



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
- American Trails - Guest Speakers Mike Passo and Candace Gallagher
- Trail Assessments and Baseline Data Reports - Michele Archie
- What else can a Trail Assessment do for you? - Mike Scanlon
- Breakout Rooms! Let's brainstorm ideas around trail assessment events!
- Report out and Open Discussion
- Making the bridge between placemaking and trail assessments
- Let's talk benchmarks!



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



Joining us today



Michele Archie,
Harbinger
Consultancy



Kelli Mark,
Sunflower
Foundation



Mike
Scanlon,
Kansas
Trails Inc.



Mike Passo,
American Trails



Candace
Gallagher,
American Trails



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American Trails



Connecting and transforming communities through the power of trails.

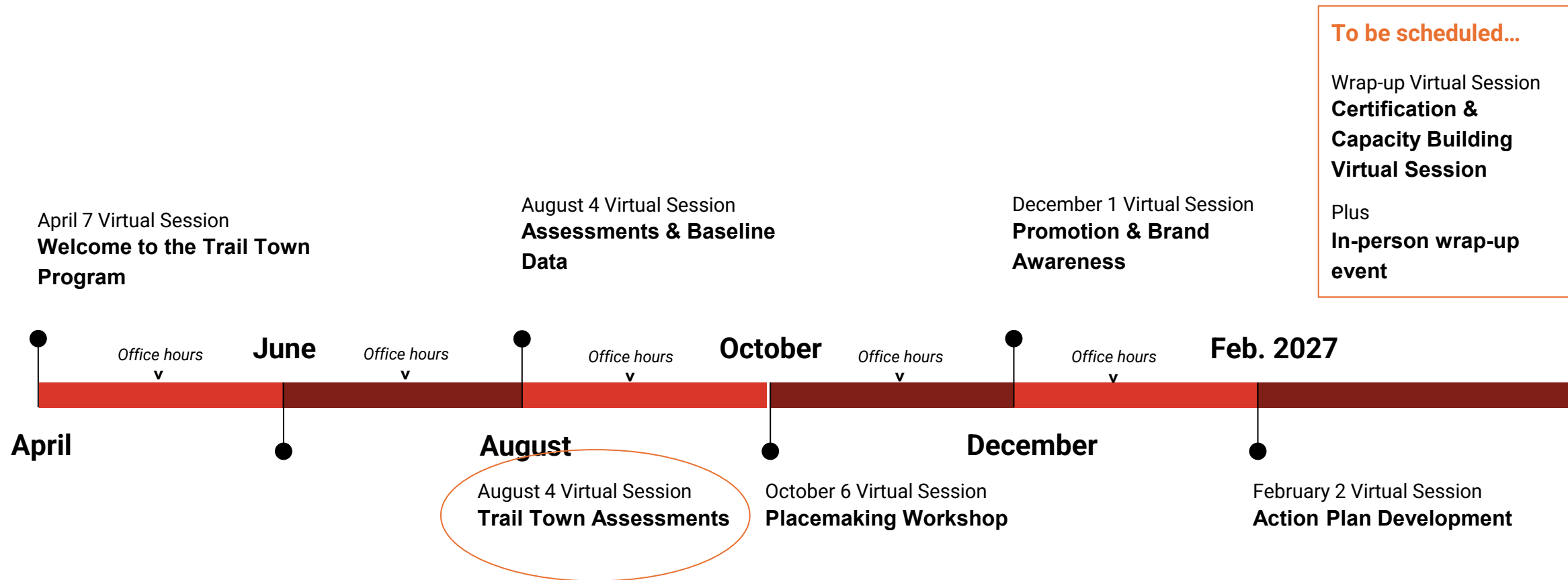


Mike Passo, Executive Director
Candace Gallagher, Director of Operations



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You are here



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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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
- It’s a benchmark for the new Kansas Trail Town designation!



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

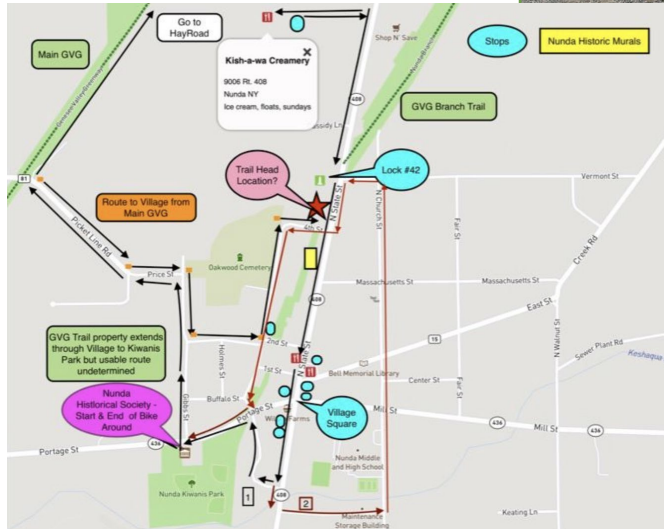
Overall Impressions:	Yes	No	Somewhat / Maybe
Does the business district feel distinct or special?			
Does the community look and feel like a "trail town" or a place that appreciates trails and its outdoor assets?			
Does the community feel safe?			
Is a walk through the business district generally a 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

