

# Trail Town Manual

## Capturing Trail-Based Tourism

A Manual for Communities Along the North Central State Trail



## Acknowledgments

### Steering Committee

Vicki Lyon	Jane McGinnis
Bud Laughlin	Jeffrey Lawson
Darrell Schwalmie	Jim Conboy
Jeff Dykhouse	John Burt
Jeff Swaddling	Kim Pappas
John Moore	Mike Ridley
John Smith	Robert Harkness
Mark Oberman	Emily Meyerson
Maureen Conklin	Sandy Planisek
Jeff Winegard	Scott McNeil
Steve Baker	Tom Kellogg
Bill Morgan	Rebecca Behm
Steve Schnell	



### Community Partners

Village of Mackinaw City  
Cheboygan County  
Otsego County  
City of Cheboygan  
Tuscarora Township  
Corwith Township  
Village of Vanderbilt  
Top of Michigan Trails Council  
Cheboygan Area Chamber of Commerce  
Indian River Chamber of Commerce  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Friends of the North Country Trail

August 2010

Prepared By **PARTNERSHIPS  
for CHANGE**



324 Munson Avenue, Traverse City, MI 49686  
231-929-3696 [www.liaa.org](http://www.liaa.org)

## Table of Contents

Introduction 1

North Central State Trail & Community Profile 3

What is a Trail Town? 7

- The Trail Town and Main Street
- Getting Organized to Create Your Trail Town
  - Define the Trail Corridor
  - Assess Local Capacity
  - Develop the Local Volunteer Organization
  - Develop the Local Volunteer Base
  - Get the Messages Out Locally
  - Build Partnerships
  - Find the Resources to Implement Your Trail Town Concept
  - Take One Step at a Time

Trail Town Design Issues 13

- Physical Character - North Central State Trail/Community Assessment
- Public Amenities - North Central State Trail/Community Assessment
- Business Amenities - North Central State Trail/Community Assessment

Economic Restructuring for Your Trail Town 31

- Understanding Your Trail User - Customer
- Assess Basic Trail User Needs
- Assess Longer-Term Needs
- Encourage Related Business Opportunities
- Assist the Local Business Community

Appendix



Promoting Your Trail Town 34

- Promote Your Trail Town Image
- Hold Trail Town Events
- Conduct Trail Town Retail Promotions

The Trail Town Master Plan 36

- Provide a Gateway Moment
- Create a Sense of Place
- Develop a Welcoming Atmosphere
- Establish the Right Mix of Services
- Promote Trail-Oriented Events

## Introduction

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

Trails can also have a significant impact on the local economy. Trails can help attract and support tourism and new business opportunities. In addition, local residents often spend money on trail related activities and related businesses. As the link between trails and economic development is better understood, many communities are looking for ways to capitalize on their current trail networks. According to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy<sup>1</sup>, *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.*

This document is designed to discuss and illustrate how communities or “Trail Towns” (hereafter referred to as *Trail Towns*) along the North Central State Trail can utilize the long, linear, multi-jurisdictional non-motorized trail to support tourism and future business and economic development opportunities.



“You can’t rely on bringing people downtown; you have to put them there.”

- Jane Jacobs

---

<sup>1</sup> [From Trail Towns to TrOD - Trails and Economic Development](http://www.railstotrails.org). Rails-to-Trails Conservancy August 2007  
[www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)

In an effort to better understand the *Trail Town* concept and develop useful strategies and recommendations for communities along the North Central State Trail, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. The literature review found a number of sources for specific components of the *Trail Town* concept, such as downtown design guidelines, walkability and promotional strategies. However, only a handful of sources were identified that addressed how each of the specific components (and others) all work together to create a *Trail Town*. Therefore, the most thorough and comprehensive source identified, *Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania*<sup>2</sup> (published by the Allegheny Trail Alliance in 2005), was used as the basis for this document. This document summarizes the Allegheny Trail Alliance *Trail Towns* publication, applying concepts to local examples and opportunities in communities along the North Central State Trail. In addition, a full copy of the *Trail Towns* document has been placed in the Appendix of this document, for general information and specific references.

In this document, we recognize the significant efforts that local officials, Chambers of Commerce and private business owners already provide in support of tourism and economic development within each community along the North Central State Trail and throughout the region. The strategies and recommendations outlined in the later sections of this document are meant to highlight new ideas and spark discussions about how communities could better utilize the North Central State Trail to expand on and compliment existing efforts.

Furthermore, many of the strategies and recommendations outlined in this document support recent local (and state-wide) efforts to capitalize and leverage local assets that will better prepare communities along the North Central State Trail to compete in the global *New Economy*<sup>3</sup>.

Existing Tourism/Economic Development Efforts: The Scottville Clown Band is the Grand Finale tradition and star attraction in the annual Mackinaw City Memorial Day.



Photo and text provided by Mackinaw City Chamber of Commerce

---

<sup>2</sup> *Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania* A project of the Allegheny Trail Alliance. 2005

<sup>3</sup> *Planning and Zoning News* January 2008 Vol. 28 No. 3

## North Central State Trail & Community Profile

The North Central State Trail is a 62-mile crushed limestone recreational trail in the Northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan that traverses from the City of Gaylord to the Village of Mackinaw City. The Trail is open to non-motorized users year-round and snowmobiles from December 1<sup>st</sup> thru March 31<sup>st</sup>. The North Central State Trail (see map on following page) passes through and along some of the most beautiful natural and agricultural areas of northern Michigan, including the valley of the Sturgeon River, the Mackinaw State Forest and Mullet Lake. Heading north from Gaylord, the trail passes through several charming northern Michigan towns, including Vanderbilt, Wolverine, Indian River, Topinabee and Cheboygan.

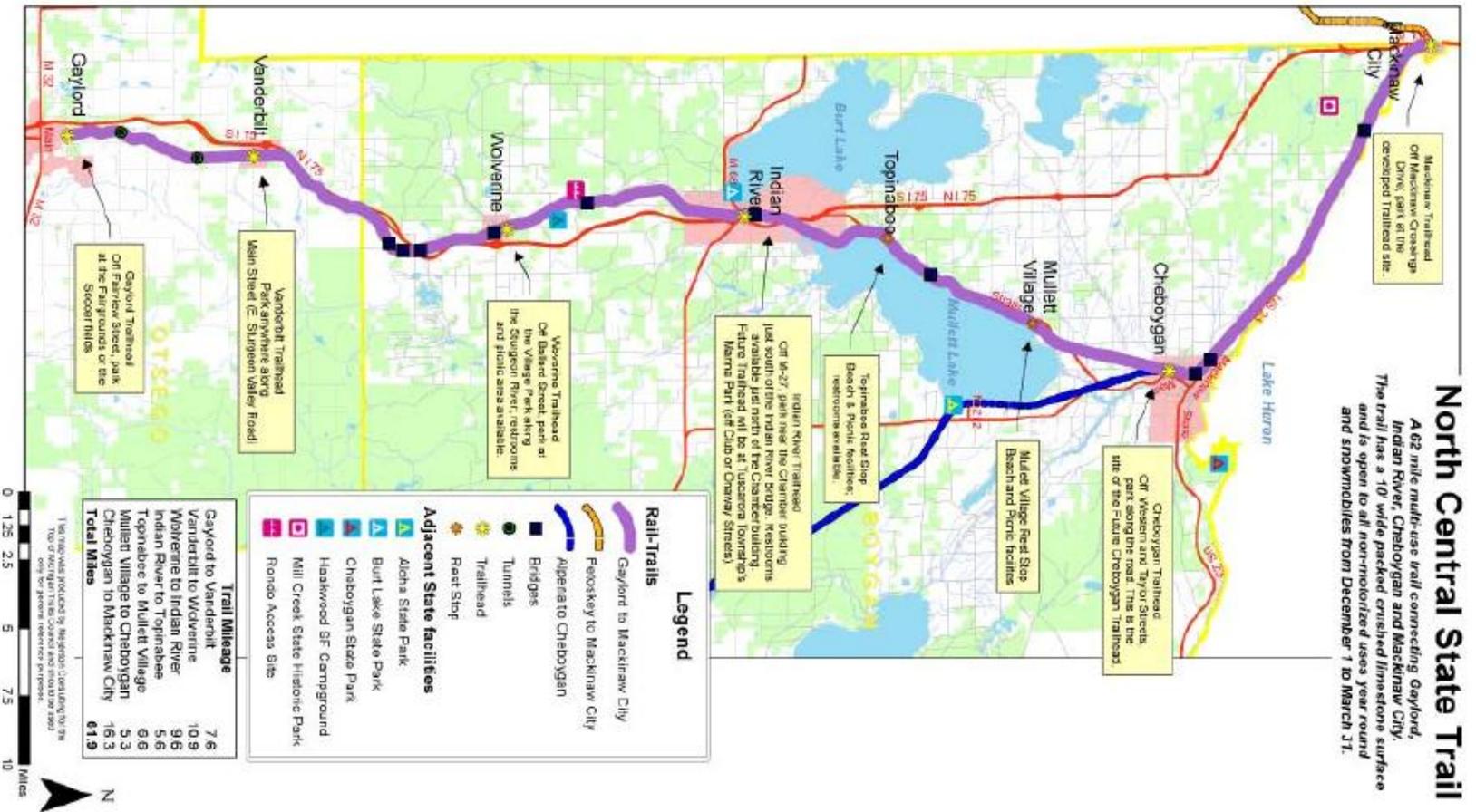
The North Central State Trail occupies a former segment of the Michigan Central Railroad. The Detroit-based company constructed the railway in 1881, connecting the southern reaches of the state with Mackinaw City and the thriving timber industry. With the opening of the Mackinac Bridge in 1957 and the shift to the automobile as the primary means of transportation (for passengers and freight), sections of the railroad began to fall out of active use. Operation of the entire railroad ended in 1992.

The North Central State Trail is owned and managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (MDNRE). The trail was developed with a \$1.7 million federal enhancement grant, including a \$320,000 local match with contributions from MDNRE, local governments and individuals along the trail corridor. Surfacing of the trails was completed in 2007 and the trail was dedicated for use in 2008.

The MDNRE purchased the inactive railroad right-of-way in 1999 and 2000 with monies from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF). This purchase was advocated by local governments, chambers of commerce and several non-profit agencies throughout the region. The trail is dedicated for non-motorized uses. However, snowmobiles are allowed to use the trail from December through March.

The North Central State Trail is a 10 foot wide, crushed limestone recreational trail. It passes through some of the most beautiful natural and agricultural areas in Northern Michigan. Pictured below, forest and farmland near the City of Gaylord and Mullet Lake.





## Trail Segments and Communities

### Gaylord to Vanderbilt (7.6 miles)

This section of trail goes through rolling farmland with excellent rural views and through two trail tunnels on its way to the small village of Vanderbilt. Parking is available off Fairview Road in Gaylord or on the Village streets in Vanderbilt.

### Vanderbilt to Wolverine (10.9 miles)

This is the most remote section of trail, including a four-plus mile stretch with no road crossings or development. The trail goes through the Stewart's Creek Marsh and crosses Stewart's Creek. This is an excellent wildlife viewing area (especially for elk). The trail crosses the Sturgeon River twice and the west branch of the Sturgeon River once before arriving at the Wolverine Village Park with parking and facilities available.

### Wolverine to Indian River (9.6 miles)

The trail parallels the Sturgeon River with many outstanding river views and crosses the river once near the Rondo Access Site. The trail also goes through Haakwood State Forest Campground before arriving in Indian River. Burt Lake State Park is less than a mile from the trail at M-68. Parking is available along local streets or at the public lot just south of the Chamber of Commerce. In the warmer months, many ice-cream shops await the trail user. Canoe liveries in Wolverine and Indian River are available to explore the area on the water.

### Indian River to Topinabee (5.6 miles)

The trail crosses Indian River as it makes its way north toward Mullet Lake. This short section of trail provides wonderful views of Mullet Lake and takes riders right into Topinabee. A Township Park near the former train depot, now a library, has parking and facilities as well as a nice picnic area and swimming beach.

### Topinabee to Cheboygan (11.9 miles)

The beginning portion of this trail segment takes you through historic resort areas along Mullet Lake and across Mullet Creek. There are many outstanding lake views and access points. Parking and lake access are available at Inverness Township Park in Mullet Village. From Mullet Village, the trail takes you through farmland and forest areas. It crosses deep swales and passes by a buffalo farm before heading into Cheboygan. At this time, a large

In 2008, the North Central State Trail was named as one of the top five autumn destinations in the nation by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

- Top of Michigan Trails Council

The Michigan Central Railroad Station in Topinabee, 1880's - Today, the former station is home to a library and (with the surrounding park) functions as a trailhead. Historical photo found at: MITowns.org



trailhead facility is being built at the intersection of Lincoln Streets and Taylor Street and will include parking, bathrooms and water year-round.

Cheboygan to Mackinaw City (16.3 miles)

This long section of trail parallels US-23 through both cedar and upland forests. The trail takes you by the Mill Creek Historic State park and an incredible view of the Mackinaw Bridge. An MDOT roadside park across the highway from the trail has facilities and lake access. Parking is available at the Mackinaw City trailhead on Mackinaw Crossings Drive.

## What is a Trail Town?

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, a “Trail Town” is: *a destination along a long-distance trail. Whether on a rail trail, towpath, water trail, or hiking trail - trail users can venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of the nearby community with its own character and charm. It is a safe place where both town residents and trail users can walk, find the goods and services they need, and easily access both trail and town by foot or vehicle. In such a town, the trail is an integral and important part of the community.*<sup>1</sup>

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

It is important for local leaders and trail planners to understand that *Trail Towns* are not isolated communities - they are linked together by the trail, creating a regional destination for residents, trail users and tourists. Trail users may pass through a town on a day trip or long distance trip, or may drive with their kids to exercise on the trail.

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, ultimately, a *Trail Town* should *be a friendly place that supports, celebrates and encourages trail users to visit and welcomes them with warm hospitality.* The basic elements of a “Trail Town Strategy,” are described at right.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Please Note:** Unless otherwise stated, all text in italics is cited from the Allegheny Trail Alliance

Example of a Trail Town Amenity Trailside  
Café & Bike Shop - Rocheport, MO



### Basic Elements of a Trail Town Strategy

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

- Allegheny Trail Alliance

## The Trail Town and Main Street

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *it is important to understand that the initiative (Trail Town) must come from within your community. And becoming a Trail Town is as much about local attitude as it is about physical improvements.* The Allegheny Trail Alliance provides a number of considerations (at right) local officials and trail planners should review as they begin to create a *Trail Town* environment in their community.

The first step in creating a *Trail Town* environment, or any public initiative, is to organize the community and key stakeholders. The Alliance says that a great way to organize the local community is to utilize the National Main Street Center's "Main Street Four Point Approach." The *Main Street Four Point Approach* is a community-driven, comprehensive strategy used to revitalize downtown and neighborhood business districts throughout the United States. Developed by the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the *Main Street Four Point Approach* has assisted over 1,200 communities throughout the United States create vibrant and healthy downtowns and commercial areas.

Communities can utilize the following Main Street Center's *Four Points* to create a successful "Trail Town" environment.

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

*Promotion sells the image and promise of a Trail Town to all prospects. Marketing the downtowns/ 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.*

### Considerations in Creating a *Trail Town* Environment

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

- Allegheny Trail Alliance

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

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

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

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, 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 (as outlined by the Allegheny Trail Alliance) that will need to be created and/or achieved to establish a *Trail Town* environment in communities along the North Central State Trail. As local leaders and trail planners review these sections it can be important to identify where additional assistance might be needed. There are a number of local and regional organizations that participated in the development of this document which are willing to assist local leaders and trail planners in several of these organizing and implementation efforts, including: the Top of Michigan Trails Council, Cheboygan County Community Development Office, Indian River Chamber of Commerce and Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

A. Define the Trail Corridor. Before any *Trail Town* initiative can get started, it is important to understand the physical and administrative structure of the trail. The Allegheny Trail Alliance *Trail Town* document lists several questions (see subset at right - full list in *Appendix*) local leaders and trail planners should ask themselves to better understand the trail system located in their community. Since this document is focused on the North Central State Trail, most of these questions can be answered very easily.

#### Questions to Help Define the Trail Corridor

- What kind of trail is it?
- How long is it?
- Who manages the trail?
- Who is the key contact or liaison for the trail?

- Allegheny Trail Alliance

However, there may be uncertainty pertaining to some questions. Regardless, it is an important and valuable exercise to complete.

B. Assess Local Capacity. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, a *Trail Town* initiative could be part of a business district or community revitalization plan. Therefore, it is important to understand local capacity to plan and implement new programs or ideas. The Allegheny Trail Alliance *Trail Town* document lists several questions (see subset at right - full list in *Appendix*) local leaders and trail planners should ask themselves to better understand the local capacity in their community.

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

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

As previously stated, there are a number of local organizations and community stakeholders working on downtown revitalization in most communities along the North Central State Trail. For some communities, the *Trail Town* concept might work as the primary vision for which revitalization efforts can be focused. For other communities, the *Trail Town* concept might expand on and compliment existing revitalization efforts.

#### Asses Local Capacity

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

- Allegheny Trail Alliance

What is a Catalyst? A catalyst is a community member who organizes the *Trail Town* program. If a downtown/business district revitalization organization already exists, then the *catalyst* could be someone that is currently affiliated with it.

- Allegheny Trail Alliance

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

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

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

G. **Find the Resources to Implement Your Trail Town Concept.** Implementing a comprehensive *Trail Town* initiative will require funding. Public funding, through grants and other economic assistance programs (such as the American Recovery and Investment Act), can be secured for community and economic development initiatives from the local, state and federal government. State and federal House and Senate members (and their legislative staffs) can provide information and guidance on funding opportunities. Funding can also be secured from trail and recreation advocacy organizations and local conservation groups. Local leaders or a full-time grant writer can be helpful in researching for and writing grants on behalf of the *Trail Town* Initiative and local communities. In addition, the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (serving northern

Michigan, including Emmet and Cheboygan Counties) and the Michigan Municipal league can be very helpful in identifying grant opportunities.

H. *Take One Step at a Time.* It is important to understand that a *Trail Town* initiative does not happen overnight - it develops and evolves over time. This may be especially true in those communities along the North Central State Trail where there is not a local organization already working on economic development programs. *The activities that the town takes on 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 a plan for your town is to assess the physical characteristics of your central business district and its relationship to the trail. A thorough assessment will help local officials and trail planners understand the trail-to-town opportunities and challenges a visitor might encounter. A sample physical assessment worksheet to help assess the characteristics of the relationship between the central business district and the trail is provided in the *Allegheny Trail Towns Guide* in the Appendix.

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *Trail Towns can thrive along long-distance trails, which link communities through one or more counties or states. Long distance trails tend to be used by those seeking at least a day-long excursion, but some may be on the trail for multiple days. Most users will require some degree of goods and services. Long-distance trails attract tourists, especially those (trails) with interesting structures, surrounded by natural beauty, or near places of historic interest. Generally, the longer the trail, the farther they come, the longer they stay and the more they will spend.*<sup>1</sup>

Determine the Type of Trail in Your Community. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *the first item to evaluate in assessing the physical characteristics of your Trail Town is to determine the type of trail that runs through or in close proximity to your central business district* (a general list of trails types is provided at right.) The North Central State Trail is used for many non-motorized activities, including: cycling; hiking; walking; observing nature and snowmobiling in the winter.

Clearly, the North Central State Trail is not exclusively one type of trail. The trail is used by different users at different times of the year. It can be useful to understand which types of users are likely to be on the North Central State Trail and at which time of year. For instance, the trail may be used by hikers and cyclists from March through October and snowmobilers from November through March. In addition, it can be useful to understand the approximate number of people who use the trail (and visit the town) over the course

<sup>1</sup> **Please Note:** Unless otherwise stated, all text in italics is cited from the Allegheny Trail Alliance

### Types of Trails

- Cycling
- Hiking & Walking
- Observing Nature
- Horseback riding
- Commuting
- Winter Uses (cross-country skiing, snow shoeing)
- River/Water Uses (canoeing, kayaking, rafting)

- Allegheny Trail Alliance

Trail Activities: A regional snowmobile trail map (including the North Central State Trail) greets visitors in Wolverine



of a year. This information should be used by trail planners and local officials when planning for special marketing campaigns and community events/festivals. This information can also help local business owners better understand potential trail clientele.

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

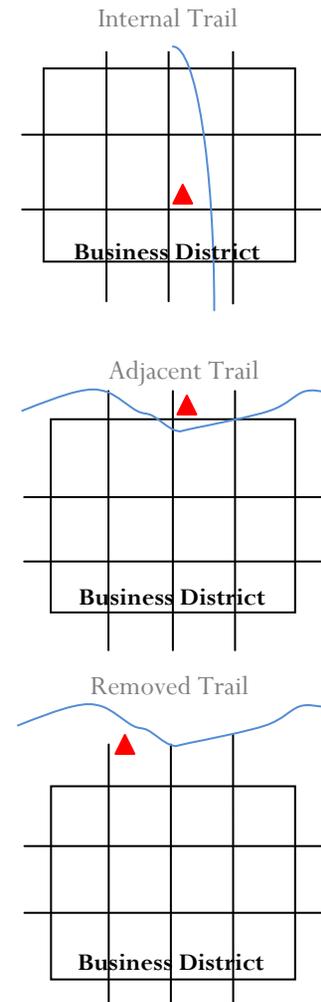
**Internal Trails.** Internal trails are trails that are located directly through the central business district.

**Adjacent Trails.** Adjacent Trails are trails that are located immediately adjacent to the downtown, usually, within 1/2 mile from the central business district.

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

Following a basic assessment of the physical relationship between the trail and the central business district in each town along the North Central State Trail, it appears that *internal trails* are located in Vanderbilt, Indian River, Topinabee and Mackinaw City and that *adjacent trails* are located in Gaylord, Wolverine and Cheboygan.

Understanding the elevation change or “grade” between the trail and the central business district is also very important. According to the International Mountain Bicycling Association, the maximum grade for the average trail rider should be no more than 15%.<sup>2</sup> No specific grade measurements were calculated as part of the basic assessment for this document. However, it does appear that Wolverine has serious grade challenges between the trail and its central business district (see picture on page 14). Please note, since the



<sup>2</sup> International Mountain Bicycling Association. Trail Difficulty Rating System - www.imba.com

trail lies within a former railroad right-of-way, the grade of the entire trail corridor is no greater than 3%.

The last item to assess is the distance between the trailheads along the trail and other sites/features within the community or along the trail that might attract tourists. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *as the range between trailheads increases, the more likely goods and services will be welcomed by trail users*. The distance between each primary trailhead along the North Central State Trail (see chart at right) appears to support the need for basic goods and services, such as a restaurant, ice cream shop or grocery store. In addition, it appears the distance between multiple segments of the North Central State Trail (i.e. Topinabee to Mackinaw City) would support the need for more extensive or overnight services, such as a hotel or laundromat.

Additionally, some of the other activities or attractions in communities along the North Central State Trail may compliment the trail, offering visitors more than one experience in the area. Local business owners may wish to expand their offerings of goods and services to meet the demand of visitors using more than one attraction.

**Identify Key Connecting Elements.** In addition to understanding the physical relationship between the trail and the central business district, it is also important to understand the function and inter-relationship of the “connecting elements” between the trail and central business district. The following pages summarize each of the connecting elements and describe the condition of the connecting elements in each town along the North Central State Trail.

Grade Challenges - Wolverine



Distance Between Trailheads

- Gaylord to Vanderbilt: 7.6 miles
- Vanderbilt to Wolverine: 10.9 miles
- Wolverine to Indian River: 9.6 miles
- Indian River to Topinabee: 5.6 miles
- Topinabee to Cheboygan: 11.9 miles
- Cheboygan to Mackinaw City: 16.3 miles

Community Activities and Attractions

Local business owners should expand their offerings of goods and services to meet the demand of visitors using other attractions within the community (in addition to the North Central State Trail). For example, boating activities in Indian River.



**Trailhead.** The trailhead is the area where users can access the trail by road, providing parking and some amenities for trail users (i.e. toilets, information, and rules). In many instances the trailhead is the point at which the trail user may first come in contact with the community and the point at which trail users will decide whether or not to enter into the community. Trail planners and local officials *should develop clear, appropriate information for visitors and make it available at the trailhead.* By providing such amenities as water and toilet facilities, the community welcomes visitors - showing hospitality and inviting them to visit the town. These amenities need to accommodate trail users for all seasons. In addition, there is a need for additional signage that directs people to the trailhead.

Gaylord



Vanderbilt



Trailhead: Gaylord

**Parking:** Large unpaved parking area is not an official trailhead. It does provide parking near the trail.

**Amenities:**

- One port-o-john
- Covered picnic area (with vending machines) not clearly tied to trailhead

**Signage/Information:** Kiosk

**Other Features:** Trailhead tied to parkland

**Opportunities:**

- Provide for dedicated trailhead facility
- Provide water
- Provide bike rack
- Provide trash receptacles
- Provide directions signage from trailhead to picnic area
- Provide directional signage to downtown

Trailhead: Vanderbilt

**Parking:** On-street parking only

**Amenities:**

- Proximity to park

**Signage/Information:** Kiosk

**Other Features:** Downtown is visible

**Opportunities:**

- Provide defined parking lot
- Provide port-o-john
- Provide water
- Provide bike rack
- Provide trash receptacles

Wolverine



Indian River



Trail Town Design Issues

Trailhead: Wolverine

Parking: Large gravel parking area

Amenities:

- Port-o-johns (in park) Pit toilets are in extremely poor condition
- Picnic tables (in park)

Signage/Information: Kiosk

Other Features: Downtown is visible, trailhead tied to parkland, interesting building (old train depot)

Opportunities:

- Provide vending machine near train depot
- Provide bike racks at park
- Provide water
- Provide for flush toilets
- Provide better access to river
- Provide access to additional amenities

Trailhead: Indian River

Parking: Small paved parking area

Amenities:

- Formal restrooms
- Picnic area
- Trash receptacles

Signage/Information: Wayfinding and Informational signage

Other Features: Downtown is visible, proximity to Chamber building, ice-cream shop (w/seating)

Opportunities:

- Provide water
- Provide community information
- Provide bike rack
- Provide for designated trail parking area
- Provide for year-round bathroom facilities

Topinabee



Trailhead: Topinabee

Parking: Small paved parking area

Amenities:

- Formal restrooms
- Water
- Covered picnic area
- Trash receptacles
- Bike rack

Signage/Information: None

Other Features: Downtown is visible, Trailhead tied to parkland, interesting library building (old train depot), proximity to Mullet Lake & Park

Opportunities:

- Drinking fountain

Cheboygan



Trailhead: Cheboygan

Parking: Paved parking area

Amenities:

- Parking (including parking for trailers)
- Restrooms (year-round)
- Water
- Trash receptacles
- Bike rack
- Picnic shelter

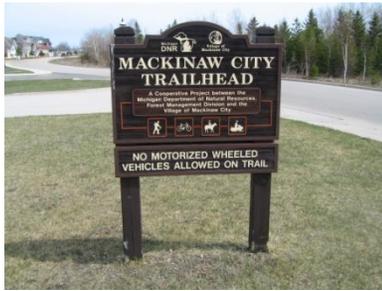
Signage/Information: Kiosk

Other Features: Proximity to non-motorized trail to Alpena

Opportunities:

- Provide larger paved parking area
- Provide for community information
- Provide better connections to downtown

## Mackinaw City



### Trailhead: Mackinaw City

Parking: Large, paved parking area

Amenities:

- Large, separated bike parking area
- Access to additional trails to Petoskey, within Mackinaw City and Emmet County's headland Trails
- Kiosk
- Wayfinding map
- Restrooms (year-round)
- Picnic Shelter
- Trash receptacles
- 

Signage/Information: Trailhead sign

Other Features: Downtown is visible

Opportunities:

- Provide for vending machines

Portal. *The portal is the point at which users of the trail exit the trailhead with the intent of visiting the nearby community. The portal should be a welcoming point that clearly begins the process of directing the trail user through the community.* Trail planners and local officials should take steps to make the portal welcoming - using wayfinding signage to clearly direct trail users into the central business district. In some instances the portal may also function as the “gateway” (see description on page 22) on an *internal trail*.

In Gaylord, a restaurant has placed a wayfinding sign indicating the direction and distance to their restaurant at the portal of the North Central State Trail. This and many other such commercial signs (picture, top two pictures at right) are, in fact, illegal at this time. Commercial signs are not allowed within the DRNE owned right-of-way. However, there is no comprehensive wayfinding system directing people to downtown or other features within the community. A comprehensive wayfinding system with no business names may be feasible, but must be approved by the MDNRE. In Vanderbilt, Wolverine and Topinabee, there is no clear indication of a portal. In Indian River, a wayfinding sign at the trailhead directs people into the central business district. In addition, clearly marked crosswalks direct people from the trailhead area (picture, second from top) into the central business district. In Cheboygan, local officials have placed an information brochure rack at the portal area (picture, second from bottom). In Mackinaw City local officials are currently working on a portal (and pathway) that will lead from the new trailhead, east along the alley (behind the motel), and onto the Arnold Line playground.

Portals: Local examples & opportunities



*Pathway. The pathway is the corridor that trail users follow from the portal to the central business district.* Depending on the location of the trail, the pathway could be just a few blocks or several miles. The pathway should continually be assessed for cleanliness, safety, lighting, physical condition and interaction with traffic. In addition, trail planners and local officials should consider the needs of local business owners along the pathway. A wayfinding system can highlight places of interest along (or adjacent to) the pathway, such as restaurants, interesting shops or historical sites.

Gaylord



- Pathway: Gaylord
- Type: Pathway
- Cleanliness: Good
- Safety: Clear yield signs and crosswalks
- Physical Condition: Good
- Wayfinding: No
- Interaction with Traffic: Limited

Vanderbilt



- Pathway: Vanderbilt
- Type: Sidewalk
- Cleanliness: Good
- Safety: Good
- Physical Condition: Good
- Wayfinding: No
- Interaction with Traffic: Limited

Wolverine



Pathway: Wolverine

Type: None - trail-users utilize street  
 Cleanliness: --  
 Safety: Poor  
 Physical Condition: --  
 Wayfinding: No  
 Interaction with Traffic: High  
 Opportunities: Direct staircase or switch-back from trail to downtown (see picture at left) or better sidewalk access near road into downtown. Additionally, access could be provided to the nearby Sturgeon River

Indian River



Pathway: Indian River

Type: Sidewalk  
 Cleanliness: Poor  
 Safety: Poor  
 Physical Condition: Fair, many areas lack a consistent sidewalk system  
 Wayfinding: No  
 Interaction with Traffic: Very high, several curb-cuts  
 Opportunities:
 

- Lower the number of curb-cuts
- Establish clear sidewalk/pedestrian system

Topinabee



Pathway: Topinabee

Type: None  
 Cleanliness: --  
 Safety: Fair, must cross Straights Hwy.  
 Physical Condition: --  
 Wayfinding: No  
 Interaction with Traffic: Fairly limited  
 Opportunities: Clear cross walks

Cheboygan



Mackinaw City



*Gateway. The Gateway is the point at which the trail users enter the business district of the community. The gateway should be located at the edge of the central business district that is closest to the trailhead along a well-developed pathway. The gateway area should welcome trail users and visitors into the central business district and be the point where directional signage to individual attractions and businesses within the district begin. In general, gateways into the central business district of towns along the North Central State Trail are undefined, lack distinguishable features and do not include directional signage.*

Pathway: Cheboygan

- Type: Sidewalks. No sidewalks in other locations (not near a defined trailhead)
- Cleanliness: Good
- Safety: Good
- Physical Condition: Good
- Wayfinding: No
- Interaction with Traffic: Moderate
- Opportunities: Complete a sidewalk

Pathway: Mackinaw City

- Type: Gravel drive
- Cleanliness: Good
- Safety: Good
- Physical Condition: Good
- Wayfinding: Under Construction
- Interaction with Traffic: Low
- Opportunities: City is currently working on developing a new pathway. In addition, the gravel drive is expected to be paved in August of 2010.

Gateway: Example of a clearly defined gateway on the Pinellas County (Florida) Trail, entering the town of Dunedin



Center. *The center is the central business district of the community that may serve as a hub of goods and services for the trail user.* The center should be regularly assessed for cleanliness, safety, lighting and physical condition. Additionally, the center should be assessed on the availability of amenities that help the trail user enjoy their experience (i.e. bike racks at restaurants, outdoor seating at restaurants, ATM machines, internet access and public restrooms). A full self-assessment checklist is provided in the *Trail Towns* document in the Appendix. A brief summary of an assessment of the center of each town along the North Central State Trail is provided at right

Gaylord



Center: Gaylord

Cleanliness: Appears clean

Safety: Good - sidewalks are clear and well maintained and crosswalks are well marked with pedestrian signals

Lighting: Interesting light fixtures at pedestrian scale

Visual Appearance:

- Unique sense of place - (“alpine theme”)
- Several storefronts empty

Building Amenities:

- Interesting “alpine theme” facades
- Many clear pedestrian-scale 1<sup>st</sup> floor windows

Streetscape Amenities:

- Brick pavers at corners
- Some outdoor seating
- Wide sidewalks (but bikes not encouraged)
- Street trees
- Planter areas in sidewalk (with bike rack)
- Centrally located drinking fountain
- Pedestrian links between main street and parking area
- Large 5-lane main street may not be friendly for pedestrians

Opportunities:

- Provide benches and banners
- Provide for more outside seating at restaurants
- Pedestrian islands at mid-block crossings
- Establish consistent sign regulations
- Provide for additional bike racks

Vanderbilt



Center: Vanderbilt

Cleanliness: Appears clean

Safety: Good - sidewalks are clear and well maintained, no crosswalks (little traffic)

Lighting: Overhead street lights

Visual Appearance:

- Several empty buildings

Building Amenities:

- Some historic buildings - home to Cyber Café, US Post Office

- Large pedestrian-scale windows

Streetscape Amenities

- Picnic table in front of cyber café
- Some small trees

Opportunities

- Provide for streetscape improvements
- Bury utilities
- Provide benches, banners & planters
- Eliminate signs in store windows
- Provide for pedestrian-scale lighting

Wolverine



Center: Wolverine

Cleanliness: Appears clean

Safety: Good - sidewalks are clear and well maintained, no crosswalks (little traffic)

Lighting: Overhead street lights

Visual Appearance:

- Topography establishes unique sense of place

- Several empty buildings

Building Amenities:

- Some historic buildings
- US Post Office, open market

Streetscape Amenities

- Bike rack in front of market
- Defined sidewalks

Opportunities:

- Bury utilities
- Provide benches, banners and planters
- Provide for pedestrian-scale lighting

Indian River



Center: Indian River

Cleanliness: Appears clean

Safety: Fair - sidewalk system incomplete  
no separation from parking areas

Lighting: Overhead street lights

Visual Appearance:

- Unique sense of place with bridge, but cluttered

Building Amenities:

- Outdoor restaurant near trail head
- Ice cream shop near trailhead
- Great library building

Streetscape Amenities

- Some sidewalks, decorative benches

Opportunities

- Preserve historical buildings
- Develop sign ordinance
- Institute facade improvement program
- Provide streetscaping improvements
- Eliminate excessive curb-cuts
- Bury utilities - add trees
- Provide for banners, planters and bike racks
- Install pedestrian-scale lighting

Topinabee



Center: Topinabee

Cleanliness: Appears clean

Safety: Fair, no cross-walks across Straights Hwy.

Lighting: Overhead street lights

Visual Appearance:

- Small, but clearly a destination
- Great view of Mullet Lake

Building Amenities:

- Historic Trail Depot

Streetscape Amenities

- Provide for benches and planters

## Cheboygan



### Center: Cheboygan

Cleanliness: Appears Clean

Safety: Good - sidewalks are clear and well maintained and crosswalks are well marked with pedestrian signals

Lighting: Interesting light fixtures slightly higher than pedestrian scale

Visual Appearance:

- Unique sense of place
- Appears active

Building Amenities:

- Several historic buildings
- Many clear, pedestrian-scale 1<sup>st</sup> floor windows
- Signage fairly consistent

Streetscape Amenities

- Streetscaping features
- Banners
- Places to sit in front of businesses
- Wide sidewalks
- Street trees
- Pedestrian links between main street and parking areas

Opportunities:

- Provide for bike racks
- Provide for planters

Mackinaw City



Center: Mackinaw City

Cleanliness: Appears Clean

Safety: Good - sidewalks are clear and well maintained and crosswalks are well marked with pedestrian signals

Lighting: Interesting light fixtures at pedestrian scale

Visual Appearance:

- Unique sense of place
- View of ferry activity

Building Amenities:

- Interesting facades
- Many clear, pedestrian-scale 1<sup>st</sup> floor windows
- Signage inconsistent, but interesting

Streetscape Amenities

- Streetscaping features
- Banners
- Benches
- Wide sidewalks
- Street trees and planters
- Pedestrian links between main street and parking areas
- Interpretive signage

Opportunities:

- Provide for bike racks

*Nodes. Nodes are points of interest along or near the Pathway or in the Center that will be visited or utilized by the users of the trail. They may include businesses that cater to the specific user (a bicycle repair shop), lifestyle interests of the trail user (a hobby shop or an antique shop), the duration of time the user will spend on the trail (a public shower room or local lodging), or to all trail users (medical supplies, water, a casual dining restaurant, snack food, etc.).* There are a number of interesting nodes within each town along the North Central State Trail. A few examples are identified at right: *Jan's Deli* along the pathway in Gaylord; the historical pathway in Mackinaw City; the *Zany Kitchen* (with outside chairs) in Cheboygan; and *Breakers Bar & Grill* in Topinabee. Trail planners and local officials should continue to identify and evaluate each possible point of interest in every town along the North Central State Trail.

It can be helpful to identify all the “connecting elements” on a map or sketch of the town. Completing a thorough assessment of the physical relationship between the trail and town will reveal new opportunities for improvements. These improvements should be clearly defined and integrated into action strategies for the town.

Nodes: Examples



**Public Amenities.** Another important step in preparing a plan for your town is to assess the public amenities that the trail user will encounter in the community. Examples of public amenities in towns along the trail are provided at right. In most instances, the local government is responsible for providing adequate public amenities. However, as Michigan’s economy continues to squeeze the finances of local governments, local trail organizations should partner with local governments to provide volunteer assistance and financial support. A brief assessment of several public amenities was included in the previous “connecting elements” section.

Clearly local laws and zoning regulations can impact the development of public amenities. For example, zoning regulations that limit sidewalk encumbrances and off-premises signs may limit the ability to develop trail-friendly amenities. In addition, off-premise sign limitations may limit your ability to develop trail-friendly way-finding signage.

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

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

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *enhancement of existing businesses and the generation of new business opportunities should be part of your Trail Town plan. Businesses providing such amenities or trail friendly hours of operation are voluntary and hopefully many will realize the value from a self-interest perspective. Education, encouragement and financial incentives may be needed, especially to encourage participation by small or marginal businesses.*

Examples of Public Amenities: Historical clock in Cheboygan - Crosswalks in Gaylord



Examples of Business Amenities: Vending machine in Wolverine - picnic tables at Jan’s Deli in Gaylord.



## Economic Restructuring for Your Trail Town

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

A. *Understanding Your Trail User - Customer.* In any downtown revitalization effort, understanding your customer is one of the most important and central activities local business leaders can undertake. There are many elements that business leaders should consider. However, the two most important elements are socio-economic characteristics and lifestyle preferences. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *by understanding both the socio-economic and lifestyle preferences of the trail customer base, the local Trail Town organization can begin to make decisions about how best to attract these customers into the community's central business district.*<sup>1</sup>

Recent research suggests that many trail users tend to be well educated with fairly high incomes. A 2004 case study of the North Carolina Northern Outer Banks Trail<sup>2</sup>, found that, of the typical bicycle tourist:

- 87% earn more than \$50,000 annually
- 78% completed college
- 73% rate themselves as an intermediate skill-level cyclist who rides 10-49 miles per month

Lifestyle preferences relate to the activities (and associated economic impact) that trail-tourists make when they visit a community.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Please Note:** Unless otherwise stated, all text in italics is cited from the Allegheny Trail Alliance

<sup>2</sup> A Case Study of the North Carolina Northern Outer Banks Trail. April 2004 Institute for Transportation Research and Education at North Carolina State University and North Carolina Department of Transportation Research and Education at North Carolina State University - Cited and Summarized by *American Trails*

What is Economic Restructuring?  
Economic Restructuring strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. The Main Street program helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district that responds to today's consumers' needs. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district.

- Main Street Program

Business leaders can better understand the lifestyle preferences of trail users by assessing many lifestyle factors. For example:

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

It may be helpful for communities along the North Central State Trail (especially communities without a local economic development organization) to work with neighboring communities to better understand both the local and regional market.

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

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

D. Encourage Related Business Opportunities. As previously stated, some of the other activities or attractions in the community may compliment the trail, offering visitors more than one experience in the area. Local business owners may wish to expand their offerings of goods and services to meet the demand of visitors using or visiting other attractions.

E. Assist the Local Business Community. There are a number of ways local leaders and the trail committee can assist local businesses with economic restructuring. The first way is to work with local civic and economic development organizations to enhance or

develop financial incentives (e.g. façade program) and identify financial resources that help local businesses take advantage of the trail.

The second way local leaders can assist the local businesses is to develop an “economic gardening” approach to business development issues related to the trail., 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.*

What is Economic Gardening?

Pioneered in Littleton Colorado in 1987, in conjunction with the Center for the New West, economic gardening is an economic development model that embraces the fundamental idea that entrepreneurs drive economies. The model works to connect entrepreneurs to resources, encouraging the development of essential infrastructure and providing entrepreneurs with needed information. The *three basic elements* of economic gardening are:

1. Providing critical information needed by businesses to survive and thrive.
2. Developing and cultivating an infrastructure that goes beyond basic physical infrastructure and includes quality of life, a culture that embraces growth and change, and access to intellectual resources, including qualified and talented employees.
3. Developing connections between businesses and the people and organizations that can help take them to the next level - business associations, universities, roundtable groups, service providers and more.

- Kauffman Foundation  
and the  
Edward Lowe Foundation

## Promoting Your Trail Town

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

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

A. **Promote Your Trail Town Image.** The first component to an effective promotional campaign is to convince local residents, the larger region, and tourists that you have an active and welcoming *Trail Town* environment. Most of the *Trail Town* recommendations and strategies described in this document are based on drawing in visitors from beyond the local market. Therefore, the full potential of the *Trail Town* concept may not be realized unless the local and regional population base is aware of it and what it can offer. Local leaders and trail planners can help “brand” the *Trail Town* by developing attractive marketing materials such as a logo, print ads and a website. An informational/marketing website for the North Central State Trail, [www.northcentraltrail.org](http://www.northcentraltrail.org), was recently developed and should be incorporated into any future marketing efforts. Local communities may be able to work with sponsors (or on their own) and local business owners to create “welcome” signs for trail users. Several businesses in towns along the North Central State Trail have placed welcome signs for other user groups directly on their buildings. Each of these welcome signs is sponsored by a beer company. In Indian River, the *Inn Between Café*, which is located just one block from the North Central State Trail, has placed welcome banners for *golfers*, *fisherman* and *race fans* (see photo at right) on the front of their building.

B. **Hold Trail Town Events.** The second component to an effective promotional campaign is to hold special events within the downtown or near the trail. Special events, especially events that tie to your community’s history, cultural identity (or the trail corridor’s history), can attract both local residents and visitors. The Allegheny Trail Alliance suggests that annual events held just before trail season can attract potential trail users

Promote a Trail Town Image: Welcome banners for golfers, fisherman and race fans greet visitors at the *Inn Between Café* in Indian River. A “Welcome Fisherman” banner greets visitors at a gas station in Vanderbilt



into your community. Presentations, displays and/or workshops on trail safety, bicycle safety or a tour of the local trail are examples of activities that could be included in a local event. In addition, local communities can incorporate the trail into athletic events that range from professional races (e.g. bike race, 5-K run) to non-competitive events geared toward benefiting charities<sup>1</sup>. Several communities along the North Central State Trail have annual events and/or celebrations where trail activities/information could be incorporated and featured such as *Alpenfest* in Gaylord, the *Venetian Festival* in Cheboygan and the Memorial Day Parade and Firework events in Mackinaw City. The kick-off event for Indian River’s annual *Summerfest* event is a decorated bike-parade on the North Central State Trail.

C. Conduct Trail Town Retail Promotions. The third component to an effective promotional campaign is to conduct special retail promotions. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *pre and post-season sales, special weekend sidewalk sales, holiday sales, and joint advertising by the local trail-related business cluster are all examples of retail promotions that the local “Trail Town” organization might organize in cooperation with local merchants and/or the local chamber of commerce.*

Due to the high costs and expertise associated with promoting and marketing the *Trail Town* concept, it can be useful for the local trail organization to establish partnerships with the local business community, chamber of commerce, visitors and convention bureau and other agencies to effectively market the *Trail Town* concept. In addition, because the North Central State Trail is a state trail, it will be very important for the local trail organization to work closely with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE).

It should also be noted that *word of mouth* is crucial to the overall success of your community and the entire North Central State Trail corridor. Therefore, the business community and local residents need to understand that creating a welcoming environment is important. Local merchants may want to participate in hospitality training if it is available within the community.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Implementing Trail-Based Economic Development Programs. A Handbook For Iowa Communities](#)  
Iowa Department of Transportation. Prepared by Economics Research Associates and SRF Consulting Group, Inc.

Trail Town Events: Local trail organizations that can incorporate presentations, displays and workshops into special community events have an opportunity to market and promote the trail within their community. Pictured Below: *Alpenfest* in Gaylord.



Photo Provided By: *Pure Michigan*

Trail Town Events: There are many events/celebrations within each community along the trail. The challenge for community and trail organizers is to find the best way to announce and promote these events to trail users. One way to do that is to continually announce these events on the trail website: [www.northcentraltrail.org](http://www.northcentraltrail.org).

## The Trail Town Master Plan

One of the last steps in developing the *Trail Town* concept is to develop a *Trail Town Master Plan*. A little like a “blueprint,” the *Trail Town Master Plan* is the guide for the development of *Trail Town* concept. Among other things, the plan provides the framework for future marketing efforts, capital improvement projects and community involvement strategies. The strategies and action polices outlined in the plan can also help to build support for local funding or leverage funding from state and federal granting agencies.

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

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *a dilemma arises between spending too much time on developing a plan and impulsively running out and implementing the first idea that comes to mind. If you want to implement a project ahead of adopting a plan, you can form a short list of key goals for your Trail Town and tackle an easy project that meets one of your goals.*

While the goals may vary from community to community, the Alliance suggests that communities work toward implementing the following five community development components:

- Provide a Gateway Moment
- Create a Sense of Place
- Develop a Welcoming Atmosphere
- Establish the Right Mix of Services
- Promote Trail-oriented Events

A. Promote a Gateway Moment. As described earlier in this document, the Gateway or “Gateway Moment” is a physical feature that indicates to trail users that they have entered your town. It is important to create a sense of excitement around your gateway, encouraging trail users to stop and explore the downtown. Local leaders and trail planners should consider signage, lighting and landscape amenities in creating a vibrant gateway into the downtown. Currently, small brown signs (see picture at right) are the only indication that trail users have arrived in any community along the North Central State Trail.

B. Create a Sense of Place. “Sense of Place” refers to the assets or attributes that are unique to your town and the central business district. These assets can be natural (proximity to water), historic (historic buildings), structural (lampposts) and cultural (festivals). Local leaders should make efforts to emphasize and build upon existing assets within the community. Whenever possible, capital infrastructure (e.g. streetscapes, lampposts, banners, planters, statues) that contributes to the community’s sense of place should reflect your town’s history and/or other things that make it unique from other places.

It is also important to keep the downtown clean and uncluttered. Be sure there are an adequate number of trash receptacles throughout the downtown and that trash is removed in a timely manner. Additionally, make an effort to minimize or eliminate street-level infrastructure. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *parking meters, overhead lines, and telephone poles all add clutter to your main street, preventing it from having a relaxed atmosphere*. Local leaders should explore running telephone lines underground and placing parking meters on lampposts to reduce clutter whenever feasible.

C. Develop a Welcoming Atmosphere. A downtown that is safe for both walking and cycling is very important. It is important for visitors and residents to feel safe as they cross your streets and explore your town. There are a number of amenities that increase the “walkability” of your downtown that most trail-users appreciate, such as pedestrian signals, bike lanes, extended curbs and bike routes signs (a full list of amenities is provided in the *Trail Town* guide in the Appendix). Many of the communities along the North Central State Trail already utilize a number of the listed pedestrian-friendly amenities.

Gateway Moment: Existing gateway moment as the North Central State Trail approaches Gaylord.



Examples of Sense of Place: A state historical marker in Wolverine and decorative banners in Cheboygan contribute to the sense of place of their respected communities.



D. Establish the Right Mix of Services. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *once the trail tourist has entered your town, it is important to provide the right businesses and services that will accommodate the needs of your visitor. Easily accessible grocers, ice cream stands, and restaurants are important. You may want to make certain that there is a full-service bicycle shop near the trail while any business with a bicycle rack near the entrance would be appreciated. Camping areas near the trail, or a historic home that has been turned into a bed and breakfast in the central area of town, may also be options.*

E. Promote Trail-Oriented Events. As previously mentioned, special events, especially events that tie to your community's history, cultural identity (or the trail corridor's history), can attract both local residents and visitors. The Allegheny Trail Alliance suggests that annual events held just before trail season can attract potential trail users into your community. Presentations, displays and/or workshops on trail safety, bicycle safety or a tour of the local trail are examples of activities could be included in a local event. In addition, local communities can incorporate the trail into athletic events that range from professional races (e.g. bike race, 5-K run) to non-competitive events geared toward benefiting charities.

In conclusion, it is important to understand that the Trail Town Master Plan (and associated strategies) must be flexible and respond to changing conditions, innovations and new information. It is important to continually review and evaluate the Master Plan to examine what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done.

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

## **Appendix**