



Sunflower Foundation

*Paving the Way: From  
Blazing Trails to Building  
Community*

*Trail Stewards & Trail Towns  
Learning Series*

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**A virtual series for assessing local trails, placemaking, branding, and developing actionable trail improvement plans. Completing the series and meeting certification benchmarks allows communities to become Certified Kansas Trail Towns.**



# *Purpose of Today's Session*

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- Build connections by getting to know fellow participants and communities
- Meet your hosts and understand their roles in supporting your journey
- Gain an overview of the full learning series
- Gain an overview of key milestones and benchmarks
- Explore the Trail Town model and what it means for your community
- Learn from a Kansas example to see the model in action
- Engage in peer-to-peer discussion through breakout sessions



# *Housekeeping*

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- All sessions will be recorded
- Paving the Way Learning Library - Link coming soon!
- Please turn your camera on, but mute your audio
- Questions? Use the raise your hand feature, or use the chat



# *Kansas Trail Inc. (KTI)*



- KTI's goal: Help KS communities develop, maintain, promote and maximize public trail access. Find Trails, Build Trails, Support Trails, Promote Trails!
- KTI is not a funding source for trails, but is the statewide trail wraparound support and TA provider

## **KTI Mission Statement:**

*Empower Kansas communities to collaboratively promote and maximize economic development, health and wellness, civic engagement, and cultural appreciation through sustainable stewardship of statewide trails and routes.*

### **FIND TRAILS**

Discover the best trails across Kansas with accurate maps and expert recommendations.

### **BUILD TRAILS**

Get the resources and guidance you need to plan, design, and construct sustainable trails.

### **SUPPORT TRAILS**

Help protect and maintain Kansas trails by joining our community of trail advocates.

### **PROMOTE TRAILS**

Showcase and share the trails you love to inspire more people to explore the outdoors.

# *National Expert – Harbinger Consultancy*

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- Harbinger – rooted in a deep passion for the people and places they call home
- National Trail Town expert Michele Archie will lead the Trail Blazer and Trail Town/Trail Steward Learning Series



# Community Team Introductions

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1) One person from each team:

- Your community
- Team members

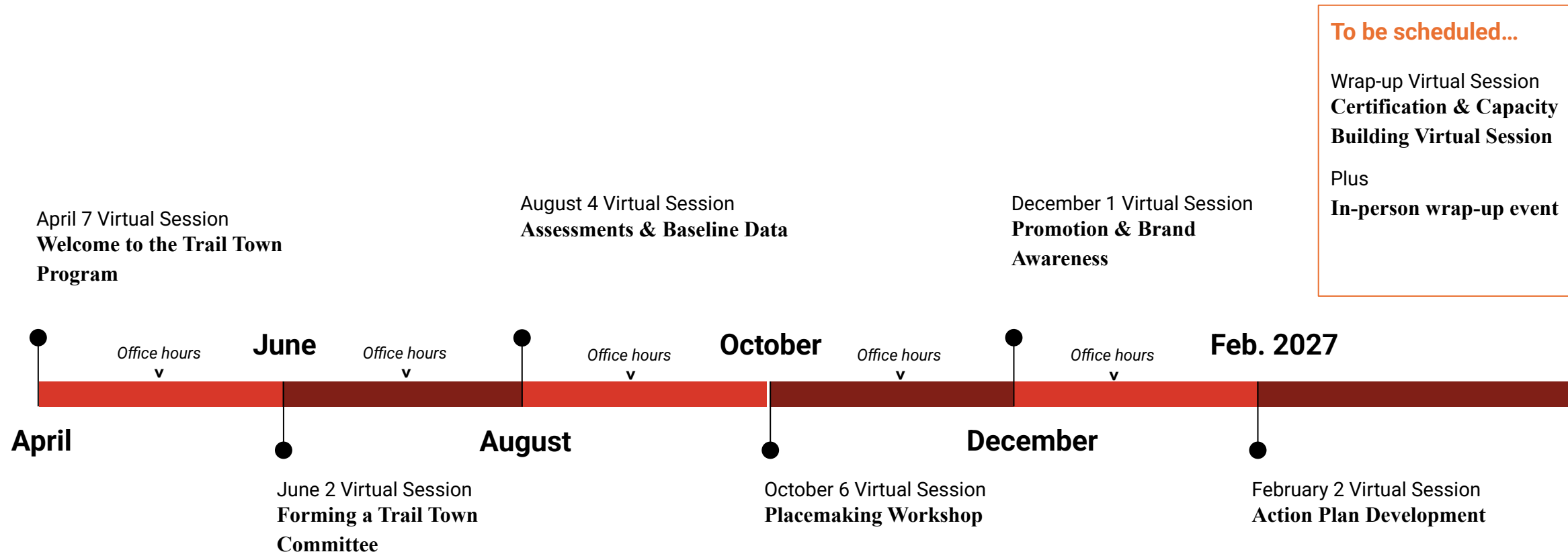
2) In the chat, everyone feel free to weigh in!

