



Lake Michigan Coastal Communities

Trail Towns Master Plan

LUDINGTON

OTTAWA COUNTY

PARK TWP.

HOLLAND

SOUTH HAVEN

BRIDGEMAN

BUCHANAN

ST. JOSEPH

NEW BUFFALO

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Lake Michigan Coastal Communities Trail Towns Master Plan

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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 supporting recreational activities that are inclusive and accessible to people of all ages and abilities. 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.

Recreational trails can also have a significant impact on the local economy. Trails can help attract and support tourism and new business opportunities. Local residents also 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 nine communities along the Lake Michigan coastline and its connecting waterways (Ludington, Park Township, Holland, Ottawa County, South Haven, St. Joseph, Bridgman, New Buffalo and Buchanan) can better leverage their existing and future water and non-motorized trail systems to maximize trail-based tourism and economic development opportunities — that is, to redefine their communities and their regions as “Trail Towns.”

Due to its primarily rural setting and relatively flat roads, the Lake Michigan coastline is an ideal location for bicycle touring. In fact, *U.S. Bicycle Route 35* passes directly through many of the nine participating communities discussed in this plan. Therefore, this document will also highlight ways these coastal communities can maximize bicycle tourism.

Trail Towns - A Michigan Perspective

The Trail Town concept is gaining traction in communities and along trails all over Michigan. In southeastern Michigan, the Clinton River Watershed Council and the

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 Trails Conservancy



Huron River Watershed Council have independent Trail Town initiatives. The initiatives are designed to help towns within each watershed develop inclusive universally accessible amenities that support trail users and leverage their riverside assets (e.g., restaurants, shops, hotels, campgrounds) for water-oriented community development.

Last year, St. Clair County, in partnership with several regional economic development agencies and Michigan State University Extension, developed formal Trail Town Master Plans for eight communities along Michigan's Thumb coast.

In northern Michigan, the cities of Alpena, Atlanta, Grayling, Mackinaw City, Topinabee, Boyne City and Charlevoix have developed formal Trail Town plans.

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA), under the auspices of the National Park Service, also has a formal Trail Town Program. The program provides information and resources to local officials on how they can better promote their town to hikers of the North Country Trail. The NCTA has awarded official "Trail Town" status to 19 communities along the trail, including nine in Michigan.

In June of 2014, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder signed into effect Public Act 210, which states that upon petition from a local official, the director of Michigan's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may designate a city, village or township as a "Pure Michigan Trail Town," provided the community meets certain criteria. As of this writing, DNR officials were still working to determine the extent of the criteria, but it is expected to become finalized by spring of 2016. A full copy of Public Act 210 can be found in Appendix A.

In an effort to better understand the Trail Town concept and develop useful strategies and recommendations for these nine coastal communities along Lake Michigan, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. The literature review found a number of resources for specific components of the Trail Town concept, such as downtown design guidelines, walkability tactics, accessibility standards and promotional strategies. However, only a handful of examples were identified that addressed how each of the specific components all work together to create a "Trail Town." The

Huron River Watershed Trail Town Program

The Huron River Watershed Council manages a robust Trail Town Program in five communities along the Huron River under its *River Up!* Initiative.

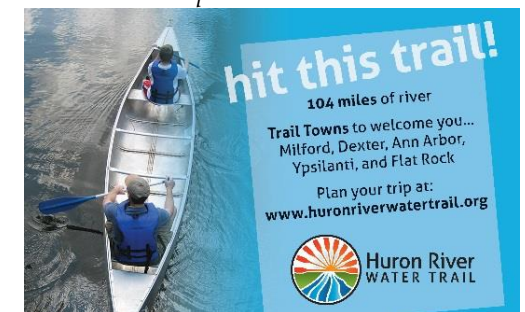


Image Provided By: Huron River Watershed Council

original source identified, *Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania*¹ (published by the Allegheny Trail Alliance in 2005), and the *Trail Town Manual for Communities in Northern Michigan*² (published by LIAA in 2013) were used as the basis for this plan.

This document utilizes and summarizes portions of each Trail Town publication, applying specific concepts and recommendations to the nine project communities. However, in an effort to demonstrate or illustrate a specific point or suggestion, examples from other communities and trails in Michigan are highlighted and described throughout the document.

This document recognizes the significant efforts that local business owners, municipal staff members, local officials, governmental bodies (e.g., Downtown Development Authorities) and regional economic development agencies already provide in support of tourism, economic development and trail building in each of the nine communities studied for this plan. The strategies and recommendations outlined in this document are only meant to highlight new ideas and spark discussions about how these coastal communities could better utilize their trail assets to expand on and complement existing recreation and community development 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 and economic development.

Trail Systems and Community Profiles

Due to its regional scope and connective qualities, the primary focus of this plan is to highlight ways in which the nine coastal communities can establish Trail Town strategies around the *Lake Michigan Water Trail* and designated water trails along connected inter-coastal rivers (e.g., St. Joseph Water Trail, Galien Water Trail, and Grand River Water Trail). However, most of the nine communities along the coastline

Community Development Efforts

The strategies and recommendations outlined in this plan are designed to expand on and complement existing community development efforts.



¹ Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania. Allegheny Trail Alliance (2005)

² Trail Town Manual for Communities in Northern Michigan. LIAA (2013)

also have a well-used network of non-motorized terrestrial trails. As previously mentioned, most of the nine project communities are also connected by *U.S. Bicycle Route 35*, which runs the entire length of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, ultimately connecting Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan to Mississippi. Ludington is also connected to *U.S. Bicycle Route 20*, which runs across the Lower Peninsula, ultimately connecting Marine City, Michigan to the Oregon coast.

Trail Systems (Water Trails)

Lake Michigan Water Trail

Michigan's Lake Michigan Water Trail begins in the Upper Peninsula and traverses 760 miles to the Indiana border. The trail then continues around the western side of the lake to complete a 1,600-mile, four-state continuous loop. The Lake Michigan Water Trail passes by some of the most picturesque landscapes and beach communities in Michigan. Paddlers can directly access the Lake Michigan Water Trail in eight of the nine project communities by way of both formal (marina) and informal (road-ending) access sites.

St. Joseph River Water Trail

The 66-mile St. Joseph River Water Trail begins in Niles and meanders west, past the town of Buchanan and through thick forested areas before it finally empties out into Lake Michigan in the coastal town of St. Joseph.

Paw Paw River Water Trail

The 62-mile Paw Paw River Water Trail begins near the headwaters of the river in northeast Van Buren County. From there, the water trail flows through both Van Buren and Berrien counties where it joins the St Joseph River Trail in Benton Harbor.

Galien River Marsh Water Trail

The Galien River Marsh Water Trail begins at a DNR boat launch on U.S. 12 and flows for three miles into the coastal town of New Buffalo. Along the way, the water trail meanders through woodlands and protected wetlands, including the 86-acre Galien River County Park Preserve. The river is slow moving and easy to paddle both upstream and downstream.

Lake Michigan Water Trail

The Lake Michigan Water Trail traverses 1,600 miles around Lake Michigan.



Galien River Marsh Water Trail

The Galien River Marsh Water Trail meanders through woodlands and protected wetlands before arriving in New Buffalo.



Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail

The 21-mile Bangor/South Haven Heritage Water Trail is located on the Black River. The water trail begins in the town of Bangor and weaves west through Van Buren County before finally emptying out into Lake Michigan in the coastal community of South Haven. Along the way, the water trail takes paddlers past historic American Indian sites, an old sawmill and a grist mill.

Grand River Heritage Water Trail

The 41-mile Grand River Heritage Water Trail encompasses nine distinct paddling routes along the Grand River in Ottawa County. The slow, meandering river averages about 3 miles per hour, making it an ideal river to see and explore the many natural and cultural assets along its shoreline. In addition, the water trail has three inclusive universally accessible launch sites, making the water trail accessible across the entire county.

Kalamazoo River Water Trail

The 130-mile Kalamazoo River Water Trail begins at the junction of its north and south branches near Albion and meanders west before spilling out into Lake Michigan in the coastal town of Saugatuck. The Kalamazoo River Water Trail has three universally accessible launches.

Lake Macatawa Water Trail (Future)

Concurrent to the development of this master plan, local officials, municipal staff and interested stakeholders from Ottawa County, Park Township and the City of Holland are exploring the development of a formal water trail around Lake Macatawa. The 6-mile water trail would pass by beautiful lakefront homes, connect to the City of Holland and nearby parks, and ultimately connect to the Lake Michigan Water Trail.

Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail

The Bangor/South Haven Heritage Water Trail is located on the Black River. Soon-to-be-completed improvements to the Black River Park Canoe and Kayak Launch in South Haven will provide universal access to the water trail.

**Lake Macatawa Water Trail**

Local officials, municipal staff and interested stakeholders from the greater Holland Community are currently exploring the development of a formal water trail around Lake Macatawa.



Trail Systems (Non-Motorized)

Each of the nine coastal communities described in this master plan has a local network of non-motorized terrestrial trails. There are also a number of long-distance trails that connect to other communities throughout the region. Many of the more developed trails have inclusive universally accessible design features such as wide paved surfaces with gentle slopes making them “stroll-able and roll-able” meaning walkable side-by-side, roll-able for parent pushing strollers, roll-able for someone using a wheelchair or walker and bike-able for someone with a disability using a hand-cycle. Rather than listing every trail in each community, the following pages describe a handful of the most popular trails in each region.

Southwest Michigan

Harbor Country Trails

Harbor Country Trails is a 36-mile bike route through the towns of New Buffalo, Union Pier, Lakeside, Harbert, Sawyer and Three Oaks. One of the primary trailheads for the bike route is located in New Buffalo. Harbor Country Trails is directed by the Friends of Harbor Country Trails.

Backroads Bikeway

The Backroads Bikeway is a series of trails that follow secondary roads throughout Berrien County. The Bikeway connects to several coastal communities including New Buffalo.

Kal-Haven Trail

The 34.5-mile Kal-Haven Trail, on the former Kalamazoo & South Haven Railroad, runs from Kalamazoo to the coastal community of South Haven. A recent trail expansion and streetscaping project in South Haven now extends the trail into the heart of downtown, where trail users can enjoy downtown shopping and dining and connect with the Van Buren Trail via a scenic connector route.

Harbor Country Trails

Harbor Country Trails is a 36-mile bike route throughout southwest Lower Michigan.



Kal-Haven Trail

The Kal-Haven Trail is a 34.5-mile rail trail that extends from Kalamazoo into downtown South Haven, where it connects with the Van Buren State Trail.



Van Buren Trail

The 14-mile Van Buren Trail State Park runs from South Haven to Hartford on the former Toledo & South Haven Railroad. Most of the trail surface is unimproved grass and gravel, but nicely maintained and well suited for mountain bikes or bicycles with fat tires. In November of 2015, a 4.5 mile section of the trail connecting Van Buren State Park to the South Haven trail system topped with a 10-foot-wide asphalt surface (the City maintains a marked route that connects to a downtown trailhead). Equestrian and snowmobile use is permitted and popular along the entire length of the trail.

McCoy's Creek Trail

McCoy's Creek Trail is a 2.5-mile pathway that connects nearby woodland areas and the St. Joseph River to downtown Buchanan.

McCoy's Creek Trail

McCoy's Creek Trail is a 2.5-mile pathway located in downtown Buchanan.

**Greater Holland Community**

The greater Holland Community is home to more than 150 miles of paved separate-use trails and off-road dirt trails. Several looped routes in Holland's bike path network incorporate popular city, township and state parks. Along the pathways, trail users experience scenic views of Lake Macatawa, Lake Michigan and the iconic DeZwaan windmill. A favorite route among bicyclists is the Lakeshore Connector Pathway that runs between Holland State Park and Grand Haven State Park.

Holland Community Trails

The greater Holland Community is home to more than 150 miles of trails, connecting most of the area's most popular assets and attractions.

**Ludington**

As previously mentioned, Ludington is the western terminus for U.S. Bicycle Route 20 in Michigan. The bicycle route passes through downtown Ludington on Rath Avenue, eventually heading north along Lakeshore Drive. U.S. Bicycle Route 35 also passes through Ludington on its way along the coastline.

Ludington

U.S. Bicycle Route 20 passes through downtown Ludington on Rath Avenue, eventually heading north along Lakeshore Drive.



Communities

This Trail Town Plan focuses on eight coastal communities along Lake Michigan: Ludington, Holland, Ottawa County, Park Township, South Haven, Bridgman, St. Joseph and New Buffalo. A ninth community, Buchanan, is also included. Although Buchanan is not located along the Lake Michigan Shoreline, it is connected via the St. Joseph River Water Trail.

Together, the nine communities are home to about 80,277 people (Ottawa County was not included in this total). However, given their location on Lake Michigan, the population of each community increases significantly during the summer months. All but two of the communities have a traditional downtown layout, with historic buildings centered along a “main” street, sidewalks, numerous waterfront and outdoor dining experiences, boutique-style shops, and art galleries. Most communities also have a fairly large marina where paddlers can easily access the water.

Several of the nine communities work together to help shape the character and identity of their region. South Haven, St. Joseph, Bridgman, New Buffalo and Buchanan help define “southwest Michigan,” whereas Park Township, Holland and portions of Ottawa County help define the “Greater Holland Area.”

Key stakeholders and staff in each region and community — especially the Ludington Community Development Office, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation, and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission — were instrumental in the development of this plan and will be central agents in both local and regional Trail Town implementation efforts.

While this concerted Trail Town Planning effort focused on the nine communities listed above, the applicability of the concepts, the process of evaluation, the basis of the recommendations, and the options for implementation serve as a model for other communities and trail systems throughout the state.

Project Communities



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.³

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

Each of the communities that were assessed as part of this planning effort already have many of the physical and business amenities that day-trip and overnight trail users and bike tourists are seeking. Many of the downtowns feature pedestrian-friendly streets, a variety of quality locally-owned restaurants, and outdoor seating. Most of the downtowns also have ice-cream shops, bars (some even have a brewery) and a coffee house where trail users and riders can casually spend an hour or two before getting back on the trail or the road. Many of the downtowns also feature a variety of boutique-style shops, with diverse and unique goods. Open, accessible and

Accessible and Comfortable Spaces

It is important to have restaurants with outdoor seating (see South Haven below), pedestrian-friendly streets and other quasi-public spaces within the downtown where trail users can get a good meal and spend a couple of hours before moving on to their next trail destination.



³ Trail Towns - Capturing Trail Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania. Allegheny Trail Alliance (2005)

inviting storefronts and pedestrian-friendly streets encourage trail visitors and bike tourists to casually stroll through the downtown.

All eight of the downtowns also have a number of physical amenities (public benches, bike racks, and parks) that allow trail users and bike tourists to rest, relax, or just hang out before getting back on their kayak or bike. For overnight trail users and bicycle tourists, there are a wide variety of accommodations (e.g., hotel, motel, bed-and-breakfast, and campground) within or in close proximity to many of the downtown areas.

Trail Town Strategy

It is important for local and regional trail advocates, economic development professionals and public officials to understand that these coastal communities are not isolated communities; they are linked together by the trails and biking routes, creating regional destinations for paddling, bike touring, horseback riding and other recreational activities. Typically, water trails tend to be used by people seeking a two-hour or half-day paddling excursion. However, some adventurous paddlers may be on the water trail for multiple days. Similarly, most bike tourists are seeking a half-day or entire day excursion. However, some bike tourists may be out for a couple of days and visit several communities, especially on weekends.

In addition, although vacationers may visit (often repeatedly) the trail located at their primary destination or “hub,” they may access different sections of the same trail or different trails when they visit nearby towns throughout the duration of their stay.

Long-distance trails and bicycle-friendly roadways attract tourists, especially trails and roads that pass by and through interesting towns, scenic areas or places of historic interest. Most trail users and bike tourists will require some degree of goods and services. 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 will spend four times as much as a local user, and an overnight visitor will spend twice the amount a day-tripper will spend.*

Business Amenities

Trail users and bike tourists will find destinations such as breweries (see Bridgman below) in almost every project community, as well as overnight accommodations, shops, and eateries.



Trail Town Strategy

Most trail users and bike tourists will require some degree of goods and services. Making connections with local businesses is important in creating a friendly Trail Town community.



Photo Collected From:
Peddler Brewing Company, Seattle Washington

Coastal West Michigan is fortunate in that it is already popular with tourists, has many interesting towns and places to visit, and has a very active and expanding network of water trails, non-motorized trails and bike-friendly roadways. Local officials, economic development professionals, local business owners and trail advocates in each community and region should continue to work with each other to expand existing trails, make new trail connections, promote trail-based tourism activities, and support positive trail experiences for the entire region.

It will also be important for local community leaders, trail advocates, business owners and economic development organizations in each region to regularly communicate with each other, local businesses and participating state agencies about local road and trail conditions, safety concerns and trail/biking events. Regular communication can be especially useful when large paddle- or bike-themed events and/or tours pass through the region.

Ultimately, Trail Town communities need to be friendly places that support, celebrate and encourage paddlers, equestrians, bike tourists and other trail users to visit, and then welcome 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 bike tourists to get off the road and into your town.
- Welcome trail users and bike tourists to your town by making information about the community readily available at the trailhead or key entryways into the community.
- Make a strong, accessible and safe connection between your town and the trail.
- Educate local businesses on the economic benefits of meeting the needs of trail and bicycle tourists.

Trail Town Strategy

Recruit new businesses or expand existing ones to fill gaps in the goods and services that trail users want and need.



- Recruit new businesses or expand existing businesses to fill gaps in the goods or services that trail users and bike tourists need.
- Support and promote the inclusive universally accessible “trail friendly,” “bicycle friendly” and “pedestrian friendly” character of the town.
- Work with neighboring communities to promote the entire trail corridor and bike-friendly roadways as a tourist destination.

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, it is also 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, trail advocates and regional organizations should review to create a dynamic regional Trail Town environment.

Considerations in Creating a Trail Town Environment

- Local communities (and each region) can grow and thrive in new ways because of proximity to trails and a bike-friendly system of roadways.
- The more Trail Towns there are along a corridor offering hospitality and services, the more attractive the region will be for tourism; the success of one community is important to the success of all the communities.
- Leadership and initiative from within the community (especially the business community) will be necessary to turn each community into a Trail Town.
- A safe, accessible and well-maintained trail and roadway is the centerpiece, so it’s important to cooperate with and support local trail-building and maintenance groups and public safety agencies.
- A core bicycle/pedestrian-friendly philosophy should be adopted by local officials and business owners.

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 citizens, trail users and road bikers, and safer trail-to-town connections. An example complete streets ordinance can be found in Appendix I.



- Trail users and road bikers should be accommodated both physically and socially within the downtown area.
- Goods and services for trail users and bicycle tourists will be appealing to other types of tourists and local residents.
- Local law enforcement agents can be important ambassadors in the town, along the trail and on rural roadways.

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 be needed to create and establish a Trail Town environment in each community. As local leaders, trail advocates, business owners and economic development professionals review these sections, it is important to identify where additional assistance might be needed. In some cases it will be imperative, at least initially, that regional agencies like the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission assist local leaders in some of these organizing and implementation efforts.

A. Define the Trail Corridor. Before any Trail Town initiative can get started, it is important that local leaders understand the physical and administrative structure of the trail(s). Local leaders and trail advocates should ask themselves a series of questions to better understand the trail system(s) located in their community. For example:

- 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?

Brief summaries of the physical and administrative structure of several trails in the nine communities are described on pages 3-7. It was fairly clear in meetings with local officials in coastal communities that many did not know about the physical and

administrative structure of the Lake Michigan Water Trail. In fact, some local officials were even unaware there is a water trail located in their community. It is imperative that local Trail Town supporters inform local officials (e.g., planning commission, city council) about their local trail systems. In some instances, it may be valuable to host “field trips” with government officials so they can get a firsthand understanding of the issues and opportunities associated with their trail system.

B. Assess Local Capacity. A Trail Town initiative could be part of the comprehensive community revitalization efforts directed by downtown merchants, a Downtown Development Association, a Main Street Program, a municipal community development department, or a combination of these organizations. Therefore, it is important to understand how well your local leaders are able to plan and implement new programs or ideas.

Some coastal communities already have very active and successful Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs), merchant groups, community development departments and civic-minded organizations. It will be important to tap into those agencies or groups of people who are eager and willing to participate. From a regional perspective, Chambers of Commerce and Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) can assist in providing support and capacity. However, creating strong local teams will be vital for the long-term viability of any local Trail Town effort.

Local officials and staff can utilize the following *Four Point Approach*⁴ to create a successful “Trail Town” environment in their community.

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.

Understanding the Trail Corridor

It is valuable to host “field trips” with government officials to the local trail network so they can get a firsthand understanding of the issues and opportunities associated with their trail system.



⁴ National Main Street Center: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>

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 and accessible atmosphere created through attractive window displays, professional signage, well-maintained sidewalks, accessible parking areas, appropriate street lights, and 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 businesses to respond to today's market, the town can help convert unused space into productive property and increase the competitiveness of business enterprises.

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, local leaders must involve as many interested groups and individuals as possible from throughout the community. Citizens, paddlers, bicyclists, stakeholder groups, and local officials all need to support downtown revitalization efforts. Local leaders should also seek support from local civic groups, historical societies, financial institutions, religious institutions, business owners and civic organizations (both public and private) that have a stake in tourism and the downtown. Because of the residual health benefits trails provide to local residents, it can be helpful to seek support from local physicians or regional healthcare networks. In addition, it will be important to include people with disabilities as well as senior citizen and disability advocates.

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

Four Point Approach - Organizing

A hands-on, volunteer-driven program and organizational structure consisting of local officials and important recreational and economic development staff will be needed to establish a robust Trail Town effort. People who participated in the local assessment meetings under this planning project would make ideal committee members.



positive aspects of the Trail Town initiative through word-of-mouth. Local leaders in each community should make concerted 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, explain to them what local leaders are doing, and let them know how they can help. It can also be helpful to submit articles (with photos) to local organizations in the community, speak at local civic and community service meetings (e.g., planning commission, city council, Rotary, Kiwanis), establish a social media platform, and have a presence at community events and festivals.

Local officials, friends groups, and the various Chambers of Commerce and Convention and Visitor Bureaus in West Michigan can assist in promoting each community and their surrounding region as Trail Town destinations. These organizations have the ability and capacity to not only promote Trail Town activities locally, but also throughout the State of Michigan and the Midwest.

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 in each community should work to identify existing community groups, business owners and key figures, and discuss ways to unite the community around the Trail Town effort.

As previously mentioned, it will also be important for local Trail Town teams to work with and coordinate efforts with neighboring Trail Town teams, regional planning agencies, and economic and community development organizations.

Get the Message Out

It can also be helpful to submit articles (with photos) to local organizations in the community, speak at local civic and community service meetings (e.g., planning commission, city council, Rotary, Kiwanis), establish a social media platform, and have a presence at community events and festivals.



G. Find the Resources to Implement Your Trail Town Concept. Implementing a comprehensive Trail Town initiative will require funding. Funding through grants and other economic assistance programs can be secured for community and economic development initiatives from local, county, state and federal agencies. These financial aid programs may include Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grants from the Michigan Department of Transportation, Rural Development grants from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), grants from Michigan's Coastal Zone Management Program (CZMP), and grants from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Local financing tools, like Tax Increment Financing (TIF), can also be utilized. In addition, tax credits are available to small businesses who make accessibility improvements that better serve customers with disabilities (information can be found at: www.ada.gov/taxincent.pdf)

Funding may also be secured from local and regional Community Foundations, regional trail and recreation advocacy organizations, friends groups, and local conservation groups. Municipal staff members, DDA staff members, interested volunteers, or even a professional grant writer can be especially helpful in researching and writing grants on behalf of a local Trail Town initiative.

Building relationships and partnerships with local businesses is also critical in securing funding for Trail Town initiatives. Local businesses (especially restaurants, breweries and hotels/resorts) may be willing to sponsor special trail-related events and promote Trail Town activities. Furthermore, local businesses may be willing to take on the cost of providing and building trail amenities and support services.

The more that local leaders can involve a wide variety of interest groups, stakeholders and individuals in the Trail Town Planning effort, the more likely it will be to secure funding from these different sources.

H. Take One Step at a Time. It is important to understand that a Trail Town initiative does not happen overnight; rather, it develops and evolves over time. This may be especially true in some of the nine communities where there is not a local organization already working on building trails or economic development initiatives.

Funding Resources

It is important to remember that most state and federal grants require a local cash match. For CZMP grants, in-kind services can also be used toward match. CZMP grant applications are typically due in December.

In addition, the DNR now allows communities to use Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grants toward the match for Natural Resources Trust Fund grants. It will be important for each community to incorporate the findings and recommendations of this plan into their local recreation plan to be eligible for Trust Fund grants. Annual Trust Fund applications are due in April.

Fortunately, there is already a great deal of local and regional support and enthusiasm in most of these coastal communities, and local trail, paddling and bicycling advocates and supporters have long been very proactive. 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.*

Trail Town Design Issues

An important step in preparing this plan was to assess the physical characteristics of each community’s central business district and its relationship to the nearby trail(s) — a *Trail-to-Town Assessment*. This assessment helps local officials, trail planners, business owners and economic development professionals better understand the physical challenges that trail visitors may encounter in their quest to visit the downtown. The results of the trail-to-town assessment for each community is summarized later in this document. The following pages describe the physical elements that were evaluated as part of the trail-to-town assessment.

Determine the Type of Trail in Your Community. The first item to evaluate in assessing the physical characteristics of a town is to determine the type of trail that runs through (or in close proximity to) the central business district. While a water trail primarily accommodates kayakers, most paved trails accommodate a wide variety of non-motorized uses (e.g., cycling, hiking, walking, observing nature, etc.). Although most of them are not groomed for such uses, in the winter months some of the non-motorized trails are often used by snow-shoers and cross-country skiers. It is important for local leaders and trail planners to understand which types of users are on the trail and at which time of year.

Understanding Trail Use

It is very important for local officials and trail planners to understand what activities are taking place on their trail systems and at what time of year so they can adequately provide supporting trail infrastructure (e.g., kayak launches).



Understanding how the trail is used during different times of the year will help local officials better provide for supporting trail infrastructure. For example, if a lot of people are paddling in the shoulder months (early spring and late fall), then perhaps local municipalities might consider installing kayak launch facilities earlier in the year (before Memorial Day) and taking them out later in the year (after Labor Day). Seasonal knowledge can also be helpful when planning specific trail-associated events or promotional activities, and can help local business owners better understand potential trail clientele.

Understand Trail Geography. As previously mentioned, another important item to assess is the physical relationship between the trail and the central business district (the *trail-to-town relationship*), which includes factors such as linear distance and elevation change. 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.

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.

In each coastal project community, the Lake Michigan Water Trail is considered an “adjacent trail,” whereas some of the water trails on connecting waterways would be considered “internal.”

Understanding the elevation change or “grade” between the trail and the central business district is also very important. This can be especially important for trail users pulling kids in trailers, people with disabilities using wheelchairs or long-distance trail users who may be carrying heavy loads of gear. The grade between the trail and the central business district can also be important for paddlers, especially if they have to carry their kayak and gear to a lock-up area or their automobile.

Understanding Trail Geography

Due to its close proximity to the downtown, trails like the McCoy Creek Trail in Buchanan are considered “internal” trails.



Trail-to-Town Elevation Change

The elevation change between the trail and the central business district can be especially important to bicyclists or long-distance trail users who may be carrying heavy loads of gear.



Certainly, weather can play a significant role in the pace at which paddlers can move along water trails. High winds can create significant waves which can be treacherous to paddle through. In addition, a stiff headwind can slow the pace of a paddler tremendously, turning a relatively moderate hour-long paddle into an exhausting three-hour paddle.

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 the six *connecting elements* — the physical components that make up and define the connection 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 accessible 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 user will decide whether or not to venture into the downtown. Therefore, it is imperative that local officials and trail planners in each community work to make the Trailhead a positive and welcoming place.

One of the most important items trail planners and local officials should provide at the Trailhead is information about the community. This might include a listing of area businesses, or a description of local attractions or historical information. Any description should include at least one photo of the downtown, preferably an image of the downtown bustling with lots of people.

By providing such universally accessible amenities as water and toilet facilities, the community welcomes visitors, showing hospitality and inviting them to visit the town. Whenever possible, these amenities (see more below) should be available to trail users all year round (or at least when the trail is being actively used). It is also important to consider providing amenities at the Trailhead for each potential user group.

Key Connecting Elements

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

Trailhead Amenities - Town Information

One of the most important amenities local officials should provide at the Trailhead is information about the downtown.



Universally Accessible Trailhead Amenities

- Bathrooms
- Water
- Benches
- Trash Receptacles
- Picnic Tables
- Shelter
- Parking (with shade)
- Wi-Fi
- Pop Machine
- Directional Signs
- Welcome Signs
- Trail Map
- Community Information
- Bike Rack/Kayak Rack

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. Most of the nine 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 bathroom facilities is not feasible, each jurisdiction should work to provide universally accessible portable bathroom facilities.

When building new brick-and-mortar bathrooms, consider installing at least one accessible “family bathroom” to accommodate parents with small children of the opposite sex and people with disabilities who may have a spouse or caretaker of the opposite sex.

Trailhead Amenities - Signs

Signs and markers are essential components on any trail system and should be incorporated into local and regional trail planning efforts. In researching best practices for Trailhead signs for this document, we found that the *Bikeway and Trail Design Standards and Planning Guidelines*⁵ from Fredrick County, Maryland, provided a comprehensive set of recommendations for information that should be included on Trailhead signs (see Figure 1.1 on the next page).

Trailhead Amenities - Bathrooms

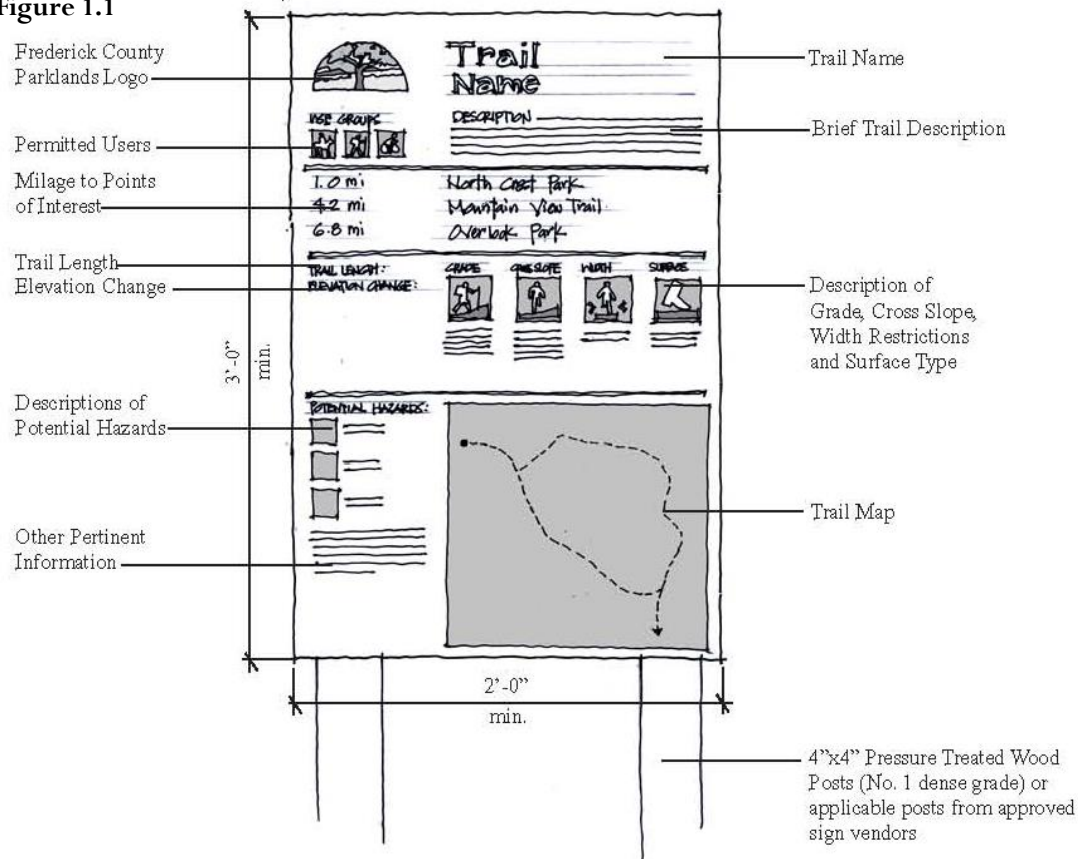
Each jurisdiction should work to provide portable bathroom facilities during the time of year when their brick-and-mortar facilities are closed. Accessible portable toilets, like the one pictured below along the Pere Marquette Trail, are relatively inexpensive.



⁵ Bikeway and Trail Design Standards and Planning Guidelines. Fredrick County Parklands, Fredrick County Department of Parks and Recreation (2003)

Whenever possible, the style (design, color, materials) of the Trailhead sign should reflect the history and/or culture of the community. For multi-jurisdictional trails, the style of the Trailhead sign should be consistent in each community and reflective of the history and culture of the entire region. The consistent appearance of the Trailhead sign (especially if it includes a logo) can help to reinforce regional and local branding efforts. The Trailhead sign should also prominently include the word “welcome” somewhere on the sign. All trail signs should be located on accessible routes and surrounded by the accessible surfacing.

Figure 1.1



Trailhead Amenities - Signs

For multi-jurisdictional trails, the style of the trailhead sign should be consistent in each community and reflective of the history and culture of the entire region. The Iron Ore Heritage Recreation Trail has incorporated iron from a local mine into the frame of the trailhead sign kiosk in each community (Marquette below).



Trailhead Amenities – Safety Signs

Paddling on the Great Lakes, or any water body, should be taken very seriously. Local efforts should be made to include warnings, information and safety tips on trailhead signs or kiosk. Information should include links to the NOAA Great Lakes marine forecasts (www.mws.noaa.gov) and the USGS (waterdata.usgs.gov/mi/nwis/rt) for inland rivers.

Given the scope, geography and heavy vegetation of the Lake Michigan coastline, it may be quite difficult for paddlers (in the water) to determine where an access site is located without a formal map or GPS unit. Several water trail systems in Michigan employ identification signs along the coastline or river bank. Local officials in each of the nine jurisdictions discussed the implementation of a flag system that could be seen by paddlers from far-away distances and in both sunny and cloudy conditions. Despite several discussions, no formal template or agreement to use a flag system was agreed upon. However, a mock-up of a “Trailhead identification sign” for the Lake Michigan Water Trail was developed for this master plan (see right).

Other sign types include:

Informational signs to direct and guide users along trails in the most simple and direct manner.

Directional signs to inform the trail user where they are along the trail and the distance to specific destinations and points of interest. More information on directional or “wayfinding” signs can be found on page 31.

Interpretive signs to offer educational information about the trail and/or the surrounding area and community.

Warning signs to alert trail users to potentially hazardous or unexpected conditions.

Regulatory signs to inform trail users of the “rules of the trail” as well as other rules and regulations.

Trailhead Amenities - Signs

A mock-up of a “Trailhead identification sign” — a sign to direct paddlers from the water to the trailhead — was developed for this master plan.



Whenever feasible, a combination of all the sign types listed above (if needed) should be provided at each Trailhead and at major access points in the downtown to convey accurate and detailed information about existing trail conditions, available facilities, and nearby downtown amenities.

A sign array template (Appendix H) was developed by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA) that illustrates the size, appearance and content of identification, trailhead, directional, safety and mile marker signs that could be implemented in areas and communities along the Lake Michigan Water Trail. Implementation of such signage would require extraordinary, but achievable, cooperation with local units of government and other regulatory agents along the entire Lake Michigan coastline.

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 town. Therefore, it is very important to include information about area businesses and attractions at the Trailhead. Photos of the primary shopping district, outdoor restaurants and other downtown amenities should be included in the description of the town. Whichever image is selected, be sure it includes people; images of a downtown devoid of people are not helpful. Good pictures help sell a positive image of the downtown and help convince trail tourists to enter the town.

Depending on the location of the trailhead and the size of the town, the sign may include a simple base map of the community with icons that identify the types of services the town offers (e.g., a fork and knife icon for restaurants). The sign could also include a more detailed map of the downtown with a comprehensive list of businesses and attractions. If the sign includes a map of the downtown, be sure to clearly mark the trail and where it connects to the downtown. If a formal sign kiosk is not possible, try to include information about the community (e.g., pictures, restaurant menus, hotel information) in other prominent places, like on the exterior of a restroom building or marina office. Business amenity signs may also be viewed by bicycle tourists at key entryways into the town.

Trailhead Amenities - Art

Trailheads can be an excellent place to display artwork that highlights the unique and cultural aspects of the community and trail system. The sturgeon sculpture located along the Blue Water River Walk in Port Huron highlights the unique spawning grounds of the ancient fish in the river.



Trailhead Amenities - Cultural Heritage Signs

Trailheads can also be an excellent place to display information about the unique historical and cultural aspects of your community. Local officials and trail planners in each community should consider how to incorporate the community's historical or cultural aspects into new signs at the Trailhead or in downtown.

Trailhead Amenities - Art

Trailheads can also be an excellent place to display artwork that highlights the unique cultural aspects of the community and trail system. When considering the size and materials of the artwork display, be aware that it may be used for other unintended purposes — that is, trail users may sit on it to tie their shoe or kids may climb on it.

