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New study: Waterfront park is Seattle's new weapon to retain tech talent

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Seattle's new waterfront park will have different economic impacts, including potentially stemming the loss of tech talent.

This is according to a new study by HR&A Advisors. The New York City-headquartered urban development consulting company found that the 20-acre park, along with other related downtown amenities, will generate an estimated \$288 million in annual economic impact, 2,385 full-time jobs and \$10 million a year in local taxes.

Friends of Waterfront Seattle, the city's nonprofit partner on the \$688 million park project, commissioned the study, which also forecasts a one-time boost from the five years of park construction that will create 6,240 full-time jobs, \$1.1 billion of economic impact and \$30 million in local taxes.

The potential to retain tech workers will be park's biggest benefit, said HR&A Vice Chair Candace Damon, a real estate and economic development expert and report author.

"We know that tech is the foundation of Seattle's economic strength," said Damon, who based the report on employment data showing that King County has 278,000 tech workers, along with another study plus a survey. One found that approximately 30 percent of tech workers in major U.S. cities may be continuously looking for jobs elsewhere, and the other estimated that half of Seattle's new resi-



Seattle is activating the new waterfront park by bringing in local acts like the Filthy FemCorps, which performed last year.

dents – largely tech workers – did not see themselves living in the city within five years. Damon said that based on this information, 83,300 tech workers may be looking to leave Seattle.

"We know that millennials in general, but tech workers in particular (as shown in other surveys), value highly amenitized urban places," Damon said.

To measure how Seattle's investments might help keep these workers, HR&A also looked at employment and other trends in Dallas, New York, Boston and other cities that have made investments similar to Waterfront Seattle Park.

"We concluded it is reasonable to assume that if you made this type of investment, you could retain 10 to 20 percent of the people at risk (of leaving)," Damon

said. This equals 8,300 to 16,700 jobs – jobs that generate other positions – so together the economic benefit of retaining the tech workers totals \$5.9 billion to \$11.8 billion.

Damon said that even without this chain of assumptions, Seattle has to retain just 1,400 tech employees to break even on the \$994 million spent building the park and operating it for 10 years.

HR&A Advisors' study also looked at other economic and fiscal impacts from the park including promoting social equity. The study forecasts the new park will bring 1.5 million new visitors generating \$191 million a year. In addition, food-and-beverage and other business opportunities for small, low- to middle-income businesses will create 30 jobs paying \$1 million in wages a year and generating \$90,000 of local fiscal impact.