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



- 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



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Logistics & engagement

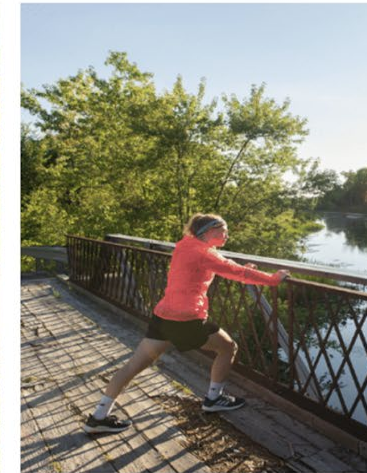
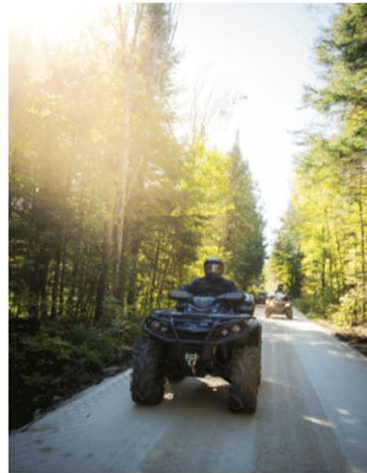
- Typically, invite a diverse group of people to participate
- Begin with a welcome, intros, and context (and refreshments, etc.)
- Send people out in small groups...use the assessment instructions
- Assessment period 60-90 minutes
- Return for discussion



An example is worth a thousand words...



Richard Allen, Manager of Economic Development, Frontenac, ON



About that discussion

It's OK to guide the discussion & OK to move along to new topics and questions.

- What did people observe? Learn?
- Any surprises?
- What are we doing well? What opportunities for improvement do we see?
- How does what we learned connect to other things we care about?
- Is additional research needed?



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Post-Ride Discussion

General Impressions

- While riding along the main street, how would you describe your level of comfort and/or safety?
- How would you describe motorist attitudes towards you as a cyclist/pedestrian? (generally agreeable/neutral/generally aggressive)
- Are all trails and other bike or pedestrian infrastructure accessible to everyone of all ages and abilities?

Policy and planning

- Are there opportunities to incorporate new bike lanes in the community?
- Is there an opportunity for new "share the road" streets?
- Has your community adopted a Safe Routes to School program? If not, is this a possibility?
- Is there a plan or ordinances in your community establishing standards for signage and/or façades?
 - Are the ordinances being enforced?
 - Does your community have a plan to address signage?
- Do the committee members know who to contact for maintenance work? Or who should be contacted to inform them of maintenance needs?
- Is there a mechanism in place for cyclists to notify traffic engineers, planners or police about problem areas or hazards? (i.e., a Facebook group or information on a municipal webpage)
- Are all stakeholder groups—including groups that have been historically underserved—properly represented during every phase of planning?

Additional field research

- Would you consider hosting a pop-up demonstration to further evaluate on-street bicycle facilities?
- Would any of the roadways benefit from a traffic calming study?

Marketing/promotion

- Describe your "community theme" - Does it include any reference to cycling or walking?
- Is there a local chamber of commerce or other promotional agency that can assist with marketing and promotion?
- Does your community promote and/or participate in Bike to Work/School Day or host an event in celebration of National Bike Month?

8

Genessee Valley Greenway Bikearound Assessment, Parks & Trails NY/Genessee Valley Trail Towns (see Learning Library)

Write up your insights

There's an insight report template in the Learning Library

- A bit of background
- About the trail and your community(ies)
- In-town observations & recommendations
- On-the-trail observations & recommendations
- Other pieces to consider



Trail Town Assessment Insight Report

Frontenac K&P Trail & Tay Havelock Trail in Sharbot Lake, Ontario

Assessment conducted on November 18, 2024



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Thanks, Richard!