- One thing you hope to do or gain over the coming year.
- Where would you say your community is in its trail town journey?

## In this order, please

1. City of Ottawa
2. Community Foundation of Dickinson Co
3. City of Basehor
4. Great Plains of Smith Co
5. Wabaunsee County
6. AARTI
7. Sunflower Rails-Trails Conservancy
8. Barber County United
9. Rossville Community Foundation
10. City of Fredonia
11. City of Garnett
12. Friends of Lawrence Area Trails
13. Thrive Allen County
14. Central Kansas Conservancy
15. Marshall County Connections
16. City of Andover
17. City of Andover
18. City of Andover
19. Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau

# The year ahead



# *More about the year ahead*

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## **How the learning sessions are configured**

These learning sessions are designed for the Trail Stewards and Trail Towns cohorts, and Trail Blazers are also invited to attend. After today, each 90-minute session will focus on learning for the 60-70 minutes and then on Trail Town benchmarks and homework.

This last 20 or so minutes is optional for Stewards and Blazers, but encourage you to stick around and see if there's anything you might want to put into practice now.

**Questions?**



# *Setting the Stage - Why Trail Towns Matter*

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## Building a Kansas Trail Towns Program

### **Why a Trail Town?**

- Boosts local economy
- Attracts visitors & tourism
- Enhances quality of life
- Strengthens Community Identify

### **Building a Culture of Trails!**

- Trails as essential infrastructure
- Promote health & wellness
- Encourage daily use & access
- Foster connection & inclusion

### **The Big Picture!**

- Build Partnerships
- Supports long-term sustainability
- Creates lasting impact





**The Stevie**

**Book Now!**

Amenities	Lake Georgia Sue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury tent on raised platform with deck</li> <li>• Queen bed with plush bedding</li> <li>• Picnic table and campfire</li> <li>• Restrooms with shower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3067 Georgia Rd</li> <li>• Ottawa, KS</li> <li>• Book on Hipcamp or Campspot</li> </ul>



# Trail Towns 101

Ottawa Bike and Trail •  
 Lake Georgia Sue Campground & Event Center • Hill Creek Cabin, Admire, KS •  
 Overbrook Farmers Market • Prairie Spirit Trail, Garnett • Corner Market, Ottawa

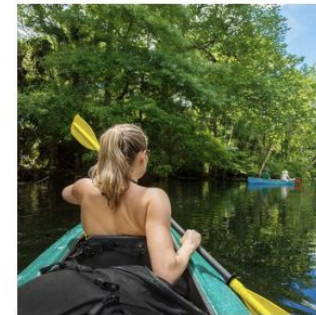


# What is a trail town?

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A Trail Town is a community through which a trail passes that supports trail users with services, promotes the trail to its residents, and embraces the trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated.

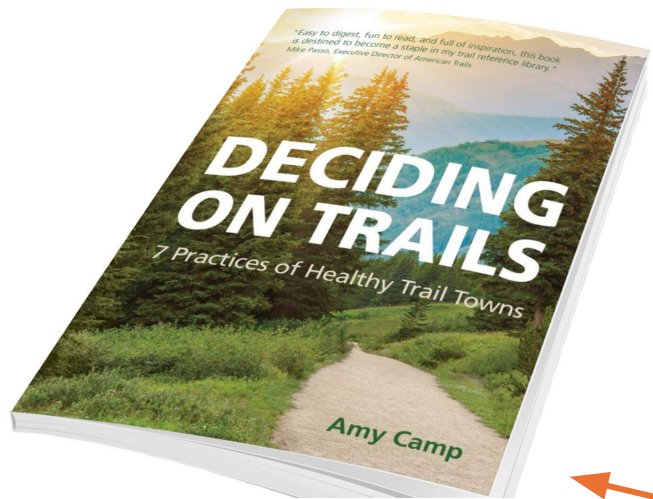
— North Country Trail Association (adapted)



# *A simpler definition*

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Investing in trails contributes to more vibrant, delightful, visitor-ready communities. **“Trail Towns” is a model to guide the investment**



At its simplest:

To be a trail town is to make a decision to pay attention to trails.

*Deciding on Trails*, Amy Camp  
[cycleforward.org/book](https://cycleforward.org/book)



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# Trail town — program or mindset or both?



- Organized trail town and gateway community initiatives have existed since 2006.
- Programs typically link multiple communities along the same trail or in the same area.
- The intent is to strengthen communities' connections with trails and better position them to realize benefits.
- HOWEVER, communities can **act, look, and feel like trail towns** without having a formal initiative in place...it's a mindset!



Map:  
Cycle Forward



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# What we know about trail town programs



[Trail Towns and Gateway Communities: Survey Findings and Impact Summary](#), Amy Camp & Julie Judkins, Dec. 2024

TABLE 1: Program Impacts and Transformations

Cited Improvement	Times Mentioned
Increased services, amenities, business	8
Increased community engagement	7
Increased events	6
Increased federal/state investment	6
Increased awareness of trail	6
Increased trail improvements, signage	6
Increased recognition of economic benefits	5
Increased planning efforts	4
Increased partners	4
Increased stewardship	3
Public art	2
Increased protection (acquisition, viewshed, conservation)	1
Increased access to education	1
Youth engagement	1

**“The communities that are connected to the trail system have been able to keep businesses open all year-round, rather than just in the high seasons.”**

– Trail Town Program Manager

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*What successes  
are managers  
most proud of?*

Table 3: Reported Successes

Specific Successes	Times Mentioned
Connection to place/identity, branding/marketing, signage, outreach	11
Increased partnerships	6
Access	4
Technical Assistance/Planning	4
Increased protection (acreage in public lands, planning ordinances, etc.)	3
Increase in business(es)	2
Infrastructure development	2
Sustained management structure	2
Innovation	1
Best practices	1



# What happens when you build a program?

Progress Fund/GAP trail towns program is one of the originals.

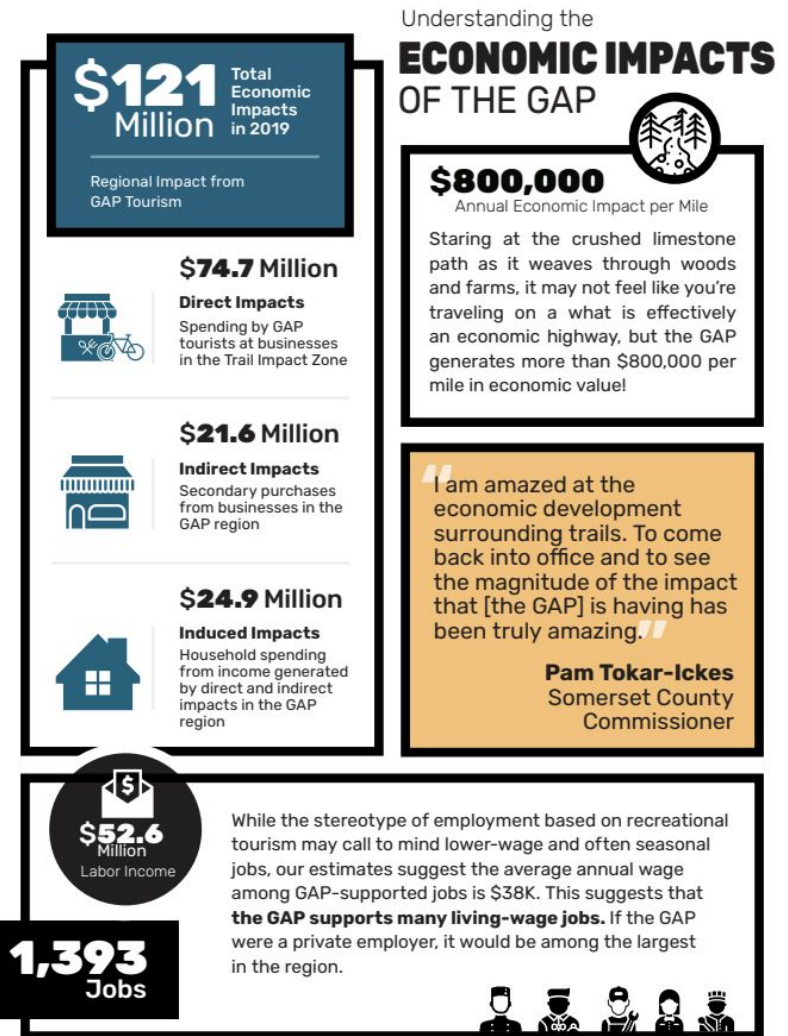
**CREATES economic growth.** In six years, the trail went from driving 25% of local income to 40%.

