

# Trail Towns

## Capturing Trail-Based Tourism

A Manual for Communities in Northern Michigan



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Photo by Sarah Traxler

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## Introduction

The human, health and community benefits associated with recreational trails have been widely studied and well documented. Trails can help encourage healthy lifestyles and active living by providing access to recreational activities. Trails can help preserve the environment by protecting important human and wildlife corridors and reducing air pollution through alternative modes of transportation. Trails can help foster a strong sense of community and place, providing an opportunity for social interaction and access to community amenities such as parks, neighborhoods and schools.

Trails can also have a significant impact on the local economy. Trails can help attract and support tourism and new business opportunities. In addition, local residents often spend money on trail-related activities and related businesses. As the link between trails and economic development is better understood, many communities are looking for ways to capitalize on their current trail networks.

This document is designed to discuss and illustrate how communities throughout Northern Michigan can utilize their local and regional trail systems to maximize trail-based tourism and future economic development opportunities - to redefine their community as a “Trail Town.” Although most of the examples in this document highlight communities with non-motorized trails, the concept also applies to communities with off-road vehicle (ORV) trails, water trails, equine trails and snowmobile trails. It is important to note that the elements in the document are only suggestions. Feel free to modify or adapt these concepts and recommendations to best suit your trail system and town. Your approach should be as unique as your community.

### Trail Towns - A National Perspective

The Trail Town concept is gaining traction along trails all over the country. This past year, the Kentucky Office for Adventure Tourism established a Trail Towns Program to promote and develop adventure tourism opportunities along the state’s extensive trail networks and wild rivers. Kentucky’s first Trail Town was designated in May and more than 30 communities have started the application process to become an official Kentucky

### The Trail Town Concept

“Communities are realizing the economic potential of trails as highly desirable destinations that bring dollars into the places they serve...trails and greenways attract visitors from near and far – visitors who facilitate job growth in tourism-related opportunities like restaurants, local stores and lodging.

Communities are increasingly utilizing this ‘Trail Town’ model of economic revitalization that places trails as the centerpiece of a tourism-centered strategy for small-town revitalization.”

*- Excerpted from a 2007 article published  
by the Rails to Trail Conservancy*



Trail Town. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy has established what is known as the *Appalachian Trail Community*. This program was created to assist communities along the Appalachian Trail advance economic development opportunities through outdoor recreation and tourism. With help from the National Parks System the North Country Trail Association recently established a Trail Town Program similar to that of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Although the North Country program is in its beginning stages, three Michigan communities (St. Ignace, Mackinaw city and Petoskey) have already been awarded Trail Town status at the time of this writing. A third Michigan community, Kalkaska, is currently awaiting word on whether it will be officially awarded Trail Town status.

In Southern Michigan, the Clinton River Watershed Council and the Huron River Watershed recently launched their own *Trail Town Programs*. The new initiatives are designed to help towns and cities within the watershed leverage the assets of the waterways for water-oriented community development.

In an effort to better understand the Trail Town concept and develop useful strategies and recommendations for communities in Northern Michigan, a comprehensive literature review was conducted in preparation for the writing of this manual. The literature review found a number of sources for specific components of the Trail Town concept, such as downtown design guidelines, walkability tactics and promotional strategies. However, only a handful of examples (noted above) were identified that addressed how each of the specific components work together to create a *Trail Town*. Therefore, the most thorough and comprehensive source identified, *Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania*<sup>1</sup> (published by the Allegheny Trail Alliance in 2005), was used as the basis for this document.

This document utilizes and summarizes the Allegheny Trail Alliance *Trail Towns* publication, applying concepts to local examples and opportunities throughout Northern Michigan. In conjunction with the development of this manual, five communities in Northeast Michigan (Mackinaw City, Atlanta, Grayling, Topinabee and Alpena) were



Financial Impacts of Trails: In July 2012, the Leelanau Trail was finally completed, creating a paved connection between Traverse City and Suttons Bay. The impact on Suttons Bay businesses was immediate. Larry Mawby, owner of L. Mawby Inc., an award winning winery just off the trail has seen a dramatic increase in sales to cyclist since the trail opened According to Mawby, “Once the trail was paved through to Suttons Bay, we saw at least an order of magnitude increase in bicycle visitors to the tasting room. We have regular wine-tasting bike tour groups stop in to taste and purchase our wines”.

TART Trails Inc,  
Newsletter (Fall 2013)

<sup>1</sup> *Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania*. A project of the Allegheny Trail Alliance. 2005

awarded service grants to participate in individual *Trail Town* Master Planning processes. The results and lessons learned from these five planning efforts are utilized and directly referenced in this document. Discussions regarding the Trail Town concept with local officials and trail planning organizations in several communities throughout Emmet and Charlevoix Counties are also referenced in this document. Examples from other communities and trails throughout Michigan are highlighted and described throughout the document.

We recognize the significant efforts that local governments, Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureaus, trail organizations, nature conservancy's, non-profits, state agencies and private businesses already provide in support of tourism, economic development and trail building throughout Northern Michigan. The strategies and recommendations outlined in this document are meant to highlight new ideas and spark discussions about how communities could better utilize their local trail assets to expand on and complement existing efforts. Furthermore, many of the strategies and recommendations outlined in this document support ongoing local, regional and even statewide efforts to capitalize and leverage local assets for community development and establish a place-based economy.

Trails & Placemaking: The Huron Boardwalk in downtown St. Ignace.



Placemaking Initiatives: Many components of the Trail Town concept fall in line with ongoing statewide initiatives and programs aimed to capitalize on and leverage local assets for economic development opportunities. These organizations and programs can provide additional strategies and recommendations that will only further enhance your local Trail Town effort.

1. MIplace Initiative: A collaboration between MSHDA, MEDC, MDOT, MDARD, MNDR, MDEQ and the Land Bank to help support and foster placemaking in Michigan communities.
2. Michigan Main Street Program
3. Great Lakes Commission: Programs focused on local waterfront economies.
4. Michigan Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA): Placemaking workshops.
5. Michigan Municipal League: *Eight Assets of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communities*:
  1. Physical Design & Walkability
  2. Entrepreneurship
  3. Transit Options
  4. Cultural Economic Development
  5. Green Initiatives
  6. Diversity/Multiculturalism
  7. Messaging & Technology
  8. Education

## What is a Trail Town?

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, a “Trail Town” is:

A destination along a long-distance trail. Whether on a rail trail, towpath, water trail, or hiking trail, trail users can venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of the nearby community with its own character and charm. It is a safe place where both town residents and trail users can walk, find the goods and services they need, and easily access both trail and town by foot or vehicle. In such a town, the trail is an integral and important part of the community.<sup>2</sup>

A Trail Town is an active, attractive, and interesting place with accessible and comfortable spaces, hosting a variety of activities and promoting social interaction and a strong sense of place. A Trail Town should meet both the needs of the trail users and the residents of the community. A Trail Town has the physical amenities that support trail users such as wide sidewalks, drinking fountains, and benches with shade. A Trail Town also has the business amenities to support day-trip trail users such as a bike shop, kayak outfitter and ice-cream shop and overnight trail users such as a hotel, casual restaurant and laundry services).

It is important for local leaders and trail planners to understand that most Trail Towns are not isolated communities; they are linked together by the trail, creating a regional destination for residents, trail users and tourists. For example, the North Central State Trail connects the towns of Gaylord, Vanderbilt, Wolverine, Topinabee, Cheboygan and Mackinaw City. Long-distance trails tend to be used by people seeking a day-long excursion, but some may be on the trail for multiple days. Most users will require some amount of goods and services. Long-distance trails attract tourists, especially trails that pass by interesting structures, scenic areas or places of historic interest. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *studies show that the longer the trail, the farther people will come to use it, the longer people will stay, and the more they will spend. A day-tripper*

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<sup>2</sup> Trail Towns – Capturing Trail Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania. Allegheny Trail Alliance (2005)

What type of community can establish a Trail Town? A Trail Town can be either a rural or urban community, and can be focused around any type of trail.



*will spend four times as much as a local user, and an overnight visitor will spend twice the amount a day-tripper will spend.*

Local officials and trail advocates from each community along the corridor should work together to support a positive trail experiences for the entire region. Community leaders and trail advocates should regularly communicate with neighboring jurisdictions about trail conditions, safety concerns and trail events. Regular communication can be especially useful if you and your neighboring community host large trail-themed tours like the *Michigander Bicycle Tour*.

Ultimately, a Trail Town should be a friendly place that supports, celebrates and encourages trail users to visit and welcomes them with warm hospitality. The basic elements of a “Trail Town Strategy” are described below.

#### Basic Elements of a Trail Town Strategy

- Entice trail users to get off the trail and into your town.
- Welcome trail users to your town by making information about the community readily available at the trail.
- Make a strong and safe connection between your town and the trail.
- Educate local businesses on the economic benefits of meeting trail tourists’ needs.
- Recruit new businesses or expand existing ones to fill gaps in the goods or services that trail users need.
- Promote the “trail-friendly” character of the town.
- Work with neighboring communities to promote the entire trail corridor as a tourist destination.

What is a Trail Town?

Economic Impact According to a 2006 Active Outdoor Recreation Economy Report, the annual average biking-related spending by participant equaled:

- Number of day trips: 7
- Average spending per day trip: \$37
- Number of overnight trips: 8
- Average spending per overnight trip: \$218
- Retail sales for gear: \$77

- Michigan Sea Grant

What is a Trail Town? A Trail Town has the physical amenities that support trail users such as wide sidewalks, drinking fountains and benches with shade.





