



Sunflower Foundation

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

*Trail Stewards & Trail Towns
Learning Series*

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.



Today's Agenda

- Welcome
- Why collaboration is crucial to trails and trail towns
- Breakout rooms & discussion: How you have built collaboration around trails?
- Trail Town Assessment preview — one way to spur interest and collaboration
- What (and why and who) is a Trail Town Committee?

Optional for Trail Stewards

- The benchmark: Committee + municipal resolution
- Homework + wrap-up discussion



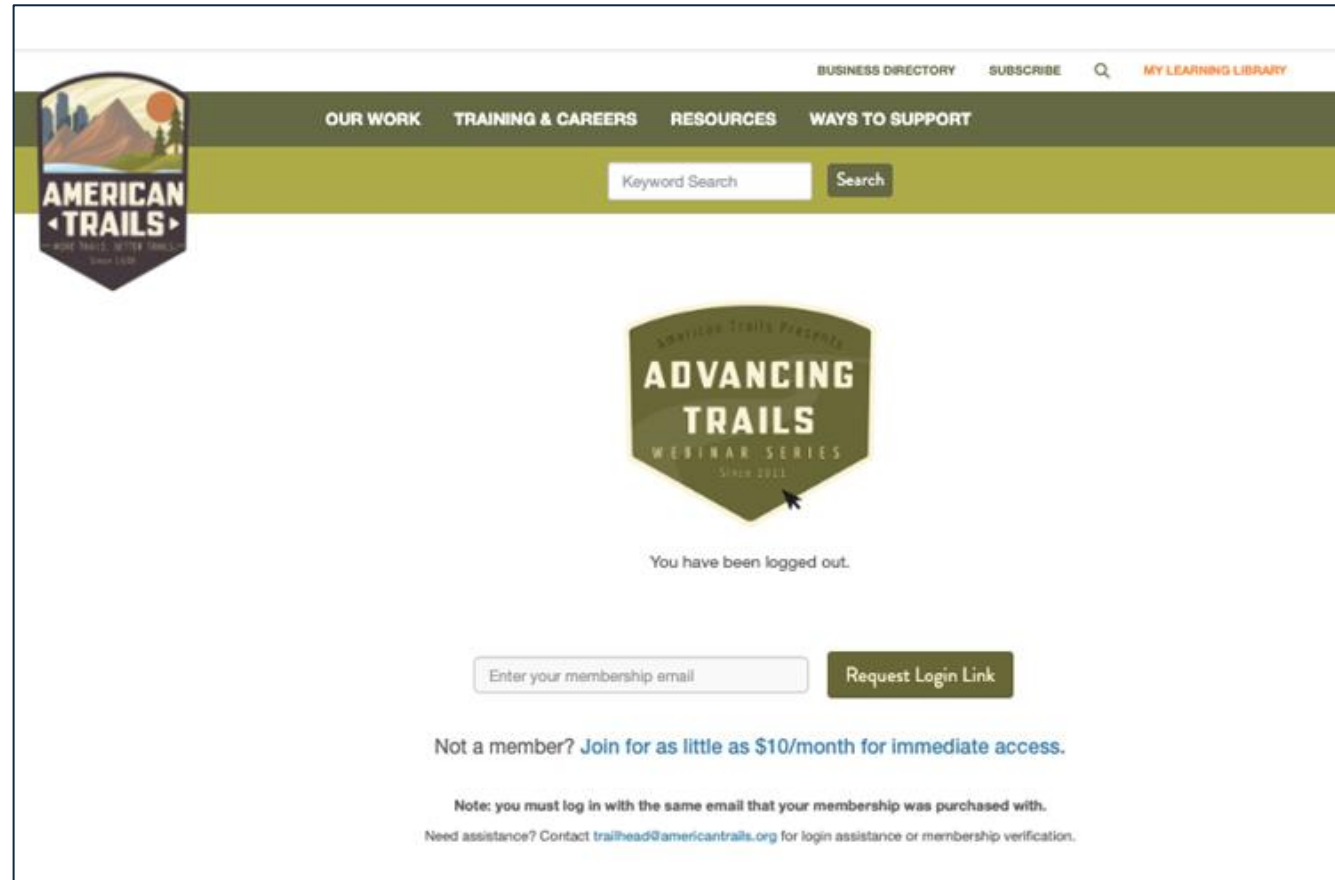
A few things to remember

- All sessions will be recorded - find session recordings and resources in the Paving the Way Learning Library!
- Please change your zoom name to include your community or organization name
- Please turn your camera on, but mute your audio
- Questions? Use the raise your hand feature, or use the chat



American Trails Memberships!

As part of your participation in Paving the Way...

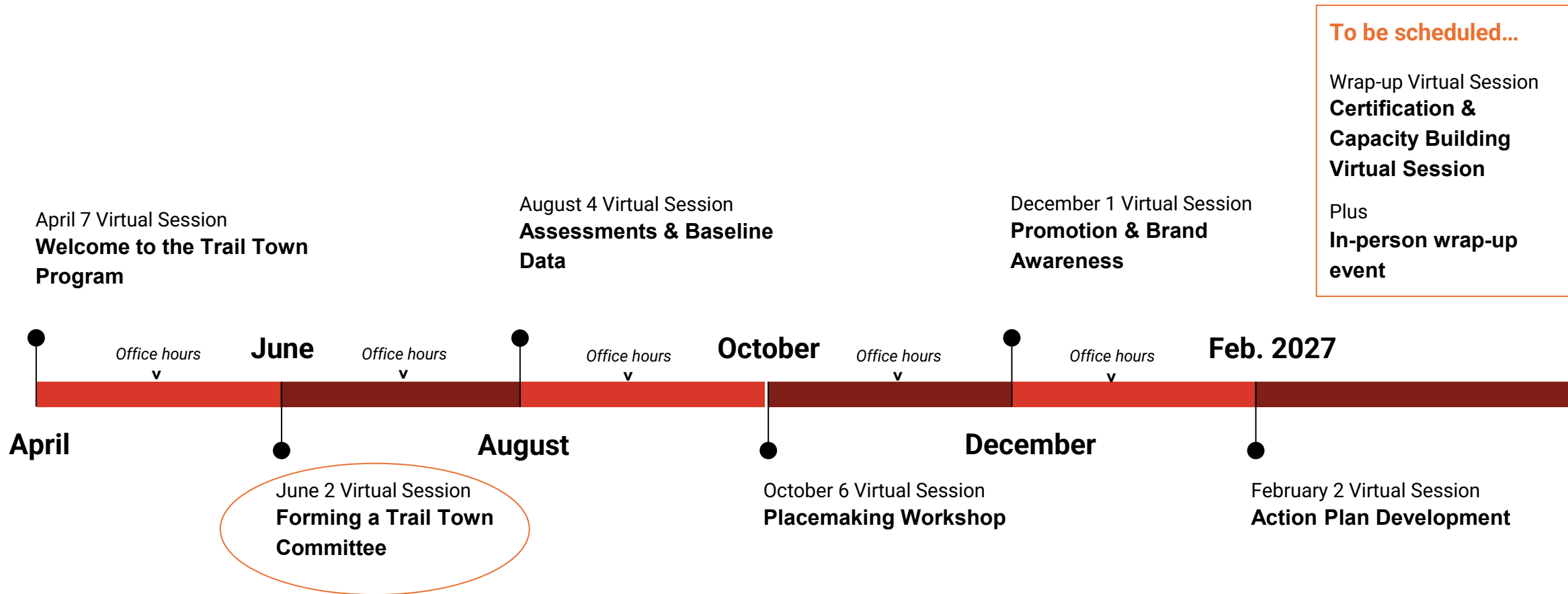


The screenshot shows the American Trails website interface. At the top left is the American Trails logo, which includes a landscape illustration and the text "AMERICAN TRAILS" and "Since 1981". To the right of the logo is a navigation menu with links for "OUR WORK", "TRAINING & CAREERS", "RESOURCES", and "WAYS TO SUPPORT". Further right are links for "BUSINESS DIRECTORY", "SUBSCRIBE", and "MY LEARNING LIBRARY". Below the navigation is a search bar with the placeholder text "Keyword Search" and a "Search" button. In the center of the page is a large green shield-shaped graphic with the text "AMERICAN TRAILS PRESENTS ADVANCING TRAILS WEBINAR SERIES SINCE 2001". Below this graphic is a message that says "You have been logged out." At the bottom of the page, there is a login form with an input field labeled "Enter your membership email" and a "Request Login Link" button. Below the form, there is a note: "Not a member? Join for as little as \$10/month for immediate access." and a footer note: "Note: you must log in with the same email that your membership was purchased with. Need assistance? Contact trailhead@americantrails.org for login assistance or membership verification."



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You are here





Why collaboration is crucial to trails and trail towns

At their heart, trail towns are collaborative, community-engaged, community-building endeavors.



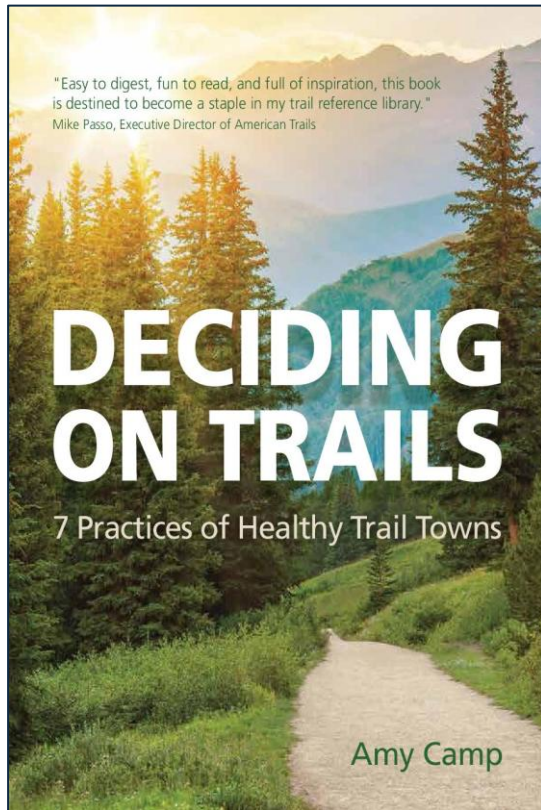
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If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