**GROWS local business and creates jobs.** In its first 10 years, the Trail Town Program netted 65 new businesses and 270 jobs, while helping grow revenue of other local merchants.

**COMPOUNDS the trail's economic potential,** turning a simple path into a destination. Overnight trips can generate more than 6x the revenue per day, and they span more days.

**IMPROVES infrastructure in rural areas,** opening doors to new ventures & opportunities, boosting options and local pride.

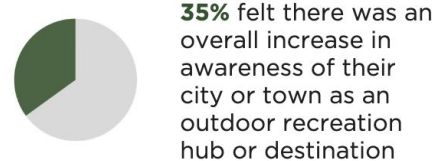
**PROTECTS the trails and surrounding nature.** Preservation funds are notoriously hard to find, but a community that's benefitting from the trail will invest back in it, too.



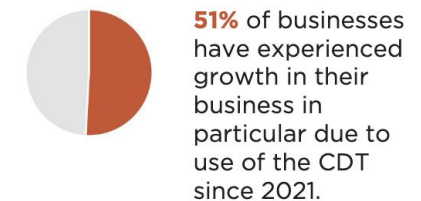
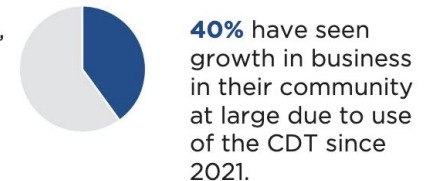
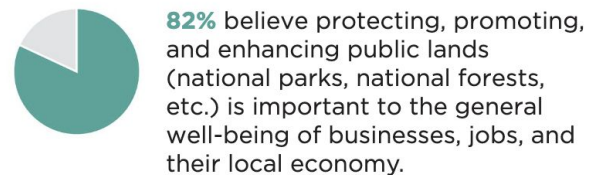
# What happens when you build a program?

## THE IMPACT OF CDT GATEWAY COMMUNITY DESIGNATION

Of respondents in CDT Gateway Communities:



Overwhelmingly, business owners in CDT communities have experienced a positive impact from the CDT and support enhancing and protecting the trail and the surrounding landscape.



# *Three Kansas communities paying attention to trails*

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**Osawatomie — Mile Zero**



**Humboldt — A Bolder Vision**



**Ottawa — Where the Trails Meet**

# What happens when Kansas pays attention to trails?

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Your investment of time, attention, celebration, money, generosity, curiosity, information, creativity, etc. etc. etc. yields returns.

**The Bike Shop Ripple** A shuttle ride on the Flint Hills Trail led Jeff Carroll to mention a forgotten rail corridor between Chanute and Fredonia. Five years later, a group of ten volunteers — average age 65 — has built seven miles of new trail.

**A World Record at Mile Zero** On June 16 — World Cup opening day — young soccer players will attempt the world's longest soccer pass along the Flint Hills Trail, starting in Osawatomie. A trail becomes a stage.

**Stories on the Trail** In Barber County, trails at the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty site are becoming an outdoor museum where all five Plains tribes involved in the 1867 treaty signing contribute their own story panels — for the first time ever.

**From Obstinate to Cheerleader** Towns along the Flint Hills Trail have shifted from skeptics to champions. Council Grove, Osage City, and others are now asking how to connect their historic sites, businesses, and parks to the trail — and to each other.

