



NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

TRAIL TOWN HANDBOOK



Acknowledgments

This Handbook is dedicated to the volunteers of the North Country Trail Association and our many community partners that make the trail a reality and the Trail Town program a success.



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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The North Country Trail Association

The human, health and community benefits associated with the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) have been widely realized in many communities. The NCNST helps encourage healthy lifestyles and active living by supporting hiking and other recreational activities. The trail provides environmental benefits by protecting important human and wildlife corridors and enabling alternative modes of transportation. The North Country National Scenic Trail also helps foster a strong sense of community and place, providing an opportunity for social interaction and access to community amenities such as parks, neighborhoods, schools, and downtowns.

The NCNST also has a significant impact on local economies. The trail helps 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 has become better understood, many communities along the NCNST are looking for new ways to capitalize on their proximity to the trail.

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) is a not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to building, maintaining and telling the story of the North Country National Scenic Trail, the longest National Scenic Trail in the United States, traversing 4,600 miles across seven states. The NCTA unites individuals, affiliated trail groups, local chapters, corporate sponsors and others in this mission, and partners with the National Park Service to bring the North Country National Scenic Trail to local communities.

NCTA chapters support members as they “adopt” and maintain a section of trail, sponsor hikes and other social events in local trail communities, and plan and conduct major trail-building projects.

The NCTA’s *Trail Town Program* helps communities and volunteers along the trail work together to plan for and capitalize on the social and economic benefits of the North Country National Scenic Trail. This comprehensive Trail Town Handbook is designed to equip NCTA chapters and communities along the North Country National Scenic Trail with simple but effective tools to maximize trail-based tourism and economic development opportunities — that is, to redefine each NCNST community as a “Trail Town.” This handbook is intended to demonstrate how NCTA chapters and local volunteers can utilize the Trail Town approach to better communicate the needs of the trail, recruit additional volunteers, and secure local support for the trail.

Tailoring Your Trail Town

This handbook is intended to provide local chapters and communities along the NCNST with the resources to become a Trail Town. However, it will be important for each community to create a Trail Town Program that is tailored to its own circumstances, resources and needs. Other than the Trail Town Criteria described in Chapter 3 and in *Toolkit C: Resources for Local Chapters*, local leaders need only utilize the resources in this handbook that are applicable to the size, resources and capacity of your community.



When complete, the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) will traverse roughly 4,600 miles, making it the longest contiguous hiking trail in the United States.



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 entitled “From Trail Towns to TrOD: Trails and Economic Development,” published by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.



Trail Town Background

The Allegheny Trail Alliance first developed the Trail Town concept in the early 2000s to help communities along the Allegheny Trail better capture the economic benefits of trail-based tourism. Since that time, individual communities, regional economic development organizations, states and other National Scenic Trail Associations have created formal Trail Town Programs.

This handbook utilizes and summarizes portions of different Trail Town publications, noting how specific concepts and recommendations can be applied in communities along the NCNST. In some instances, in an effort to demonstrate or illustrate a specific point or recommendation, pictures and examples from communities and other trail systems throughout the United States are highlighted and described.

This handbook recognizes the significant efforts that local business owners, municipal staff members, local officials, North Country Trail Association Chapter members, governmental bodies (e.g., Downtown Development Authorities) and regional economic development agencies already provide in support of tourism, economic development and trail building in communities along the North Country Trail.

It is important to understand that the strategies and recommendations outlined in this handbook are meant to highlight new ideas and spark discussions about how communities along the trail could better utilize the North Country Trail to expand on and complement existing recreational and community development efforts. While this handbook provides resources and the framework for becoming a Trail Town, it will be important for each community to create a Trail Town Program that is tailored to its own circumstances and needs.

The North Country National Scenic Trail

Administered by the National Park Service, the NCNST is part of the network of scenic, historic and recreation trails created by the National Trails System Act of 1968. The North Country National Scenic Trail is one of 11 National Scenic Trails throughout the United States.

Threading its way across seven northern states for more than 4,600 miles, the NCNST weaves together a variety of landscapes in the northeastern and north central United States. From the grandeur of the Adirondack Mountains in New York, the trail meanders westward through the hardwood forests of Pennsylvania, through the countryside of Ohio and southern Michigan, along the rocky shores of the Great Lakes, and through the glacier-carved forests,



lakes and streams of northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. The trail's western terminus lies in the vast plains of North Dakota.

In fulfilling its purpose to take users through the diversity of scenic, natural, cultural and recreational resources along its route, the NCNST incorporates many existing local trails that already traverse these resources and nearby communities. While the NCNST is primarily for hiking, backpacking and other forms of foot travel (e.g., snowshoeing, skiing), some segments of the trail permit other non-motorized uses (e.g., mountain biking) as determined by the managing authorities of those trail segments.

While most portions of the trail pass through large state parks, sizable national forests and vast areas of remote wilderness, many portions of the trail pass through or nearby small villages and towns and even a few large cities. Each of these communities offer access to the trail for day-hikers and opportunities to resupply for long-distance hikers. Each community along the trail offers its own unique combination of lodging, restaurants and breweries, locally owned shops and galleries, distinctive festivals and events, and interesting cultural and historical features that are attractive to both day-hikers and long-distance hikers.



The North Country National Scenic Trail is within a day's drive of 40% of the U.S. population.



Figure 1. The North Country National Scenic Trail is the longest National Scenic Trail in the United States, meandering over 4,600 miles through seven states.



NCNST Partnership Structure

The National Park Service (NPS)

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the North County National Scenic Trail, providing management oversight to the entire trail by working with federal agencies, state and local governments, private organizations, landowners and land users. The NPS also provides guidance and assistance to the NCTA.

The National Park Service provides:

- Funding for NCTA programs
- Technical assistance and training
- Planning and decisions on trail routing
- Trail tools
- Supplies and signage for volunteers
- Trail certification guidelines
- Volunteer support through the VIP program

Other Land Management Agencies

Other land management agencies (USDA Forest Service, State Parks and Forests, etc.) provide the legal managing authority for the trail and the land on which the trail traverses. Decision making rests with each agency in order to adhere to its specific governing policies and procedures. The NPS and NCTA hold many agreements with these agencies across the trail. The agreements stipulate how the trail should be managed by that agency.

North Country Trail Association (NCTA)

Lastly, the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) is the primary partner of the National Park Service in the management of the NCNST. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the NCTA's mission is to develop, maintain, protect, and promote the NCNST as the nation's premier hiking path. The NCTA was founded in 1981.

The NCTA provides:

- Volunteer coordination
- Trail building and maintenance
- Fundraising for projects
- Mapping across the trail
- Promotion and outreach
- Trail advocacy

Designated Trail Towns

As of this writing, there are 20 designated Trail Towns in five states along the NCNST. A full list and description of each Trail Town can be found on the NCTA website, <https://northcountrytrail.org>



The NCNST in Marquette, Michigan.





Trail Murals in Lowell, Michigan.



CHAPTER 2. WHAT IS A TRAIL TOWN?

A Trail Town is a community that has embraced the North Country National Scenic Trail and is using the trail to leverage new opportunities for community and economic development. A Trail Town is also a community that celebrates and actively works to promote and maintain the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Trail Towns are active, attractive, and interesting places with accessible and comfortable public spaces. These spaces in turn host 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.
- Have the physical amenities that support trail users such as wayfinding signs, wide sidewalks, well-marked crosswalks, public restrooms, drinking fountains, and benches.
- Have the business amenities that appeal to and support trail users (e.g., lodging, restaurant, brewery, ice cream shop and boutique-style shops).

Long-distance hikers will likely seek additional business amenities such as a laundromat, campground, café with internet, camp store (to secure additional supplies) and post office (to mail supplies). Whether your town has a large downtown with many active shops or just a handful of businesses on one block, open and inviting storefronts and vibrant pedestrian-friendly streets will be appealing to trail users and will encourage visitors to casually stroll through your downtown.

Trail Town Strategy

The North Country National Scenic Trail, like all of the National Scenic Trails, attracts long-distance as well as weekend and day-hikers. This is especially true of portions of the trail that pass by and through interesting towns, scenic areas and places of historical interest. No matter the duration of their stay, most trail users will require some degree of goods and services.

It is important for chapter members and community officials to understand that every community along the NCNST (even communities without the Trail Town designation) are linked together by the trail. Communities clustered together along stretches of the NCNST, and even entire regions and states, can become destinations for trail tourists.

For many small towns, the NCNST might be the only trail system within the community. However, larger communities may have several trail systems that are already popular with local residents and tourists alike. In some communities, these trail systems connect to or even make up part of the greater NCNST corridor. In these instances, it is imperative for chapter members to work with community officials, regional trail organizations, and

What is a Trail Town?

“A community through which the North Country National Scenic Trail passes that supports hikers with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens, and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated. Trail Towns are built on a relationship between a town, the Trail and its volunteers.”

- North Country Trail Association



Most trail users will require some degree of goods and services. Making connections with local restaurants, bars and retailers will be important in creating a friendly Trail Town community.



Keys to Success

Successful Trail Town communities must help support the local NCTA chapter and the continued development, maintenance and promotion of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Using this Handbook

While all NCNST volunteers will benefit from the information in this handbook, the following icons are intended to draw the specific attention of the following key groups of stakeholders:



Local Officials including elected officials, municipal staff and appointed officials.



Business Interests including Downtown Development Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureaus, Merchant Associations, and local business owners.



Local Chapters including NCTA chapter members, volunteers, and other trail management organizations.

These icons reappear throughout the handbook. Toolkits for each key group are found at the end of the handbook and contain a description of key Trail Town components, as well as redistributable forms, resources and sample language to use in Trail Town planning efforts.

state agencies to make new or improved trail connections to the NCNST, collectively promote trail-based tourism activities, and support positive trail experiences for the entire community.

It is also important for chapter members and community officials to regularly communicate with neighboring chapters and local officials from nearby towns about regional trail conditions, safety concerns and trail events. Regular communication can be especially useful when large trail events and/or tours pass through the community.

Basic Elements of a Trail Town Strategy

Ultimately, Trail Town communities need to be friendly and welcoming places that support, celebrate and encourage NCNST users to visit. Trail Town communities also need to help support the continued development, maintenance and promotion of the NCNST. Understanding and developing a comprehensive Trail Town strategy is an important part of building this culture.

The basic elements of a “Trail Town Strategy”:

- Entice trail users to get off the NCNST and into your town.
- Welcome NCNST users to your town by making information about the community readily available at the trailhead and key entryways into the community.
- Make a strong and safe connection between your town and the NCNST.
- Educate local businesses on the economic benefits of meeting the needs of day-hikers, section hikers and long-distance hikers.
- Recruit new businesses or expand existing businesses to fill gaps in the goods or services that NCNST users want and need.
- Support and promote a “trail friendly” and “pedestrian friendly” character of the town.
- Work with neighboring chapters and communities to promote the NCNST as a regional tourist destination.
- Expand the local NCTA volunteer network and build additional capacity.

It is important for chapter members and local officials to understand that the Trail Town initiative must come from *within* the community. Becoming a Trail Town is as much about local attitude as it is about physical improvements. Listed below are several considerations chapter members and local officials should consider to create a dynamic Trail Town environment.



CONSIDERATIONS IN CREATING A TRAIL TOWN ENVIRONMENT

- The more Trail Towns there are along the NCNST offering hospitality and services, the more attractive regions will be for tourism; the success of one community is important to the success of all the nearby communities.
- Leadership and initiative from the local NCTA chapter and within the community (especially the business community) will be necessary to turn the community into a Trail Town.
- A safe and well-maintained trail is the centerpiece, so it's important that members of the local NCTA chapter collaborate closely with public officials, local public works departments and public safety agencies as needed.
- A core pedestrian-friendly philosophy should be adopted by local officials and business owners.
- Trail users should be accommodated both physically and socially within the downtown area/business district.
- Goods and services for trail users will be appealing to other types of tourists as well as local residents.
- Local law enforcement agents can be important ambassadors in the town, along the NCNST, and on pathway connectors.
- Workers within the local service industry (e.g., wait staff, taxi drivers, hotel employees) are important ambassadors for the NCNST and the town, providing information, advice, guidance and recommendations to trail tourists.

Complete Streets



One way to establish a 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.

A sample *Complete Streets* Resolution can be found in *Toolkit A: Resources for Local Officials*.



Wide sidewalks, bump-outs, crosswalks, narrow streets, benches, open storefronts, decorative street trees, and bike and pedestrian resting areas all work together to create a pedestrian-friendly and welcoming environment in Petoskey, Michigan.



State Game Area in Lowell, Michigan



CHAPTER 3. CREATING YOUR TRAIL TOWN

In order to plan for, create and implement a successful and long-term Trail Town initiative, it is important to have a good understanding of the criteria that must be met to receive the Trail Town designation, the process to follow, and ultimately what it takes to become a successful Trail Town. More details about the information presented in this chapter, including the Trail Town application form, can be found in *Toolkit C, Resources for Local Chapters*.