According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *it is important to understand that the Trail Town initiative must come from within your community. Becoming a Trail Town is as much about local attitude as it is about physical improvements.* Listed below are several considerations local officials and trail planners should review as they begin to create a Trail Town environment in their community.

#### Considerations in Creating a Trail Town Environment

- Your town can grow and thrive in new ways because of a nearby recreational trail.
- The more Trail Towns there are along a corridor offering hospitality and services, the more attractive the region will be for tourism. Your neighboring town's success is important to your town's success.
- Leadership and initiative from within the community will be necessary to turn your town into a Trail Town.
- A safe and well-maintained trail is the centerpiece, so it's important to cooperate with and support the local trail-building and maintenance group.
- A core bicycle and pedestrian-friendly philosophy should be adopted by your town.
- Trail users should be accommodated both physically and socially within the town.
- A work plan, your blueprint, should be developed and then chipped away at as funds and energy allow. Make changes as successes (or failures) happen.
- Goods and services for trail users will be appealing to other types of tourists and residents.
- Local law enforcement agents can be important ambassadors in your town and along the trail. For examples, the U.S. Coast Guard can be especially helpful if you have Great Lakes water trails along your shoreline.

Considerations in Creating a Trail Town Environment - One way to establish a core bicycle and pedestrian-friendly atmosphere in your town is to adopt a *Complete Streets* policy (resolution or ordinance). *Complete Streets* are streets designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Complete Streets should provide better mobility to both citizens and trail users and safer trail-to-town connections.

By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities can direct their local planning and transportation officials to routinely consider, design for and build streets with safe access for all users.



Photo Provided by MML (Flickr)

## The Trail Town and Main Street

As in any public initiative, the first step in creating a Trail Town environment is to organize the community and key stakeholders. The Allegheny Trail Alliance notes that a great way to organize the local community is to utilize the National Main Street Center's "Main Street Four Point Approach." The *Main Street Four Point Approach* is a community-driven, comprehensive strategy used to revitalize downtown and neighborhood business districts throughout the United States. Developed by the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the *Main Street Four Point Approach* has assisted over 2,000 communities throughout the United States create vibrant and healthy downtowns and commercial areas.

Communities can utilize the following *Four Points*<sup>3</sup> to create a successful "Trail Town" environment.

Organizing gets everyone working toward the same goal. The tough work of building consensus and cooperation among groups that have an important stake in the downtown area can be eased by using the basic formula of a hands-on, volunteer driven program and an organizational structure consisting of a board and committees to direct the program.

Promotion sells the image and promise of a Trail Town to all prospects. Marketing the downtown's unique characteristics to local customers, investors, new businesses, and visitors requires an effective promotion strategy. It forges a positive town image through advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out by the local volunteers.

Design gets a Trail Town into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets such as historic buildings and traditional downtown layout is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere created through attractive window displays, professional signage, well-maintained sidewalks, accessible parking areas, appropriate street

The Main Street Program in Northern Michigan - This past spring, the Boyne City Main Street Program celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Among its many accomplishments, Boyne City's Main Street Program has worked to help install new streets, sidewalks and lighting, assisted in façade improvement projects, initiated new events and festivals, and expanded the local farmers market.



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<sup>3</sup> National Main Street Center: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>

lights, and inviting landscaping conveys a visual message about what a Trail Town is and what it has to offer.

Economic Restructuring finds a new purpose for the town's enterprises. By helping existing downtown businesses expand and by recruiting new ones to respond to today's market, Main Street programs help convert unused space into productive property and increase the competitiveness of business enterprises.

### **Getting Organized to Create Your Trail Town**

In order to create, plan for and implement a successful Trail Town initiative, it is important to have the right team assembled from the community. The following sections describe some of the important roles and activities that will need to be created and/or achieved to establish a Trail Town environment in communities throughout Northern Michigan. As local leaders and trail planners review these sections it can be important to identify where additional assistance might be needed.

A number of local, regional and state organizations that participated in the development of this document are willing to assist local leaders and trail planners in several of these organizing and implementation efforts, including the Top of Michigan Trails Council, the Cheboygan County Community Development Office, the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Similar organizations throughout Northern Michigan can assist local leaders and trail planners in organizing implementation efforts.

**A. Define the Trail Corridor.** Before any Trail Town initiative can get started, it is important to understand the physical and administrative structure of the trail. Local leaders and trail planners should ask themselves a series of questions (see subset on the next page and a full list in the Appendix) to better understand the trail system located in their community.

Questions to Help Define the Trail Corridor - Although it might seem obvious, it is important to understand what type of trail is located in your community. For example, Michigan's public ORV trail/route system provides four types of riding opportunities: (1) motorcycle trails, (2) all-terrain vehicles (ATV) trails, (3) ORV routes which are open to ORVs of all sizes including Secretary of State licensed vehicles, and (4) scramble areas.



It's also important to understand who is responsible for the local trail system. If your community is located along a state trail, then most likely the DNR is in charge of maintenance and upkeep. However, there may be instances where local jurisdictions are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of multi-jurisdictional trails. Do you know where your local jurisdiction's maintenance responsibility ends and another's begins? Do you know who to call if there is a problem along a portion of the trail that is not your responsibility but is posing a safety threat to your citizens?

### Questions to Help Define the Trail Corridor

- What kind of trail is it?
- How long is the trail and where does it connect to?
- Who manages the trail and who is responsible for daily upkeep and annual maintenance?
- Who is the key contact or liaison for the trail?

B. **Assess Local Capacity.** A Trail Town initiative could be part of a business district, DDA or community revitalization plan. Therefore, it is important to understand how well your local leaders are able to plan and implement new programs or ideas. Local leaders and trail planners should ask themselves a series of questions (see subset at right, a full list is outlined in Appendix A.) to better understand the local capacity in their community.

Once you have answered these questions, you are positioned to start the process of creating a Trail Town in your community. Whether the Trail Town effort is spearheaded by an established business revitalization organization, a local government or a regional trail organization, at least one leader or community activist will be needed to drive the process. However, the success of the Trail Town effort ultimately depends on a larger community engagement effort.

C. **Create or Enhance Your Local Organization.** Everyone in the community has a stake in the future of their downtown. In order to be successful, a local downtown revitalization program must involve as many interested groups and individuals as possible from throughout the community. Citizens, business owners and local officials all need to support downtown revitalization efforts. Local officials and trail organizers should also seek support from local civic groups, historical societies, financial institutions, religious institutions and other civic organizations (both public and private) that have a stake in the downtown. In addition, it can be helpful to seek support from organizations that have a stake in the health and well-being of the community (e.g., schools, hospitals).

### Asses Local Capacity

- Does a downtown or business district revitalization organization currently exist?
- If so, what kind of organization is it?
- Does the organization implement activities using the Main Street Four Point Approach?
- Who would be willing to serve as the *catalyst* to start the *Trail Town* effort?

### Create You Local Organization

It is very important to recruit a wide variety of community stakeholders to the Trail Town Committee. The Boyne City Trail Town Committee has been very active, seen hear mapping their “connecting elements” (page 14).



As previously stated, there are a number of local organizations and community stakeholders working on downtown revitalization in communities throughout Northern Michigan. For some communities, the Trail Town concept might work as the primary vision for which revitalization efforts can be focused. For other communities, the Trail Town concept might expand on and complement existing revitalization efforts.

D. **Develop the Local Volunteer Base.** A Trail Town initiative requires support from the entire community. In addition to mobilizing community organizations, it is important to mobilize local volunteers. Volunteers bring new and different ideas forward and can help carry out activities. In addition, volunteers can help promote the positive aspects of the Trail Town initiative through word-of-mouth. Local leaders and trail planners should make efforts to ensure the volunteer base is as broad as possible.

E. **Get the Message Out Locally.** Marketing and advertising are essential to promote trail use and appreciation. A marketing committee can be helpful in organizing these efforts. A catchy name for the organization is also helpful - something that lets people know what the organization does and is easily remembered. The marketing committee will need to develop a relationship with the local media, such as the newspaper's editorial board. Explain to them what local leaders and trail planners are doing and how they can help. It can also be helpful to submit articles (with photos) to local organizations in the community, establish social media platforms, speak at local civic and community service meetings (e.g., planning commission, city council, rotary) and have a presence at community events and festivals.

F. **Build Partnerships.** As previously stated, implementing a Trail Town initiative requires support from the entire community. Building partnerships with existing community groups and stakeholders will help to develop broad-based local interest and buy-in as the initiative moves forward. Local leaders and trail planners should identify and meet with existing community groups and key figures to discuss ways to unite the community around the Trail Town effort.

Marketing Your Trail Town - It can be helpful to establish a catchy name for the organization leading the Trail Town effort - something that lets people know what the organization does and is easily remembered.



**G. Find the Resources to Implement Your Trail Town Concept.** Implementing a comprehensive Trail Town initiative will require funding. Public funding through grants and other economic assistance programs can be secured for community and economic development initiatives from local, state and federal government programs. These financial aid programs may include Michigan Trust Fund grants from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Enhancement grants from the Michigan Department of Transportation, development grants from the Coastal Zone Management Program, Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the USDA.

Funding can also be secured from local foundations, trail and recreation advocacy organizations, and local conservation groups. Local leaders or a professional grant writer can be helpful in researching and writing grants on behalf of the Trail Town initiative and local communities. In addition, organizations like the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (serving northern Michigan, including Emmet and Cheboygan Counties), the regional Councils of Government, and the Michigan Municipal League can be very helpful in identifying grant opportunities.