## A few “ripples on the pond”

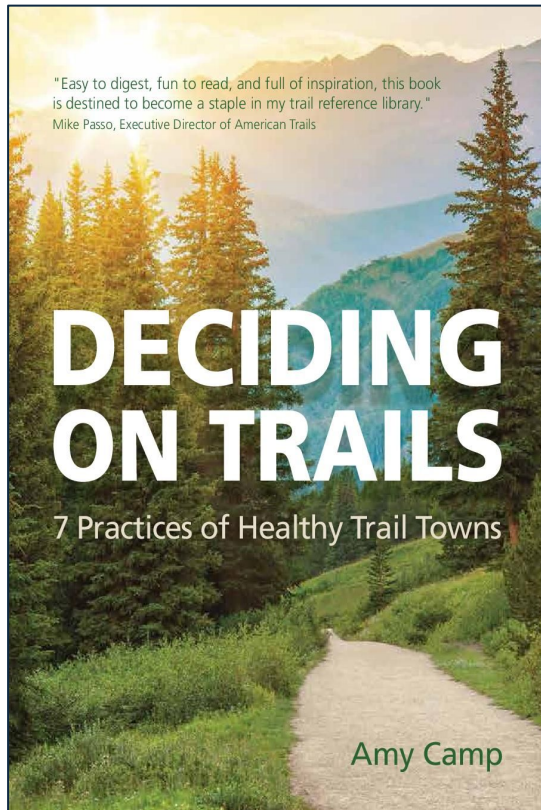
**Camp Follows the Trail** A Kansas City couple bought bare lots in Allen just to camp. One port-a-pot led to HipCamp, which led to Base Camp Flint Hills — a full campground that now fills to capacity on big trail weekends. No one planned it.

**Trails Open New Doors** The Flint Hills Trail created an unexpected partnership between Council Grove and the Kaw Nation, with plans to shuttle visitors between town and Allegawaho Heritage Park during events — a cultural connection nobody anticipated.



# *Sneak peak: 7 practices of healthy trail towns*

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1. Adopt a shared vision
2. Physically connect trail to town
3. Extend an invitation
4. Cultivate a trail culture
5. Know your market
6. Share your story
7. Commit to quality trails

← *Foundational practice*

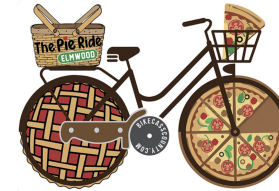
# Building trail culture as anchor

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## Cyclobia Brownsville

a free, open-streets event that temporarily makes selected Brownsville streets available for participants to walk, skate, bike, run, and skateboard without worrying about vehicle traffic.



## The Pie Ride

Elmwood, NE hosts summer Pie Rides to encourage people to bike (or drive, it's OK) and enjoy good company, music, and great pie.

The Pie Ride started as a strategy to build community support for a 12-mile extension to connect with another trail.

**Plus loads of ideas in  
Deciding On Trails!**



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# Take Lindsborg, for example



## Chalk the Valk

Ava Elliott--2025 7th-9th  
Winner



MEADOWLARK TRAIL  
**GRAND OPENING**

CELEBRATING NATIONAL  
RAILS TO TRAILS DAY 2026



# *Breakout rooms & discussion*

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**15 minutes:** How does your community already connect with trails?  
Have you seen changes/benefits?  
What new ideas and opportunities for “deciding on trails” would you like to explore? (bonus points if it’s connected to building trail culture!)

**Come back with:**

1. One way your community connects with trails
2. One opportunity to explore

Put these in the chat when we come back together, and bring your insights, ideas and questions to share in an open discussion.



# Join the conversation!

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## All About Trail Towns Facebook group

A space for conversations and questions related to trail towns and gateway communities. This may include topics such as the outdoor economy, trail culture, trail tourism, creating safe ways to get between your trail and community, and ideas for getting more people outside onto trails.

This group is open to people living along all types of trails in all sorts of communities. We encourage sharing best practices and celebrating successes, along with an open exchange in the interest of advancing the health of and vibrancy of trail communities.



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# *What's next?*

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**Next meeting:** June 2 Virtual Session: Forming a Trail Town Committee  
**Open office hours** for Q&A and idea sharing — to be scheduled in May

***Deciding on Trails*** book will be in the mail to you soon.

**Contacts** (details on next slide)

Kelli Mark, Sunflower Foundation (technical/grant questions)

Michele Archie, The Harbinger Consultancy (trail town ideas & advice)

**Paving the Way Learning Library** — recordings, slides, resources



# Thank you!

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