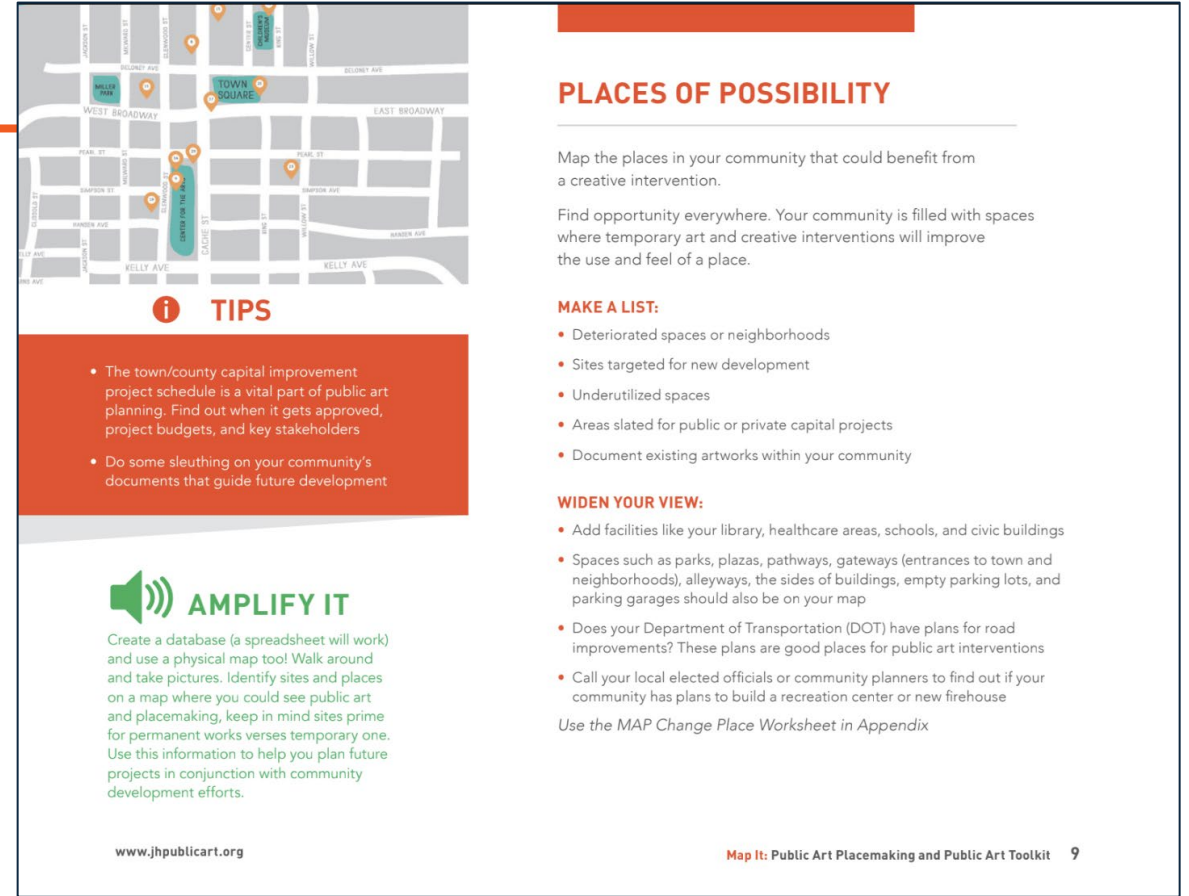
Resources in the Learning Library

- Trail Town Assessment Workbook = How-to and assessment form from the Progress Fund
- Trail Community Walking Assessment (PDF and Word) = the Trail Town assessment that Amy Camp and Michele Archie created based on the Progress Fund's template
- The Genesee Valley Greenway/Parks & Trails New York bikearound assessment guidelines and assessment form, including post-assessment questions
- A Trail Town Assessment insight report template + few sample insight reports from Trail Town Assessments



A look ahead to placemaking

Placemaking is the art of shaping the shared spaces of a community — a trailhead, a storefront block, a park, a gateway, an empty corner — into places where people want to linger. It's a collaborative, look-around-and-imagine way of asking: how could this spot be more welcoming, more useful, and more full of life?



Places of Possibility: Public Art & Placemaking Toolkit for Rural Communities, Jackson Hole Public Art



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Three questions to keep in mind

Where do people gather — or where could they? Notice the benches, plazas, trailheads, and porches. Where does the community naturally come together, and where's a spot that's just waiting for a reason to?

Which spaces feel overlooked? A blank wall, a tired gateway, an empty lot, a dull stretch between the trail and downtown — the kinds of places a little creativity could bring to life.

What makes this place feel like here? The local character, stories, and assets a first-time visitor should notice. Placemaking works best when it celebrates what's already yours.



Want help planning or interpreting your assessment?

Schedule a 1-on-1 with
Michele (email works best)

THE HARBINGER
CONSULTANCY



Michele Archie
(808) 389-9995 (mobile)
michele@harbingerconsult.com

Richard Allen

rallen@frontenacounty.ca



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FROM TRAIL TOWN TO FUNDED TOWN

A City & County Playbook for the Sunflower Foundation Trail Town Pilot

Mike Scanlon • Executive Director, Kansas Trails Inc.

Trail Towns Session — August 4, 2026



You're Already Writing a Grant Application

Every benchmark deliverable you complete for Trail Town Certification is also a funding exhibit — whether you file for a grant next month or three years from now.



“Congratulations — you just started applying for a grant, and you didn’t even know it.”



Committee



Data



Story



Plan



Funding Case

Four benchmarks in, and you’ve already built the four things every funder asks for.



STEP 1

Build the Committee



Due Feb 28, 2027

The 3Ls Method

LARGEST

The biggest name in town — the hospital, the chamber, the school district. If they're at the table, funders notice.

LOUDEST

The person who already won't stop talking about the trail. