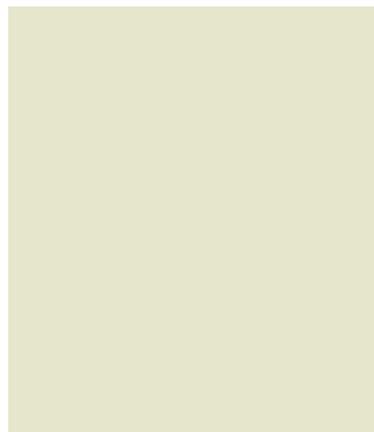


CHAPTER 2 . INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW



Trail Towns Are...
Becoming a Trail Town
Trail Town Vision and
Strategy
Communities as a Visitor
Destination
Launching a Trail Town

TRAIL TOWNS ARE...

Trail Towns are vibrant, welcoming communities along a long-distance trail, whether a river or land trail, and where trail users can venture off the trail to enjoy the services, amenities and attractions in the nearby town. It is a safe and enjoyable experience for the visitor and positively impacts the economy of the community.

The overarching goal is to effectively connect the trail user market to the community and actively encourage trail users to visit Titusville, use its business services and safely and easily return to the trail to continue their trail experience.

Titusville has the necessary criteria for a successful trail town. It is a community with a distinct downtown area, the capacity and willingness for growth and amenities such as natural resources, historic buildings, and public parks. The trail passes through the community and there are opportunities for trail head signage, public amenities (water, restrooms, benches, and parking). However, the assessment of trail services now available in Titusville revealed some significant gaps that should be addressed prior to the completion of the trail.

Our recommendation was to create a Trail Town Action Team to prioritize these needs and implement projects to address them; and to act as the liaison to coordinate with existing agencies about community and economic development activities related to the trail. In the future, should other towns wish to participate, this Action Team should be expanded to address trail-wide needs for services and amenities. This model of regional coordination is economical and efficient and resonates with funding agencies as it embraces a regional and multi-state approach of the use of resources and assets.



BECOMING A TRAIL TOWN

How do you build a trail town?

- » **ORGANIZE:** Create a Trail Town Action Team
- » **DESIGN:** Connect to the trail and visual improve your town appearance
- » **BUSINESS GROWTH & ATTRACTION:** Educate existing businesses to the niche market and collectively attract new business and services to serve the trail demographic
- » **MARKET:** Position your Brand and your Town as a Trail Town and Bicycle Friendly

The number of people experiencing the outdoors is increasing each year. Twenty and thirty year olds flock regularly to land and water trails. Baby boomers, leading longer and healthier lives, are seeking outdoor experiences in record numbers. With increasing frequency, both individual residents and businesses locate where trails and rivers are accessible.

A long trail or greenway represents a recreational/tourism corridor and can offer new opportunities for your community. Visitors to these areas need services; they are looking for restaurants, lodging and sundry supplies. While these visitors are drawn to the natural element, they are also interested in welcoming communities that can make their journey a pleasant one.

The economic benefit to trail towns is well documented. Trails like the Great Allegheny Passage (McKeesport, PA to Cumberland, MD) documented a \$40 million impact on businesses in the counties through which it passes. Pine Creek Trail, a 62-mile trail in north central Pennsylvania determined the average expenditure of a trail

user was \$30.36 and the impact from this trail in bordering trail communities in 2009 was \$3.6 Million. Other significant trails report similar findings.

Titusville is located along the planned Erie-to-Pittsburgh Trail. The Erie-to-Pittsburgh Trail Alliance (EPTA) is an alliance of non-profit organizations, municipalities, and other organizations actively involved in the acquisition, development and maintenance of non-motorized trails and safe, well marked bicycle and pedestrian routes in Western Pennsylvania. The primary goal of the Alliance is to establish a continuous trail from the Erie Bayfront to Point State Park in Pittsburgh. By linking northwestern PA to the Great Allegheny Passage in the south (which leads along with the C&O Canal Towpath all the way to Washington, DC) cyclists will be able to enjoy hundreds of miles of nearly continuous trail in an arc from Lake Erie to the nation's capital. The existence of this through route is likely to stimulate the development of numerous feeder trails to link communities across northwestern Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio.