A Recreation Authority property tax millage could also be used to finance the construction and maintenance of pathways and/or acquire property. The Recreational Authority Act 321 of 2000 authorizes a Recreational Authority to levy a tax of not more than 1 mill for a period of not more than 20 years on all of the taxable property within the territory of the authority. A Recreation Authority may be a good option for communities in which the trail passes through neighboring jurisdictions.

**H. Take One Step at a Time.** It is important to understand that a Trail Town initiative does not happen overnight; it develops and evolves over time. This may be especially true in those communities where the trail system is fairly new and where there is not a local organization already working on economic development programs. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *the activities that the community undertakes should be evaluated by their outcomes, not outputs. You may want to start implementation with a small project with good potential, one that might have good “bang for the buck.” Use resources prudently on projects that are well thought out and their potential impact thoroughly evaluated.*

Financial Resources - Local funding tools like Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or funds from a Corridor Improvement Authority (CIP) may also be used to finance Trail Town projects.

## Trail Town Design Issues

An important step in preparing a plan for your Trail Town is to assess the physical characteristics of your central business district and its relationship to the trail. A thorough assessment will help local officials and trail planners understand the trail-to-town opportunities and challenges a visitor might encounter. A sample physical assessment worksheet to help assess the characteristics of the relationship between the central business district and the trail is provided in the Appendix C.

**Determine the Type of Trail in Your Community.** The first item to evaluate in assessing the physical characteristics of your town is to determine the type of trail that runs through or in close proximity to your central business district. While this assessment might seem obvious, local officials and trail planners are often surprised to discover all the different activities that take place on their trail.

For example, in the summer months the North Central State Trail from Gaylord to Mackinac City accommodates cyclers, hikers, walkers, and nature observers. In the winter months, the trail accommodates snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. The North Central State Trail is not exclusively one type of trail. The trail is used by different users at different times of the year and for different purposes.

It can be useful to understand which types of users are likely to be on your trail and at which time of year. For instance, the trail may be used by hikers and cyclists from March through October and snowmobilers from November through March. Understanding these prime-use seasons may be helpful in planning for regular grooming and maintenance activities. It can also be helpful when planning specific trail-associated events or promotional activities. This information can also help local business owners better understand potential trail clientele.

For water trails, it can be useful to understand how late into the season kayakers venture out onto local waterways. Many communities remove their dock and boat-launch facilities just after Labor Day weekend. However, if your community has an active

**Determining the Type of Trail in Your Community:** It is very important to thoroughly understand what type of trail runs through your community and what activities are taking place on the trail.



Photo Provided by Emily Meyerson

**Understanding Trail Conflicts:** If your trail accommodates different uses, it is important to understand the potential conflicts that may arise.



paddling organization or is an attractive paddling destination, local officials should consider leaving the appropriate support infrastructure in place until mid-to late fall.

Understand Trail Geography. Another important item to assess is the physical relationship between the trail and the central business district (i.e., the *trail-to-town relationship*), including factors such as linear distance, elevation change and range. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, the linear relationship can be described in one of three ways: (1) Internal Trails; (2) Adjacent Trails; and (3) Removed Trails (see illustrations at right).

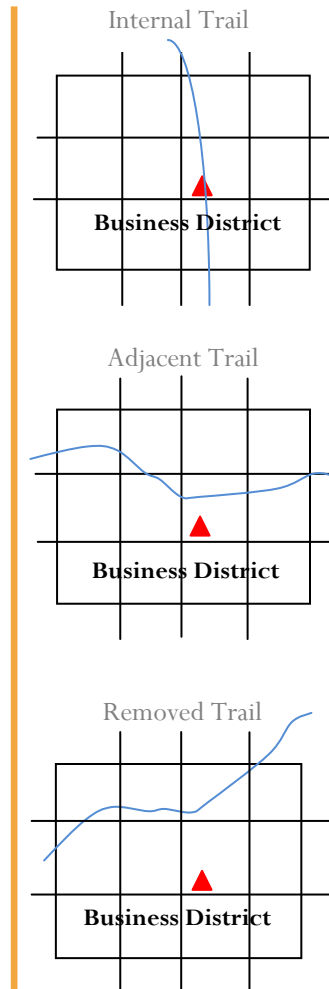
Internal Trails are located directly through the central business district.

Adjacent Trails are located immediately adjacent to the downtown, usually within a half-mile of the central business district.

Removed Trails are located up to two miles away from the central business district.

Pictured Below - Examples of Internal Trails:

- (A) ORV Trail in Atlanta
- (B) Water Trail in Port Huron
- (C) Non-Motorized Trail in Reed City





While the Trail Town concept is primarily geared toward towns with traditional downtowns, this concept is very much applicable in rural communities. Even if your community is just a handful of shops and a gas station, most rural communities have at least one center of commercial activity.

Understanding the elevation change or “grade” between the trail and the central business district is also very important. This can be especially important for long-distance trail users who may be carrying heavy loads of gear, or parents pulling kids in trailers.

The last item to assess is the distance between trailheads, as well as the distance from trailheads to other sites/features within the community or along the trail that might attract tourists. As the range between trailheads increases, the more likely it is that goods and services will be welcomed by trail users. The distance between trailheads on many of the regional trails throughout Northern Michigan suggest there is a need for basic goods and services in several trail communities, such as a restaurant, ice cream shop or grocery store. In addition, it appears the distance between multiple segments of many Northern Michigan trails would suggest a need for more extensive or overnight services, such as a hotel and laundromat.

Other activities or attractions near the trail (e.g., beaches, parks, museums) will offer trail users additional experiences in your community. Therefore, local business owners may wish to expand their offerings of goods and services to meet the demand of visitors using more than one attraction.

**Identify Key Connecting Elements.** In addition to understanding the physical relationship between the trail and the central business district, it is also important to understand the function and inter-relationship of six *connecting elements* between the trail and central business district. The following pages summarize each of the connecting elements.

1. **Trailhead.** The Trailhead is the area where users can access the trail by road, providing parking and amenities for trail users. In many instances the Trailhead is the point at which the trail user may first come in contact with the community and the point at which trail users will decide whether or not to enter into the community. Therefore,

#### Distance Between Trailheads:

Understanding the distance between trailheads along a trail can have significant safety implications for trail users. For example, many regional water-trail planning initiatives on the Great Lakes are working to identify access points and port-of-refuge sites for every five miles of shoreline (below: potential water trail access site in Mackinaw City).



#### Connecting Elements:

1. **Trailhead**
2. Portal
3. Pathway
4. Gateway
5. Center
6. Nodes



it is imperative for local communities to make the Trailhead a positive and welcoming place.

Trail planners and local officials should develop clear and appropriate information about the community for visitors and make it available at the Trailhead. By providing such amenities as water and toilet facilities (see more below), the community welcomes visitors, showing hospitality and inviting them to visit the town. Whenever possible, these amenities should be available to trail users all year round (or at least when the trail is being actively used). In addition, it is important to provide signs that direct people to the Trailhead.

#### *Important Trailhead Amenities*

- Bathrooms
- Water
- Benches
- Trash Receptacles
- Picnic Tables
- Shelter
- Parking (with shade)
- Air Pump
- WiFi
- Pop Machine
- Directional Signs
- Welcome Sign
- Trail Map
- Community Information
- Dog Waste Bags
- Hazard Warnings
- Storage (bike rack, kayak rack, hitching post)

#### *Trailhead Amenities - Bathrooms*

One of the most important amenities for any Trailhead is a bathroom. Bathrooms not only provide toilet facilities, but often they are used by trail users to fill water bottles, freshen up, and change clothes. Many jurisdictions close their traditional brick-and-mortar bathrooms during the winter months, even if the trail is still being actively used all year round. If year-round access to your traditional bathroom is not possible, local jurisdictions should work to provide portable (and accessible) bathroom facilities.

#### *Trailhead Amenities - Signs*

Signs and markers are essential components on any trail system and should be incorporated into local and regional trail planning efforts. *Informational signs* direct and guide users along trails in the most simple and direct manner. *Directional signs*

#### Trailhead Amenities - Bathrooms:

Wherever possible, local jurisdictions should work to provide portable bathroom facilities during the time of year when their brick-and-mortar facilities are closed. ADA-accessible portable toilets, like the one pictured below in Flat Rock near the Huron River Water Trail, are relatively inexpensive.



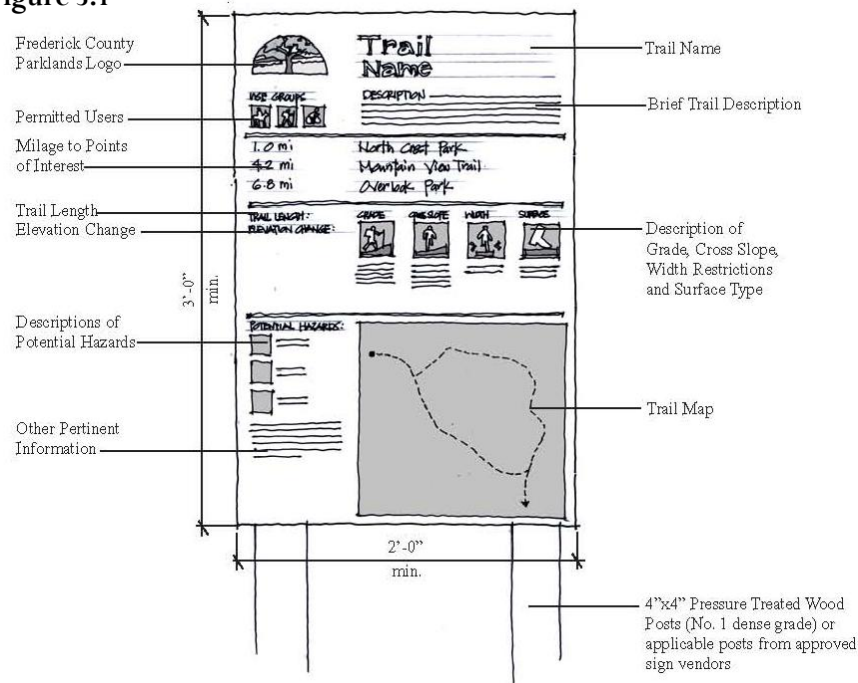
#### Trailhead Amenities:

An ATM machine at a Pere Marquette Trailhead in Coleman.



inform the trail user where they are along the trail and the distance to specific destinations and points of interest. *Interpretive signs* offer educational information about the trail and/or the surrounding area and community. *Warning signs* alert trail users to potentially hazardous or unexpected conditions. *Regulatory signs* inform trail users of the “rules of the trail” as well as other rules and regulations. Informational signs should be provided at each Trailhead and major access point to convey accurate and detailed information about existing trail conditions and available facilities. In researching best practices for trailhead signs for this document, we found that the Bikeway and Trail Design Standards and Planning Guidelines<sup>4</sup> from Fredrick County, Maryland, provided a comprehensive set of recommendations (see figure 3.1 below).

**Figure 3.1**



<sup>4</sup> Bikeway and Trail Design Standards and Planning Guidelines (2003) Fredrick County Parklands, Fredrick County Department of Parks and Recreation

**Trailhead Amenities - Signs:**

Directional signs may be as simple as symbols and directional arrows, like this sign for ORV riders pictured below in Atlanta.



**Trailhead Amenities - Signs:**

To avoid user conflicts, it is very important to include signs at your Trailhead that identify which types of uses are allowed on the trail.



**Trailhead Amenities - Signs:**

Sign design, color and layout (including any trail logo) can help to reinforce regional and local branding efforts.



The Arcadia Dunes Baldy Trailhead sign, pictured below, is an example of a well-designed Trailhead sign in Northern Michigan. The sign was developed by the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.



### *Trailhead Amenities - Business Amenity Signs*

As previously stated, the Trailhead is the point at which the trail user may first come into contact with the community and the point at which the user will decide whether or not to enter your town. Therefore, it is very important (whenever possible) to include informational signs about area businesses and attractions at the Trailhead. This may be as simple as symbols with directional arrows to a nearby gas station or restaurant or as detailed as a map of the downtown with a list of businesses and attractions (see right).

### *Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trailheads & Business Signs*

There are many multi-jurisdictional trails throughout Northern Michigan that are owned and managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR has very strict guidelines about the size, look and content of signs at Trailheads. In general, the DNR does not allow private businesses to advertise and locate signs at their Trailheads. However, the DNR has been willing to work with local jurisdictions on signs that describe generic amenities of nearby downtowns and commercial areas. It is imperative that your Trail Town team work with DNR staff to explore opportunities for sign development.

### *Trailhead Amenities - Cultural Heritage Signs*

Trailheads can also be an excellent place to display information about the history, natural resources and unique cultural aspects of your community. If your local trail is part of a regional rail-trail, then perhaps your community has a historic trail depot your community can highlight. If your community is located along a water trail, perhaps your community can work with the regional watershed organization to provide information about how the river interacts with the watershed. If you have an ORV trail or snowmobile trail in your community, perhaps your community could provide information about how one might join the local trail riding club or volunteer for trail maintenance.

### *Trailhead Amenities - Cultural Heritage (Art)*

Trailheads can be an excellent place to display artwork that highlights the unique and cultural aspects of your community and your trail system. When considering the size, color and materials of the artwork display, be aware that it may be used for other

Trailhead Amenities - Business Amenity Signs: It is very important to have information about and direction to downtown businesses (and preferably a map) at the Trailhead, like the sign pictured second below in Indian River.



Trailhead Amenities - Cultural Heritage Signs: Trailheads can be an excellent place to display information about the area's natural resources, like this watershed map pictured below along the Huron River Water Trail in Flat Rock.



unintended purposes - that is, trail users may sit on it to tie their shoe or kids may climb on it.

Trailhead Amenities - Art: Art located at Trailheads can highlight unique cultural aspects of the community, like the sculpture pictured below along the Iron Ore Heritage Trail in celebration of the Upper Peninsula's mining heritage.



### *Water Trailhead*

The number and quality of Trailhead amenities for water trails will likely depend upon the location of the Trailhead. For example, a Trailhead located in a marina may include large areas for parking, restrooms, showers, and an American Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible kayak launch. On the other hand a Trailhead located at a road ending may only have a small path from which paddlers can access the water. One of the most important Water Trailhead amenities is parking. Whenever possible, parking should be in close proximity to the point of water access. In addition, parking lots should be able to accommodate large trailers and equipment.

In 2004, the National Park Service developed a guidebook<sup>5</sup> to assist in the development of canoe and kayak launches. The document highlights a few general recommendations for designing an accessible launch, including:

#### Height Above Water:

Between 9 inches and 2 feet above the highest expected water level.

#### Width:

At least 5 feet wide, preferably 6 to 12 feet.

#### Length:

At least 25 feet long to allow paddlers “dry” access to the entire length of their boats.

#### Support:

Handrails or other support structures, including step-down designs or ropes, help paddlers balance their weight during put-in and take-out.

#### Location:

Ideally in areas without heavy flow, erosion, exposure to elements, heavy boat traffic, or fragile riparian habits.

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<sup>5</sup> *Logical Lasting Launches* (2004) National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. Written and produced by Caroline Wolf, Student Conservation Association

Water Trailhead - Whenever possible, parking areas at water trail access points should be able to accommodate large trailers and paddling equipment (e.g., kayaks, canoes, oars and life-jackets).



Water Trailhead - A kayak rack allows for temporarily storage of kayaks and canoes. This kayak rack, in downtown Rochester, allows paddlers to lock their kayak and walk to nearby restaurants.



### ADA Accessibility Guidelines

Guidelines for newly designed, constructed and altered recreation facilities issued by the ADA in 2002 require that all public boat launches (which include fixed and floating structures of all sizes) comply with ADA Accessibility Guidelines. A copy of ADAAG standards for boating facilities is available online through the National Park Service.<sup>6</sup> Within that publication, Michael Passo, an experienced paddler who uses a wheelchair, recommends the following design accommodations in order to provide access for paddlers with disabilities.

#### A Clear Access Route

Surface grade, width and cross slope need to be as accessible as a particular location will allow. The surface should be as even and level as possible (not exceeding 8.33% slope or 2% cross slope) and without gaps or interruptions. The route should be clearly marked.

#### A Level and Stable Landing/Loading Area

There should be an area adjacent to the loading area that is level, stable and at least 60 feet square. This can be anywhere adjacent to the loading area, including in water up to 12 inches deep. An accessible back-country canoe launch might incorporate a large, flat rock surface that is 8 to 12 inches under the surface of the water and has a gradual access rout made of native soil. The transfer from a wheelchair on that rock to a floating canoe could be nearly level.

#### Transfer Assistance

Once a paddler is beside the boat, the greatest challenge to using a launch can be getting down into the seat of the boat. Whether it is a highly developed launch or only the bank of a lake, it is difficult to transfer to a moving boat. Making the transfer easier will help paddlers considerably.

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<sup>6</sup> Logical Lasting Launches. (2004) National Park Serve  
<http://www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/rtca/helpfultools/launchguide/title.pdf>

Water Trail ADA Accessibility Guidelines: Whenever possible, local water trail planning initiatives should include ADA-accessible kayak launches. Simple launches, like the self manipulated launch one pictured below in St. Clair can be purchased for a few thousand dollars.



Water Trail ADA Accessibility Guidelines: A solar powered electronic lift kayak launch system, like the one pictured below in Wyandotte can be purchased for around \$30,000.





### *Equestrian Trailheads*

Like water trails (and other trails where users frequently utilize trailers), one of the most important amenities for Equestrian Trailheads is parking. Whenever possible, parking lots should be able to accommodate large groups and several trailers, with easy drive-in and pull-out access. In addition, it can be helpful for the Trailhead to include loading and unloading ramps, tie-up areas, fresh water and small corrals.

### *ORV and Snowmobile Trailheads*

While no specific official best practices could be found for this document, observations and interviews with trail riders indicate that parking and wayfinding signs are two important features at ORV and Snowmobile Trailheads. Parking lots tend to be quite large, with plenty of room to maneuver trailers, snowmobiles and ORVs. Plowing the parking area during the winter months is essential to allow snowmobilers access to the trails. Wayfinding signs are also very important. Wayfinding signs not only direct trail users to the trail, they also direct users to paved shoulders or other routes that lead into nearby downtowns.

If the Trailhead is adjacent to a busy road, it is important to include signs that warn drivers that trail users may be crossing the road.

ORV & Snowmobile Trailheads - Large parking areas and wayfinding signs are important features at ORV and Snowmobile Trailheads. The pictures below illustrate an ORV and snowmobile trailhead just outside Grayling.



Equestrian Trailheads - A hitching post along the Wadam/Avoca Trail in St. Clair County.



Equestrian Trailheads - Whenever possible, Equestrian Trailheads should be able to accommodate large trailers, with easy drive-in and pull-out access. The sign below illustrates how trail riders should park at the Lime Creek Conservation Area in Mason, Iowa.