Water Trailheads

As previously mentioned, each of the nine project communities has access to at least one formal water trail. The quality of amenities at each paddling Trailhead often depends on its location. For example, a Trailhead located in a marina may include large areas for parking, restrooms, showers, and an accessible kayak launch, whereas a Trailhead at a rural road-ending may only have a small path from which paddlers can access the water. This document is not suggesting a minimum amenities standard at all paddling Trailheads. However, urban areas (near downtowns) should have at least one Trailhead with an accessible launch, a kayak rack/locker, and as many amenities as possible (see list on page 20).

In 2014, the National Park Service developed a guidebook, *Prepare to Launch*⁶, to assist in the development of canoe and kayak launches. The document provides a comprehensive summary of and recommendations for designing kayak launches.

Water Trailhead

Kayak racks (or lockers) provide an opportunity for trail users to secure their kayak and venture into town. The picture below shows a kayak rack along the Clinton River in downtown Rochester, Michigan. Some Michigan communities are considering installing kayak storage lockers that could be rented by residents each summer, much like a boat slip at a marina.



⁶ Prepare To Launch - Guidelines For Assessing, Designing And Building Access Sites For Carry-In Watercraft (2014) Prepare to Launch! is a joint project of the NPS Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance Program and the River Management Society

Universally Accessible Water Trailheads

ADA guidelines for newly designed, constructed and altered recreation facilities issued in 2002 require that all public boat launches (which include fixed and floating structures of all sizes) comply with ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). However, these guidelines represent *minimum* standards for boating facilities.

Paddlers of all abilities want to launch and land smoothly without capsizing or damaging their watercraft. They need firm surfaces that support their movement from their arrival place to the launch at the water's edge, and sufficient space to accommodate the length of their watercraft during transitions into and out of their vessel and into and out from the water. Therefore, it is important to consider *Universal Design* practices in the development of the complete water access facility, from car to launch. Simply put, universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without need for adaptation or specialized design. A few considerations of universal design are provided below. A more thorough description of universal design considerations and a formal accessibility report (and site plan) for each water trail access site studied in each of the nine communities can be found in Appendix B and C.

Universal Design Concepts - Launch Sites that are:

- For all people of all abilities
- For all ages
- For all skills
- For independent use
- Safe
- Intuitive
- Easier to use by everyone together

2. Portal. The Portal is the point at which users of the trail exit the Trailhead (or the trail) with the intent of visiting the nearby downtown. The Portal should be a welcoming point in which lighting, wayfinding signs, and accessible sidewalks and pathways clearly direct trail users into the central business district. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to place informational signs about downtown businesses (see page 24) at the Portal rather than the Trailhead. Local officials and trail planners should work closely with their downtown merchants or an organization like a DDA to develop signs

Universally Accessible Kayak Launch

Local officials should always consider the installation of universally accessible kayak launches at key water trail access sites. Simple launches, like the self-manipulated launch pictured below, can be purchased for a few thousand dollars. The EZ Dock Company has installed accessible launches in many Michigan communities (www.ez-dock.com).



that are inclusive (that is, they include all businesses) and are of a size and design that is complementary to the surrounding landscape and character of the community.

Portal - Picture (A) is an example of a well-done portal sign in Evart, Michigan that has captured all the local businesses along the White Pine Trail. Picture B shows a less desirable example of a portal sign, exclusive to just one business, tacked up along the North Central State Trail in Gaylord, Michigan.

A. Inclusive Portal Sign



B. Exclusive Portal Sign



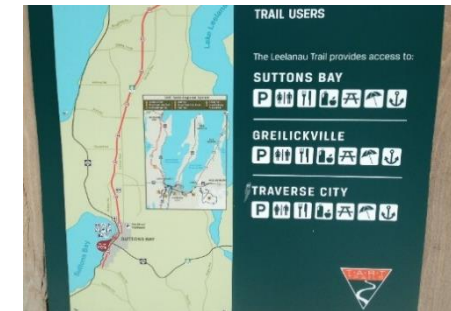
3. Pathway. The Pathway is the corridor that trail users follow from the Portal to the central business district. In some communities (e.g., Buchanan), the Pathway is just a few blocks, while in others (e.g., South Haven), the Pathway is about a mile. If the trailhead is several miles away from the central business district, the Pathway could include a combination of paved shoulders, bike lanes, and/or sidewalks or other pathways.

The Pathway may also pass through commercial areas or residential neighborhoods. Therefore, it is important to include wayfinding signs or trail markers at key intersections and connections. Wayfinding signs along the Pathway should include the distance to the downtown, displayed in blocks and/or minutes.

Wayfinding signs can also highlight places of interest along (or adjacent to) the Pathway, such as restaurants, shops, historical markers or a library. Local officials should continually assess the Pathway for cleanliness, safety, lighting, physical condition accessibility and interaction with traffic.

Portal

In some instances, it may be more appropriate and cost effective to include symbols (e.g., a fork and knife for restaurants) to identify general community assets rather than listing each individual business.



Pathway

Wayfinding along the Pathway should include the distance to the downtown in blocks or minutes (see sign in Rochester, Michigan below).



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 accessible Pathway. It is important to note that points along each major road coming into the central business district will serve as the Gateway for bike tourists. The Gateway area(s) should welcome trail users and visitors into the central business district and be the starting point for directional signs to individual attractions and businesses within the district.

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 accessibility and physical condition. Window displays and building façades should also be regularly assessed for best practices (see *retail building form* later in this document). Additionally, the Center should be assessed on the availability of amenities that help trail users enjoy their experience (e.g., bike racks, outdoor seating at restaurants, ATM machines, free Wi-Fi, free air hoses for inflating tires, and public restrooms).

Communities like New Buffalo, St. Joseph, Ludington and South Haven have offices or storefronts within their downtown devoted to tourist information (often the Chamber of Commerce). Each of these storefronts should include trail maps, brochures about bike and kayak rentals/outfitters, and information about where trail users can eat, sleep and shop within the downtown. In some instances, these storefronts and adjacent areas could be used as a central depot for trail users and their gear (e.g., bike racks, restrooms, lockers, etc.).

6. Nodes. Nodes are points of interest along or near the Pathway or in the Center that will be visited or utilized by trail users. Nodes may include businesses that cater to the specific trail user (a kayak rental 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

Gateway

An examples of a Gateway point along the Little Traverse Wheelway into downtown Petoskey, Michigan.



Center: Offices and/or storefronts devoted to tourist information should include brochures and flyers about the local trail systems, where to rent bikes and kayaks, and places the trail user could eat, sleep and shop. In some instances these offices and the surrounding groups could be used as a central depot for trail users. Picture A is the visitor information booth in downtown New Buffalo. Picture B is the visitor center in downtown South Haven.



food, etc.). Local leaders in each community should continue to identify existing and/or potential nodes along each existing and potential Pathway into their downtowns.

Putting It All Together

Local officials, business owners, volunteers, municipal staff and other important stakeholders in each community should work to assess and map the connecting elements of their trail-to-town corridor (see example below, Gateway & Center not shown).

Connecting Elements Map (Ludington)

Trailhead Portal Pathway Gateway Center



Connecting Elements

As part of this planning effort, local officials in some communities worked to identify the preliminary location of each connecting element. A formal assessment with business owners, volunteers and other important community stakeholders should be conducted in each community.



Public Amenities

As previously mentioned, another important step in becoming a Trail Town is to have accessible public amenities that support both day-trip and overnight trail users and bike tourists. It will be important for each community to have amenities such as well-marked and accessible crosswalks, working pedestrian signals, bike racks, kayak lockers, drinking fountains, benches, bike stations (see right), and wayfinding signs within its downtown. Most of the coastal communities assessed for this document have a number of public amenities that support trail users and bike tourists, but gaps remain. Local leaders should continue to develop these types of amenities and resources as funding becomes available.

The responsibility of some public amenities fall under the authority of regional or state agencies. For example, the County Road Commission oversees and maintains road shoulders, and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) oversees crosswalks and traffic signals on state highways. It is imperative that local leaders in each community continually communicate with regional and state agencies about their local Trail Town planning efforts and improvements. 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 public amenities. However, the purchase, installation and maintenance of these public amenities is expensive. Local leaders should look for opportunities to partner with stakeholder groups, local business owners, non-profit organizations, and regional community development agencies to share in the cost of providing these essential amenities.

In addition, local officials in each jurisdiction should examine whether local zoning regulations inhibit the development of quasi-public amenities. For example, does the community have zoning regulations that prohibit restaurants from offering outdoor seating?

Public Amenities

A bike station is an important public amenity that gives trail users and bike tourists the opportunity to fix equipment that is not working or to pump up tires. At least one bike station should be located near the downtown or near the trail-to-town Pathway in each community.



Public Amenities - Wayfinding Signs. Wayfinding signs are one of the most important public amenities local jurisdictions can provide for trail users and bike tourists. Wayfinding signs direct visitors to the primary assets and features of the community, and the local trail systems should be treated as such. A comprehensive wayfinding signage system should include signs located along major thoroughfares directing drivers to the Trailhead, and pedestrian-mounted signs on sidewalks directing trail users through the downtown and to nearby Trailheads. Remember, if the wayfinding sign includes a map of the downtown, be sure to clearly mark the trail and where it connects to the downtown.

Wayfinding signs should also be placed on the trail, directing trail users to the central business district. As previously mentioned, LIAA developed a comprehensive wayfinding sign array for communities along the Lake Michigan Water Trail, which can be found in Appendix H.

If there are multiple trails in the community, each trail should be included on the local wayfinding sign. In addition, the name of the Trailhead and any identifying trail logo should be included on the local wayfinding sign. As previously mentioned, the distance to the Trailhead (or to the downtown from the trail) should also be included on the wayfinding sign. The distance to the trail in rural areas can be displayed in miles. However, wayfinding signs in urban settings should be displayed in blocks or even minutes.

Most of the nine communities included in this plan already have a very distinctive wayfinding system that includes both vehicular wayfinding signs and pedestrian wayfinding signs and maps. It will be important for local officials in each community to work with their local or regional MDOT office to include their trail systems on state wayfinding signs.

Public Amenities - Cultural Heritage. Local officials in each community should celebrate and incorporate the community's unique cultural heritage at the Trailhead, along the trail-to-town corridor, and within the central business district. In addition, the trail itself should be celebrated in the central business district. One way to do this is with public art. A sculpture, symbolic of the community's cultural heritage, could

Wayfinding Signs

The community wayfinding system should direct drivers to the downtown and trail system (picture A), pedestrians along the trail into downtown (B), and pedestrians through the downtown (C).



A.



B.



C.

be placed at the Trailhead. Another sculpture, symbolic of the trail, could be placed in the central business district or near the Gateway.

Picture (A) shows a sculpture of iron workers along the Iron Ore Heritage Trail in the Upper Peninsula. Picture (B) shows a sculpture of trail users near the Gateway into downtown Traverse City.

A.



B.



Interpretive kiosks can provide information about the culture and history (e.g., movements or influential figures) of the community at the Trailhead, along the trail-to-town corridor, or in the downtown. As previously noted, interpretive signs should incorporate a design reflective of a unique cultural aspect of the community.

Public Amenities - Bike Racks. Bike racks not only provide a secure place for trail users to store their bikes as they visit the town, but they also support local residents and bike commuters. In an effort to eliminate obstructing the pedestrian way and the chaining of bikes to trees, benches or light posts, it will be important for each community to strategically place bike racks at locations throughout the downtown.

Although sometimes they are less efficient, decorative bike racks (especially those that incorporate cultural themes into the design) further enhance the image of the community as a Trail Town.

Cultural Heritage

Interpretive kiosks at Trailheads, along the trail-to-town corridor, or in the downtown can help tell the story of the community to trail tourists.



Bike Racks

Strategically placed bike racks will help eliminate bike clutter within the downtown.



Sometimes, if a bike rack is too elaborate, it can appear to be public art, resulting in lack of use. Be sure to indicate a bicycle on the bike rack to denote that it is indeed intended to be used as such (see Boyne City example at right).

Bike Racks

Although they are less efficient, decorative bike racks like this one in Ludington further enhance the image of a Trail Town.



Bike Racks

Bike racks near water trail access sites may encourage local residents to bike to their kayak storage area.



Public Amenities - Public Transportation. For many trail users and bicycle tourists, time and distance may limit the likelihood of visiting other communities in the region. Some paddlers may only be comfortable paddling 10 miles over a two-day period, whereas bike tourists may only have enough endurance to pedal 30 miles over a two-day period. However, trail users and bicycle tourists may still like to recreate on other segments of the trail and visit other communities during their stay in the region. Local leaders should work with their local or regional transportation agency to explore opportunities to establish a seasonal “trail transportation” program in which the public transportation agency would transport trail users and their equipment to stops at Trailheads in communities throughout the region. For communities in which there is no public transportation agency, perhaps a local outfitter would be willing to provide that service.

Bike Racks

The artistic bike rack shown in downtown Boyne City is engraved with a bicycle, denoting its intended use.



Public Transportation

In Traverse City, the public transit agency (BATA) locates bus stops near Trailheads and transports trail users between Traverse City and Suttons Bay during the summer months.



Business Amenities

The local businesses that will be of interest to the trail user and bike tourist will be primarily service-based businesses. Trail planners, local officials and local/regional community development agencies can help local business owners in each community better understand the needs of the trail user and bike tourist. In addition to providing goods and services to trail users and road bikers, local business owners can incorporate simple trail-friendly and inclusive universally accessible amenities and trail-based hospitality into their business practices. For example, restaurants and bars could provide bike racks outside their establishments, accessible restrooms that are open to the public, and perhaps a “trail special” menu item or drink. Wait and host staff should be able to talk about the trail and describe how to get to the Trailheads. Gas stations near Trailheads should offer a free air pump. Motels should have trail maps in their lobby and offer bike cleaning stations and a secure bike storage area. Retail establishments should have friendly hours of operation, trail-related merchandise, and options to ship their merchandise to the trail tourist’s home.

It is also important that all downtown businesses, especially restaurants, accept credit cards; long gone are the days of “cash only.” It may also be helpful to host a “service industry trail day” in which community service workers are given tours of the trail so they can better describe and recommend it to tourists.

The enhancement of existing businesses and development of new business opportunities are important elements to becoming a Trail Town. Many businesses in the region already provide goods and services geared toward trail users and bike tourists. Hopefully, 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 businesses.

When Building Form Meets Retail

The look and feel of the downtown are important elements in creating a Trail Town. The density, size and architectural elements of the buildings, as well as the character

Business Amenities

Local officials can help local business owners in each community better understand the needs of the trail user.



Building Form

Attractive storefronts, historic buildings, outdoor cafés and wide sidewalks are essential elements in creating a pedestrian-friendly and thriving retail environment.



and pattern of the storefronts, tree canopy and sidewalks, all work together to create a pedestrian-friendly environment that attracts tourist and creates a thriving retail environment.

The following section highlights several “best practices” for the design of buildings, storefronts and sidewalks, as noted by Robert Gibbs in his book, *Principles of Urban Retail, Planning and Development*⁷.

These best practices can be implemented in the local zoning code or through the adoption of design guidelines. The following section highlights examples of building form elements within the nine communities that are contributing to the character of the downtown.

Building and Public Realm Elements

Awnings:

- Define the first-level storefront
- Reinforce brand
- Bring attention to the business

Awnings (Best Practices):

- Materials should be constructed from canvas, cloth, steel or glass but should reflect the overall character of the business brand. Awnings constructed of plastic and internally illuminated should not be permitted.
- Color should be limited to two colors.
- Lettering should be limited to eight inches in height and only allowed on the front flap rather than on the top-sloped awning.
- Awnings should complement the character of the building and should not cover architectural elements.
- Awnings should be no more than six to eight feet deep and have a pitch of no more than 25 degrees.

Awnings

Materials should be constructed from canvas, cloth, steel or glass, but should reflect the overall character of the business brand.



⁷ Gibbs, Robert. *Principles of Urban Retail Planning and Development*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (2012)

Signs Should:

- Be well designed
- Be properly scaled
- Support continuity, but encourage individuality

Signs (Best Practices):

- Signs should be limited to one square foot of signage for each linear foot of storefront.
- Lettering should be no higher than 10 inches.
- Internally illuminated signs should be prohibited.
- Design materials should reflect the character of the building.

Windows and Doors:

- Help advertise goods
- Reinforce building form
- Add interests to pedestrians
- Draw people into the store
- Provide a sense of safety

Windows and Doors (Best Practices):

- At least 60% of first-level storefronts facing the primary sidewalk should be transparent glass.
- Keep displays simple, don't overcrowd.
- Keep the back of the display window open to allow the store's interior to be visible
- Primary doors should face the sidewalk.
- Doors facing the street should be recessed whenever practical.

Signs

Signs should support continuity, but encourage individuality.



Windows

At least 60% of first-level storefronts facing the primary sidewalk should be transparent glass.



Sidewalks:

- Provide the first and last impression for visitors
- Should not distract from the storefront windows

Sidewalks (Best Practices):

- Sidewalks should be wide enough to allow pedestrians to pass one another comfortably as well as to accommodate limited outside displays and dining.
- Sidewalks should be 8 to 16 feet wide.
- Wider sidewalks should be located on the sunny side of the block.

Street Trees:

- Contribute to the perception that the downtown stores offer quality goods

Street Trees (Best Practices):

- Select native tree species.
- Avoid short bushy trees that block storefronts and window displays.
- Plant trees near or on common property lines.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks should be wide enough to allow pedestrians to pass one another comfortably while accommodating limited outside displays and dining.



Street Trees

Trees contribute to the perception that downtown stores offer quality goods.



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 economic development agencies to understand how economic restructuring can capitalize on existing community assets to help establish a Trail Town.

A. Understanding Your Trail User - The Customer

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *in any downtown development effort, understanding your customer is one of the most important and central activities local business leaders can undertake*. Often, local officials want formal metrics to justify their budgets or invest in capital improvements. Big cities, regional governments and state agencies across the country have spent millions of dollars trying to better understand customer habits and the economic impact of trails. This process is very costly and probably unrealistic for most communities. A better approach is to get a general sense of the economic impact of trail users by asking local business owners what trail users are buying, where they are staying, and where they are eating. A good story about the economic impact of just one trail user can go a long way.

Broad information on the social, economic and lifestyle preferences of trail users can be found in reports from trail user associations (e.g., International Mountain Biking Association). Another way to better understand the characteristics and spending habits of trail users is by surveying them. Several communities or trail systems (e.g., Kal Haven Trail) have conducted formal trail user surveys to get a better idea of who is on their trail and what kind of experience they are having in the community.

Local officials and community development professionals, could administer an online survey, or conduct a more thorough survey of trail users at the trail using volunteers. Once the socio-economic and lifestyle preferences of the trail customer base are somewhat better understood, local leaders, community development agencies and tourism organizations can begin to make decisions about how to best attract potential trail customers into the community.

Economic Impacts

A 2013 study by the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development found that the Huron River Water Trail has roughly 103,000 annual visitors, which translates to almost \$50 million in regional economic activity.

Understanding Your Trail User

Once the socio-economic characteristics and lifestyles of the trail customer base is better understood, local officials and business owners can better make decisions on how to attract these potential customers.



Understanding Your Trail User - A Closer Look at Bike Tourism

In 2014, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources delivered a presentation on bike tourism that 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 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 (e.g., beach, shopping, restaurants, full-service hotel, and museums). The typical Comfort Cyclist has a high amount of discretionary income, on average spending over \$100 a day.

These three bike tourist profiles are just one example. Due to their proximity to the water, all of the coastal communities are also visited by paddlers and boaters. It will be important to try understand the needs, desires and spending habits of each trail user that travels to the community.

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
- 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



B. Assess Basic and Long-Term Trail User Needs

There are a number of *basic* and *long-term* goods and services that most trail users expect in every community; a full list can be found in Appendix E. Local leaders should continually assess if and to what extent their community is providing these goods and services.

C. Encourage Related Business Opportunities

As previously stated, trail users and bicycle tourists will be interested in other activities and 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.

D. Assist the Local Business Community

Local community development offices, Chambers of Commerce and Convention and Visitor Bureaus should work with local business owners to explore ways to encourage economic restructuring around local and regional trail and recreational assets.

One way local and regional 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 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 Opportunities

Local businesses may wish to expand their offerings of goods and services to meet the needs of trail tourists.



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 a 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. Establish a Trail Town Image. The first component of an effective promotional campaign is to convince local residents, the larger region, and then tourists that you have an active, universally accessible and welcoming Trail Town environment. Most of the Trail Town strategies described in this document are based on drawing in visitors from beyond the local market. However, 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 officials and trail/recreation advocates need to make sure local officials and residents (the “community ambassadors”) are aware of their local trail systems and the regional paddling and bike-touring opportunities. Hosting local trail tours and implementing programs like “smart-commute week” are just a couple of ways to build up the trail-friendly character of the community and garner local support. Local stakeholder groups and active volunteers can also help build awareness.

Local officials and economic development agencies can help “brand” their community and the region as a Trail Town by developing attractive print marketing materials such as brochures, maps, billboards and advertisements. Digital marketing pieces, including videos, can be developed for the online outlets.

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 into the community’s history and cultural identity (or even the trail corridor’s history), can attract both local residents and visitors.

Promote a Trail Town Image

Local communities could incorporate Trail Town promotional pieces into streetscape features, like this banner in Boyne City, Michigan.



Promote a Trail Town Image

Local stakeholders can help brand their community (and region) as a Trail Town by developing uniform and attractive marketing materials.



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.

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. As previously mentioned, local officials and trail advocates should work with at least one local restaurant or bar to name a sandwich or drink special after the trail. A restaurant may also be willing to sponsor a weekly paddle/ride trail event.

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

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

A.



B.



Trail Town Events

Local Trail Town stakeholders should consider holding special and/or annual events to raise awareness about the local trail system and Trail Town effort. For example, a local brewery could host an annual paddling festival. A special beer could be made for the festival, with all proceeds going to water trail development efforts (see the Paddle-N-Pour event in downtown Port Huron below). Other events could include a smart-commute week or weekly bike-ride around the community, ending at a local restaurant.



Additional Recommendations

Establishing an impactful Trail Town initiative in the communities along the Lake Michigan coastline will require cooperation and long-term commitment by local and regional planning agencies, community and economic development agencies, local officials, trail advocates, and business owners. Many of the recommendations and best practices outlined throughout this document will be implemented by local leaders or, ideally, a local “Trail Town Committee.” At the same time, many recommendations, especially those related to promotions, may be implemented by regional agencies with input from local leaders. Using the framework of the “four-point approach,” the following section outlines additional recommendations for each of the nine communities and the region, including agencies that might be charged with directing implementation. Formal site plans for local water access sites are also provided in Appendix C. We have also included photographic renderings of how some of the recommendations discussed in this document might appear in all nine communities.

Organizing

Trail Town Committee(s)

As previously mentioned, many of the recommendations and best practices outlined earlier in this document will be implemented by local leaders. Therefore, it is important that each community establish a local “Trail Town Committee.” The local committee will provide the administrative structure required to schedule and hold meetings, establish priorities, and get everyone working toward the same goals. The committee should consist of a broad spectrum of local officials, trail advocates, environmental stewardship organizations, public safety agencies, accessibility advocates, business owners and community stakeholders. If the community has an established DDA or merchants association, it is imperative that those members participate. In some instances, it may be appropriate to include the Trail Town Committee within the sub-committee structure of the DDA.

Trail Town Committee

The local Trail Town Committee will help to schedule and hold meetings, establish priorities and get everyone working toward the same goals.



In an effort to support and coordinate Trail Town planning and implementation activities on a regional scale, members from the local Trail Town Committees in New Buffalo, Buchanan, Bridgman, St Joseph and South Haven should convene a “Southwest Michigan Trail Town Advisory Committee.” The Regional Trail Town Advisory Committee could be organized and facilitated by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, in cooperation with local Trail Town committee members, local Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureaus and local economic development officers who are already working on regional initiatives.

The Advisory Committee could meet as little as every quarter or as often as every month. The Advisory Committee will provide a venue for local and regional leaders to share ideas and information, discuss new initiatives, and talk about lessons learned. The Advisory Committee will also provide an opportunity to discuss regional promotional opportunities and other collaboration opportunities.

A similar regional advisory committee could be formed from Trail Town Committee members in Holland, Park Township and Ottawa County.

Safety

Paddling on the Great Lakes, or any water body, should be taken very seriously. In order to provide for a pleasant and safe paddling experience, local officials should consider implementing a formal safety plan for their community. This plan may include working with the Coast Guard and/or local or county public safety departments to make them aware of the trail and determine what safety measures should be used to protect paddlers. The plan may also include the development of safety tips and warnings to be placed on informational kiosks and promotional materials.

Promotion

Existing Print Materials

Just about every community has a number of brochures and pamphlets that highlight fun activities, a unique place or something to experience in their community. Some brochures might be developed by the local DDA, whereas others might be developed by local businesses. If the brochure is developed by the local municipality or DDA, it should include a description about the local trail system(s) and how the community supports trail users. It will be important to include pictures of trails users as well.

The Michigan Trails Magazine is the premier publication for trails in Michigan. Produced annually by the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance (MTGA), the magazine includes descriptions, photos and maps of each non-motorized trail system in Michigan. The magazine includes summaries of many of the trails in the nine communities discussed in this plan.

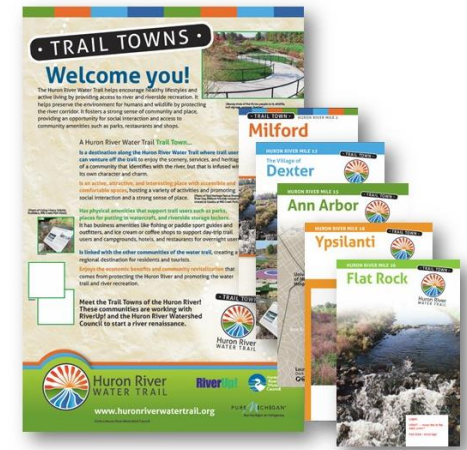
While water trails are not featured in the magazine, MTGA does allow trail organizations to place ads within their designated page. Local officials could place an ad for their section of the Lake Michigan Water Trail or inland water trail within the magazine. In addition, another ad and summary of the local Trail Town initiative could be included in the layout.

New Print Materials - Trail Town Rack Card

As previously mentioned, every community has a number of brochures and pamphlets (and even magazines) that highlight local assets. Some of these promotional pieces mention the local trail system or speak directly to trail tourists, but many do not. Each community, in partnership with other Trail Town communities in their region, should develop a Trail Town Rack Card Set. The set should include one card that describes the regional Trail Town initiative as well as a unique Trail Town card for each community. The format and design of each community-specific card should be similar, including a unique description of the community, things to do in the downtown (e.g., eat, drink, shop, and sleep), a description of the trail system, a map that shows how the trail, Trailhead and downtown are connected, links to local

Trail Town Rack Cards

The Huron River Watershed Council has developed an excellent Trail Town rack card set (see below) for their communities along the Huron River Water Trail. The cards are informative, well-designed and attractive, and should be emulated for each of the communities along the Lake Michigan coastline.



websites of interest, and contact information. Each card should also include vibrant pictures of the downtown and pictures of paddlers or road bikers engaging in the downtown (e.g., road bikers enjoying an outdoor restaurant). The border or dominant color of the card should be different for each community and consistent with the color of a Trail Town logo.

Advertisements

As previously mentioned, one of the first components to an effective promotional campaign is to convince local residents, the larger region, and then tourists that you have an active and welcoming Trail Town environment. One way to promote this message is through direct advertising on billboards, radio and television. Billboards can be great forms of advertising because they are relatively inexpensive, communicate simple and quick messages, and can be seen by a lot of people. Radio spots are advantageous in that they are relatively low cost and have the ability to reach a large audience segmented by demographics and geography. Television advertisements can be effective because they reach a large audience and are repetitive.

Promotional Merchandise

Another way to promote the local trail systems and Trail Town experience is through promotional merchandise. Promotional materials such as t-shirts, mugs, pins, stickers, car decals, and water bottles are relatively low cost and provide long-term contact with local residents and trail tourists. Local officials should work with business owners to develop a series of promotional materials that incorporate their logo. Initially, stickers and pins might be the most cost-effective promotional pieces because a high volume can be purchased for relatively little money and they can be easily distributed at events.

In addition, these same organizations should develop promotional merchandise that incorporates the trail activity and the name of each community. For example, “Paddle New Buffalo” or “Pedal South Haven” could be placed on sweatshirts and car decals. In many instances, local Trail Town leaders could work with local retailers who are already selling community-themed apparel to add these designs to their offerings.

Billboards

Billboards can communicate simple and quick messages about local and regional Trail Town efforts (see rendering below).

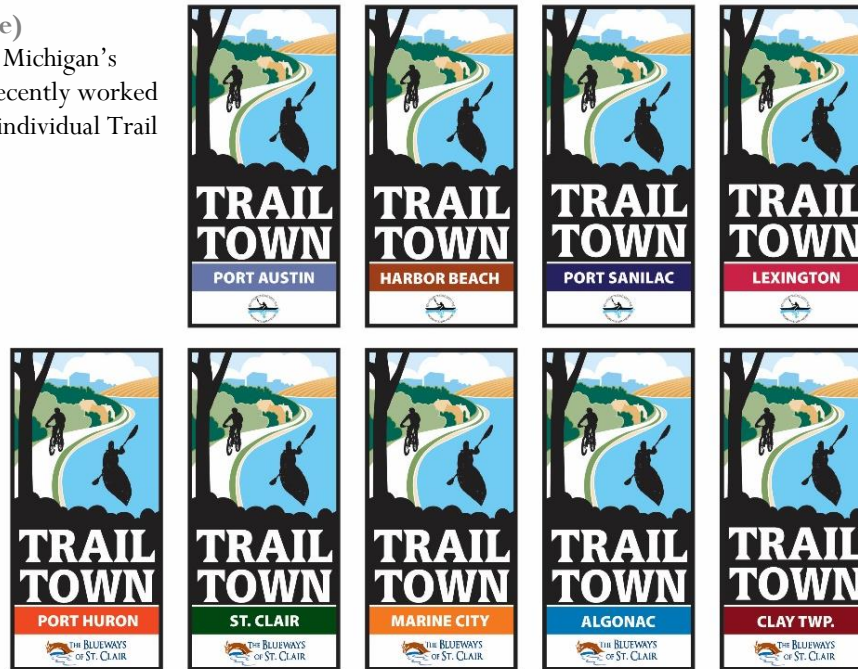


Logo and Identity

In an effort to build identity for the local and regional Trail Town initiative, a series of Trail Town logos for each community should be developed. The logos could then be incorporated into local and regional promotional materials.

Logo (Example)

Communities in Michigan's Thumb region recently worked to develop nine individual Trail Town logos.



U.S. Bike Route

As previously mentioned, many of the project communities studied for this document are connected by an official U.S. Bicycle Route. Bicycle Route 35 runs the entire length of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, ultimately connecting Sault Ste. Marie Michigan to Mississippi. Along the way it passes through New Buffalo, Bridgman St. Joseph, Sough Haven, Holland and Ludington. U.S. Bicycle Route 20 also passes through Ludington before it runs east across the Lower Peninsula, ultimately connecting Michigan to the Oregon coast.

These bike routes are unique in that they connect Michigan (including the six communities) to over 11,000 miles of bicycle routes across the United States. In addition, they support a vast number of state, national and international bike tourists. U.S. bicycle tourists can have a significant economic impact to the local economy. According to the Adventure Cycling Association, bicycle tourist spend between \$98 and \$223 dollars per overnight stay.

The Adventure Cycling Association notes that there are three significant ways in which communities can better accommodate touring bicyclists.

1. **Create Multimodal Connections.** Bicycle tourists often have difficulty getting their bicycle (and associated gear) from their home to their beginning or ending destination. Communities (and their associated transportation providers) can support cyclists by making it easier to transport their bicycle from one point to another. For example, the USS Badger has a reduced travel rate (\$12.00 round-trip) for people traveling to and from Ludington by bicycle. Amtrak is currently considering allowing travelers to bring their fully assembled bicycle on board. Local officials, especially in places like New Buffalo where the train station is directly downtown, should continue to talk to Amtrak about the benefits of allowing such cargo.
2. **Create a Network of Bikeways or Greenways.** Local officials in each of the six communities mentioned above should continue to explore ways to connect the US Bicycle routes with existing and future bikeways, trails and pathways. The Federal Highway Administration (FHA) notes three resources that especially useful to planners and engineers:
 - *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities*, AASHTO
 - *Urban Bikeway Design Guide*, National Association of Transportation
 - *Design Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach*, Institute of Transportation Engineers

Create Multimodal Connections

Local officials, especially in places like New Buffalo where the train station is directly downtown, should continue to talk to Amtrak about the benefits of allowing such cargo.



3. **Provide Wayfinding.** As previously mentioned, providing consistent and easily navigable signage to and from the bike route as well as communities amenities (where to eat, sleep and shop) is immensely important. Please see the summary and recommendations on wayfinding earlier in this document. Local officials, in partnership with the Michigan Department of Transportation should continue to place U.S. Bicycle Route signs in prominent locations, clearly directing cyclists through the community. When bike routes are changed, local officials should inform the community through public outreach (press release) and the update of any non-motorized maps).

Economic Restructuring

As previously discussed, economic restructuring refers to the functions of business expansion, business retention, and new business recruitment. It will be important for local and regional economic development agencies to work with local officials and business leaders to better understand the local and regional trail-tourist market and potential economic development opportunities.

Consumer Spending Habits

Consumers (especially younger consumers) are using credit cards or debit cards much more frequently than cash for both large and small transactions. In fact, a recent poll by creditcard.com cited in Bloomberg Business Week⁸ found that 51% of Americans under the age of 30 will use plastic even for purchases under \$5. Too many “cash only” signs in the downtown area can deter trail tourists — many of whom are already using credit cards because it’s easier to carry plastic rather than dollar bills and change — from spending their money in your community. It will be important for local and regional economic development agencies to encourage local business owners to accept credit card and debit card transactions.

Provide Wayfinding

Local officials, in partnership with the Michigan Department of Transportation should continue to place U.S. Bicycle Route signs in prominent locations, clearly directing cyclists through the community.



⁸ <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-08-27/plastic-beats-cash-among-young-adults>

Design

Public Amenities

As previously mentioned, another important step in becoming a Trail Town is to have inclusive universally accessible public amenities that support both day-trip and overnight trail users and bike tourists. In addition to the amenities described throughout this document (e.g., bike racks), it is important that each community install at least one bike station. The station could be placed at a prominent location in the downtown or at the primary Trailhead. The bike station allows trail users or road bikers to fill their tires with air or fix a broken chain. Renderings related to the design of access sites, the connecting elements and the downtown for each of the nine communities were developed for this plan and can be found in Appendix D.

Getting Started

The best management practices and recommendations outlined in this document might seem quite daunting to local officials. In addition, many of the capital improvement projects described in the Appendix D will require careful planning and funding. As each community moves forward with their local Trail Town Initiative, local officials should work on small achievable tasks first, including:

- 1. Establish the Local Trail Town Committee and Schedule a Meeting.**

Creating a Trail Town will require the input and time of community stakeholders. To keep people engaged, it will be important to establish a local Trail Town committee and meet on a consistent basis. The more formal the meeting (e.g., regular times and dates, an agenda, meeting minutes, report, etc.) the more likely that people will consistently attend and participate. Once the committee is formed, members should begin to identify priorities and assign responsibilities. A formal “Action Plan” should be created which: (1) outlines specific projects; (2) identifies the responsible party (e.g., trail town committee, DDA, local businesses, chamber of commerce); (3) determine the funding requirements; and (4) identify a timeline for implementation.

Bike Station

A bike station, placed in a prominent location, will help bolster the Trail Town image and provide a needed service to trail users.



2. Get Projects Adopted Into Other Local and Regional Planning Documents.

Once specific projects have been identified, the local Trail Town Committee should work with municipal staff to get each project placed within local planning documents like the Master Plan, TIF Plan and/or Parks and Recreation Plan. This will ensure that projects will be reviewed and considered in all future planning activities. In addition, projects listed in these planning documents are more likely to receive funding. For example projects listed within the Parks and Recreation Plan are eligible for Michigan DNR Trust Fund Grants.

3. Get Public Officials and Business Owners on the Trail and Help Them Understand the Economic Opportunities of the Trail.

Simply put, if local officials are not aware of the trail system and its associated amenities they will be less likely to allocated funding toward it. It will be important for the Trail Town Committee to host an orientation about their trail and associated trail amenities for local officials. It can also be helpful to explain to local officials how the trail fits into the recreational system and transportation network of the community. In addition, it will be important to educate business owners on the benefits of the local trail system and discuss how they could contribute to its success.

4. Add Trail Systems to Local Wayfinding Signs.

Most of the nine project communities already have a fairly comprehensive wayfinding signage program already in place. It will be important that when wayfinding signs get replaced or new wayfinding signs get erected, the local trail system (and trailheads) are included in the list of amenities.

5. Get Trail Images and Descriptions into Local and Regional Marketing Materials.

Many of the nine project communities already have developed and employ a comprehensive marketing campaign. Whereas other communities participate in regional marketing efforts. Whether the focus of the marketing materials is local or regional, it will be important to include a description of the trail system and the Trail Town theme within the web and print materials. Don't forget, a good picture can go along way!