-releases/rep-mike-thompson-announces-50000-federal-funding-lake-county-library-and>

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Randolph

Rebuilt its senior center into an intergenerational community center — basketball courts, fitness studios, and a teaching kitchen alongside senior programming, drawing residents of every age.

See the project

<https://bhplus.com/our-work/recreation-community-centers/intergenerational-community-center>

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A nine-person library staff became the town's default front door for almost everything — senior programming, job fairs, health outreach — earning "Best Small Library in America," 2023.

Read the story

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Embudo Valley (Dixon)

Grew from a rented room with two volunteer librarians into a 1.5-acre campus with a library, community center, orchard, park, and co-op grocery — built incrementally over three decades.

[Learn more](#)

<https://www.idealists.org/pt/ong/82ddd35ed93d488ea02340c51bac0c7d-embudo-valley-library-and-community-center-dixon>
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Reimagining the Civic Commons

National initiative (Akron, Lexington, Macon, Detroit, Memphis, and others) connecting libraries, parks, and community centers, with six years of published metrics and planning toolkits.

[See the metrics reports](#)

<https://civiccommons.us/2024/10/final-metrics-reports/>
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North Bergen

Library and Parks & Recreation leadership designed one shared building rather than two separate ones, including a teen makerspace open on community-center hours instead of library hours.

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Forest Hills Community Center, Queens

One building flips roles through the day: senior center in the morning, after-school program in the afternoon, teen center in the evening — over 500 neighbors pass through daily.

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The case for investing in shared space

Findings on how community-building spaces affect safety, civic growth, and local economies.

SAFETY

Community-designed environmental improvements were linked to **measurable drops in violent and firearm crime** across 505 street segments in Flint, MI.

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GROWTH & CIVIC LIFE

Rural school districts with library investment showed **improved standardized test performance** compared to districts without it.

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Library capital spending can produce **broad, positive effects on student outcomes** — often at lower cost than comparable school facility investment.

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Across six years, Civic Commons sites saw **increased cross-income and cross-race social connection** and rising public support for shared spaces.

[Source ↗](#)

<https://civiccommons.us/2024/10/final-metrics-reports/>

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Texas public libraries returned **\$4.64 in economic benefit for every \$1 invested** statewide in FY2015.

[Source ↗](#)

<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/roi>

Nine public library systems in southwestern Ohio generated **economic impact nearly four times** what was invested in their operations.

[Source ↗](#)

https://icma.org/sites/default/files/100005_ROI-public%20library.pdf

A statewide California study found libraries return **between \$2 and \$10 for every \$1 invested**, with most falling between \$3 and \$6.

[Source ↗](#)

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

Nearby restaurants, retail, and services see an estimated **23% "halo" increase in spending** from library visitors passing through.

[Source ↗](#)

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

Pittsburgh's Carnegie Library system was estimated to generate **over \$91 million in combined economic output** and sustain more than 700 jobs.

[Source ↗](#)

https://www.urbanlibraries.org/assets/MakingCitiesStronger_Full_Report.pdf

Location-analytics research shows libraries act as **steady daytime foot-traffic drivers** that downtown business districts can build activation plans around.

[Source ↗](#)

<https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/how-library-visits-create-daytime-foot-traffic-and-promote-economic-vitality-in-downtowns-a-case-study>

During the 2008 downturn, **over 30 million people** used library computers to search for work, and 3.7 million reported finding a job as a result.

[Source ↗](#)

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

What other communities added to their commons

Programs, partner organizations, and recurring events that other towns layered into a shared library / senior-center / community space once it existed.

WORKFORCE & SMALL BUSINESS

Turns the space into a resource for job seekers and entrepreneurs, not just a reading room.

One-to-one career & business consultations

Santa Barbara Public Library's "SBPL Works!" offers résumé help, interview practice, and bilingual job-seeker support directly out of the library — later expanded to disaster recovery assistance.

[Source](#)

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

Business incubation resources & coworking

The Urban Libraries Council's Business Value Calculator helps libraries track how coworking space, market-data access, and small-business workshops translate into new and strengthened local businesses.

[Source](#)

<https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/how-library-visits-create-daytime-foot-traffic-and-promote-economic-vitality-in-downtowns-a-case-study>

MAKER & CREATIVE SPACE

Shared tools and equipment that would be too costly for any one household or nonprofit to own alone.

Makerspace with 3D printers & laser cutter

Redwood City, CA built a library makerspace funded jointly by city capital funds and its library foundation, running teen STEAM workshops, adult drop-in hours, and community-partner classes.

Source

<https://www.redwoodcity.org/departments/library/rcpl-info/makerspace>

Tool-lending library

The Chicago Tool Library loans power tools, masonry, and woodworking equipment on a pay-what-you-can basis, growing to roughly 6,000 members and outgrowing its original space.

Source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Tool_Library

Shared teen makerspace

North Bergen, NJ designed a makerspace jointly with Parks & Recreation, keeping it open on community-center hours (longer than standard library hours) so teens always have access.

Source

<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/From-Co-location-to-Blended-Facilities>

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Brings services to where people already gather, lowering the barrier to using them.

On-site mental health counseling & food banks

Architecture firm HBM has designed library-anchored facilities that include space for social-service partners such as mental health counseling and food banks, alongside a cultural arts center in Maitland, FL.

Source

<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/community-building-for-modern-libraries-bringing-people-together-is-fundamental-lj231017>

Blood drives & senior wellness classes

San Bernardino, CA schedules recurring senior fitness classes, music-appreciation clubs, and bingo at its senior centers, plus periodic community blood drives — a simple recurring-calendar model.

Source

<https://www.pressreader.com/usa/the-sun-san-bernardino/20240105/281775633990788>

MARKETS & GATHERINGS

Recurring, low-cost events that give people a reason to return to the space every week.

Farmers market partnership

The Peabody Institute Library in Massachusetts partnered with local businesses and growers to help pioneer a farmers' market, pairing library foot traffic with fresh, local food access.

Source

<https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/04/community-centered-23-reasons-why-your-library-is-the-most-important-place-in-town/>

Storytime at the farmers market, concerts, movie nights

Small towns across Minnesota, Oregon, and California regularly pair library storytimes with farmers markets, and host outdoor concert series and movie nights on library or community-center grounds.

Source

https://www.hometownsource.com/county_news_review/county_news_review/free/local-community-events-calendar/article_06ee18e2-be24-4fc6-96d7-171be034c7dd.html

Community gardens & food-box programs

Queens Community House runs a community-run farmers market, a food box program, and communal cooking-and-eating events out of its neighborhood community centers.

Source

<https://www.qchnyc.org/communitycenters>

CIVIC & LIFELONG LEARNING

Keeps the building useful to residents who aren't there to borrow a book.

ESL classes, tech literacy, and teen programs

San Bernardino Public Library runs English-as-a-Second-Language classes and after-school teen programs, while St. Helena, CA offers basic computer and internet literacy classes for adults.

Source

https://napavalleyregister.com/star/lifestyles/st-helena-events-entertainment-calendar/article_29b223d2-bf34-4e34-9e1e-42e3273dc75d.html

Multi-use daily schedule

Forest Hills Community Center in Queens runs as a senior center each morning, an after-school site each afternoon, and a teen center each evening — one building, three communities served.

Source

<https://www.qchnyc.org/communitycenters>

Other ways a commons can generate revenue

Beyond the library itself — how similar shared spaces fund their own upkeep once built.

SPACE & MEMBERSHIP INCOME

The most common revenue base, and usually the easiest to start with.

Room and venue rental

A UK study of community hubs found that as hubs grow past micro-scale, building-rental income becomes a core part of the budget, and the largest hubs draw over 40% of revenue from service contracts, fees, and retail sales rather than grants alone.

Source

<https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-blogs/blog/community-hubs-the-importance-of-developing-a-sustainable-business-model/>

Weddings and private events

Community centers nationwide routinely rent halls for weddings, receptions, and celebrations of life — a low-overhead revenue stream requiring only a booking system and rate card, not new staff.

Source

<https://www.wedding-spot.com/wedding-venues/community-center-weddings/washington/seattle/>

Coworking desks & makerspace memberships

Redwood City's library makerspace blends free public drop-in hours with paid memberships and equipment-use fees for heavier users, funded jointly by city capital funds and its library foundation.

Source

<https://www.redwoodcity.org/departments/library/rcpl-info/makerspace>

RESIDENT BUSINESSES

Bringing in a mission-aligned tenant that pays rent and draws its own foot traffic.

Cooperatively-owned café & music venue

The New Deal Café in Greenbelt, MD operates inside the town's historic community center as a consumer cooperative owned by 200+ member-patrons — a restaurant, coffeehouse, and live music venue that generates its own revenue while functioning as a genuine gathering place.

Source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal_Cafe

Shared commercial kitchen

Shared kitchens can generate revenue well beyond basic rental — membership fees, hosting farmers markets and pop-ups, culinary classes, and food-safety certification training — while still serving a community-access mission.

Source

<https://www.thefoodcorridor.com/toolkit-guide/community-programming-and-services/>

EVENTS & VENDOR FEES

Stacks on top of the "halo spending" effect covered earlier — foot traffic that benefits the whole building.

Farmers market vendor stall fees

A market hosted on-site can charge vendors stall fees directly, while the foot traffic it draws also boosts spending at any café, retail, or rental tenants already in the building.

Source

<https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/04/community-centered-23-reasons-why-your-library-is-the-most-important-place-in-town/>

Intergenerational activities beyond reading groups

Formats other communities have used to connect seniors and young people, with documented outcomes.

CO-LOCATED CARE — THE MOST-STUDIED MODEL

Puts childcare and senior care in the same building rather than pairing them for occasional visits.

Preschool inside a senior-living community

Providence Mount St. Vincent in Seattle houses a full preschool inside its senior-living community. Five days a week, children and roughly 400 older residents share music, dance, art, lunch, storytelling, and joint community service like packing lunches for people experiencing homelessness — well-documented enough to be the subject of the acclaimed documentary *Present Perfect*.

Source

<https://www.providence.org/locations/wa/mount-st-vincent/facility-profile/intergenerational-learning-center>

REVERSE MENTORING — TEENS TEACHING SENIORS TECH

One of the most common and effective intergenerational formats currently in use.

Peer-to-peer tech support

Tech Buddies, a student-led nonprofit, has provided free one-on-one tech support to more than 2,500 seniors; organizers report the sessions routinely turn into genuine friendships rather than one-off tutoring.

Source

<https://www.channelkindness.org/tech-buddies/>

Measured confidence & connection gains

An evaluation of a similar digital-literacy campaign found over 80% of participating seniors felt more comfortable with technology afterward, and 70% reported feeling closer to their grandchildren as a result.

Source

<https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1155846>

Structured multi-week tech coaching

Michigan's Digital Connecting Corps pairs college-age "tech coaches" with older adults at senior centers over 9–12 week courses and distributes refurbished laptops — 96% of participants who requested a device received it along with training.

[Source](#)

<https://ginsberg.umich.edu/article/digital-connecting-corps-building>

DIGITAL LITERACY — WITH A REAL ECONOMIC PAYOFF

Beyond social connection, pairing generations around technology has a documented economic angle on both sides of the table.

Seniors' income rises with digital engagement

A 2026 study found digital engagement significantly increases income among older adults, working through four pathways — employment, material capital, social capital, and human capital — with the employment pathway alone accounting for roughly a third of the total effect.

[Source](#)

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/18/6/2913>

Digital literacy boosts local consumer spending

Research on the "longevity economy" found that digital literacy among older residents reduces precautionary saving and increases consumption spending — a direct contributor to local economic activity rather than just an individual quality-of-life gain.

[Source](#)

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-025-06175-y>

Paid youth work built into the model

Los Angeles's Bridge The Digital Divide pairs older adults with a Youth Digital Navigator program that provides paid work experience for young people alongside their volunteer mentorship — making the intergenerational pairing an income source for youth, not just a service to seniors.

[Source](#)

<https://la2050.org/blog/bridge-the-digital-divide-intergenerational-tech-ed>

A path back into the workforce

GetSetUp, a digital learning platform for older adults, hosted more than 233,000 classes on finance and employment in 2023 alone, often delivered through library and nonprofit partnerships, helping older adults re-enter the workforce with career, CV, and software skills.

[Source](#)

<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/02/older-adults-workforce-innovation-digital-economy/>

SHARED PROJECTS

Working side by side toward something tangible tends to build deeper connection than a scheduled visit.

Intergenerational gardening

The Imperial Beach Intergenerational Community Garden in California pairs seniors and youth to garden together; a similar Austin-based program pairs the two groups specifically around food justice, nutrition, and financial literacy, with produce often returning to shared community meals.

Source

<https://www.community-gardening.org/intergenerational-gardening-programs/>

Multigenerational choirs & music programs

Several senior communities host recurring choirs or joint music programs with local schools that evolve into standing community fixtures performing at town events, rather than one-off visits.

Source

<https://www.onwardlivinghq.com/1548/intergenerational-activities-for-seniors-and-youth/>

Structured mentorship pairing

Beyond informal interaction, formal mentoring relationships between teens and adults are linked in youth-mentoring research to meaningfully lower rates of substance use and school truancy — worth considering for a more intentional pairing program alongside drop-in intergenerational time.

Source

<https://beachwood.roseseniiorliving.com/the-importance-of-intergenerational-activities-in-seniors/>

The loneliness backdrop — and could a ping pong room help?

Why low-barrier, drop-in spaces matter right now, and what the research says about table tennis specifically as an intergenerational activity.

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

Context from the U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 Advisory on the healing effects of social connection.

Roughly half of U.S. adults report loneliness

In recent years, about one in two American adults has reported experiencing loneliness, with young adults among the hardest hit — and rates were already climbing before the pandemic widened the gap further.

Source

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

A health risk on par with smoking

Lacking social connection raises the risk of premature death about as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, with loneliness and isolation independently raising mortality risk by 26% and 29% respectively.

Source

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Weak local ties, even among neighbors

As of 2018, only 16% of Americans said they felt very attached to their local community, and only about 3 in 10 report knowing all or most of their neighbors — a gap that shared, low-barrier gathering spaces are well positioned to close.

[Source](#)

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Connected communities are measurably safer and stronger

A one standard-deviation increase in social connectedness was associated with a 21% reduction in murders and a 20% reduction in motor vehicle thefts; separately, the U.S. cities with the strongest resident attachment saw the greatest GDP growth over a three-year study period.

[Source](#)

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT PING PONG SPECIFICALLY

Chicago set up roughly 300 free public tables around the city in 2000 as a low-cost way to activate public space — a fun precedent, though not one that was formally studied for social outcomes. The research below looks at table tennis itself as a health and connection tool.

Lower loneliness among seniors who play

A 2018 University of Leeds study found that older adults who played regular group table tennis reported significantly lower loneliness and higher life satisfaction — directly relevant to a senior-center pairing.

[Source](#)

<https://sanweisport.com/en/5-scientific-benefits-of-playing-ping-pong-backed-by-real-studies/>

Studied across every age group, in social settings

A 2026 scoping review in Frontiers/MDOI examined 17 studies from 2010–2025 and found table tennis has been studied as a health-and-wellbeing tool across children, adolescents, older adults, and people with conditions like ADHD or Parkinson's — delivered specifically in community and social settings, not just competitive ones.

[Source](#)

<https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4663/14/2/63>

Low-barrier by design

Research reviews note table tennis requires no expensive equipment or physical contact, and its pace can be adapted for players of any age or skill level — exactly what makes it viable as a genuine intergenerational activity rather than a youth-only or senior-only one.

[Source](#)

<https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/2/3/107>

Benefits on the youth side too

A 2024 narrative review found table tennis training positively affected executive function, motor skills, coordination, and social behavior in children and adolescents.

[Source](#)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11353217/>

One table, very different populations

A dedicated nonprofit, PingPongParkinson, is built entirely around table tennis for people managing Parkinson's disease — a real-world example of how a single table can serve very different populations in the same room.

[Source](#)

<https://www.pingpongparkinson.org/why-ping-pong>

How a successful commons pays for itself over time

The research above doesn't just support each piece in isolation — it describes a self-reinforcing cycle. A well-used commons drives economic activity, which helps residents put down roots, which strengthens the tax base, which funds the next round of investment in the commons itself.

1 · INVEST Build the Commons Library + senior center + shared space 2 · GROW Economic Activity Rises Foot traffic, local spending, jobs 3 · RETAIN Residents Stay Engaged Social ties, lower turnover, civic pride 4 · REINVEST Tax Base Strengthens Property values, revenue, next investment THE COMMONS FLYWHEEL

RESEARCH BEHIND EACH STAGE OF THE LOOP

Invest → Grow

Library visitors generate an estimated 23% "halo" increase in spending at nearby businesses, and California libraries return \$2–\$10 in economic benefit for every \$1 invested.

[Source](#)

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

Grow → Retain

Across six years, Reimagining the Civic Commons sites saw rising cross-income and cross-race social connection and increasing public support for shared spaces — the pattern of residents staying invested in a place once it's working for them.

[Source](#)

<https://civiccommons.us/2024/10/final-metrics-reports/>

Retain → Reinvest

A three-year study of 26 U.S. cities found that the cities with the highest levels of resident attachment experienced the greatest GDP growth over the study period — engagement compounding directly into local economic strength.

[Source](#)

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Reinvest → Invest (the loop closes)

Nine public library systems in southwestern Ohio generated economic impact nearly four times what was invested in their operations — the kind of return that gives a city room to reinvest in the next phase of a shared space.

Source

https://icma.org/sites/default/files/100005_ROI-public%20library.pdf

COMPILED FOR SEBASTOPOL, CA — SEPTEMBER 2026 · ALL LINKS OPEN THE ORIGINAL SOURCE

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Across six years, Civic Commons sites saw **increased cross-income and cross-race social connection** and rising public support for shared spaces.

Source ↗

<https://civiccommons.us/2024/10/final-metrics-reports/>

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Texas public libraries returned **\$4.64 in economic benefit for every \$1 invested** statewide in FY2015.

Source ↗

<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/roi>

Nine public library systems in southwestern Ohio generated **economic impact nearly four times** what was invested in their operations.

Source ↗

https://icma.org/sites/default/files/100005_ROI_public%20library.pdf

A statewide California study found libraries return **between \$2 and \$10 for every \$1 invested**, with most falling between \$3 and \$6.

Source ↗

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

Nearby restaurants, retail, and services see an estimated **23% "halo" increase in spending** from library visitors passing through.

Source ↗

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

Pittsburgh's Carnegie Library system was estimated to generate **over \$91 million in combined economic output** and sustain more than 700 jobs.

Source ↗

https://www.urbanlibraries.org/assets/MakingCitiesStronger_Full_Report.pdf

Location-analytics research shows libraries act as **steady daytime foot-traffic drivers** that downtown business districts can build activation plans around.

Source ↗

<https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/how-library-visits-create-daytime-foot-traffic-and-promote-economic-vitality-in-downtowns-a-case-study>

During the 2008 downturn, **over 30 million people** used library computers to search for work, and 3.7 million reported finding a job as a result.

Source ↗

<https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf>

What other communities added to their commons

Programs, partner organizations, and recurring events that other towns layered into a shared library / senior-center / community space once it existed.

WORKFORCE & SMALL BUSINESS

Turns the space into a resource for job seekers and entrepreneurs, not just a reading room.

One-to-one career & business consultations

Santa Barbara Public Library's "SBPL Works!" offers résumé help, interview practice, and bilingual job-seeker support directly out of the library later expanded to disaster recovery assistance.

Source

[https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value of Libraries Economic Engine.pdf](https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf)

Business incubation resources & coworking

The Urban Libraries Council's Business Value Calculator helps libraries track how coworking space, market-data access, and small-business workshops translate into new and strengthened local businesses.

Source

[https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/how-library-visits-create-daytime-foot-traffic-and-promote-economic-vitality in downtowns a case study](https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/how-library-visits-create-daytime-foot-traffic-and-promote-economic-vitality-in-downtowns-a-case-study)

MAKER & CREATIVE SPACE

Shared tools and equipment that would be too costly for any one household or nonprofit to own alone.

Makerspace with 3D printers & laser cutter

Redwood City, CA built a library makerspace funded jointly by city capital funds and its library foundation, running teen STEAM workshops, adult drop-in hours, and community-partner classes.

Source

<https://www.redwoodcity.org/departments/library/rcpl-info/makerspace>

Tool-lending library

The Chicago Tool Library loans power tools, masonry, and woodworking equipment on a pay-what-you-can basis, growing to roughly 6,000 members and outgrowing its original space.

Source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Tool_Library

Shared teen makerspace

North Bergen, NJ designed a makerspace jointly with Parks & Recreation, keeping it open on community-center hours (longer than standard library hours) so teens always have access.

Source

<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/From Co location to Blended Facilities>

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Brings services to where people already gather, lowering the barrier to using them.

On-site mental health counseling & food banks

Architecture firm HBM has designed library-anchored facilities that include space for social-service partners such as mental health counseling and food banks, alongside a cultural arts center in Maitland, FL.

Source

<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/community building for modern libraries bringing people together is fundamental lj231017>

Blood drives & senior wellness classes

San Bernardino, CA schedules recurring senior fitness classes, music-appreciation clubs, and bingo at its senior centers, plus periodic community blood drives a simple recurring-calendar model.

Source

<https://www.pressreader.com/usa/the sun san bernardino/20240105/281775633990788>

MARKETS & GATHERINGS

Recurring, low-cost events that give people a reason to return to the space every week.

Farmers market partnership

The Peabody Institute Library in Massachusetts partnered with local businesses and growers to help pioneer a farmers' market, pairing library foot traffic with fresh, local food access.

Source

<https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/04/community centered 23 reasons why your library is the most important place in town/>

Storytime at the farmers market, concerts, movie nights

Small towns across Minnesota, Oregon, and California regularly pair library storytimes with farmers markets, and host outdoor concert series and movie nights on library or community-center grounds.

Source

<https://www.hometownsource.com/county news review/county news review/free/local community events calendar/article 06ee18e2 be24 4fc6 96d7 171be034c7dd.html>

Community gardens & food-box programs

Queens Community House runs a community-run farmers market, a food box program, and communal cooking-and-eating events out of its neighborhood community centers.

Source

<https://www.qchnyc.org/communitycenters>

CIVIC & LIFELONG LEARNING

Keeps the building useful to residents who aren't there to borrow a book.

ESL classes, tech literacy, and teen programs

San Bernardino Public Library runs English-as-a-Second-Language classes and after-school teen programs, while St. Helena, CA offers basic computer and internet literacy classes for adults.

Source

<https://napavalleyregister.com/star/lifestyles/st-helena-events-entertainment-calendar/article-29b223d2-bf34-4e34-9e1e-42e3273dc75d.html>

Multi-use daily schedule

Forest Hills Community Center in Queens runs as a senior center each morning, an after-school site each afternoon, and a teen center each evening — one building, three communities served.

Source

<https://www.qchnyc.org/communitycenters>

Other ways a commons can generate revenue

Beyond the library itself — how similar shared spaces fund their own upkeep once built.

SPACE & MEMBERSHIP INCOME

The most common revenue base, and usually the easiest to start with.

Room and venue rental

A UK study of community hubs found that as hubs grow past micro-scale, building-rental income becomes a core part of the budget, and the largest hubs draw over 40% of revenue from service contracts, fees, and retail sales rather than grants alone.

Source

<https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-blogs/blog/community-hubs-the-importance-of-developing-a-sustainable-business-model/>

Weddings and private events

Community centers nationwide routinely rent halls for weddings, receptions, and celebrations of life — a low-overhead revenue stream requiring only a booking system and rate card, not new staff.

Source

<https://www.wedding-spot.com/wedding-venues/community-center-weddings/washington/seattle/>

Coworking desks & makerspace memberships

Redwood City's library makerspace blends free public drop-in hours with paid memberships and equipment-use fees for heavier users, funded jointly by city capital funds and its library foundation.

Source

<https://www.redwoodcity.org/departments/library/rcpl-info/makerspace>

RESIDENT BUSINESSES

Bringing in a mission-aligned tenant that pays rent and draws its own foot traffic.

Cooperatively-owned café & music venue

The New Deal Café in Greenbelt, MD operates inside the town's historic community center as a consumer cooperative owned by 200+ member-patrons — a restaurant, coffeehouse, and live music venue that generates its own revenue while functioning as a genuine gathering place.

Source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal_Cafe

Shared commercial kitchen

Shared kitchens can generate revenue well beyond basic rental — membership fees, hosting farmers markets and pop-ups, culinary classes, and food-safety certification training — while still serving a community-access mission.

Source

<https://www.thefoodcorridor.com/toolkit-guide/community-programming-and-services/>

EVENTS & VENDOR FEES

Stacks on top of the "halo spending" effect covered earlier — foot traffic that benefits the whole building.

Farmers market vendor stall fees

A market hosted on-site can charge vendors stall fees directly, while the foot traffic it draws also boosts spending at any café, retail, or rental tenants already in the building.

Source

Intergenerational activities beyond reading groups

Formats other communities have used to connect seniors and young people, with documented outcomes.

CO-LOCATED CARE — THE MOST-STUDIED MODEL

Puts childcare and senior care in the same building rather than pairing them for occasional visits.

Preschool inside a senior-living community

Providence Mount St. Vincent in Seattle houses a full preschool inside its senior-living community. Five days a week, children and roughly 400 older residents share music, dance, art, lunch, storytelling, and joint community service like packing lunches for people experiencing homelessness — well-documented enough to be the subject of the acclaimed documentary *Present Perfect*.

Source

<https://www.providence.org/locations/wa/mount-st-vincent/facility-profile/intergenerational-learning-center>

REVERSE MENTORING — TEENS TEACHING SENIORS TECH

One of the most common and effective intergenerational formats currently in use.

Peer-to-peer tech support

Tech Buddies, a student-led nonprofit, has provided free one-on-one tech support to more than 2,500 seniors; organizers report the sessions routinely turn into genuine friendships rather than one-off tutoring.

Source

<https://www.channelkindness.org/tech-buddies/>

Measured confidence & connection gains

An evaluation of a similar digital-literacy campaign found over 80% of participating seniors felt more comfortable with technology afterward, and 70% reported feeling closer to their grandchildren as a result.

Source

<https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1155846>

Structured multi-week tech coaching

Michigan's Digital Connecting Corps pairs college-age "tech coaches" with older adults at senior centers over 9–12 week courses and distributes refurbished laptops — 96% of participants who requested a device received it along with training.

Source

<https://ginsberg.umich.edu/article/digital-connecting-corps-building>

DIGITAL LITERACY – WITH A REAL ECONOMIC PAYOFF

Beyond social connection, pairing generations around technology has a documented economic angle on both sides of the table.

Seniors' income rises with digital engagement

A 2026 study found digital engagement significantly increases income among older adults, working through four pathways — employment, material capital, social capital, and human capital — with the employment pathway alone accounting for roughly a third of the total effect.

Source

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/18/6/2913>

Digital literacy boosts local consumer spending

Research on the "longevity economy" found that digital literacy among older residents reduces precautionary saving and increases consumption spending — a direct contributor to local economic activity rather than just an individual quality-of-life gain.

Source

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-025-06175-y>

Paid youth work built into the model

Los Angeles's Bridge The Digital Divide pairs older adults with a Youth Digital Navigator program that provides paid work experience for young people alongside their volunteer mentorship — making the intergenerational pairing an income source for youth, not just a service to seniors.

Source

<https://la2050.org/blog/bridge-the-digital-divide-intergenerational-tech-ed>

A path back into the workforce

GetSetUp, a digital learning platform for older adults, hosted more than 233,000 classes on finance and employment in 2023 alone, often delivered through library and nonprofit partnerships, helping older adults re-enter the workforce with career, CV, and software skills.

Source

<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/02/older-adults-workforce-innovation-digital-economy/>

SHARED PROJECTS

Working side by side toward something tangible tends to build deeper connection than a scheduled visit.

Intergenerational gardening

The Imperial Beach Intergenerational Community Garden in California pairs seniors and youth to garden together; a similar Austin-based program pairs the two groups specifically around food justice, nutrition, and financial literacy, with produce often returning to shared community meals.

Source

<https://www.communitygardening.org/intergenerationalgardeningprograms/>

Multigenerational choirs & music programs

Several senior communities host recurring choirs or joint music programs with local schools that evolve into standing community fixtures performing at town events, rather than one-off visits.

Source

<https://www.onwardlivinghq.com/1548/intergenerationalactivitiesforseniorsandyouth/>

Structured mentorship pairing

Beyond informal interaction, formal mentoring relationships between teens and adults are linked in youth-mentoring research to meaningfully lower rates of substance use and school truancy — worth considering for a more intentional pairing program alongside drop-in intergenerational time.

Source

<https://beachwood.roseseniorkliving.com/theimportanceofintergenerationalactivitiesinseniors/>

The loneliness backdrop — and could a ping pong room help?

Why low-barrier, drop-in spaces matter right now, and what the research says about table tennis specifically as an intergenerational activity.

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

Context from the U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 Advisory on the healing effects of social connection.

Roughly half of U.S. adults report loneliness

In recent years, about one in two American adults has reported experiencing loneliness, with young adults among the hardest hit — and rates were already climbing before the pandemic widened the gap further.

Source

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

A health risk on par with smoking

Lacking social connection raises the risk of premature death about as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, with loneliness and isolation independently

raising mortality risk by 26% and 29% respectively.

Source

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Weak local ties, even among neighbors

As of 2018, only 16% of Americans said they felt very attached to their local community, and only about 3 in 10 report knowing all or most of their neighbors — a gap that shared, low-barrier gathering spaces are well positioned to close.

Source

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Connected communities are measurably safer and stronger

A one standard-deviation increase in social connectedness was associated with a 21% reduction in murders and a 20% reduction in motor vehicle thefts; separately, the U.S. cities with the strongest resident attachment saw the greatest GDP growth over a three-year study period.

Source

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT PING PONG SPECIFICALLY

Chicago set up roughly 300 free public tables around the city in 2000 as a low-cost way to activate public space — a fun precedent, though not one that was formally studied for social outcomes. The research below looks at table tennis itself as a health and connection tool.

Lower loneliness among seniors who play

A 2018 University of Leeds study found that older adults who played regular group table tennis reported significantly lower loneliness and higher life satisfaction — directly relevant to a senior-center pairing.

Source

<https://sanweisport.com/en/5-scientific-benefits-of-playing-ping-pong-backed-by-real-studies/>

Studied across every age group, in social settings

A 2026 scoping review in Frontiers/MDPI examined 17 studies from 2010–2025 and found table tennis has been studied as a health-and-wellbeing tool across children, adolescents, older adults, and people with conditions like ADHD or Parkinson's — delivered specifically in community and social settings, not just competitive ones.

Source

<https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4663/14/2/63>

Low-barrier by design

Research reviews note table tennis requires no expensive equipment or physical contact, and its pace can be adapted for players of any age or skill level — exactly what makes it viable as a genuine intergenerational activity rather than a youth-only or senior-only one.