NCTA Trail Town Criteria

Any town directly located on the NCNST route or located on a connector trail within a reasonable distance of no more than a few miles may apply for a Trail Town designation and must meet the following criteria:

1. **Establish a Trail Town Advisory Committee.** Establish a Trail Town Advisory Committee that includes representatives of the local chapter of the North Country Trail Association, elected and appointed officials (e.g. town council, planning commission, recreation board), municipal staff, any other local trail organizations (not affiliated with the NCTA), tourism development association, chamber of commerce, and trail enthusiasts.
2. **Annual Project or Celebration.** Host an annual volunteer project, event or celebration for the trail within the downtown. The local NCTA chapter can provide ideas, suggestions and assistance.
3. **Community Support.** To demonstrate community support, applicants must have both an official resolution of support for the designation adopted by the town's legislative body and a letter of support from the local NCTA Chapter
4. **Trail Town Master Plan Process.** Using the NCTA Trail Town Handbook as a guide for best practices, the Trail Town Advisory Committee will develop a local Trail Town Master Plan within the first two years of the designation.
5. **Incorporation into Local Land Use Documents.** Include language for the development, protection and support of the NCNST in local land use documents (e.g., municipal master plan, recreation plan, or zoning ordinance) or demonstrate that there is support to amend, revise or add to such plans.
6. **Promote the Trail.** The North Country Trail Association and the North Country Trail should be promoted through all available communication channels.
7. **Memorandum of Understanding.** Once the NCTA officially designates your community as a Trail Town, local leaders must sign and submit back to the NCTA an official Memorandum of Understanding.

Trail Town Advisory Committee

If your community is unable to establish a robust Trail Town Advisory Committee, please dedicate at least one member from the local chapter and one member from the local community (e.g., elected or appointed official, municipal staff member).

Master Plan

The Trail Town Master Plan outline provided in Chapter 7 is only meant as a general guideline. The Master Plan could be very extensive or as simple as a one- or two-page document that outlines and describes how the community is going to improve and celebrate the trail and promote the Trail Town concept.

In some instances, it might be more efficient and appropriate to include the content of the Trail Town Master Plan within the local municipal master plan or community recreation plan.



Trail Town Liaison

In developing the Advisory Committee, the local NCTA chapter should select one member to serve as its general Trail Town liaison. In addition, if possible, community partners should appoint one person to serve as the official Trail Town liaison for the community at large, someone who can work alongside the chapter liaison to help with the effort. A *Trail Town Advisory Committee* should include:

- Public officials
- Volunteers
- Community Organizations
- Downtown Business Organizations
- NCTA Chapter

The Four Point Approach

The *Four Point Approach* or “Main Street Approach” is a well-known, successful revitalization program established by the National Main Street Center. The Four Point Approach has driven a comprehensive approach for downtown revitalization in over 1,700 towns and cities throughout the United States.

It is essential at the start of a Trail Town planning process to assemble the right team from the community. The local NCTA chapter should partner with public officials from the town to establish a *Trail Town Advisory Committee*. The committee should include volunteers from community organizations and stakeholder groups that have an active interest in the downtown as well as the NCNST. Prior to developing the committee, your chapter should select one person to serve as its general Trail Town liaison. This person is charged with understanding and maintaining the partnership with the community and also serves as the main liaison to stakeholder groups involved in the local Trail Town effort.

The community at large should also appoint one person to serve as its official Trail Town liaison. This person will work closely with the chapter appointee to plan for and coordinate Trail Town activities and organize municipal support. This person could be staff from the local chamber of commerce or convention and visitors bureau (CVB), an employee of the town (e.g., recreation director), a public official (e.g., recreational board, planning commission, town council), or an engaged and enthusiastic citizen.

The Framework – Using the Four Point Approach

Given the potential size of this planning effort, one effective way to organize your local Trail Town initiative is to utilize the *Four Point Approach* established by the National Main Street Center.¹

1. Organization

Organizing gets everyone in the community working toward the same goal. Use the basic formula of a hands-on, volunteer driven program with an organizational structure to direct the program. This will help ease the tough work of building consensus and cooperation among groups that have an important stake in the NCNST and the downtown.

2. Design

Design gets a Trail Town into top physical shape. Capitalizing on a community’s best assets, such as historic buildings and walkable streets, is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere created through attractive window displays, professional signage, well-maintained sidewalks, tree canopy, accessible parking areas, appropriate street lighting, and attractive landscaping conveys a visual message about what a Trail Town is and what it has to offer.

¹ National Main Street Center: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>



3. Economic Restructuring

Economic restructuring finds a new purpose for the town's existing businesses. 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.

4. Promotion

Promotion sells the identity and promise of a Trail Town to the community. Marketing the downtown's unique characteristics to trail tourists, local customers, investors, businesses owners, and visitors requires an effective promotion strategy. Good promotion can create positive town images through advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out by chapter volunteers, municipal staff and other community development organizations and agencies.

Getting Started

The following section describes some of the important roles and activities that will be needed to create and establish a Trail Town initiative in your community. Chapter 7 outlines the first steps to get your initiative underway. In addition, the Toolkits at the end of this handbook contain supportive handouts and forms for these activities. As chapter members and local stakeholders review this section of the handbook, it will important to begin to identify where additional assistance might be needed.

A. Define the Trail Corridor

It is important that local officials, staff members (e.g., parks director, public works director) and the business community understand the physical and administrative structure of the NCNST. At the onset of the planning process, local chapter members should meet with these local stakeholders to discuss how the trail is managed and maintained, the geographic context of the trail system within their community, and how it connects to other trail systems within the community.

B. Assess Local Capacity

Although the Trail Town initiative will be led by a committee that includes members of the local chapter as well as community officials, certain aspects of the Trail Town initiative could be part of an existing comprehensive community revitalization or development effort directed by downtown merchants, a Downtown Development Association, Chamber of Commerce,

Tools for Local Chapters



There are a number of resources that local NCTA chapters can use to get started with a Trail Town planning process. See *Toolkit C: Resources for Local Chapters* for help with assessing your local capacity, developing a volunteer base, and working with local media outlets.



To get the message out locally, it can be helpful to give tours of the trail and trail activities, and to speak before local boards and community service organizations.



Local volunteers identifying Trail Town assets in Lowell, Michigan.

a Main Street Program, a local government, or a combination of these organizations. This professional experience can be quite valuable; therefore, it is important to identify the resources and capacities that already exist in the community, and understand how well local leaders are able to plan and implement new programs or ideas.

Your community might already have a very active and successful Downtown Development Authority (DDA), merchant group or community development department. Local chapters will need to tap into those agencies, who generally are eager and willing to participate in community development efforts. Creating strong local teams will be vital for the long-term viability of your local Trail Town effort.

C. Create or Enhance Your Local Organization

Everyone in the community has a stake in the success of the North Country National Scenic Trail and the viability of their downtown. In order to be successful, chapter volunteers and local leaders must involve as many interested groups and individuals as possible from throughout the community. Chapter volunteers and local officials should seek support from local volunteer organizations, historical societies, financial and religious institutions, environmental organizations, business networks, and civic organizations (both public and private) that have a stake in the trail, tourism and the downtown. Because the NCNST provides health benefits to local residents, it can also be helpful to seek support from local physicians or regional healthcare networks. Some volunteers could be asked to participate on the advisory committee or sub-committees for specific tasks. It should be noted that the more stakeholders you involve in the local Trail Town effort, the more access to additional resources you will have for implementation.

D. Develop the Local Volunteer Base

A Trail Town initiative requires support from the entire community. In addition to mobilizing support from community organizations, it is important to mobilize local volunteers. Volunteers bring new and different ideas forward and help to carry out activities. Volunteers are also needed to maintain the NCNST. Chapter members and local officials 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 both the trail and the town. A marketing committee can be helpful in organizing these efforts. The marketing committee will need to develop a relationship with the local media, explain to them what trail volunteers are doing, and explain how media outlets can help. It can also be helpful to submit articles to the local



newspaper; speak before local boards, commissions, and community service organizations (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis); establish a social media platform; and have a presence at community events and festivals. See *Toolkit C: Resources for Local Chapters* for help in identifying local media outlets and a template to develop a press release.

F. 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 trail development grants from your state's Department of Natural Resources, grants for non-motorized facilities from your state's Department of Transportation, and grants from your state's economic development agencies. Financial aid may also be secured through grants from the NCTA and National Park Service.

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.

G. 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 communities where there is not an active NCTA chapter or local organization already working on economic development initiatives. Your Trail Town team should work to implement small projects first and then build on that success.

Helpful Tip

The more that chapter members 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 support from these different sources.



Affiliated Program: Buckeye Trail Towns

In Ohio, large portions of the North Country National Scenic Trail follow the Buckeye Trail, a long-distance hiking trail that circumnavigates the state. The Buckeye Trail Association (BTA), the organization charged with maintaining and promoting the Buckeye Trail, has partnered with the NCTA to facilitate its own Trail Town Program in six communities located along the trail.

Similar to the NCTA Trail Town Program, the BTA Trail Town Program works with the participating communities to help identify ways local officials and trail volunteers can work together to capitalize on the benefits of the long-distance trails. Among other things, the program is working with communities to grow awareness and support for the Buckeye Trail, improve access to the trail, get residents of the community active in outdoor activities, recognize local businesses that support the trail, and promote the economic benefits of the trail. As of 2016, six towns (Milford, Dayton, Xenia, Piqua, Troy and Zoar) have been designated as Buckeye Trail Towns.



Long-distance hikers are welcomed by volunteers upon entering Dayton.

Dayton, Ohio

The City of Dayton, by far the largest Buckeye Trail Town, offers hikers a wide range of services and amenities, including outfitters, camping, hotels, restaurants and even outdoor guiding companies. Since becoming a Trail Town in 2013, the program has worked extensively with volunteers to make significant improvements to the trail, including replacing a bridge at Eastwood MetroPark.

In addition, two local hiking-focused “meet-up groups” (the Dayton Hikers and the Miami Chapter of the BTA) often promote and host hikes and workdays along the trail. Whenever possible, the Dayton Hikers as well as staff from Five Rivers MetroParks volunteer to greet long-distance hikers when they pass through the city.

In 2015, local volunteers organized a Buckeye Trail Membership Drive event that included formal presentations as well as inspiring messages about hiking and volunteering on the trail. The successful event brought in 143 new members to the organization.



Hocking Hills, Ohio

Photo: Peter Zelinka



Downtown Lowell, Michigan



CHAPTER 4. DESIGN GUIDELINES

An important step in a local Trail Town initiative is to assess the physical characteristics of the central business district and its relationship to the NCNST — an exercise referred to as the *Trail-to-Town Assessment*. The assessment helps the local Trail Town Advisory Committee better understand the physical challenges that trail visitors may encounter in their quest to visit the downtown. The following pages describe the physical elements chapter members and local officials should evaluate as part of the trail-to-town assessment.

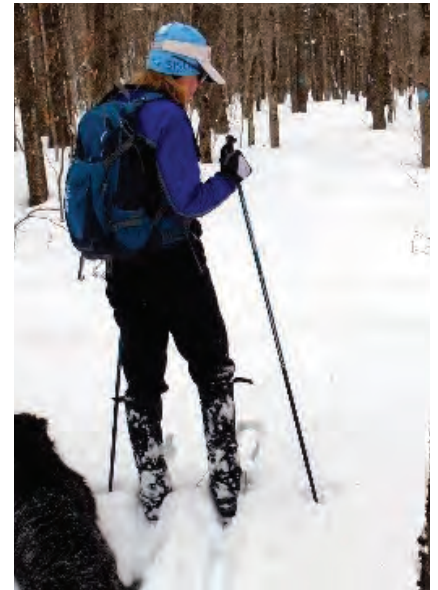
Understand the Uses of the North Country National Scenic Trail

The nature and purpose of the NCNST as defined by the National Park Service is to offer a world-class walking and hiking experience. However, other non-motorized uses may be permitted depending on the location, season, and the policies of the local land management agency. Understanding the uses allowed, the activities that are taking place at different times of the year, and the level of use will help both chapter members and local officials better provide for supporting trail infrastructure. For example, although they are not groomed for such uses, many parts of the NCNST are often used by snowshoers and cross-country skiers in the winter months. In urban areas, the NCNST may host a wide variety of uses. It is important for chapter members and local officials to understand which types of users are on the trail and at which time of year. This 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. Local chapters could use volunteers to survey and assess trail use. However, most chapters, as well as local stakeholders, have a fairly good idea of the types of uses on the trail in any given season.

Understand Trail Geography

As the trail approaches the Trail Town, it will transition from a natural setting to an urban setting (e.g., paved shoulders, sidewalks). The condition of the trail in these transitional areas should be continually assessed by the local NCTA chapter and the appropriate land managers to ensure the trail is sustainable in design and construction, properly signed according to standards, and maintained to provide a world-class hiking experience.

Another important item to assess is the physical relationship between the NCNST and the central business district, which can include factors such as linear distance and elevation change. The linear relationship between the NCNST and the downtown can be described in one of three ways: (1) Internal Trail; (2) Adjacent Trail; and (3) Removed Trail.



It is very important for chapter members and local officials to understand what activities are taking place on the trail — and at what time of year — to adequately provide supporting trail infrastructure.



Internal Trail

The NCNST is located directly through the central business district.

Adjacent Trail

The NCNST is located immediately adjacent to the downtown, usually within a half-mile of the central business district.

Removed Trail

The NCNST is located up to two miles away from the central business district.



The NCNST in Lowell, Michigan, is considered an Internal Trail because it runs directly through the central business district.