- Trails succeed when a whole community pays attention — not when 3 or 4 people carry the load
- Recreation projects need **instigators, sellers, builders, and maintainers** — and rarely is any one person all four
- Still, a lot of trail projects are driven by one or two or three champions. The goal? Broaden your "coalition of the willing" — involve more people, more deeply



Remember these? Collaboration is key across the spectrum of trail town practices, too



Seven practices of healthy trail towns

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



Collaboration builds culture builds collaboration

When sectors connect around trails, the benefits ripple far beyond the trail itself

- Economic development & downtown revitalization
- Health, social cohesion & quality of life
- Culture, story & sense of place
- Cross-sector partnerships that outlast any single project

Symptoms of collaboration & emerging trail culture

- By the time a trail proposal reaches a city council packet, officials already recognize it: "Oh, I've heard about this. I know there was a group working on it. Joe at the coffee shop told me about it."
- Personal relationships among unlikely allies
- A welcoming community of entrepreneurs and leaders
- Local government paying attention to the look and feel of downtown
- Matching people to opportunities, and supporting them
- Showing up for each other — even 300 miles away

What symptoms of collaboration do you see?



Breakout rooms & discussion

15 minutes: How have you built collaboration around trails so far?
One thing that's worked well, and one that's been challenging?
How did you cultivate your volunteers?

Come back with:

1. One way collaboration is working for your trail
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.

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Trail Town Assessments

One way to spur interest and collaboration.

Use a Trail Town assessment to build momentum around trails and making the most of them for community benefit.



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Starting Point – Simple Trail Town Reflection

- One way to reflect and assess
- Ideal as you are first thinking about Trail Towns
- Lends itself to places considering a formal program (but good food for thought for all communities)

Reflection Statement	100% Agree	Mostly Agree	Mostly Disagree	100% Disagree
My/our community values and embraces its trails.				
There's a clear entity that can lead a Trail Town initiative here.				
My/our community will be able to create an active task force of six or more people.				
There is a desire for "something more" in the community and connecting to its trails might be part of the solution.				
My/our community is clear about the pain points (problems) that bring us to considering Trail Towns.				
Town leaders are accessible and are likely to support a program.				
My/our community has relationships with neighboring trail communities that may also benefit from Trail Towns.				



Why Assess?



- Establishes a baseline on community conditions
- Can see communities & trails with fresh eyes...and fresh perspectives
- Brings together interested parties...can help broaden the support base
- Creates space to ponder community assets, needs, and opportunities
- Invites trail town and “trail-friendly” conversations and planning

How the assessment works

- It's broken into sections:
 - In Town:
 - Overall Impressions, Buildings & Storefronts, Safety
 - Available Business & Community Services
 - Trail Access / Trailhead:
 - General, Signage, Amenities
 - Access Between Trail and Town
 - Engaging Residents and Visitors
 - Reflection questions

Check one

Overall Impressions:	Yes	No	Somewhat / Maybe
Does the business district feel distinct or special?			
Does the community look and feel like a "trail town" or a place that appreciates trails and its outdoor assets?			
Does the community feel safe?			
Is a walk through the business district generally a pleasant experience?			
Is there a gateway point to enter/leave town (e.g. a piece of art; mural; sign)?			
Are business signs clearly visible and well-designed?			
Buildings and Storefronts:	Yes	No	Somewhat / Maybe
Are the structures in overall good condition?			
Are storefronts well maintained (attractive displays, clean windows, flower boxes, etc.)?			
Are there enough benches in public spaces?			
Are the sidewalks swept and kept neat and free of debris?			
Are there bike racks near businesses and public spaces?			
Safety:	Yes	No	Somewhat / Maybe
Are sidewalks in good shape?			
Are crosswalks well-marked?			
As a pedestrian, do you feel safe crossing the street?			

AVAILABLE BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES (Check one per line)

	Widely Available	Available	Limited Availability	Not Available
Traditional indoor lodging (hotel, B&B, etc.)				
Private rentals (Airbnb, VRBO, etc.)				
Camping				
Bike rental (or bike share)				
Bike shop/repair				

Best practices in trail town assessments



- Move as a group (or small groups), but form individual conclusions. Every participant completes their own assessment.
- Involve people who do not know your trail or community well. Partner with neighboring communities.
- Imagine being a first-time visitor. Be honest with yourself and others without being too critical of your community.
- Bring an “appreciative inquiry,” asset-based mindset to the exercise



Logistics & engagement

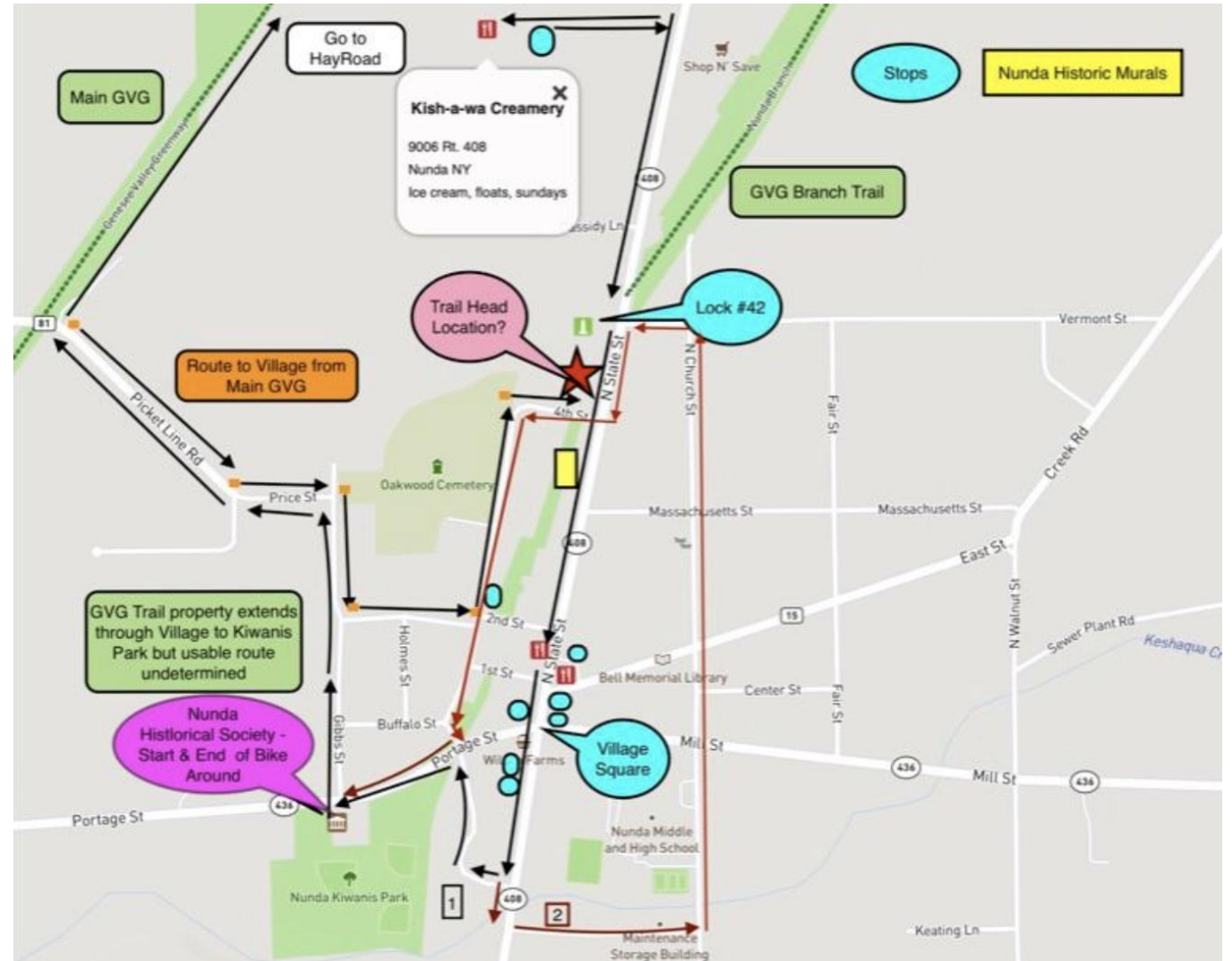
- Typically, invite a diverse group of people to participate
- Begin with a welcome, intros, and context (and refreshments, etc.)
- Send people out in small groups...use the assessment instructions
- Assessment period 60-90 minutes
- Return for discussion



Walk-around or bike-around?

Do a walking assessment...or
organize your assessment as
a bike-around

*Thanks for the idea, Parks and
Trails New York!*



Why are we telling you about this now?

- Early summer is a great time to do assessments
- They can take some time to plan
- Doing an assessment is one of the benchmarks for the Kansas Trail Towns program. Get a head start!





*What (and why and who) is
a Trail Town Committee?
...and is it the same as a
Trail Commission?*



What (and why and who) is a Trail Town Committee?

A trail town committee...

- A standing group that coordinates a community's trail work – planning, promotion, partnerships, and priorities
- It formalizes the collaboration you're already doing, so it's sustained beyond any one champion or staff person
- It can be the body that recommends trail priorities and a trail budget to your governing body each year (e.g., if your community's trail committee/commission is the backbone for your trail town committee)



Why have one?

A trail town committee...

- Sustains collaboration so it doesn't depend on a few individuals
- Targets investment — can give the municipality a clear partner and a reason to put trails in the budget, but also help coordinate and target investment from beyond local government
- Builds trail culture — broadens the "coalition of the willing" beyond parks & rec and tourism
- Creates a recognized home for the work (promotion, placemaking, connecting town and trails, engaging the business community, organizing



Who belongs at the table?

A strong committee reaches well beyond municipal staff

- Residents and trail users
- Local businesses and tourism
- Landowners
- Municipal and county leadership
- Nonprofit, civic, and health organizations
- Schools and other community stakeholders
- Who else?



What it looks like in practice

You don't have to invent this from scratch. You can start with an existing trail committee, build from your park board, use an existing collaborative or nonprofit as the “home” for your committee. MOU templates in the learning library.

- **Osawatomie Trail Commission** — a working Kansas example: a 7-member commission, council-approved operating procedures, recommends an annual trails budget, leverages grants and partnerships to minimize city cost
- **Two resolution templates** in the shared library — one for *recognizing* an existing committee as an official advisory body, one for *establishing* a new Trail Town Committee
- Pick the path that fits where you're starting

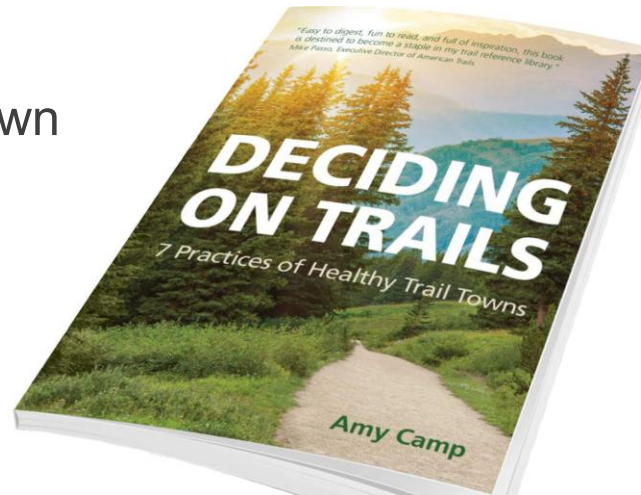
Plus a bonus MOU template for a regional community & economic development collaborative that runs a trail town program, promotional website, and more.



From trail committee to Trail Town committee

Investing in trails contributes to more vibrant, delightful, visitor-ready communities. **“Trail Towns” is a model to guide the investment, and ultimately your committee should reflect that commitment.**

1. Adopt a shared vision
2. Physically connect trail to town
3. Extend an invitation
4. Cultivate a trail culture
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At its simplest:
To be a trail town is to
make a decision to pay
attention to trails.

Deciding on Trails, Amy Camp

**Your trail commission
may be a good starting
point, but don't stop there!**



Let's talk about the benchmarks...

Trail Stewards, feel free to stick around if this interests you.

Benchmarks for certification in October – have these in place by end of September. What questions, concerns or strategies do you want to talk about?

- **Trail Town Committee**
- **Municipal resolution**



What's next?

Next meeting: August 4 Virtual Session: Assessments and Baseline Data
Open office hours July 7, noon — Q&A and idea sharing

Contacts (details on next slide)

Kelli Mark, Sunflower Foundation (technical/grant questions)

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

Mike Scanlon & Mike Goodwin, Kansas Trails Inc. (all things trails)

Paving the Way Learning Library — recordings, slides, resources



Thank you!



Sunflower Foundation

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