Source

<https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/2/3/107>

Benefits on the youth side too

A 2024 narrative review found table tennis training positively affected executive function, motor skills, coordination, and social behavior in children and adolescents.

Source

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11353217/>

One table, very different populations

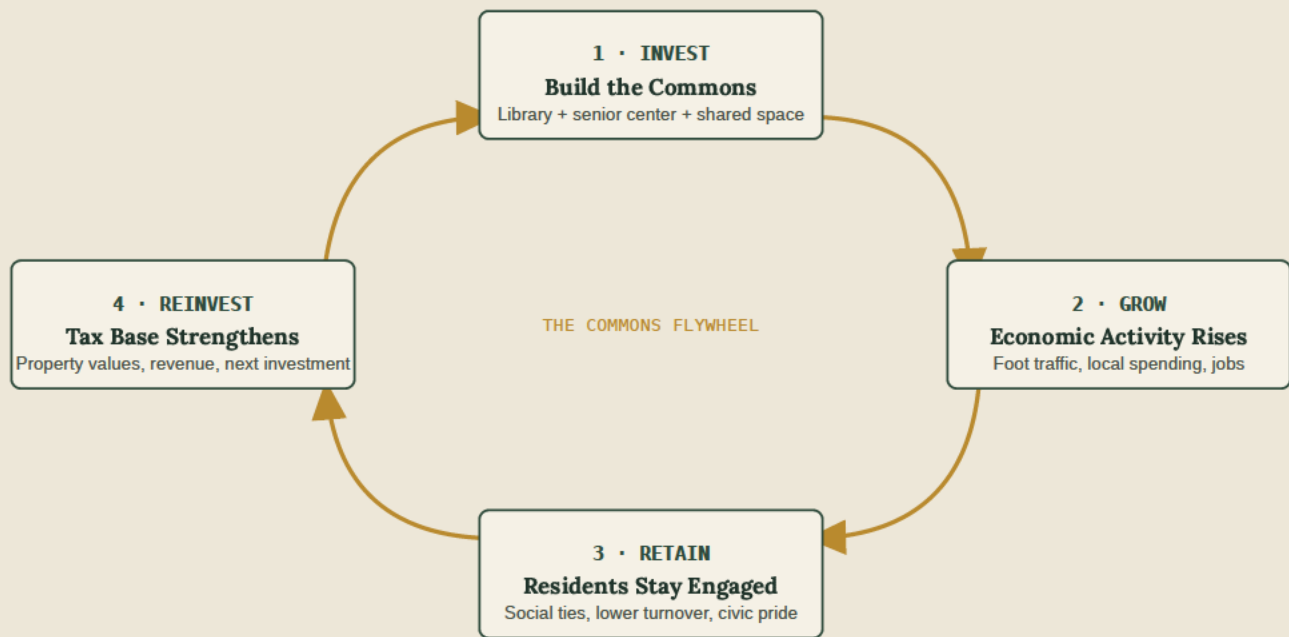
A dedicated nonprofit, PingPongParkinson, is built entirely around table tennis for people managing Parkinson's disease — a real-world example of how a single table can serve very different populations in the same room.

Source

https://www.pingpongparkinson.org/why_ping_pong

How a successful commons pays for itself over time

The research above doesn't just support each piece in isolation — it describes a self-reinforcing cycle. A well-used commons drives economic activity, which helps residents put down roots, which strengthens the tax base, which funds the next round of investment in the commons itself.



RESEARCH BEHIND EACH STAGE OF THE LOOP

Invest → Grow

Library visitors generate an estimated 23% "halo" increase in spending at nearby businesses, and California libraries return \$2 \$10 in economic benefit for every \$1 invested.

Source

[https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value of Libraries Economic Engine.pdf](https://library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Value-of-Libraries-Economic-Engine.pdf)

Grow → Retain

Across six years, Reimagining the Civic Commons sites saw rising cross-income and cross-race social connection and increasing public support for shared spaces the pattern of residents staying invested in a place once it's working for them.

Source

<https://civiccommons.us/2024/10/final-metrics-reports/>

Retain → Reinvest

A three-year study of 26 U.S. cities found that the cities with the highest levels of resident attachment experienced the greatest GDP growth over the study period — engagement compounding directly into local economic strength.

Source

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Reinvest → Invest (the loop closes)

Nine public library systems in southwestern Ohio generated economic impact nearly four times what was invested in their operations — the kind of return that gives a city room to reinvest in the next phase of a shared space.

Source

https://icma.org/sites/default/files/100005_R0I-public%20library.pdf

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