Identify Key Connecting Elements

In addition to understanding the physical relationship between the NCNST and the central business district, it is also important to understand the function and interrelationship of the six *connecting elements* — that is, the physical components that make up and define the connection between the NCNST and the central business district. The following pages summarize each of the connecting elements.

1. Trailhead

In most communities, the Trailhead is the area where users can access the NCNST by car, providing parking and other amenities (e.g., restrooms) for trail users. In many instances, the Trailhead is the point at which the trail user may first come in contact with your community and the point at which the trail user will decide whether or not to venture into your downtown. Therefore, it is imperative that chapter members and local officials work together to make the Trailhead a positive and welcoming place.

In some instances, the community may not have a well-defined Trailhead. Rather, the NCNST enters the town via an unassuming side street or parking lot. Despite the lack of formality, chapter members and local officials should still work to make the point of entry clear and welcoming.

One of the most important resources that should be provided at the Trailhead is information about the community. This could include a kiosk listing area businesses and a description of local attractions. Services and amenities important for long-distance hikers (e.g., restaurants, hotels, laundromat, camp store, and post office) should be prominently listed. Any description of the downtown should include at least one photo, preferably an image of bustling activity with lots of people. The kiosk should also include a map of the downtown, with the NCNST prominently labeled.

The NCTA has developed a sign template to make it easier for local chapters

Connecting Elements

The “connecting elements” are the key components of the Trail-to-Town route. Chapter members and community officials should be familiar with the six connecting elements and know where they are in their community:

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



to provide information about their community at the trailhead. Each NCTA template is 36" by 48", but the design can be easily modified to fit the needs of the community. The template will require the local chapter to develop a map and text about the community as well as incorporate several photos. The local chapter is responsible for the fabrication and placement of the sign. However, chapters can apply for NCTA grants to cover expenses. A description and sample sign template is located in *Toolkit C: Resources for Local Chapters*.

By providing amenities such as water and toilet facilities at the Trailhead, the community welcomes visitors, showing hospitality and inviting them to visit the town. Whenever possible, a variety of amenities should be available to trail users all year round (or at least when the trail is being actively used). For example, a Trailhead may feature a ski rack and warming center for cross-country skiers during the winter months.

TRAILHEAD AMENITIES

While every community's needs vary, the following list of amenities are generally recommended at Trailheads.

Bathrooms

- Bathrooms
- Potable Water
- Benches
- Trash Receptacles
- Picnic Tables
- Shelter
- Parking (with shade)
- Wi-Fi
- Pop Machine
- Directional Signs
- Welcome Signs
- Trail Map
- Community Information & Map
- Dog Waste Bags
- Hazard Warnings (if needed)

One of the most important amenities for the Trailhead is a bathroom. Bathrooms not only provide toilet facilities, but often they are used by trail users to fill water bottles, freshen up, and change clothes. Many communities close their traditional brick-and-mortar public bathrooms during the winter months, even though the NCNST may still be actively used all year round. If year-round access to bathroom facilities is not feasible, the chapter and local officials should work to provide portable, universally accessible bathroom facilities. If there is no bathroom at the Trailhead, signs should be placed directing trail users to public restroom facilities within the downtown.

Trail-to-Town Assessment



The Trail-to-Town Assessment is an important step in identifying the focus improvement areas for your Trail Town process. The Assessment should be completed with a group of diverse participants, in order to identify the varied perspectives of the route. The Trail-to-Town Assessment Form can be found in *Toolkit C: Resources for Local Chapters*.



Local jurisdictions should work to provide portable bathroom facilities during the time of year when their brick-and-mortar facilities are closed. ADA-accessible portable toilets are relatively inexpensive.



Local chapters will need to work with local officials to be sure their directional markers are well maintained if placed on municipal infrastructure. It is important to design the directional trail signage to reflect the familiar blue North Country National Scenic Trail markers.



Trailheads can be an excellent place to display signs that celebrate the historical and cultural aspects of the community.

When installing 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.

Signs and Markers

Signs and markers are essential components of any trail system and should be incorporated into both local and NCNST trail planning efforts. Trail markings and directional signs guide the user along the trail and can display the distance to specific destinations and points of interest. Interpretive signs offer an opportunity to educate and engage the trail user at a deeper level.

Trail Marking and Directional Signs

The National Park Service has established the following trail marking standards for the NCNST:

- The official NCNST route should be marked with the NCNST emblem and blue blazes.
- Routes through towns should be marked according to the NPS’s urban trail marking system, which can be found online at: <https://northcountrytrail.org/members/volunteer-resources/trail-design-construction-and-maintenance/>.
- Additional directional signs that show the distance to destinations and points of interest are an important part of the overall sign program.
- Roadway signs that direct users to the trailhead or alert motorists to trail road crossings may be necessary. The placement of such signs should be determined in coordination with the appropriate road or city agency.

Interpretive Signs

Interpretive signs help to provide more information about the trail, the nearby town and its amenities. Interpretive signs also provide an opportunity to celebrate the natural, cultural or historic amenities of the community.

The NCTA has established templates for informational panels that can be tailored to your community. If the chapter and community choose not to use the sign template provided by the NCTA, the style (design, color, materials) of the Trailhead sign should reflect the history and/or culture of the community.



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. Information about area businesses and amenities that cater to hikers can be included in the sign template provided by the NCTA or on a separate but complementary sign. 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 visit.

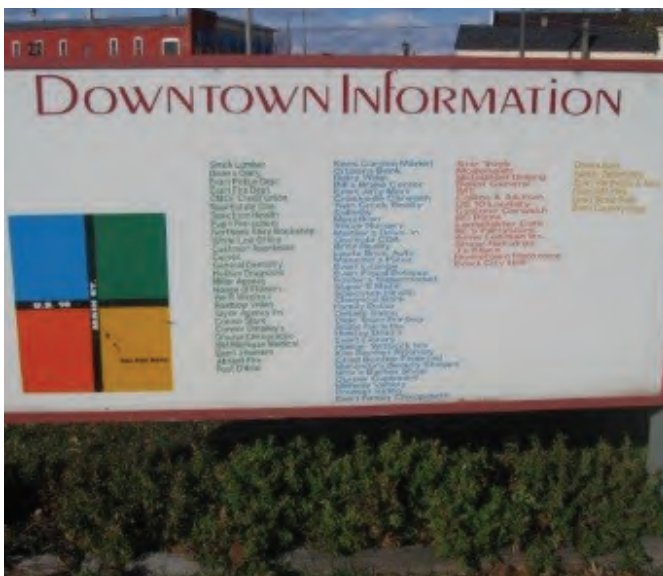
The sign could also include a detailed map of the downtown with a comprehensive list of businesses and attractions. If the sign includes a map of the downtown, be sure to clearly indicate the location of the NCNST and where it connects to the downtown. If a formal sign kiosk is not possible, try to include information about the community (e.g., pictures, restaurant menus, hotel information) in other prominent places, like on the exterior of a nearby restroom or building. The Hiker Amenities Checklist in *Toolkit C: Resources for Local Chapters* provides a good list of business amenities that can be included on signage.



The Portal is the point at which users of the trail exit the Trailhead (or trail) with the intent of visiting the nearby downtown.

Helpful Tip

Advertisements should not be placed on the trail or at the Trailhead unless the Trailhead is developed and near the urban center.



A good example of a sign at a Portal that has captured all the local businesses (left), compared to a less desirable example of a sign exclusive to just one business (right).



A celebration of iron workers along the Iron Ore Heritage Trail in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Cultural Heritage Signs

As previously mentioned, Trailheads can also be an excellent place to display information about the unique historical and cultural aspects of your community. Chapter volunteers and community officials should work with local historians or other community groups to determine the most significant and/or interesting historical and cultural aspects of the community and consider how to incorporate these stories into signage at the Trailhead.

Art

Trailheads can also be an excellent place to display artwork that highlights the unique cultural aspects of the community and the NCNST. 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 shoes, or kids may climb on it.

2. Portal

The Portal is the point at which users of the NCNST exit the Trailhead with the intent of visiting the nearby downtown. The Portal should be a welcoming point in which lighting, wayfinding signs, sidewalks and/or pathways clearly direct trail users into the central business district.

In some instances, it may be more appropriate to place signs about downtown businesses at the Portal rather than the Trailhead. Chapter members and local officials should work closely with downtown merchants or the downtown development organization to develop wayfinding signs 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.

3. Pathway

The Pathway is the corridor that trail users follow from the Portal to the central business district. Depending on the distance between the NCNST and the downtown, the Pathway could be just a few blocks or a couple of miles. If the Trailhead is several miles away from the central business district, the Pathway could include a combination of walking paths, road shoulders, sidewalks or other pathways.

The Pathway may 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 can also highlight places of interest along (or adjacent to) the Pathway, such as restaurants, shops, historical markers, the post office or the library. Chapter members and community officials should continually assess the Pathway for cleanliness, safety, lighting, physical condition and interaction with traffic.



In some instances, the Pathway may pass through areas of the community where the Pathway is indistinguishable from existing sidewalk infrastructure. Therefore, it is important to include wayfinding signs or markers at these key intersections and connections.



4. Gateway

The Gateway is the point at which trail users enter the central 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 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 and physical condition. Window displays and building façades should also be regularly assessed for best practices (see *Building Form and Public Realm Elements* later in this chapter). Additionally, the Center should be assessed on the availability of amenities that help trail users enjoy their experience (e.g., outdoor seating at restaurants, ATM machines, free Wi-Fi, and public restrooms).

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 or services that cater to trail users (e.g., a camp store), places that relate to the duration of time the trail user is 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.). Chapter members and local officials should continually identify existing and/or potential Nodes along the existing Pathway into their downtown.

Identifying the Connecting Elements

The Advisory Committee, as well as other trail and community stakeholders who want to participate, should work together to identify, map and assess the trail-to-town corridor and each connecting element. In order to get an accurate assessment, the Advisory Committee should walk the entire trail-to-town corridor.



The Gateway should welcome trail users into the central business district.



Trail-To-Town Assessment working groups.
Source: LIAA



Prior to walking the corridor, it can be helpful to identify the connecting elements on a large map. As is often the case, when you're actually out walking around, you may find that the actual trail-to-town corridor may be different than what the committee identified on the map. Figure 2 identifies the connecting elements following an assessment in Lowell, Michigan.

Figure 2. Connecting Elements Map example from Lowell, Michigan.

Connecting Elements Map (Lowell, MI)

■ Trailhead
 ▲ Portal
 ← Pathway
 ● Gateway
 ○ Center





Public Amenities

As previously mentioned, another important step in becoming a Trail Town is to have public amenities that support both day and overnight trail users. It will be important for the community to have amenities like well-marked and accessible crosswalks, working pedestrian signals, drinking fountains, benches, and wayfinding signs within its downtown.

Keep in mind that responsibility for public amenities may fall under the authority of a few different local, regional or state agencies. For example, the County Road Commission may oversee and maintain road shoulders, whereas the local municipality may oversee crosswalks and traffic signals in the downtown area. In most instances, the local municipality is responsible for providing public amenities. The purchase, installation and maintenance of these public amenities is expensive. Local officials should look for opportunities to partner with local stakeholder groups, local business owners, non-profit organizations, and regional community development agencies to share in the cost of providing these essential amenities.

It is imperative that chapter members and local officials continually communicate with regional and state agencies about their local Trail Town planning efforts and improvements. One way to ensure their participation in the discussion is to include their staff members on the local Trail Town Advisory Committee.

Wayfinding Signs

Wayfinding signs are one of the most important public amenities communities can provide to trail users. Wayfinding signs direct visitors to the primary assets and features of the community, and the NCNST should be treated as such. A comprehensive wayfinding signage system should include signs located along major thoroughfares as well as pedestrian-scale signs on local sidewalks. For portions of the NCNST near a Trailhead or central business district, wayfinding signs should also be placed on the trail, directing trail users to the central business district.

The NCNST name and emblem should always be included in the local wayfinding sign system. In addition, the name of the Trailhead should be included on local wayfinding signs. Furthermore, the distance to the Trailhead (or to the downtown from the trail) should also be included on wayfinding signs. The distance to/from the Trailhead in rural areas can be displayed in miles; the distance in urban settings should be displayed in blocks.

Local Businesses



Local businesses play a large role in developing plans for the downtown and can partner with local officials and the Advisory Committee to help develop Trail Town plans. This chapter includes a detailed listing of best practices for downtown designs, including public amenities and business amenities. More information can be found in *Toolkit B: Resources for Business Owners*.



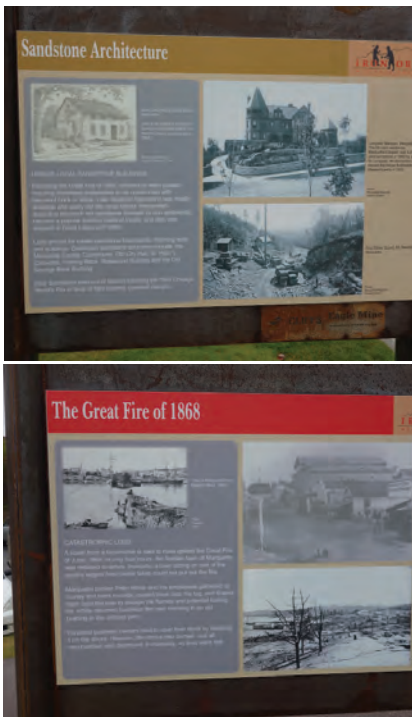
Be sure to include the North Country Trail in your community's wayfinding signage, like the examples above.



Cultural Heritage

As previously mentioned, chapter members and local officials 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 NCNST itself should be celebrated in the central business district. One way to do this is with public art. A sculpture, symbolic of the NCNST, could be placed in the central business district or near the Gateway.

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

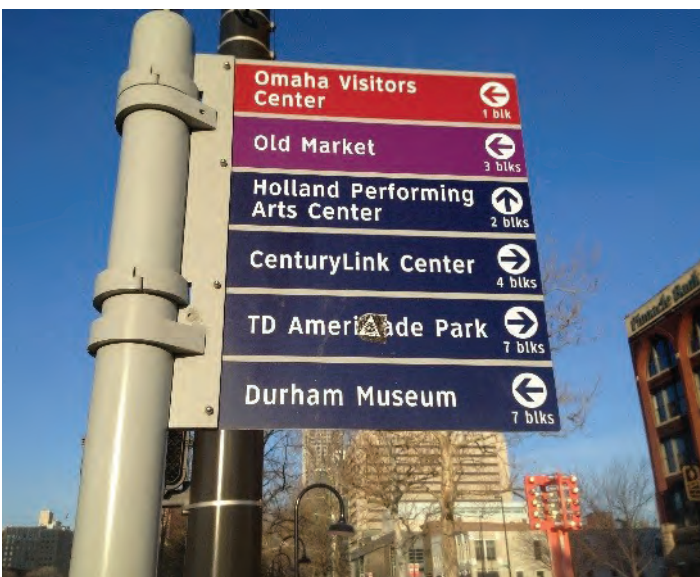


Interpretive kiosks at Trailheads can provide information about the culture and history of the community. This sign kiosk in Marquette, Michigan, provides information on the city's sandstone architecture and its Great Fire of 1868.

Public Transportation

For many weekend or day-hikers, time and distance may limit the likelihood of visiting other communities in the region. However, trail users may still like to hike on other segments of the trail and visit other communities within the region during their stay.

Chapter members and local officials should work with regional economic development agencies and transportation agencies to explore opportunities to establish a seasonal shuttle program in which the public transportation agency would transport trail users and their equipment to Trailheads in communities along the trail. In communities without a public transit agency, this concept could be filled by a local business.



In urban settings, the distance to the Trailhead or the downtown should be indicated by the number of blocks.



Business Amenities

The local businesses that will primarily be of interest to the trail user will be service-based businesses. Chapter members, local officials and regional community development agencies can help local business owners in each community better understand the needs of the trail user. In addition to providing goods and services to trail users, local business owners can incorporate simple trail-friendly amenities and trail-based hospitality into their business practices. For example, restaurants and bars could provide bike racks outside their establishments, restrooms that are open to the public, and perhaps an “NCNST trail special” menu item or drink. Wait and host staff should be able to talk about the NCNST and describe how to get to the nearest Trailhead. Motels should have trail maps in their lobbies. Retail establishments should have friendly hours of operation, trail-related merchandise, and options to ship merchandise to a 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 be helpful to host a “service trail day” in which chapter volunteers give local service workers a tour of the NCNST so they can better describe and recommend it to tourists.

The enhancement of existing businesses and the development of new business opportunities are important elements in becoming a Trail Town. Initially only a few businesses in communities along the NCNST might provide goods and services geared toward trail users. However, 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 and pattern of the storefronts, tree canopy and sidewalks, all work together to create a pedestrian-friendly environment that attracts tourists 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 *Principles of Urban Retail, Planning and Development*.²

These best practices can be implemented in the local zoning code or through the adoption of design guidelines. See the Best Management Practices Evaluation Forms in *Toolkit B: Resources for Local Businesses* to see how your community compares to recognized best management practices for downtown design.



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

² Gibbs, Robert. *Principles of Urban Retail Planning and Development*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (2012)



BUILDING FORM AND PUBLIC REALM ELEMENTS

Awnings

Awnings should define the first-level storefront, reinforce a business's particular brand, and bring attention to the business. Best Practices include:

- 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.



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



Signs should support continuity, but encourage individuality.

Signs

Signs should be well designed and properly scaled. Sign choices should support continuity along a corridor, but also reflect the individuality of each business. Best Practices include:

- 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

Careful design of windows and doors can help advertise goods, add interest to the street, and draw people into the store. Doors and windows also provide a sense of safety and are an opportunity to reinforce the building's form and design. Best Practices include:

- 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.



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



Sidewalks

Sidewalks are both the first and last impression for visitors of a business. In general, sidewalks should be designed to not distract the attention of visitors from the storefront windows and other design elements.

- 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

Street trees provide many benefits to both the natural and built environment. For businesses, the presence of street trees can contribute to the perception that downtown stores offer quality goods and can encourage visitors to spend more time walking along beautiful streets and visiting shops.

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



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



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



**FIFE LAKE INN
OPEN FOR LUNCH**



CHAPTER 5. ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

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 chapter members, local officials and economic development agencies in your region to understand how economic restructuring can capitalize on existing community assets to help establish the Trail Town concept.

1. Understanding Your Trail User - The Customer

Understanding who your trail users and customers are is very important. Often, local officials want formal metrics to justify their budgets or to invest in capital improvements for the downtown. 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 along the NCNST. 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 few good stories about what a few trail tourists did in your community and how they spent their money can go a long way.

Broad information on the social, economic and lifestyle preferences of trail users can be found in studies and reports from several national trail user associations as well as consumer associations. Another way to better understand the characteristics and spending habits of trail users is by surveying them.

2. Assessing 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. See the *Existing Businesses, Services and Amenities* checklist in *Toolkit A* to view a full list. For example, the long-distance hiker needs access to showers, a laundromat, a place to resupply and a post office, whereas the day-hiker needs a campstore or a grocery store to get snacks for the day.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRAIL USERS

Unlike the Appalachian Trail or the Pacific Crest Trail, the NCNST does not have a history of many long-distance hikers. In fact, just a handful of people have hiked the entire trail in the last 20 years. However, as new trail segments open and more gaps are filled, the trail could see many more hikers looking for long-distance experiences.

Helpful Tip

Trends for outdoor consumers (e.g., hikers) can be found from consumer advocacy groups like the Outdoor Industry Association, <http://outdoorindustry.org>



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.



Day-Hikers

The NCNST is most heavily used by day-hikers. Day-hikers typically park their car at a trailhead or parking lot, hike to a certain location, then return hike to their car. When hiking in a group, they may also park two cars, one at the starting point and one at the ending point. Communities can assist day-hikers by providing clearly marked parking areas close to the trail, or by making shuttle services available from town.

Section Hikers

Section hikers are similar to day-hikers, but may be hiking longer distances over a period of days or weeks. Section hikers may shuttle themselves using their vehicle and then stay in local lodging, returning to their end point each successive day. Section hikers may also act more like a long-distance hiker and camp along the trail. Communities can assist section hikers by offering lodging in town, shuttles, and access to camping.

Long-Distance Hikers

Long-distance hikers are less common on the NCNST, but are dependent on communities for vital services such as food, lodging, post offices, banking, and laundry.

If your community doesn't have a camp store, a hardware store with a well-stocked camping section will be helpful for day-hikers and long-distance hikers alike.





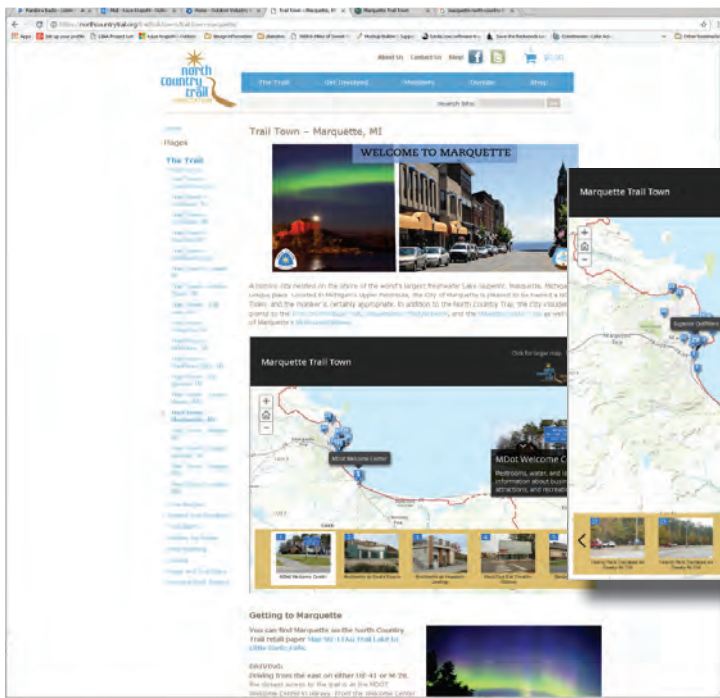
3. Encourage Related Business Opportunities

As previously stated, trail users 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. For example, a grocery store could create hot deli items or sell pre-made sandwiches and trail mix for hikers. The local variety store could add basic hiking/camping supplies like water bottles, stove fuel and travel-size soaps and shampoo.

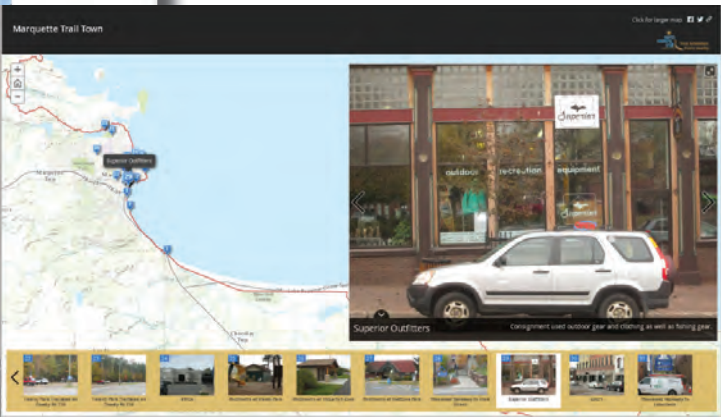
In some instances, their might be a large retailer just outside of town who could provide a wider selection of goods and services (e.g., new tent, hiking boots) to hikers. These retailers could establish a shuttle service between their store and the trail, or directly drop goods at the post office.

4. Assist the Local Business Community

Chapter members and local officials should work with local business owners to explore ways to encourage economic restructuring around regional trail and recreational assets. One way chapter members and regional leaders can assist local businesses is to develop an “economic gardening” approach to business development issues related to the trail. Under this approach, chapter members and local officials would develop an in-depth understanding of trail user needs and then educate local business leaders on new ways to meet those trail user needs.



Featuring local businesses on the North Country Trail Town page (<https://northcountrytrail.org/trail/trail-towns/trail-town-marquette/>) can assist in connecting trail users and encouraging “economic gardening” related to the trail.





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CHAPTER 6. PROMOTING A TRAIL TOWN

Promoting your community as a Trail Town will inevitably attract new trail users to your community. Promoting your community as a Trail Town will also encourage local residents to buy into the concept and help support a thriving Trail Town environment. Promotional efforts may also help increase the awareness of the local NCTA chapter and volunteer opportunities for the residents of the community. Your community should utilize and implement four primary marketing strategies to create an effective promotional campaign for a Trail Town.

- Establish a Trail Town identity for the community starting with the Trail Town logo.
- Hold special events that highlight and celebrate the trail and the community.
- Conduct retail promotions to entice people into the downtown.
- Provide information to the NCTA for the NCTA's Trail Town website, blog, and other materials.

Key Steps in Promoting Your Trail Town

While promoting your Trail Town may require a unique strategy in your community, in general, the following strategies are helpful.

1. Establish a Trail Town Identity

The first component of an effective promotional campaign is to convince local residents, the larger region, and then trail tourists that you have an active and welcoming Trail Town environment. Many of the Trail Town strategies described in this handbook are based on attracting visitors from beyond the local market. However, the full potential of a community's Trail Town identity may not be realized unless the local population is aware of it and what it can offer. Chapter members and public officials need to make sure the local business community and residents (the "community ambassadors") are aware of the NCNST. Hosting local trail workdays and tours as well as implementing programs like "smart-commute week" that incorporate the NCNST are just a couple of ways to build up the trail-friendly character of the community and garner local support. These efforts can be driven by chapter members as well as local community organizations.

2. Hold Trail Town Events

The second component to an effective promotional campaign is to hold special events within the downtown or near the NCNST. 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. Fun and interesting events held throughout the year can attract potential trail users to



Local communities can incorporate Trail Town promotional pieces into streetscape features, like this banner.



Local chapters and local tourism agencies should work together to help brand each community (and region) as a Trail Town by developing uniform and attractive marketing materials.



Events such as this yoga class in Lowell, Michigan help tie the community's cultural identity to the trail.



Use local media, like this newspaper above, to get the word out about your Trail Town.

your community. Presentations, displays and/or workshops, or a tour of the trail are examples of activities that could be included in a local event. These activities could also take place in conjunction with and complement other annual community events (e.g., Fourth of July celebration, street fair, etc.).

When your town becomes an official NCTA Trail Town, be sure to celebrate the occasion! The celebration will honor the people that made the designation possible and bring greater awareness to the trail. Chapter members should work with local officials and the local business community to host an event with food, activities and live music. During the event it will be important to get interviews from hikers and business owners describing the value of becoming a Trail Town.