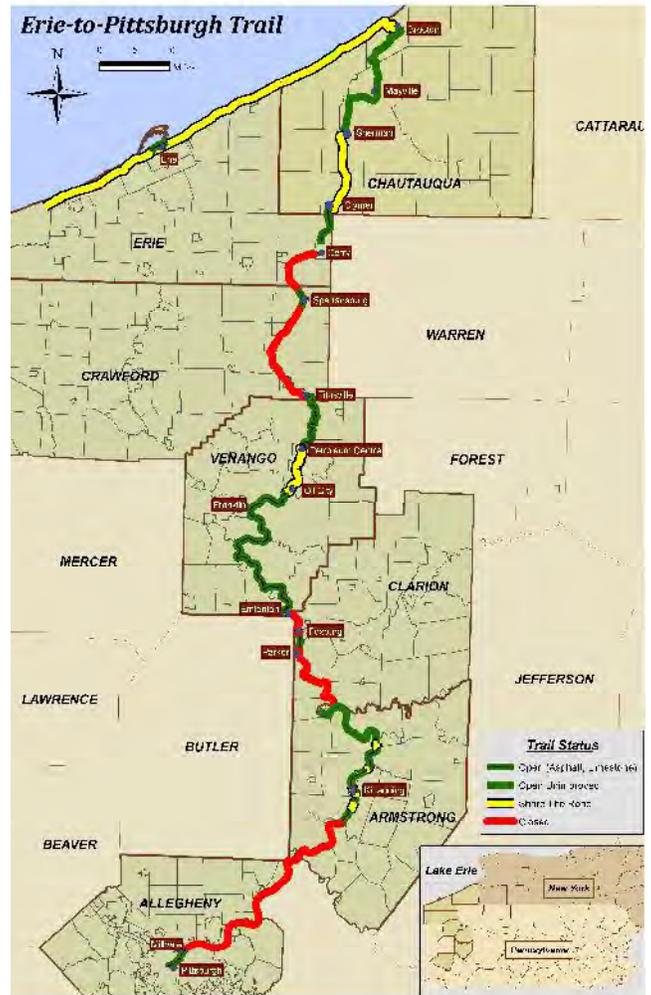
The goal of a Trail Town is to be a welcoming stop where visitors can experience an authentic community with a strong heritage and a solid conservation ethic. To launch such a place, a core group of volunteers dedicated to a healthy downtown join together to craft a plan of action to ensure that their community will be in a position to offer visitors the services and amenities of the river and/or trail as recreation as well as a community which embraces conservation and sustainable development.

If done effectively, a Trail Town will reap the economic benefits of the growing heritage-tourism market.

As stated in the ATA Trail Town guide, www.atatrail.org, a successful trail town plan is similar to the “Main Street Approach” and is composed of the following major elements:

- » **Organizing:** The trail town plan focuses each organization’s ability and combines the efforts of local businesses, business and marketing agencies, non-profits, churches and community groups to strengthen and reinforce the goals of the project toward implementation.
- » **Design:** Trail town design capitalizes on a community’s best assets - such as historic buildings, the traditional town mix development and street grid layout, and the areas culture, and environmental features.

The plan proposes recommendations such as: a uniform sign system; reinforcing and improving connections between the trail, the business district, schools and the waterfront; creating community spaces for people; enhancements to street corridors for improved safety and access; and celebrating what make Titusville special.



The role of the **Erie-to-Pittsburgh Trail Alliance (EPTA)** is to advocate for the continuous trail, assist the partners by sharing expertise and resources, and promote the use of the trail as a system. The purpose of the trail is to improve the quality of life for local residents and to stimulate economic development for communities along the route through recreational tourism.

- » **Economic Restructuring:** Economic restructuring finds new purposes for a town's enterprises by helping existing business expand, recruit and respond to an enhanced trail, tourism, and recreation market.
The trail town plan recommends improvements for information, services, trip packaging, and promotions to existing businesses and identifies service gaps within the local market.
- » **Promotion:** This sells the image of the trail town to potential prospects. Marketing the town's unique character to locals, to business, investors, real estate firms, new businesses and visitors requires an on-going promotion strategy.
The planning process included many business owner meetings, steering committee meetings and special focus group meetings to discuss strategies for economic enhancement. The plan recommends short and long-term approaches for promotion.

TRAIL TOWN VISION AND STRATEGY

Trail Towns envision a corridor of revitalized communities that reap the economic benefits of outdoor recreational-based tourism as part of a larger, coordinated approach to regional economic development. The long-term economic viability of participating communities is to be achieved through concentrated business development efforts that capitalize on the trail user market.

Trail Towns embrace sustainable development practices, comprehensive community planning and cooperative marketing strategies to further the economic health of each community and enhance its connection to trails and other outdoor recreational opportunities.

The program follows a successful process first implemented in the communities along the Great Allegheny Passage. The economic development strategies launched there led to the opening or expansion of 55 businesses and 227 new jobs in six small rural communities. The economic impact from the trail in 2008 was documented at \$42 million in direct spending by trail users in these communities.

Creating a successful visitor destination is complex. If it were easy, the region would already be a world class destination. While there are currently many users of the outdoor recreational opportunities throughout Pennsylvania, there is limited public recognition in the small towns of the benefit of these users.

We should strive to be sustainable communities- a community that is trying to grow the local economy in a socially, economically and environmentally responsible manner. A community that realizes the value of conserving and preserving its natural, cultural and historic resources (Titusville's architecture and historic structures), will reap the rewards of creating a special place- a place that is only Titusville. American towns are becoming unrecognizable- they all look alike. It is also about maintaining the resources with the fewer dollars available- be economical, recycle, reuse, use volunteer and in-kind services. Finally, it is about creating the perception and the brand that people can identify with and remember.

COMMUNITIES AS A VISITOR DESTINATION

A destination is a place where people are willing to travel to experience the resources because:

- » The resource is recognized as being unique
- » Prospective visitors believe the local communities welcome them
- » The region is large enough to support the investment in facilities and amenities
- » The trail is long enough to attract overnight visitors
- » The local community embraces and welcomes the visitor market

Once established, you'll find more people walking and bicycling in your town, more outside eating places, more socializing on the trail and on the sidewalks, more property sales & business opportunities, and more street activity from people who live in Titusville and from those who visit here.

- » Local businesses understand the needs of the user groups (customers)
- » Communities acknowledge the value of their local outdoor recreational resources and actively engage in planning for their protection and sustainability.
- » User organizations are interested in creating events and competitions to draw users into the local communities
- » The trail system, community hubs and gateways are integrated and designed to make travel easy, safe, alluring and interesting.

A destination is sustainable because it is able to cater to a mix of seasonal markets and users. Fortunately, the woodlands, riparian areas, wetlands, agricultural fields, scenic views and trails have multiple markets. Protecting these resources helps grow the market. Connections between resource and town make it easy for visitors to enjoy their choice of recreation as well as access services and amenities.

Not all communities are created equal. Community evaluations are made to understand strengths and weaknesses of each community and to prioritize where to invest time and energy first. Next, groups work together to create the right community character, access, infrastructure, services, amenities and facilities for targeted users and business mix. This will require both short- and long-term strategies.

Short-term strategies deal with signage, minor infrastructure, facilities, store fronts, community readiness, “going green” strategies, small events, and a regional place-based business plan with prioritized initiatives. Longer term strategies deal with major infrastructure, business development and attraction, branding and major events. The goal is to create momentum in the short term with a clear vision for the future. This helps tourism and business development and attracts the interest of sponsors and funders.

LAUNCHING A TRAIL TOWN

- » **Use the Trail Town Community Matrix:** Determine whether or not the community meets criteria to warrant designation as a Trail Town.
- » **Present to municipal officials:** Their engagement from the start is important, if not essential. The presentation to the municipal officials should be open to the public and outline the program and process.
- » **Engage your community:** Engage the community, particularly the business community, by hosting a community-wide meeting to discuss the value of the trail to economic development. Disseminate the economic impact studies for the Great Allegheny Passage, the C&O Canal Towpath, and other trail systems, including demographic information and raw numbers of visitors. Highlight the direct economic impact on business, if available.
- » **Review existing information**
 - › Review the inventory of existing and proposed trails, recreational facilities and opportunities and historic and cultural facilities, offerings and studies of the area.
 - › Review existing economic development plans and strategies.
 - › Collaborate with local municipality and designated community groups (chambers, merchants associations) in scheduling community outreach.
 - › Identify existing businesses in trail town and gateway communities and related recreation and tourism businesses and assess status.
 - › Synthesize trail status (funding and completion status, existing length and nearby attractions).
 - › Develop descriptions of gateway/trail town community resources.
- » **Conduct a Needs Assessment:** The Needs Assessments is a survey to assist in producing a record and list of the gaps in service and connections with outdoor, specifically trail users. The process takes approximately 4-6 hours and actively engages community leaders, residents, trail users, municipal officials, business owners/operators, and experts in the fields of architecture, land use planning and economic development.

The Assessment process directs community goals, objectives and strategies based on the analysis that follows the activity. Those having participated in the Assessment follow the activity with a group debriefing and discussion of findings. Priority projects are determined and volunteer committees begin to take shape based on project interest.

The Trail Town Needs Assessment addresses issues of design, safety and access, business service gaps, trail and town amenities, marketing and sustainable, historic and environmentally conscious attitudes and programs in the community.

- » **Synthesize Assessment results and prioritize projects:** Immediately following the Assessment, synthesize results and outline priority projects in a community-wide debriefing. These projects become the foundation of the Trail Town Action Plan which will include a Business Attraction Strategy and an Economic Development Plan.
- » **Create the Action Plan:** The Action Plan will prioritize goals and propose strategies to obtain them. It includes projected timeframes, estimated budget costs and the parties responsible for completing the projects. It also includes possible financing sources to support the priority projects and other available tools.
- » **Form Committees to implement Action Plan:** At the Assessment debriefing and following the prioritization of projects, committees are formed to begin the implementation of the Action Plan.

Community contacts form the basis of the Trail Town Action Team and act as a steering committee. This Action Team strengthens the planning process by identifying issues of local import, assists in community outreach and policy recommendations. In the implementation phase that follows the Needs Assessment, the Action Team assists in identifying potential funding sources to implement the program. The Action Team should constantly strive to ensure broad public participation and meaningful involvement in the Needs Assessment process by residents and businesses.
- » **Community outreach and continued engagement:** The Action Team distributes the findings of the Assessment, the prioritized projects, committee structure and the initial action plan to community participants. The Trail Town Community Action Team is encouraged to engage wide participation and to hold regular committee meetings to move the process forward. Consultant remains available for consultation as the committees meet and begin to map their process for implementation of their assigned projects.
- » **Participate in Regional Collaborative (Regional Action Team):** Trail Town Community Action Team members also serve as part of a regional Trail Town Regional Action Team that works regionally to address trail-wide issues, raise regional funding for trail town wide projects and aggressively assist in the marketing and sustainability of the trail. The Trail Town Regional Action Team meets quarterly. All community participants are also invited to participate in periodic Trail Town summits to address key issues/challenges such as Packaging; Marketing; Signage and Branding.
- » **End Result:** The end result of the Trail Towns process are engaged communities recognizing the economic engine offered through outdoor recreational tourism and a working structure for moving a Trail Town community plan forward. The communities are better connected to available outdoor resources, attract and welcome visitors more efficiently and effectively and position a business attraction and economic development strategy on a proven and growing market.