Picture provided by the  
Mason City Globe Gazette



2. Portal. The Portal is the point at which users of the trail exit the Trailhead with the intent of visiting the nearby community. The Portal should be a welcoming point that clearly begins the process of directing the trail user through the community. Trail planners and local officials should take steps to be sure the Portal is welcoming, using wayfinding signs, sidewalks and pathways to clearly direct trail users into the central business district. In some instances the Portal may also function as the “Gateway” (see description on page 25) on an internal trail.

Portal - The Portal should be welcoming, using sidewalks, pathways and wayfinding signage to clearly direct trail users to the central business district. Picture (A) shows a pedestrian crosswalk directly leading from the Trailhead into downtown Indian River. Picture (B) shows a well-marked walkway from a trail into downtown Marquette, and (C) shows a pathway from the *Dequinder Cut* into downtown Detroit.



Portal - In communities with ORV and snowmobile trails, the Portal may be the point at which the trail user begins to use city streets or paved shoulders to access the downtown. Picture (D) below shows the Portal for snowmobile users in Cheboygan. Picture (E) below shows the Portal for ORV users in Atlanta.



If you are unable to place informational signs about area businesses at your Trailhead, you may be able to place them in the Portal area. Local trail planners should work with downtown businesses to develop signs that are inclusive (that is, they don't single out one business) and that have a design that is complementary to the surrounding landscape and community character.

Portal - Pictures (A) and (B) below are good examples of sign that has captured all the local businesses along the White Pine Trail in Avart and Little Traverse Wheelway in Petoskey. Picture (C) shows a less desirable example of a business sign, exclusive to just one business, along the North Central State Trail in Gaylord.



3. Pathway. The Pathway is the corridor that trail users follow from the Portal to the central business district. Depending on the location of the trail, the Pathway could be just a few blocks or several miles. If the Trailhead is several miles away from the central business district, the Pathway could include a combination of non-motorized infrastructure, such as paved shoulders, bikes lanes, and/or sidewalks or other paths.

The Pathway may also pass through other commercial areas or residential neighborhoods. Therefore, it is important to include wayfinding signs at key intersections and connections. Wayfinding signs can also highlight places of interest along (or adjacent to) the Pathway, such as restaurants, interesting shops or historical sites. Trail planners and local officials should continually assess the Pathway for cleanliness, safety, lighting, physical condition and interaction with traffic.

Pathway: The Pathway may include a combination of non-motorized infrastructure, like this bike lane in Grayling.



Pathway: The Pathway may pass through areas of the community where the Pathway is indistinguishable from existing sidewalk infrastructure. It is important to include wayfinding signs or surface markers at these key intersections and connections.



4. Gateway. The Gateway is the point at which trail users enter the business district of the community. The Gateway should be located at the edge of the central business district that is closest to the Trailhead along a well-developed Pathway. The Gateway area should welcome trail users and visitors into the central business district and be the point where directional signs to individual attractions and businesses within the district begin. In general, Gateways into the central business district of communities throughout Northern Michigan are undefined, lack distinguishable features and do not include directional signage, signaling ample opportunities for improvement.

5. Center. The Center is the central business district or primary commercial area of the community. The Center serves as a hub of goods and services for the trail user. The Center should be regularly assessed for cleanliness, safety, lighting and physical condition. Additionally, the Center should be assessed on the availability of amenities that help trail users enjoy their experience (i.e., bike racks, restaurants, outdoor seating at restaurants, ATM machines, internet access, free air at gas stations, and public restrooms).

Center: The Center should include amenities that help trail users (both day-trip and overnight) enjoy their experience. Picture (A) below shows bike racks and outdoor seating in Suttons Bay. Picture (B) shows a car wash that is frequently used by ORV trail users in Atlanta. Picture (C) shows a walk-up ATM machine near the Baw Beese Trail in Jonesville.

Gateway: Examples of a Gateway along the Little Traverse Wheelway, into downtown Petoskey and along the Pere Marquette Trail into downtown Sanford.



6. **Nodes.** Nodes are points of interest along or near the Pathway or in the Center that will be visited or utilized by the trail users. Nodes may include businesses that cater to the specific user (a bicycle repair shop), lifestyle interests of the trail user (a hobby shop or an antique shop), the duration of time the user will spend on the trail (a public shower room or local lodging), or to all trail users (medical supplies, water, a casual dining restaurant, snack food, etc.). It can be helpful to identify all the “connecting elements” on a map or sketch of the town (see figure 3.2 as an example below). Completing a thorough assessment of the physical relationship between the trail and town will reveal new opportunities for improvements. These improvements should be clearly defined and integrated into action strategies for the town.

**Figure 3.2 Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail - Alpena, Michigan**



Trail Town Design Issues

**Nodes:** Picture (A) shows a bicycle shop in downtown Grayling. Picture (B) shows a tour boat loading area along the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail in Alpena. Picture (C) shows the River Raisin Heritage Trail as it passes in front of the River Raisin National Battle Field in Monroe.



**Public Amenities.** Another important step in preparing a plan for your town is to assess the public amenities that the trail user will encounter in the community. Examples of public amenities include items like safe crosswalks, crossing signals, bike racks, lighting, drinking fountains, benches, plowed pathways and wayfinding signs.

Some public amenities may fall under the authority of a county, regional or state agency. For example, the County Road Commission may oversee and maintain road shoulders, a Regional Transportation Authority may include bike racks on all of its buses, and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) may oversee bike lanes and crosswalks on state highways. It is imperative that local officials and trail planners continually communicate with regional and state representatives about their local Trail Town planning effort. One way to ensure their participation is to include their staff members in the local Trail Town steering committee.

In most instances, the local municipality is responsible for providing adequate public amenities. However, as local governments continue to experience financial difficulties, local Trail Town organizations should also look to partner with local non-profits and the business community to seek and secure volunteer assistance and financial support.

In addition, local officials should examine how local laws and zoning regulations can impact the development of public amenities. For example, zoning regulations that limit sidewalk encumbrances and off-premises signs may limit the ability to develop trail-friendly amenities.

**Public Amenities:** Local officials should examine how local zoning regulations (e.g., sidewalk encumbrances) impact the development of public amenities, like this outdoor seating area in downtown Alpena.



**Public Amenities:** Public amenities (e.g., public transportation near trailheads) that support your local Trail Town effort may be under the purview of county, regional and state agencies.



**Public Amenities:** Whenever possible, local trail town organizations should partner with local non-profits to secure volunteer assistance and financial support. For example, volunteers are recruited to plow portions of the trail system in Traverse City.



*Public Amenities - Wayfinding Signs.* Wayfinding is one of the most important public amenities local jurisdictions can provide for tourists and visiting trail users. Wayfinding signs are designed to direct visitors to the primary assets and features of the community, and your local trail system should be treated as such. Therefore, each trailhead should be included in your local wayfinding signs. The wayfinding signage system should include roadway signs directed at drivers, and pedestrian mounted signs within the downtown area. If your community has multiple trails, be sure to identify the trail by name and/or use on the sign. If your community does not have a wayfinding system, try to work with your local road agency or MDOT to place directional signs to local trail systems in strategic areas.

*Public Amenities - Cultural Heritage.* Whenever possible, local officials and trail planners should emphasize and incorporate the community's unique cultural heritage on the trail and within the trail's supporting elements. For example, artwork symbolic of the community's heritage could be placed at different locations along the trail. Interpretive kiosks could provide information about the history of the area along the trail. Trail signs could incorporate a design reflective of a unique cultural aspect of the community.

The Dequindre Cut is a beautiful 1.35 mile below-street pathway located in a former railroad corridor in the heart of downtown Detroit. Prior to its transformation, the neglected corridor had long been a haven for graffiti artists who used the sprawling overpasses as their canvas. Initially, leaders from the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, the non-profit organization responsible for the trail, were concerned the graffiti might deter people from using the new pathway. But instead of working to find ways to eliminate the graffiti, the Conservancy decided to take a "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" approach. Over the last four years, the Conservancy has commissioned several of Detroit's most well-known graffiti artists to paint new pieces in certain areas along the trail. Marc Pasco, a spokesman for the Conservancy, noted that "graffiti art is a part of what makes Detroit unique... the graffiti incorporates the look and feel of the city."<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Conservancy has placed well-known prints from the Detroit Institute of Arts at certain points along the trail (see next page).

<sup>7</sup> *Dequindre Cut Art Adds To Movement of Legal Graffiti* (2012) Elisha Anderson, Detroit Free Press.

**Public Amenities:** It is essential to include directions to your trailheads on your local wayfinding signs, like this sign in Cheboygan.



**Public Amenities:** Graffiti art along the Dequindre Cut in downtown Detroit.

Photo by Diane Weiss/DFP







Public Amenities - Tunnels & Graffiti: Trails or pathways with a tunnel near the downtown should make trail users feel safe - the tunnel should be well-lit, clean of debris and regularly plowed in the winter months. To combat graffiti, municipalities may wish to employ their own “graffiti art.” Picture (A) shows a tunnel in downtown Marquette and picture (B) shows a tunnel in downtown Utica.



Public Amenities - Bike Racks: Bike racks provide bike storage for trail tourist and local citizens. The Trail Town image can be further enhanced by incorporating cultural themes within your bike rack design (see more on page 37). For example, Marquette has a series of bike racks (C) throughout its downtown that incorporates different theme into its back wheel. It can also be beneficial to work with your business community to sponsor bike racks. Picture (D) is a bike rack in Sutton Bay sponsored by a local bike rental company. Picture (E) is bike rack in Alpena sponsored by Stephen’s Shoe Store - one of many bike racks sponsored by different downtown retailers.