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, chapter members and local officials should work with at least one local restaurant or bar to create a trail-themed sandwich or drink special.

It can be useful for chapter members and local officials to work with local groups like a DDA or just a small group of store owners to effectively plan for, conduct and promote any special retail promotions. It should also



A Trail Town event in Fife Lake, Michigan included a picnic lunch and a live band. The Trail Town was promoted using video interviews.



be noted that *word of mouth* is crucial to the overall success of your trail and your community. Therefore, the business community and local residents need to understand that creating a welcoming and friendly environment is important.

4. Provide Information to the NCTA for the NCTA's Trail Town Website, Blog and Other Material

The NCTA has established pages on its website that highlight each designated Trail Town along the North Country National Scenic Trail. Each page includes an interactive story map that allows the viewer to learn more about the community and business amenities of each Trail Town. The *NCTA Website Instructions for Submitting Your Trail Town* in Toolkit C provide guidance about what type of information and pictures should be collected and how to submit it all to the NCTA.

Litchfield, Michigan Trail Town Story Map

Each NCTA Trail Town web page includes an interactive story map that allows the viewer to learn more about the community and its amenities.

Litchfield, MI-Trail Town

The City of Litchfield is located in the northwest corner of Hillsdale County, between the cities of Albion and Hillsdale along State Highway M-99.

[Click for a larger map](#)

Munro House

"The Best Place to Stay in Hillsdale County" is at the Munro House B&B in Jonesville. This Michigan Bed and Breakfast has historical significance for being the oldest house (1834) and first brick building (1840) in Hillsdale County.

Munro House

Litchfield Deli

Litchfield Park

Litchfield Park

Luigi's Pizza

Subway

Post Office

Medigars

North Country Trail Association Trail Town Handbook | Chapter 6. Promoting a Trail Town

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Fife Lake
TOWNSHIP OFFICE

Fire & Rescue
BATTALION-6 FIFE LAKE EMS

FIFE LAKE
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

NCT NORTH
COUNTRY
TRAIL

**YARD
SALE**

OPEN





CHAPTER 7. MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

Trail Town Master Plan

Once the community has been designated a Trail Town by the NCTA, it is time to develop a Trail Town Master Plan. The Trail Town Master Plan is intended to serve as the official document used to guide the development of the local Trail Town initiative. The Trail Town Master Plan provides the framework and basis for decision making and establishes a vision and direction for the Trail Town initiative. It should be noted that the Master Plan is intended to be a flexible document, guiding the local Trail Town initiative while providing the ability to respond to changing conditions, innovation, funding opportunities and new information.

The Trail Town Master Plan can serve as a stand-alone document. The Plan should provide guidance to members of the local NCTA chapter as well as local municipal officials. However, the Master Plan, or portions of the Master Plan, can be incorporated into existing municipal planning documents (e.g., community master plan, recreation plan, DDA plan) or programs and plans developed by local economic development agencies such as the Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau, or Main Street Program. This may give the Trail Town Advisory Committee greater access to grants and other funding tools that often require these types of planning documents. In addition, municipal staff members and community development leaders can use the Master Plan to help develop new programs and projects.

The master planning process should be directed by the Trail Town Advisory Committee. However, there is no prescription for how the master planning process is facilitated; each community is unique and the Advisory Committee will need to determine the most appropriate way to develop the plan. In some communities, the Master Plan may be developed by one or two individuals.

The master planning process will likely involve several Advisory Committee meetings as well as focused discussions with community stakeholders. Public engagement is an important part of the master planning process. The amount of public engagement should be determined by the local Advisory Committee, but the Advisory Committee should hold at least two public meetings. The first public meeting provides an opportunity to inform the community about the Trail Town designation, the Trail Town initiative and how citizens can become involved. A second public meeting, near the conclusion of the initial planning process, provides an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the final recommendations and strategies of the Master Plan. The Trail Town Advisory Committee may determine that additional public meetings will be helpful to identify additional action items, determine support for capital improvement projects, and establish priorities. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee may decide that each Advisory Committee meeting shall be open to the public.

Trail Town Master Plan

The components of the Trail Town Master Plan discussed in this chapter are only meant as a general guideline. The master plan could be very extensive or as simple as a one- or two-page document that outlines and described how the community is going to improve and celebrate the trail and promote the Trail Town concept.

Note: In some communities, it may make sense to develop the Trail Town Master Plan prior to applying for and receiving Trail Town designation. This allows the local chapter and the community to quickly implement key strategies and projects upon receiving the official designation.



Public Engagement

The Advisory Committee should hold at least two public meetings under the master planning process. However, the public could also be invited to participate in other planning activities, such as the trail-to-town assessment.

The content previously discussed in this handbook, as well as the resources and forms provided in the three toolkits listed in the back of this document, can be used by the Advisory Committee to guide the planning process and content of the Trail Town Master Plan. However, it will be important for the community to create a Master Plan that is tailored to its own circumstances and needs. The following section offers suggestions regarding the organization and content of the Trail Town Master Plan.

Master Plan Components

INTRODUCTION

The Introduction frames the Master Plan, describing the purpose and context of the planning effort. The Introduction can include a description of the Trail Town Advisory Committee, the municipal departments or local agencies that are working on the Trail Town initiative, and the capacities of the community stakeholders. The Introduction can also include a description of the planning process, highlighting Advisory Committee activities as well as the results of public meetings.

TRAIL PROFILE

The Trail Profile should include a detailed description (and map) of the local section of the North Country National Scenic Trail, noting trailheads and any unique or special features. The Trail Profile should also include a description of the local NCTA Chapter, including ongoing or future trail maintenance projects and volunteer events.

TOWN PROFILE

The Town Profile should include a brief description of the community as well as a description of the characteristics that contribute to the Trail Town environment. This would include a descriptions and maps of how the North Country National Scenic Trail interacts with the town, the trail-to-town route, and the assets that contribute to the Trail Town environment (e.g., parks, restaurants, breweries, lodging, campgrounds, post office, etc.).

The Town Profile could also include a description of the downtown, a description and evaluation of the community's marketing resources (e.g., brochures and pamphlets, websites), and a listing of community and downtown events and activities.



ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan should describe, in detail, growth opportunities for the existing assets that support the trail as well as the town's physical and business assets that contribute to the Trail Town environment. The Action Plan should also discuss how the local chapter and community will work together to promote the town as a Trail Town, noting promotional materials (e.g., website, brochures), trail-related and community events, and other promotional activities. Once the Action Plan is complete, it can be helpful to create an implementation chart to help the Advisory Committee track its progress.

Getting Started

Creating an active and robust Trail Town initiative does not happen overnight; it develops and evolves over time. However, getting the Trail Town initiative started and developing a Trail Town Master Plan can be achieved through five simple steps:

Step One: Introduce the Trail Town Concept

Members from the local NCTA chapter (or local officials) should kick off the master planning process by providing an overview of the NCTA Trail Town Program, what it means to be a Trail Town, and the process (steps) by which the community will create its Trail Town Initiative. This may be achieved through a large public meeting, a small meeting with invited stakeholders, or both. Ideally, many of the stakeholders your chapter and community has already identified will participate in the first meeting. However, additional meetings with specific stakeholders may be needed to garner their support and participation. The first meeting(s), whether they are large public meetings or small stakeholder meetings, also provide an opportunity to discuss and identify which community stakeholders need to be part of the process and who might be willing to sit on the Trail Town Advisory Committee. The first meeting(s) also provide an opportunity to review the Trail Town Handbook, the forms in each Toolkit, and any plans and projects that are related to the trail or Trail Town elements (e.g., recreation plan, municipal master plan, downtown plan, etc.).



The first meeting provides an excellent opportunity to discuss and identify which community stakeholders need to be part of the process and who might be willing to sit on the Trail Town Advisory Committee.



Prior to the walking assessment, it can be helpful to review a large map of the trail and downtown to better understand the location of the trail-to-town corridor.

Step Two: Conduct a Trail-to-Town Assessment

Once the Trail Town initiative has been thoroughly introduced to the community and the Advisory Committee has been established, the Advisory Committee (and other stakeholders if warranted) should physically walk and assess the *Key Connecting Elements* (see Chapter Four) within the trail-to-town corridor. The findings of the assessment can be recorded using the *Trail-to-Town Assessment Form* in **Toolkit C**. Be sure to also take pictures. In addition, the Advisory Committee should evaluate the pedestrian and vehicular signage system along the trail-to-town corridor and throughout the immediate downtown. Prior to the walking assessment, it can be helpful to review a large map of the trail and downtown to better understand the location of the trail-to-town corridor.

Step Three: Identify Business, Community and Service Amenities

Following the assessment, the Advisory Committee should work together to map and identify all the business, community and service amenities of the community. The Advisory Committee should try to focus on assets within the immediate downtown area. However, important assets in other areas of the community or region that are supportive to hikers could be noted. The findings of this exercise can be recorded using the *Existing Businesses, Services and Public Amenities Form* in **Toolkit A**. In addition, it can be helpful to identify and label each business and amenity on a large map. The results of this meeting will help inform the information and pictures your community submits to the NCTA for your online story map.

Step Four: Identify and Assess Promotional Materials and Community Celebrations

Once all the assets have been identified, the Advisory Committee should review and assess the type and content of all the promotional materials within the community. This assessment should cover both web and print materials. The findings of this exercise can be recorded using the *Existing Marketing Material Inventory Form* in **Toolkit C**. In addition, the Advisory Committee should identify each celebration in the community, noting its time of year, primary location and purpose. The findings of this exercise can be recorded using the *Community Celebration Form* in **Toolkit C**.



Step Five: Prioritize Actions and Include Actions in Master Plan

Once all the previous four steps have been completed, the Advisory Committee should review and synthesize the results. The Advisory Committee should then develop and prioritize a list of recommendations and actions. In addition, it can be helpful to identify what person, organization or department will take the lead on each action step and how each action step may be funded (if needed). The results of this step — the Action Plan — should then be included into the Master Plan.

Trail Town Process - Getting Started

Creating an active and robust Trail Town initiative does not happen overnight; it develops and evolves over time. As described in this handbook, your community can get started by working through a series of group activities and forms over just five meetings.



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TOOLKIT A: RESOURCES FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS

Local officials play an important role in developing and supporting a robust Trail Town initiative. Ideally, local officials would work closely with chapter volunteers to help convene key stakeholders and mobilize local Trail Town activities and development efforts. Furthermore, local officials help guide and support the development and maintenance of public amenities that support trail users. This Toolkit is designed to help local officials work with local NCTA chapter members to launch a local Trail Town initiative.



Local Officials can include both elected and appointed officials as well as municipal staff members. Examples include:

- Town Council
- Planning Commission
- Recreation Board
- Historic Preservation Commission
- City Manager
- Public Works Director
- Parks and Recreation Director
- Economic Development Director

In this Toolkit:

Existing Businesses, Services and Public Amenities Inventory Form

Identify the local businesses, services and amenities in your community that contribute to creating a vibrant Trail Town atmosphere.

Sidewalks Evaluation Form

Evaluate the location, condition and opportunities to improve your community's sidewalk system.

Complete Streets Sample Resolution

A sample Complete Streets resolution that could be adopted by your town's legislative body.

Sample Language for Local Plans

Language that could be included in local planning documents (e.g., municipal master plan, recreation plan, capital improvement plan) to further justify and garner support for local Trail Town efforts.

Trail Town Designation Sample Resolution

A sample resolution of support for the Trail Town designation, to be adopted by your town's legislative body and used in the Trail Town application to the NCTA.

What is a Trail Town? One-Page Handout

A one-page handout about what it means to be a Trail Town that local officials can use at public meetings and distribute to interested parties.





SIDEWALKS Evaluation Form

In many communities, a series of smaller trails, pathways and/or sidewalks lead hikers from the NCNST into the downtown. The condition of these sidewalks is very important. Sidewalks provide for safe passage throughout the town, provide a first impression for trail users, and contribute to the viability of the local retail market. This form should be used to evaluate the condition of the sidewalk system in your community.

Sidewalks	
Key Roles Within the Downtown: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sidewalks provide the first and last impression for visitors. 2. Sidewalks should not distract from the storefront windows. 3. Sidewalks bring more trail users through the community. 	
Best Practices	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sidewalks should be 8 to 16 feet wide, or wide enough to allow pedestrians to pass another comfortably as well as to accommodate limited outside displays and dining. 2. Wider sidewalks should be located on the sunny side of the block. 	
Evaluation of Sidewalk Sections	
Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:	Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:
Opportunities for Improvement:	Opportunities for Improvement:
Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:	Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:
Opportunities for Improvement:	Opportunities for Improvement:
Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:	Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:
Opportunities for Improvement:	Opportunities for Improvement:
Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:	Address/Block: Adjacent Establishment: Evaluation:
Opportunities for Improvement:	Opportunities for Improvement:





COMPLETE STREETS

Sample Resolution

The following Complete Streets resolution could be adopted by the planning and legislative bodies of your community. The following language is just an example; your community may wish to include additional language and/or adopt additional Complete Streets policies.

WHEREAS,

“Complete Streets” are defined as a design framework that enables safe and convenient access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and drivers of all ages and abilities;

WHEREAS,

“Complete Streets” are achieved when transportation agencies routinely plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain the transportation network to improve travel conditions for all users in a manner consistent with, and supportive of, the surrounding community;

WHEREAS,

streets that support and invite multiple uses, including safe, active, and ample space for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit are more conducive to the public life and efficient movement of people than streets designed primarily to move automobiles;

WHEREAS,

increased walking and bicycling offers the potential for improved public health, economic development, a cleaner environment, reduced transportation costs, enhanced community connections, and more livable communities; and

WHEREAS,

the [insert state] Legislature has passed “Complete Streets legislation that requires the [insert state] Department of Transportation and local governments to consider all legal users in transportation related projects;

NOW, THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED

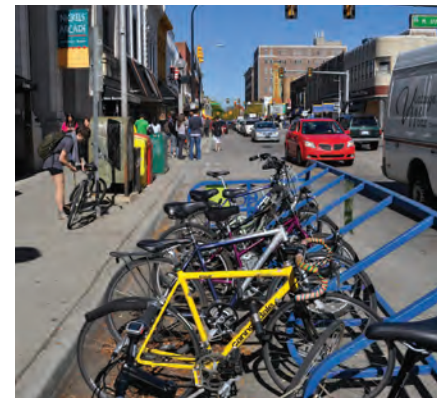
that the [insert community] [insert name of board or commission] hereby declares its support of “Complete Streets” policies and to the extent feasible [insert community] will incorporate “Complete Streets” design considerations and practices as a routine part of infrastructure planning and implementation;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

that [insert community] is open and willing to explore ways of planning for, designing, constructing, operating and maintaining “Complete Streets” infrastructure, including non-motorized trails, with neighboring municipalities wherever feasible to offer connections to regional transportation and recreational assets.

What are Complete Streets?

Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work.
- Smart Growth America



Example of a Complete Street in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Photo Courtesy of Michigan Municipal League and Michigan Complete Streets.





SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR LOCAL PLANS

The following language can be inserted into local planning documents (e.g., municipal master plan, recreation plan, capital improvement plan, etc.) to further justify and garner support for local Trail Town planning efforts. The following language is just an example; your community may wish to include additional language.

Language on Trail Uses

The North Country National Scenic Trail is most heavily used by day hikers. Day hikers typically park their car at a trailhead and hike to a certain location, then return to their car. If hiking with a group, they may also park two cars, one at the starting point and one at the ending point [or insert local trailheads].

Section hikers are similar to day hikers, but may be hiking longer distances over a period of days or weeks. Section hikers may shuttle themselves using their vehicle and then stay in a local campground or motel, returning to their end point each successive day. Long-distance hikers are less common on the North Country National Scenic Trail, but are dependent on communities like [insert community] for vital services such as food, lodging, a post office, banking, and laundry.

Through the year, trail users on the North Country National Scenic Trail will engage in a variety of activities. Although they are not groomed for such uses, in the winter months some areas of the North Country National Scenic Trail are used by snowshoers and cross-country skiers. Trail running is also common activity on the North Country National Scenic Trail through all seasons. Other large sections of the trail accommodate mountain bikers.

About the North Country National Scenic Trail

Traversing some [insert miles] through [insert community], the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) is an integral part of the [insert community] recreational system and trail network. Administered by the National Park Service, the North Country National Scenic Trail is a unit of the network of scenic, historic and recreational trails created by the National Trails System Act of 1968 and it is also a component of the National Park System.

The North Country National Scenic Trail currently extends westward from the vicinity of Crown Point State Historic Site, New York (on Lake Champlain near the central Vermont border) to Lake Sakakawea State Park on the Missouri River in North Dakota, where it joins the route of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. Planning is completed to expand the trail to include the Arrowhead region of northern Minnesota, and in Vermont to connect with the Appalachian Trail. Pending successful enactment of legislation incorporating these two areas, the trail will be approximately 4,600 miles long.

The North Country National Scenic Trail is a truly special recreational resource. It is the longest National Scenic Trail in the United States. It meanders through seven northern states, taking users through a fascinating diversity of scenic, historic, cultural and natural landscapes and recreational features.

The local section of the North County Trail is supported by the North Country Trail Association and a team of dedicated volunteers from the [insert local chapter]. Working with [insert trail-maintenance affiliate partner organization], chapter volunteers perform on-the-ground trail construction, maintenance and property development, among other activities that support the trail.

The Trail Town initiative in [insert community name] began in [insert year] and has involved many partners including [insert partners]. A Trail Town is a designation recognized by the North County Trail Association through which the North Country National Scenic Trail passes that supports hikers with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens, and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated.

OTHER PIECES TO INCLUDE

- Map or visual of the entire North Country National Scenic Trail.
- Map or visual of the North Country National Scenic Trail segment in your community. <https://northcountrytrail.org/trail/maps/>
- Photos of the trail and trail users in your community.





TRAIL TOWN DESIGNATION Sample Resolution

The following resolution of support must be adopted by the legislative body of your community before applying to become a Trail Town.

City/Town of _____, _____.

WHEREAS, The City/Town of _____ is in close proximity of the North Country National Scenic Trail;

WHEREAS, The North Country National Scenic Trail (North Country Trail) is one of eleven (11) National Scenic Trails in the country;

WHEREAS, the North Country Trail Association is the lead volunteer organization for developing and maintaining the North Country National Scenic Trail from New York to North Dakota for over 4,600 miles of hiking trail;

WHEREAS, such hiking trail provides a year-round source of pleasure and recreation to the North Country's citizens and visitors to the North Country;

WHEREAS, many of the citizens in and around the community of _____ and other visitors and citizens of the North Country National Scenic Trail are becoming more health conscious and are turning to hiking as one of the major forms of maintaining a healthy body;

WHEREAS, the community of _____ is an ideal destination for many of today's visitors to the North Country National Scenic Trail,

WHEREAS, _____ offers a variety of outdoor and cultural experiences to residents and visitors;

WHEREAS, available supporting services and facilities such as lodging and restaurants make _____ an outstanding heritage and nature-based tourism destination;

WHEREAS, casual walkers, day hikers, and weekend backpackers want to enjoy the North Country National Scenic Trail and the community of _____ can provide the gateway to their experience; and

WHEREAS, the _____ seeks to receive a formal designation as a Trail Town from the NCTA;

NOW THEREFORE, the City/Town of _____, _____, does hereby proclaim to be a NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL TOWN and commends the North Country Trail Association for its work in developing and maintaining the North Country National Scenic Trail and further encourages all residents of and visitors to take a hike on the North Country National Scenic Trail.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this
_____ day of _____,

Legislative Chief

SEAL.





WHAT IS A TRAIL TOWN?

A Trail Town is a community through which the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) passes that supports hikers with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens, and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated.

A Trail Town meets both the needs of trail users and the residents of the community. A Trail Town has the physical amenities that support trail users such as wayfinding signs, wide sidewalks, well-marked crosswalks, public restrooms, drinking fountains, and benches. A Trail Town should also have the business amenities that appeal to and support both long-distance hikers and day-hikers (e.g., restaurant, brewery, motel, ice cream shop and boutique-style shops). Long-distance hikers will likely seek additional business amenities such as a laundromat, campground, café with internet, camp store (to secure additional supplies) and post office (to mail supplies).

HOW DOES A COMMUNITY DEVELOP INTO A TRAIL TOWN?

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

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

Communities must meet specific criteria and apply to the North Country Trail Association to become an official North Country Trail Town.

Basic elements of a Trail Town strategy:

- Entice trail users to get off the NCNST and into your town.
- Welcome NCNST users to your town by making information about the community readily available at the trailhead and key entryways into the community.
- Make a strong and safe connection between your town and the NCNST.
- Educate local businesses on the economic benefits of meeting the needs of day-hikers, section hikers and long-distance hikers.
- Recruit new businesses or expand existing businesses to fill gaps in the goods or services that NCNST users want and need.
- Support and promote a “trail friendly” and “pedestrian friendly” character of the town.
- Work with neighboring chapters and communities to promote the NCNST as a regional tourist destination.
- Expand the local NCTA volunteer network and build additional capacity.







TOOLKIT B: RESOURCES FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

Local business owners and staff from local community and economic development organizations also play an important role in developing and supporting a robust Trail Town initiative. Local businesses owners function as Trail Town ambassadors, welcoming trail users into the town and supplying much-needed services. Local business owners also welcome trail users by maintaining their buildings, having open storefronts, and using attractive signage. Local business owners can work with local officials to implement design guidelines and standards that create a viable downtown.

This Toolkit is designed to help local officials and business owners evaluate the aesthetic of the downtown and evaluate business operations. Community and economic and development organizations can also help chapter volunteers and local officials include the Trail Town initiative in local marketing materials, collectively organize business owners, attract business opportunities, provide funding for Trail Town projects, and provide additional support and training on economic Trail Town initiatives.

Local Community and Economic Development Organizations may include:



- Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Development Authority (DDA)
- Main Street Program
- Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)
- Merchants Association

In this Toolkit:

Best Practices for Awnings, Windows and Doors

Self-assess the awnings, windows and doors of your downtown business compared to recognized best management practices.

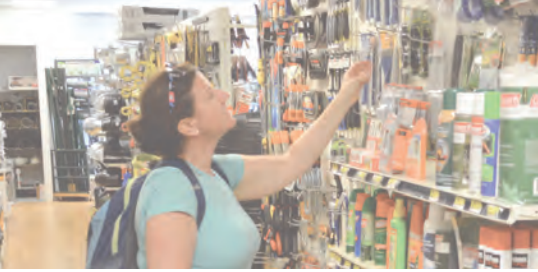
Best Practices for Signs

Self-assess the signage of your downtown business compared to recognized best management practices.

Business Operations Assessment Checklist

A brief assessment form to gauge how well businesses in your town collectively serve trail users.





AWNINGS, WINDOWS & DOORS

Best Practices

Awnings

Key Roles Within the Downtown:

1. Define the first-level storefront.
2. Reinforce the store's brand.
3. Bring attention to the business.



Best Practices

- Materials should be constructed from canvas, cloth, steel, or glass and 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 features.
- Awnings should be no more than six to eight feet deep and have a pitch of no more than 25 degrees.

Windows & Doors

Key Roles Within the Downtown:

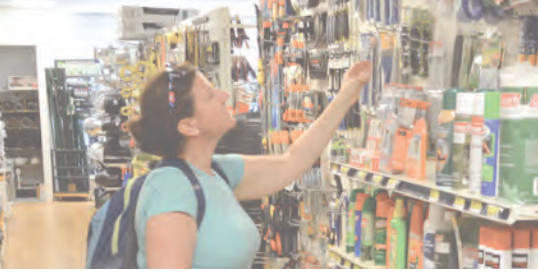
1. Help advertise goods.
2. Reinforce building form.
3. Add interest to pedestrians.
4. Draw people into the store.
5. Provide a sense of safety.



Best Practices

- At least 60% of first-level storefronts facing the primary sidewalk should be transparent glass.
- Keep displays simple, do not 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 possible.





SIGNS

Best Practices

Signs

Key Roles Within the Downtown:

1. Signs should be well-designed.
2. Signs should be properly scaled.
3. Signs should support continuity, but it is important to encourage individuality.



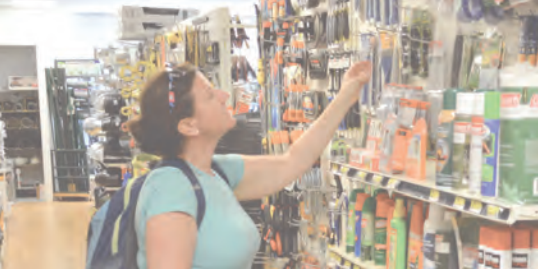
Best Practices

- 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 .

NOTES/EXAMPLES

Blank area for notes and examples.





BUSINESS OPERATIONS Assessment Checklist

Local businesses that will be of interest to the trail user will be primarily serviced-based. Therefore, the operation and degree of services collectively provided by local businesses is very important to creating a vibrant Trail Town atmosphere and viable retail market. The following checklist is designed to quickly assess operations as they relate to trail users.

Business Operations Assessment Checklist						
Is the Central Business District easily identified?		Are the downtown businesses clustered in a compact area?				
Yes <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>		Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>				
		No Businesses	Some Businesses	Most Businesses	All Businesses	N/A
1)	Do business hours match customer needs (i.e., open late and on weekends)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2)	Do businesses clearly indicate that they're open?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3)	Do businesses accept credit/debit cards?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4)	Are business hours posted on the front door or window?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5)	Are business signs clearly visible and well-designed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6)	Is the merchandise and store clean and well-kept?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7)	Do businesses encourage window shopping?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8)	Are there window displays that show off the town's heritage?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9)	Are there window displays that show off the NCNST?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10)	Do businesses cross promote?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11)	Do businesses offer out-of-town shipping for large items?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12)	Do shops offer information on the town/region?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13)	Do shops carry souvenirs related to the town?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14)	Do shops carry souvenirs related to the NCNST?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15)	Do restaurants, coffee shops, ice cream shops, and bars have outdoor seating?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16)	Are customers generally greeted warmly when they walk in the door?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17)	Can employees answer questions about the town or region?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18)	Can employees answer questions about the NCNST?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19)	Can employees give directions to the NCNST?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



TRAIL TOWN



north
country
trail

ASSOCIATION





TOOLKIT C: RESOURCES FOR LOCAL CHAPTERS

NCTA chapters are the backbone of the North Country National Scenic Trail. Chapter volunteers build and maintain trails, bridges and other structures; lead hikes and facilitate outreach events; recruit new volunteers; support and lead fundraising efforts; and manage relationships with land managers and public officials. The local chapter will serve as the primary lead for each local Trail Town initiative. This toolkit is designed to provide chapter volunteers with the resources and materials needed to kick-start a local Trail Town initiative.

In this Toolkit:

Trail-to-Town Assessment Form

Assess the elements of the trail-to-town connection between the North Country National Scenic Trail and the Central Business District.

Community Celebration Inventory Form

Identify the festivals, celebrations and events that occur in your community.

Local Media Inventory Form

Identify each media outlet in your community.

Writing a Press Release Template

A sample press release that can be used to highlight your town's designation as a Trail Town. This also includes a guide on how to construct a press release.

Existing Marketing Material Inventory Form

Identify and assess the marketing materials that are already being used in your community.

NCTA Website Instructions for Submitting Your Trail Town

A guide about what type of information should be collected and how to submit it to the NCTA for promotion on its website.

NCTA Sign Panel Template Guide

A guide about what type of trail signage information should be collected and how to submit it to the NCTA.

Trail Town Advisory Committee Form

Identify your local Trail Town Advisory Committee members.

NCTA Trail Town Criteria and Application Form

The formal Trail Town criteria and application form.

Local Chapter Letter of Support

Letter of Support template from Chapter Representatives to the North Country Trail Association.

Memorandum of Understanding

A sample Memorandum of Understanding that must be signed by the legislative body of your community in order to become an NCTA Trail Town.





TRAIL-TO-TOWN Assessment Form

The following form is designed to assess the elements of the **trail-to-town** connection between the North Country National Scenic Trail and your town's Central Business District.

1. TRAILHEAD								
The TRAILHEAD is the point at which the trail users access the trail and the community by road.								
Amenities Checklist								
	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
Bathrooms Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Parking Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Potable Water Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wi-Fi Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Benches Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Vending Machine Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trash Receptacles Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Directional Signs Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Picnic Tables Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Sign Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Trail Map Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Shelter Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Art Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Lighting Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>			
Kiosk Area to Identify Area Amenities and Businesses Condition:								
Is the TRAILHEAD welcoming?								
Other comments:								
2. PORTAL								
The PORTAL is the point at which trail users exit the trail to visit the nearby town.								
	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
Directional Signs Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Is the area clean? Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Is it clear where the portal begins? Condition:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
What type of PORTAL is present (e.g., trail extension, dirt path, concrete sidewalk) and what is the condition?								
Is the PORTAL welcoming?								
Other comments:								



3. PATHWAY

The **PATHWAY** is the corridor that connects the Portal to the Central Business District.

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
Does it feel safe?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Is the pathway buffered from traffic?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Is the area clean?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Notes:			Notes:			Condition:		
What type of PATHWAY is present (e.g., trail extension, dirt path, concrete sidewalk) and what is the condition?								
Are there community/business amenities along the pathway? If so, list them.								
Is it clear you are on the PATHWAY ?								
Is the PATHWAY welcoming?								
Other comments:								

4. GATEWAY

The **GATEWAY** is the point at which the trail user enters the Central Business District.

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
Is the area clean?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Is there directional signage?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Is the pathway buffered from traffic?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Condition:			Condition:			Notes:		
Is it clear where the GATEWAY is located?								
Is the GATEWAY welcoming?								
Other comments:								

5. CENTER

The **CENTER** is the Central Business District and offers good and services to the trail user.

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
Is it walkable?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Is the area clean?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Does it feel safe?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Notes:			Notes:			Notes:		
Is the CENTER welcoming?								
Other comments:								

6. NODE

A **NODE** is a point of interest along or near the pathway.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____





COMMUNITY CELEBRATION Inventory Form

Giving presentations, hosting displays or facilitating tours at festivals, celebrations and special events in your community is a great way to promote the Trail Town initiative. This form is designed to help chapter volunteers identify and track the special and unique festivals, celebrations and events that take place in the community.

Community Events, Festivals and Celebrations	
Event	
EVENT:	
DESCRIPTION/ACTIVITIES:	
DATES:	
ORGANIZER:	
CONTACT:	
Event	
EVENT:	
DESCRIPTION/ACTIVITIES:	
DATES:	
ORGANIZER:	
CONTACT:	
Event	
EVENT:	
DESCRIPTION/ACTIVITIES:	
DATES:	
ORGANIZER:	
CONTACT:	





LOCAL MEDIA Inventory Form

Marketing is an essential way to promote trail use and the Trail Town initiative. Chapter volunteers and local officials should build relationships with local media, explain to them what local leaders are doing to develop the Trail Town initiative, and explain how the media can help. The following form is designed to help identify each media outlet in your community.

Local Media Outlets	
Organization and Contact Information	
NAME:	
TYPE (newspaper, television, etc.):	
CONTACT:	
POSITION:	
ADDRESS:	
PHONE:	
EMAIL:	
WEBSITE:	
CONTACT FOR (press release, editorial, advertisement, etc.):	
Organization and Contact Information	
NAME:	
TYPE (newspaper, television, etc.):	
CONTACT:	
POSITION:	
ADDRESS:	
PHONE:	
EMAIL:	
WEBSITE:	
CONTACT FOR (press release, editorial, advertisement, etc.):	
Organization and Contact Information	
NAME:	
TYPE (newspaper, television, etc.):	
CONTACT:	
POSITION:	
ADDRESS:	
PHONE:	
EMAIL:	
WEBSITE:	
CONTACT FOR (press release, editorial, advertisement, etc.):	





WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Template Guide

One way to promote your local Trail Town initiative is to submit articles to the local press about recent activities and accomplishments. The follow guide can be used to help construct a press release that is both succinct and insightful.

Let recipients know when you want them to publicize your information. Usually it's immediately, but you can also prescribe a date/time of your choosing.

Contact(s) should be well informed on the press release and its subject matter, and willing and able to be contacted. Always include phone number AND email, and use the contact information that is most immediate for the contact (e.g., if they use a cell phone more often than they answer their office phone, use the cell). Make it as quick and easy as possible for press to reach your contacts.

Include a headline. The best are short and to the point, but also intriguing. A headline can also be used as the subject line on an email distribution (i.e., "News Release: Treadwell achieves National Trail Town status").

Include a subhead with a brief, accurate preview of the release's contents and any important dates or deadlines.

Familiarize yourself with common journalistic style guides such as that of the Associated Press (AP). A release leads with a dateline that includes the town name in all capital letters, followed by an abbreviation of the state where the town is located (for all but the largest, most well-known cities). Note that the journalistic abbreviations for states are not the same as postal abbreviations; lists of AP Style state abbreviations can be found online. Also include the date of your release. Following some of these basic guidelines will make your release more professional and, more importantly, make it easier for journalists to use your information.

Contacts:

Mary Montague, Village of Treadwell, 231-444-5555,

mmontague@treadwellmi.gov

Carl Crawford, [chapter name] North Country Trail Association, 231-333-7777,

[\[use chapter e-mail @northcountrytrail.org\]](mailto:use%20chapter%20e-mail%20@northcountrytrail.org)

Treadwell achieves National Trail Town status

North Country Trail Association designation recognizes Treadwell's advanced efforts to embrace trails and serve trail users; community celebration planned for May 14.

TREADWELL, Mich. – May 2, 2016 – The Village of Treadwell has been designated a National Trail Town by the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) in recognition of local efforts to promote trails and serve users of the North Country Trail.

The North Country Trail is the longest National Scenic Trail in the nation, stretching for 4,600 miles across seven states from New York to North Dakota. According to the NCTA, a Trail Town is a community along the North Country Trail that "supports hikers with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens, and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated."

Treadwell's own celebration of its new Trail Town status will be held Saturday, May 14, beginning with a group hike from the Treadwell Trailhead beginning at 9:30 a.m. Festivities continue in the Village Square from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. and include trail information and maps, food vendors, children's activities, and a sidewalk sale.

Continued...





According to Mary Montague, Treadwell village council president, the National Trail Town designation is part of an ongoing community effort that brings together local government officials, business owners and trail enthusiasts to collaborate on trail-related issues and opportunities, including services for trail users and ways to promote and market Treadwell's relationship with the trail.

"The national designation is a great honor, and it will help draw attention to all the great things we're doing here in Treadwell," Montague said. "Our community loves the trail and it just makes sense to share that enthusiasm with others."

For more information on Treadwell's Trail Town activities, visit the village website at www.treadwellmi.gov. For more information on the North Country Trail, visit the NCTA website at www.northcountrytrail.org.

About the North Country Trail Association

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) unites individuals, affiliated trail groups, local chapters, corporate sponsors and others linked in support of building and maintaining the North Country National Scenic Trail, and telling its story. A not-for-profit membership organization of volunteers along the seven-state trail and elsewhere, the NCTA partners with the National Park Service in bringing the North Country Trail to local communities. NCTA chapters support members as they "adopt" and maintain a section of trail, sponsor hikes and other social events in local trail communities, and plan and conduct major trail-building projects. For more information visit northcountrytrail.org.

List the content of your release (the who, what, where, when, why and how) in order of importance from top to bottom, so if a journalist wants to shorten your information for publication, the most important details won't be omitted. Include quotes from prominent people involved in the effort, and include avenues for additional information (contact information, office locations).

"Boilerplate" information about the group(s) involved in your effort can be added to the end of your release. Journalists can refer to this if they or their audiences want basic information about the organization(s) involved.





EXISTING MARKETING MATERIALS Inventory Form

Marketing is an essential way to promote trail use and the Trail Town initiative. This form is designed to identify and assess the marketing materials that are already being used in your community.

Existing Marketing Materials	
Organization and Contact Information	
TYPE (brochure, book, website): _____	
ORGANIZATION: _____	
CONTACT: _____	
PHONE: _____	
EMAIL: _____	
DOES IT MENTION TRAILS? YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>	DOES IT MENTION THE NCNST? YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
IF YES, DESCRIBE: _____	IF YES, DESCRIBE: _____
Organization and Contact Information	
TYPE (brochure, book, website): _____	
ORGANIZATION: _____	
CONTACT: _____	
PHONE: _____	
EMAIL: _____	
DOES IT MENTION TRAILS? YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>	DOES IT MENTION THE NCNST? YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
IF YES, DESCRIBE: _____	IF YES, DESCRIBE: _____
Organization and Contact Information	
TYPE (brochure, book, website): _____	
ORGANIZATION: _____	
CONTACT: _____	
PHONE: _____	
EMAIL: _____	
DOES IT MENTION TRAILS? YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>	DOES IT MENTION THE NCNST? YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
IF YES, DESCRIBE: _____	IF YES, DESCRIBE: _____





NCTA WEBSITE INSTRUCTIONS

For Submitting Your NCTA Trail Town

The NCTA has established pages on its website that highlight each Trail Town along the North Country National Scenic Trail. Each page includes an interactive story map which allows the viewer to learn more about the community and business amenities of each Trail Town. The following pages provide guidance about what type of information should be collected and how to submit it to the NCTA. Each designated Trail Town will have its own dedicated page on the North Country Trail Association website. In order to provide the best information about your community to hikers and trail tourists, please provide the following information:

Introduction to Your Community

Write a 2-3 sentence introduction to the community that includes its location in relation to other recognizable towns or areas within the state.

Directions (Getting There)

Include driving directions from nearby major cities, highways, and state routes into the town from each direction (North, South, East and West). Include directions for hikers coming in from each direction with a short description of hiking directions.

About the Town

Write 100-200 words about the history of the town and the current state of the town, such as major industry and attractions.

Things to Do and See

Write short descriptions for interesting destinations in the town such as historical sites, camping areas, museums, festivals, or unique places and events in the town.

Additional Resources


Please provide names and web links of places for gear, goods and services for resupply, and additional links for the town (such as chamber of commerce, visitors bureau, etc.).

EXPLORE PRESQUE ISLE

In fact, if exploration is your thing, it is more than worth your time to head north to [Presque Isle](#), the City's recreational crown jewel. There, hikers can avail themselves of the network of paths crisscrossing the 323-acre forested peninsula, and can visit the grave of Charles Kawbawgam, a Native American chief who lived on Presque Isle until his death in the early 1900s.

VISIT ROSEWOOD WALKWAY FOR FOOD, FUN, AND RELAXATION

Those looking to see what the City has to offer can use the Rosewood Walkway, the trail gateway to downtown Marquette, where visitors will find ample opportunities for food, fun and relaxation. The options are many, from [Vango's pizza and cocktail lounge](#) and [Blackrocks Brewery](#), both situated along Third Street; to the [Ore Dock Brewing Co.](#) and various restaurants located in the traditional downtown area.



Example from NCTA's webpage for Marquette, Michigan's Trail Town.





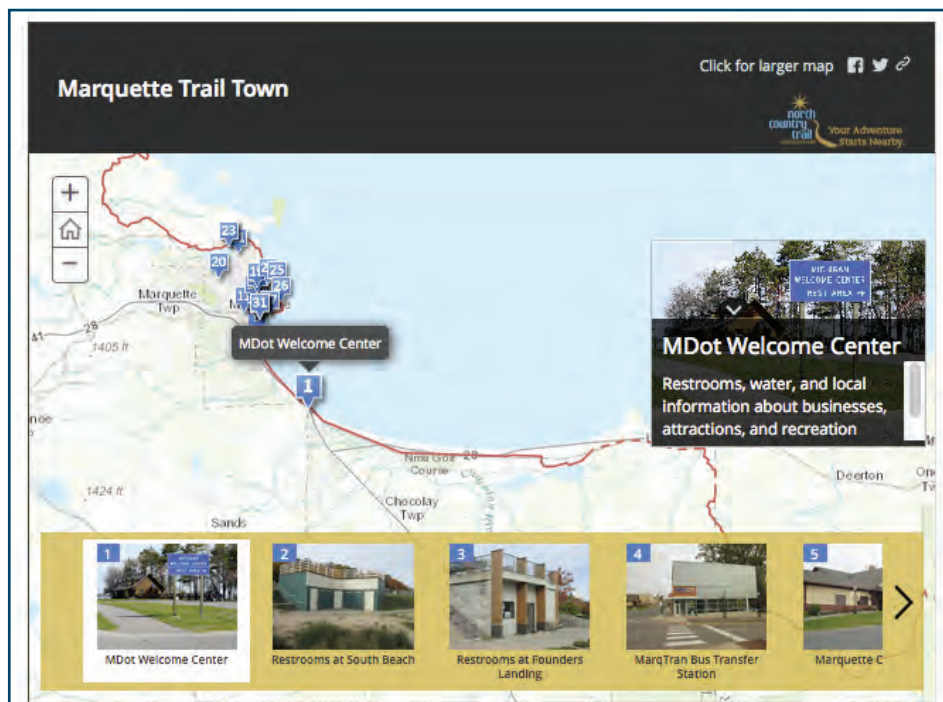
Story Map

NCTA will also build a Story Map for your town. Here's what we need:

1. **Good photos with a location.** Photos should be taken with a GPS-enabled camera, or send the lat/long points or an address so we can place them on the map.
2. **We can also include short videos.** If you have a short video clip (5-30 seconds) of places in the town or along the trail, we can include that on the Story Map. Also provide a 1-2 sentence description of each location including what can be found there so the hiker/visitor knows what it has to offer.
3. **Choose your photos, locations and links based on what might be of interest to hikers, visitors and even residents.** Include campgrounds or lodging, trailheads and parking lots, library, post office, outfitters, sporting goods or hardware store, grocery or general store, laundromat, banks and ATMs, and businesses that support the trail. You can even highlight the nearby sections of trail or points of interest along the trail with photos and a description that includes the length of the hike and what hikers might experience.

Submission

Contact NCTA for a spreadsheet to use when sending photos, descriptions, and locations for the storymap: hq@northcountrytrail.org.



Example Story Map from NCTA's webpage for Marquette, Michigan's Trail Town.





NCTA SIGN PANEL Template Guide

The NCTA has established a sign template for local communities. The following sheet provides guidance about what type of information should be collected and how to submit it to the NCTA. Each template is 36" by 48", but the design files can be easily modified to fit your local needs. The template will require the development of a map, text that highlights the community and its assets, and interesting photos. Each chapter will be responsible for the fabrication and installation of these signs. However, chapters may apply for NCTA grants to cover expenses. The sign template below was developed for the Trail Town of Lowell, Michigan.

North Country National Scenic Trail
National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

A North Country Trail Town

Lowell is one of Michigan's premier North Country Trail towns. Visitors can stroll on the Downtown Riverwalk and stop by the North Country Trail Headquarters for maps, information, and a friendly face. Lowell's many local trails connect with the North Country National Scenic Trail and offer a variety of

loop hiking experiences close to town. Hike through stands of red pine and maple in the Lowell State Game Area, or pause on scenic overlooks along the Flat River in Fallsburg Park. For long-distance hikers, Lowell offers food, lodging, and other amenities as they make their way along the trail.

Lowell and the North Country Trail

Fallsburg Park
Enjoy a few hours on the trail in this popular park. It is a perfect place for a hike and a picnic on the river. And don't forget to see the Fallsburg Bridge, one of only two remaining covered bridges in Kent County.

Lowell State Game Area
Multiple trail heads provide access to this habitat for cottontail rabbit, wild turkey, and white-tailed deer. **CAUTION** Plan ahead. Be alert during hunting season.

Riverwalk on the Flat River
Downtown is the place to be! You will find a library, post office, shops for resupply, restaurants, and lodging. Events like the Riverwalk Fest make Lowell the perfect home for the trail.

NCTA and NPS Headquarters
Lowell is home to the North Country Trail Headquarters and the National Park Service office for the North Country National Scenic Trail. Visit us on the corner of Main Street and Monroe Street.

Tips for Panel Design

Town Description

- No more than three paragraphs
- Include a description of the NCNST and any interesting features
- Include a brief description of amenities for hikers
- Include a brief description of the town (and downtown)
- Include a brief description of interesting cultural or historical facts or features

Map

- Include key trailheads (w/ parking)
- Include mileage between trail segments
- Include other recreational assets
- Include camping areas

Pictures

- Include a picture of downtown, preferably with people
- Include a picture of the trail
- Include a picture of interesting assets and features
- Include a picture of one outdoor café/restaurant (if applicable)

The NCTA can provide the contact information of the original designers of this template.





NCTA TRAIL TOWN CRITERIA

Thinking of Applying?

Before beginning the process of applying for a Trail Town designation, please call or email the North Country Trail Association:

NTCA

Director of Trail Development
616-897-5987
hq@northcountrytrail.org

Applying for Trail Town Designation with NCTA

The following criteria are the requirements to become a NCTA Trail Town. The application (and associated materials) should be sent to the North Country Trail Association for review and consideration for a Trail Town designation.

Who should apply?

The application page should be filled out by a town official (e.g., mayor, manager, etc.) and lead volunteer liaison of the local NCTA Chapter.

Any town directly located on the NCNST route or located on a connector trail within a reasonable distance of no more than a few miles may apply for a Trail Town designation and must meet the following six criteria.

Criteria for NCTA's Trail Town Designation

- 1. Establish a Trail Town Committee.** Establish a Trail Town Committee that includes representatives of the local chapter of the North Country Trail Association, elected and appointed officials (e.g., town council, planning commission, recreation board), municipal staff, local trail organization (if not affiliated with the NCTA), tourism development association, chamber of commerce, and trail enthusiasts.
- 2. Annual Project or Celebration.** Host an annual volunteer project, event or celebration for the trail within the downtown. The local NCTA chapter can provide ideas, suggestions and assistance.
- 3. Community Support.** To demonstrate community support, applicants must have both an official resolution of support for the designation adopted by the town's legislative body and a letter of support from the local NCTA Chapter
- 4. Trail Town Master Plan Process.** Using the NCTA Trail Town Handbook as a guide for best practices, the Trail Town Committee will develop a local Trail Town Master Plan within the first two years of the designation.
- 5. Incorporation into Local Land Use Documents.** Include language for the development, protection and support of the NCNST in local land use and recreation documents (e.g., municipal master plan, recreation plan, zoning ordinance, recreation plan) or demonstrate that there is support to amend, revise or add to such plans.
- 6. Promote the Trail.** The North Country Trail Association and the North Country National Scenic Trail should be promoted through all available communication channels.

Selection Process

Once the application has been received, the NCTA will review and evaluate the request. The NCTA will inform the applicant with a formal letter of recognition. The town will also receive two NCTA Trail Town signs for placement in the community. The community and the NCTA must then sign a **Memorandum of Understanding** to formalize the Trail Town designation.





NCTA TRAIL TOWN Application Form

North Country Trail Town Application

Town, City, or Community Name:

NCTA Chapter Lead

Name

Title

Address

City, State, Zip

Phone

Email

Local Official Lead

Name

Title

Address

City, State, Zip

Phone

Email

Why should our community be considered a Trail Town?

Required Attachments

Complete?

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Attach the NCTA Trail Town Advisory Committee Form | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Attach the Resolution of Support adopted by your legislative body | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Attach any Letters of Support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Attach excerpts from land use documents that demonstrate support for the North Country National Scenic Trail | <input type="radio"/> |

Selection Process

Once the application has been received, the NCTA will review and evaluate the request. If the application is approved, the NCTA will inform the applicant with a formal letter of recognition. Upon the designation, the town will receive two Trail Town signs to be placed at key entryways into the community. In addition, a local official and chapter president must sign a formal Memorandum of Understanding.

Mail completed applications to:
Director of Trail Development
North Country Trail Association
229 E. Main St., Lowell, MI 49331





LOCAL CHAPTER Letter of Support

The Chapter President could use this Letter of Support Template for their official submission and application for NCTA Trail Town designation.

Name
Director of Trail Development
North Country Trail Association
229 E. Main Street
Lowell, MI 493331

Dear _____,

On behalf of the [name of local chapter] in [town, state], I would like to enthusiastically extend this letter of support and request to participate in the North Country Trail Association Trail Town Program. Our chapter believes [insert community] would be an ideal Trail Town.

The [insert name of local chapter] has worked closely with local officials from [insert community] to review the Trail Town Handbook and are committed to meeting the criteria needed to participate. We have designated [insert person and title if applicable] as the primary chapter liaison to the community and this Trail Town initiative.

Our chapter will be working closely with local officials from [insert community] to establish a Trail Town Committee, host an annual volunteer event and develop a Trail Town Master Plan.

We understand that the Trail Town designation and the benefits associated with being a Trail Town depend on our commitment to and cooperation with [insert community].

We sincerely appreciate your consideration in naming [insert community] your next North Country Trail Trail Town.

Sincerely,

[insert name]
Chapter President/Representative





MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The following Memorandum of Understanding must be signed by the legislative body of your community in order to become a Trail Town.

Template Memorandum of Understanding

Memorandum of Understanding

Between

North Country Trail Association and _____

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered into by and between North Country Trail Association, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, located at 229 E. Main Street, Lowell, MI 49331, hereinafter referred to as NCTA, and _____ located at _____, hereinafter referred to as Trail Town.

Purpose: The purpose of this MOU is build a relationship between North Country Trail Association and the community that is beneficial to both, supports hikers with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated. It will identify ways the town and the Trail can work together, plan together, and capitalize on the benefits a National Scenic Trail can bring to the area.

Statement of Mutual Interests and Benefits: NCTA is dedicated to building, maintaining, promoting, and protecting a 4,600 mile long distance hiking trail through the northern tier of states from New York to North Dakota, called the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST), providing a variety of outdoor experiences throughout the North Country to connect visitors to the wonders of nature. The Trail Town is near the NCNST which offers basic tourism amenities and can be marketed as a nature-based tourism destination, resulting in local economic stimulus and increased public awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of the North Country.

This MOU is established between NCTA and Trail Town to help each other accomplish mutually beneficial objectives:

- A. Educate local businesses of the value of the NCNST as an economic resource.
- B. Enable both parties to apply for targeted grants to assist in the community's efforts towards nature-based tourism development, economic development, and trail-related infrastructure development through the development of promotional products, educational resources or signature events.
- C. Increased usage and awareness of the NCNST attracting more eco-tourists to local communities.
- D. Promote responsible tourism development within the community and support of the NCNST.

In consideration of the above premises, the parties agree as follows:

NCTA shall:

1. Promote the Trail Town as a destination through its website and other media.
2. Offer outreach materials to the community such as brochures, newsletters, posters, displays, etc.
3. Provide detailed information on hiking opportunities near the community which can be reproduced and distributed to visitors to Trail Town.
4. Provide periodic guided hikes that depart from the Trail Town.



5. Provide support at local festivals or other community events to encourage interest in the North Country Trail, when possible.
6. Provide two 18” x 18” metal signs with the North Country Trail Town logo for posting at the entrances to Trail Town.
7. Regularly maintain the section(s) of the North Country National Scenic Trail near the Trail Town so that casual day hikers can easily locate and follow it.

Trail Town shall:

1. Include the NCNST and the NCTA in their promotional materials.
2. Make North Country Trail information available to the public at the local visitor centers and/or Chamber of Commerce and provide space for a NCTA display or wall mounted poster.
3. Work with the local NCTA contact to promote guided hikes or events
4. Assist in promoting special designations such as National Trails Day (first Saturday each June) and Annual North Country National Scenic Trail Day (last Saturday each September).
5. Monitor the number of visitors who are seeking the Trail Town as a destination for hiking.
6. Attract businesses that support nature-based tourism such as outfitters, hostels, and shuttling services and assure that NCTA maps and guides will be available from a business in town for visitors to purchase.
7. Encourage local businesses to provide discounts on accommodations or special weekend packages for visitors who show their NCTA membership card.
8. Develop a Trail Town Master Plan.
9. Install the two North Country Trail Town signs at the entrances of the community as soon as possible after the issuance of the Proclamation.

We, the undersigned, have agreed on the contents of this MOU. Any changes must be agreed to by both parties.

Trail Town—(Town, City, Village, Borough)

Signed _____, Title _____ Date _____

Signed _____, Title _____ Date _____

North Country Trail Association

Signed _____, Executive Director _____ Date _____

Signed _____, Chapter President _____ Date _____







NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

TRAIL TOWN HANDBOOK



Funding to develop this Handbook was generously provided by the National Park Service. This Handbook was prepared for the North Country Trail Association.



This Handbook was prepared by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA, www.liaa.org) in cooperation with the North Country Trail Association.