Public Amenities: As a way to celebrate its maritime history (including the maritime museum and the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary), two-story images of local shipwrecks have been placed on buildings along the Maritime Heritage Trail in Alpena.



**Business Amenities.** The last step in preparing a plan for your town is to assess the business amenities that the trail user will encounter in the community. The local businesses that will be of interest to the trail user will largely depend on the characteristics of the individual trail and its primary visitors. Trail planners and local officials can help local business owners better understand the needs of the trail user.

In addition to providing goods and services to trail users, local business owners can incorporate simple visitor-friendly amenities into their business practices. For example, businesses can offer bike racks located outside their establishment, restrooms that are available to the public, outdoor vending machines, and friendly hours of operation. Gas stations can offer free air. Hotels can offer bike cleaning and repair stations as well as bike storage area. Hotels and local outfitters can also offer to transport kayaks and canoes to and from nearby water trail access points.

The enhancement of existing businesses and development of new business opportunities are important elements to include in your local Trail Town plan. Smart businesses probably already provide goods and amenities (e.g., trail-friendly hours of operation) geared toward trail users. Over time, more and more business owners will realize the value of this emerging market. Education, encouragement and financial incentives may be needed, especially to encourage participation by small or marginal businesses.

Examples of Business Amenities: The following pictures show a welcome sign, bike rack and a free air pump at a market adjacent to the North Central State Trail in downtown Topinabee.



## Economic Restructuring for Your Trail Town

*Economic Restructuring* refers to the functions of business expansion, business retention, and new business recruitment. It also deals with the key issue of market demographics. It is important for local officials and trail planners to understand how economic restructuring can capitalize on existing community assets to help establish the Trail Town concept.

A. *Understanding Your Trail User - The Customer.* According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *in any downtown revitalization effort, understanding your customer is one of the most important and central activities local business leaders can undertake.* There are many elements that business leaders should consider. However, the two most important elements are socio-economic characteristics and lifestyle preferences. Once the socio-economic and lifestyle preferences of the trail customer base is understood, the local Trail Town organization can begin to make decisions about how best to attract these potential customers into their community.

### Understanding Your Trail User - A Closer Look at Cycling

This past year, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources delivered a presentation on bike tourism in which they profiled three basic types of bike tourists, noting their demographics, biking tendencies and spending preferences.

#### 1. The Shoestring Cyclist

Shoestring Cyclists tend to be younger and more self contained. They will typically ride between 75 and 100 miles per day and prefer low-cost options for lodging and meals, spending no more than \$30 a day. When traveling, Shoestring Cyclists seek campgrounds near town and low-cost access to showers.

#### 2. The Economy Cyclist

Economy Cyclists tend not to be age-specific. They will typically ride between 50 and 90 miles per day and prefer eating their meals in restaurants, spending no more than \$50 per day. The type of lodging preferred is typically dictated by the weather and

### Understanding Your Trail User:

According to a Michigan Sea Grant report, in 2008 kayakers in the United States:

- Made an average of 10 outings each - and 47% of kayakers made 1 to 3 outings
- 56% of kayakers are male
- 36% are between 25 and 44 and 30% are over 45
- 57% earn over \$75,000 per year
- 51% have a college degree or higher
- 14.1% live in the Midwest

### Understanding Your Trail User:

Bike tourists from New Zealand pass through Marine City on US Bicycle Route 20, part of a cross-country route that begins (or ends) in Oregon.



location. When traveling, Economy Cyclists seek discounts for local tourist attractions, and campgrounds near town or other low-cost lodging options.

### 3. The Comfort Cyclist

Comfort Cyclists tend to be older (between 50 and 65) and highly educated. They will typically ride less than 50 miles per day and are looking to stay in communities that offer the full vacation experience (shopping, restaurants, full-service hotel, and museums). The typical Comfort Cyclist has a high amount of discretionary income, on average spending over a \$100 a day.

These three bike tourist profiles are just one example. If your community has snowmobile trails, it will be important to understand the needs, desires and spending habits of the snowmobilers that travel to your community. Lifestyle preferences relate to the activities (and associated economic impact) that trail tourists make when they visit a community. Business leaders can better understand the lifestyle preferences of local trail users by assessing many lifestyle factors. For example:

- Where do trail users like to eat?
- Where do trail users like to shop?
- How much money do trail users spend on traveling activities per year?

Broad information about these lifestyle factors can be found online through reports from trail user associations (e.g., International Mountain Biking Association). Surveys can be an excellent way to better understand your local lifestyle factors. It may be helpful for communities throughout Northern Michigan (especially communities without a local economic development organization) to work with neighboring communities to better understand both the local and regional tourism market.

B. Assess Basic Trail User Needs. There are a number of *basic* goods and services that most trail users expect in every community (a full list can be found in the Trail Town guide in Appendix B). The Trail Town committee or another local committee (for revitalization) should assess if and to what extent the community is providing these goods and services, noting new opportunities.

Assessing Trail Needs - Local business owners may wish to expand their offering of goods and services to meet the demand of visitors using the trail system. Pictures (A) and (B) show bike rental shops in Suttons Bay and downtown Detroit. Picture (C) shows a water-sports rental shop adjacent to Grand Traverse Bay in Traverse City.



C. Assess Longer-Term Needs. There are also a number of *long-term* goods and services that trail users who are on multi-day trips expect in communities along the trail (e.g., overnight lodging, laundry, internet access). A full list can be found in the Trail Town guide in the Appendix. The marketing committee or another local committee should assess if and to what extent the community is providing these long-term goods and services.

D. Encourage Related Business Opportunities. As previously stated, trail users may be interested in other activities or attractions in the community. Local business owners may wish to expand their offerings of goods and services to meet the demand of visitors using or visiting other attractions.

Business Opportunities: The well known *Rivercrab* restaurant has a hotline at the St. Clair Marina. When called, the restaurant shuttle will pick kayakers up at the marina and bring them back after dinner.



E. Assist the Local Business Community. There are a number of ways local leaders and the trail committee can assist local businesses with economic restructuring. The first way is to work with local civic and economic development organizations to enhance or develop financial incentives (e.g., façade improvement program) and identify financial resources that help local businesses take advantage of the trail.

Another way local leaders can assist local businesses is to develop an “economic gardening” approach to business development issues related to the trail. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *under the economic gardening approach, one or more members of the committee would develop an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the trail-user customer base and the trends in the activity itself. Then, through informational bulletins and educational sessions, the Trail Town concept is*

#### Business Related Opportunities

Communities and business owners across Michigan are slowly realizing the economic impacts of bike tourists. Communications Coordinator Elizabeth Shaw noted in an article for the Michigan Municipal League’s September magazine that the owner of the Shamrock Tavern in Freeport Michigan “packed more than a 100 box lunches in hopes of drawing even a fraction of the 800 plus riders cycling through town” for the annual PALM bike tour.

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#### Business Related Opportunities

According to a report from the Michigan Municipal League (MML), the development of downtown trail access in Marquette has “created stimulus for more than \$40 million in private investment and provided the impetus for more than \$12 million in other public projects”.



*nurtured and grown in the community. Businesses that cater to this customer base will also flourish. The committee may also wish to provide funding to ensure that magazines, books, and publications that provide current information about the trail activity are available in the business section of the local library.*

#### Business Related Opportunities - Pere Marquette Trail

Businesses along the Pere Marquette Trail are realizing the financial benefits of catering to trail users. Pictured below is Alex's Railside Restaurant, which is directly located off the trail, in Sanford. In the nearby town of Coleman, an *Auto and Bike* parts store is located just off the trail.



Business Related Opportunities - Leelanau County - The Crystal River Outfitter in Glen Arbor provides kayak and bike delivery to area cottages. In the nearby town of Leeland, a bike enthusiast has opened a bike rental business out of his garage.



## Promoting Your Trail Town

The Allegheny Trail Alliance recommends that communities utilize and implement three primary marketing strategies (as outlined in the *Main Street Four-Point Approach*) to create an effective promotional campaign for your Trail Town.

- Establish a Trail Town image for the community
- Hold special events that highlight and celebrate the trail and the community
- Conduct retail promotions to entice people into the downtown

1. **Promote Your Trail Town Image.** The first component to an effective promotional campaign is to convince local residents, the larger region, and tourists that you have an active and welcoming Trail Town environment. Most of the Trail Town recommendations and strategies described in this document are based on drawing in visitors from beyond the local market. Therefore, the full potential of the Trail Town concept may not be realized unless the local and regional population base is aware of it and what it can offer. Local leaders and the Trail Town Team can help “brand” the Trail Town by developing attractive marketing materials such as a logo, brochure, printable map, print ads and a website. As previously mentioned, it can be helpful to seek advice and assistance from the local DDA, Chamber of Commerce or economic development agency in developing these materials. Furthermore, if your town is part of a regional collection of towns all sharing access to the trail, it might be helpful to collectively work with local officials and marketing professionals in other towns to develop a regional brand.

In addition to the traditional marketing pieces, local officials should incorporate trail themes in the design of municipal infrastructure (e.g., bike racks, street signs, banners, way-finding signs). If your town already has a popular brand, try to incorporate that theme into trail associated infrastructure.

Promote a Trail Town Image: Known for its public art, the City of St. Clair has incorporated art into the design of their municipal bike racks.



Promote a Trail Town Image: Mackinaw City incorporates the local trail/bicycle theme in the design of a bike rack and on its downtown banners.



Promote a Trail Town Image: Taking advantage of the fact that two rail-trails bisect the center of its downtown; Reed City has branded itself the “Crossroads.” You may have seen this billboard off U.S. 131.





2. **Hold Trail Town Events.** The second component to an effective promotional campaign is to hold special events within the downtown or near the trail. Special events, especially events that tie to your community's history and cultural identity (or even the trail corridor's history) can attract both local residents and visitors. The Allegheny Trail Alliance notes that annual events held just before trail season can attract potential trail users into your community. Presentations, displays and/or workshops, or a tour of the local trail are examples of activities that could be included in a local event. In addition, local communities can incorporate the trail into athletic events that range from professional races (e.g. bike race, 5-K run) to non-competitive events geared toward benefiting charities.<sup>8</sup> For example, the Top of Michigan Trails Council hosts an annual ultra-marathon (100k) on the North Central State Trail. Teams of participants typically begin their "section" in one of the five communities that line the trail.

Trail Town Events: Participants stop for ice cream as part of the official Suttons Bay Roubaix, a local bike tour and celebration in June.



3. **Conduct Trail Town Retail Promotions.** The third component of an effective promotional campaign is to conduct special retail promotions. Seasonal or special sale promotions backed by cooperative advertising can help drive trail-related revenues to local businesses. If your community has a restaurant near the trail or is frequented by trail users, work with the owners to name a sandwich or dinner special after the trail. If your community has a micro-brewery, perhaps it can develop a trail themed beer for the trail season. The restaurant or brewery may also be willing to sponsor a weekly trail ride or event.

<sup>8</sup> Implementing Trail-Based Tourism Economic Development Programs. A Handbook for Iowa Communities  
Iowa Department of Transportation. Prepared by Economics Research Associates and SRF Consulting group, Inc.

Trail Town Events: Local trail organizations should host special tours or events on their local trail system at least once a year. Picture (A) is a motorized tour for senior citizens on the Kal-Haven Trail in Kalamazoo. Picture (B) is the annual (but unofficial) "Float Down" along the St. Clair River, part of the Blueways of St. Clair Water Trail.



As previously mentioned, it can be useful for the local Trail Town Team to work with the DDA, merchants association or just a small group of store owners to effectively plan for, conduct and promote any special retail promotions. It should also be noted that *word of mouth* is crucial to the overall success of your trail and your community. Therefore, the business community and local residents need to understand that creating a welcoming environment is important.

Retail Promotions: Several local retailers in Suttons Bay (picture A) have incorporated the bicycle theme in their storefront window displays. In Alpena Michigan, local merchants sponsor decorative bike racks (picture B) throughout the downtown.



### Retail Promotions - Some Thoughts About Signs

Signs advertising local establishments near or adjacent to the trail can help further strengthen the connection between the trail and downtown. However, it is important to consider that too many signs along the trail may negatively impact the trail user's experience. Inconsistent aesthetics and poor placement of signs can be regarded as an eyesore, negatively impacting the natural character of the trail corridor. In general, business signs along the trail should be a much smaller version of the sign that adorns the front façade of the establishment. In addition, the sign should be made of quality materials and provide direction to the trail user. Too many signs, signs with too much information, and signs with direct advertising should be avoided. These considerations can be addressed in the sign and off-premise sign sections of the local zoning ordinance.

Signs: Local retail signs along the trail should be a smaller version of the sign that adorns the front façade of the establishment and provide direction to the trail user (picture C). Signs with too much information (picture D) and direct advertising (picture E) should be avoided. Pictures below were taken along the TART Trail in Traverse City.



## The Trail Town Master Plan

Once your community has completed its comprehensive planning effort, it is time to develop the Trail Town Master Plan. A little like a “blueprint,” the Trail Town Master Plan is the guide for the development of a Trail Town concept. Among other things, the plan provides the framework for future marketing efforts, capital improvement projects and community involvement strategies. The strategies and action polices outlined in the plan can also help to build support for local funding or leverage funding from state and federal granting agencies.

Local leaders and trail planners should make a concerted effort to work with a wide variety of community stakeholders to develop the master plan. If your community is located along a regional trail, local leaders should work with regional planning/trail agencies and the other communities along the trail to coordinate concepts, strategies and recommendations, wherever appropriate. It is important to understand that developing the master plan requires time, consideration and prioritization.

### Essential Trail Town Components

As previously mentioned, the elements in this document are only suggestions. It will be important to modify and adapt these concepts and recommendations to best suit your trail system and town. However, there are ten essential components that each town should work toward to be considered a Trail Town. Some of these components are suggestions from the Allegheny Trail Alliance and others are gathered from research and recent efforts to develop a Trail Town master plan in the five communities mentioned in the Introduction. Additionally, some of these components may be relatively easy to achieve while others will take time and dedication.

1. **Name Your Trail.** There are many examples of trails throughout Michigan that do not have a formal name. Name your trail. A name for your trail gives it substance and legitimacy to both locals and tourists. It also helps to provide focus for future promotional and branding efforts. As mentioned earlier in this document, it can be helpful to have a catchy name for your local Trail Town effort. Whenever possible, the

**Name Your Trail:** It is important that your local trail have a name. When deciding on a name, local leaders may wish to consider the location of the trail or any cultural features located near the trail.



name of the organizing effort should be identical (or at least match very closely) to the name of the trail running through your community. When deciding on a name for your trail, local leaders may want to consider the location of the trail and any feature (cultural or natural) the trail may connect to or pass through. Local leaders may also consider naming the trail after an important local historic figure, civic leader or trail benefactor. Once designated, the name of the trail should be incorporated into marketing pieces and specifically called out on local way-finding signs.

2. **Include Your Trail on Local Way-Finding Signs.** Way-finding signs are designed to direct visitors to the primary assets and features of the community. Therefore, each trailhead should be included in your local way-finding sign system. The trail should be called out on way-finding signs directed toward drivers and way-finding kiosks directed toward pedestrians. If your community has multiple trails, be sure to identify the trail by name and/or use on the sign. If your community does not have a way-finding system, try to work with your local road agency or MDOT to place directional signs in strategic areas to guide people to local trail systems.

3. **Include Your Downtown on Way-finding Signs on Your Trail.** Way-finding signs on the trail are also very important, directing trail users to the downtown or primary commercial area. This can be especially important to long-distance trail users, who may be entering your town for the first time on the trail.

4. **Promote a Gateway Moment.** As described earlier in this document, the Gateway or “Gateway Moment” is a physical feature that indicates to trail users that they have entered your town. It is important to create a sense of excitement around your gateway, encouraging trail users to stop and explore the downtown. Local leaders and trail planners should consider signage, lighting and landscape amenities in creating a vibrant gateway into the downtown.

5. **Create a Sense of Place.** “Sense of Place” refers to the assets or attributes that are unique to your town and the central business district. These assets can be natural (e.g., proximity to water), historic (historic buildings), structural (lamp posts), and cultural (festivals). Local leaders should make efforts to emphasize and build upon existing assets within the community. Whenever possible, capital infrastructure that contributes

Way-Finding Signs: Way-finding signs on the trail are important and can direct visitors to your downtown and other community features.



Gateway Moment: The Gateway should help create a sense of excitement or intrigue about your downtown, like this gateway arch in Rochester, Michigan and harbor sign (water trail) in St. Clair.



to the community's sense of place (e.g., streetscapes, lamp posts, banners, planters, statues) should reflect your town's history and/or other things that make it unique from other places.

It is also important to keep the downtown clean and uncluttered. Be sure there are an adequate number of trash receptacles throughout the downtown and that trash is removed in a timely manner. Additionally, make an effort to minimize or eliminate street-level infrastructure; overhead lines, utility poles, and even parking meters can clutter a main street and detract from its overall appeal. Local leaders should explore running telephone lines underground and placing parking meters on lamp posts to reduce clutter whenever feasible.

6. **Develop a Safe and Pedestrian Friendly Atmosphere.** A downtown that is safe for both walking and cycling is very important. Visitors and residents need to feel safe as they cross your streets and explore your town. There are a number of amenities that increase the "walkability" of your downtown that most trail users appreciate, such as pedestrian signals, bike lanes, extended curbs, and bike route signs. Many communities throughout Northern Michigan already utilize many pedestrian-friendly amenities.

7. **Establish the Right Mix of Services.** Think about what trail users will need when they enter your town, and make sure they have easy access to businesses and services to accommodate those needs. This basically includes places to eat (grocers and restaurants), shop (including trail-related gear, like a bike repair shop), sleep (campgrounds or hotels), and play (such as a park with shade/shelter and benches). The book *Urban Retail - Planning and Development*, by Robert Gibbs is an excellent resource for learning how the right mix of services relates to the economic viability of the community.

8. **Promote Trail-Oriented Events.** As previously mentioned, special events - especially events that tie in to your community's history or cultural identity - can attract both local residents and visitors. The Allegheny Trail Alliance suggests that annual events held just before the trail season can attract potential trail users into your community. Presentations, displays, workshops, or a tour of the local trail are examples of activities could be included in a local event. In addition, local communities can incorporate the

**Safe Atmosphere:** Visitors need to feel safe as they cross your streets and explore your town. Pictured below is the state's first trail-user induced traffic signal at a crosswalk along the Avoca/Wadams Trail in St. Clair County.



**Promote Trail-Oriented Events:** Participants wrap up the annual 100k ultimate marathon - the course for the event is the North Central State Trail.



trail into athletic events that range from professional races (e.g., bike race, 5K run) to non-competitive events geared toward benefiting charities.

9. **Develop a Map of Your Trail System and Make It Easily Accessible.** Surprisingly, many communities with active trails do not create printable maps. It is very important that your community develop a map that can be made available at city offices and at local brochure kiosks. It is also very important to provide a digital copy of your trail map on your municipal and/or local marketing website that can be easily printed. The trail map should be a very prominent feature on the website. It should also be very easy to find on the website, not buried under four or five links. In addition, it will be important to develop trail maps that can be uploaded through a mobile website or app.

10. **Provide at Least One Outdoor Eating Establishment.** Whether it's on a day-trip or an overnight tour, most trail users prefer to dine outside. In part, they may feel more comfortable to sit outside in sweaty clothes than inside a restaurant with wide tablecloths. Work with your local restaurant owners to establish outside seating areas whenever it's feasible. Even a few small tables or a picnic table will be sufficient for most trail riders.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the Trail Town Master Plan (and associated strategies) must be flexible and respond to changing conditions, innovations and new information. It is important to frequently review and evaluate the Master Plan to examine what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done. In addition, elements of the Trail Town Master Plan should be included into your local recreation plan, capital improvements plan and the community master plan. This will ensure that your effort is more likely to be funded supported and carried out by local officials and staff. In addition, it can help secure funding for future projects and improvements.

As your community continues to move forward with the Trail Town concept, it is important to update residents, the business community, community leaders, and local and state officials on the progress (and future challenges) of your initiative.

Outside Eating Establishments: Work with local restaurant owners to provide for outdoor seating for trail riders. Even a few small tables or a picnic table will be sufficient for most trail riders.



## **Appendix**

## Trail Characteristics

Trail Name

---

What kind of trail is it?

---

Is it just a local trail  or part of a multi-jurisdictional trail?

---

What is the Trail Surface? (please note if there are segments of the trail with a different surface type and where they are located)

---

How long is the trail? \_\_\_\_\_

If the trail is part of a multi-jurisdictional trail, how long is the entire trail system? \_\_\_\_\_

If the trail is part of a multi-jurisdictional trail, how long is the trail segment in your community? \_\_\_\_\_

What types of activities are permitted on the trail?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Are their different activities permitted on the trail at different times of the year? (see chart on next page)

Activity

Season

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_



# Appendix A. Trail Town | Evaluation Form I.

## Activity Chart

	Daily Exercise Walker	Hiker	Nature Watcher	Snow-Shoe	Cyclist	Equestrian	Snow mobiler	Cross County Skier	Kayaker	ORV	Motorcycle
January											
February											
March											
April											
May											
June											
July											
August											
September											
October											
November											
December											

- x = No users on trail
- 1 = Low months for users of this type of trail
- 2 = Moderate months for users on this type of trail
- 3 = Heavy months for users of this type of trail
- 4 = Peak month for users of this type of trail

### Who manages the trail?

\_\_\_\_\_

### Contact Information

Person(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Trailhead Locations:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

More

# Appendix A. Trail Town | Evaluation Form I.

## Unique features along the Trail

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

More

## Potential hazards along the Trail

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

More

Do you have a physical map of your trails?  Yes  No

Do you have a digital map of your trails?  Yes  No

# Appendix A. Trail Town | Evaluation Form I.

## Local Capacity

Is there a downtown or business district development organization in your community?  Yes  No  
If yes, list the name of the organization and their contact information:

---

---

---

What kind of organization is doing downtown development?

- Main Street Organization
- DDA
- Chamber of Commerce
- Merchants Association
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the organization(s) local or regional?

Local  Regional

Is there a trail or recreational organization in your community?  Yes  No  
If yes, list the name of the organization and their contact information:

---

---

---

Is the organization(s) local or regional?

Local  Regional

Are there community celebrations in your community?  If yes, please list them?

Are there special retail celebrations in your community?  If yes, please list them

### Trail Town Team Members

**Name:**  
**Organization:**  
**Phone Number:**  
**Email:**

**Name:**  
**Organization:**  
**Phone Number:**  
**Email:**

**Name:**  
**Organization:**  
**Phone Number:**  
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**Organization:**  
**Phone Number:**  
**Email:**

# Appendix B. Trail Town | Evaluation Form II.

## Four Point Information

### Active Planning Efforts and Ideas

**Appendix B. Trail Town** | Evaluation Form II.

**Design**

**Promotions**

A large, empty gray rectangular area that occupies most of the page below the 'Promotions' header. It is intended for the respondent to provide their answers or observations.

**Economic Restructuring**



## Appendix B. Trail Town | Evaluation Form II.

### Organization

## Connecting Elements

### Trail Head

Is it welcoming?

---

Parking (type, size, amenities)

---

Restroom Facilities (types, cleanliness)

---

Information posted

---

Water

---

Signage

---

Bike/Kayak Storage

---

Trash Receptacle

---

Shelter/Picnic Area

---

Power

---

WiFi

---

Other Features/Notes

## Appendix C. Trail Town | Evaluation Form III.

### Portal

Is it welcoming?

---

Is directional signage posted?

---

Is it clear where the downtown is located?

---

### Pathway

Is it clean?

---

Is it safe (lighting, good condition)?

---

How does it interact with other streets and traffic?

---

## Appendix C. Trail Town | Evaluation Form III.

### Gateway

Is it well-defined?

---

Is it welcoming?

---

Is it located in the downtown?

---

### Center

Is it clean?

---

Is it safe (lighting, good condition)?

---

Is it walkable?

---

### Amenities

---

---

---

# Appendix C. Trail Town | Evaluation Form III.

## Trailhead Sign

### Features

---

---

---

### Areas for Improvement

---

---

---

### Are there wayfinding signs on the trail?

---

---

---

## Appendix D. Trail Town | Evaluation Form IV.

### Business Checklist

<b>Operations</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Is the central business district easily identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do business hours match customers needs (i.e. open late and on weekends)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are downtown businesses clustered in a compact area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are customers greeted warmly when they walk through the door?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the merchandise and store clean and well kept?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do businesses cross-promote?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there window displays that show off the community's heritage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do businesses encourage window-shopping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Accommodations and Amenities</b>		
Do businesses offer out-of-town shipping for large items?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there public-accessible restrooms in the businesses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do businesses offer information on the town/region?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can employees answer questions about the town or region?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do employees answer questions in a friendly manner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do shops carry souvenirs, especially related to the town?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix D. Trail Town | Evaluation Form IV.

### Signs

Yes

No

Are businesses' signage clearly visible and well-designed?

Do the signs clearly state what is being sold?

Do businesses clearly indicate that they're open?

Are business hours posted on the front door or window?

### Does your town have the following types of food service?

Outdoor vending machines

Grocery or portable food

Coffee shop

Ice Cream

Family-style Restaurant

Fast food or chain restaurant

Informal café with wait service

Bar or tavern

Restaurant with liquor service

### Does your town have the following types of food service?

Bike rental

Bike equipment and repair

Convenience/quick stop

Drug store

## Appendix D. Trail Town | Evaluation Form IV.

	Yes	No
24 hour ATM	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bookstore	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Laundromat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rental/Outfitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Does your town have these services and amenities?</b>		
Hotel or Motel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bed and Breakfast	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nearby camping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emergency medical service available	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family medical service available	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shuttling service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taxi service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public park or green area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Calendar of events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to public email (library)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sufficient trash cans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special events to encourage people to come into town?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do businesses use marketing tactics to invite people in?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a museum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are places open on the weekend?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# Trail Towns

---

## What is a Trail Town?

A *Trail Town* is a community in which local officials have used their trail system as the focal point of a tourism-centered strategy for economic development and local revitalization. The Trail Town concept was originally developed by the Allegheny Trail Alliance, a coalition of seven trail organizations along the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile multi-use trail running through Pennsylvania and Maryland. Many communities in Michigan are now working to develop their own local Trail Town Program. The basic Trail Town concept is simple: **ensure that communities along the trail are better able to maximize the economic potential of trail-based tourism.**



The local Trail Town effort can be centered around any type of trail (e.g., non-motorized, snow-mobile, equestrian and kayak). While the Trail Town concept is primarily geared toward cities and towns, the concept is very much applicable in rural areas that have at least one small center of commercial activity. Most Trail towns are not isolated communities - they are linked together by the trail, creating a regional destination for residents, trail users and tourists.

## How Does a Community Establish a Trail Town?

While there are a number of different ways in which local communities can organize around an effort to create a Trail Town Program, the most common approach has been to use the “Four Point Approach” developed by the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

1. **Organization.** Establish consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among various groups that have a stake in the local trail system and the downtown.
2. **Promotion.** Sells the image and promise of a Trail Town to all prospects.
3. **Design.** Gets the Trail Town into top physical shape to create a safe and appealing environment.
4. **Economic Restructuring.** Helping existing businesses expand and recruit new businesses to respond to current trail activities and market forces.

## What are the Benefits of Becoming a Trail Town?

Over the last several years, as the full economic potential of linking trails, recreation, tourism and business development has become better known, the Trail Town concept has caught on. According to an article from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, “communities around the country are increasingly utilizing the ‘Trail town’ model of economic revitalization that places trails as the centerpiece of a tourism-centered strategy for small town revitalization.” In fact, studies from neighboring states like Wisconsin have shown that bicycle tourism supports more than \$900 million in tourism and residential spending each year.

**For more information** about the Trail Towns concept, please contact: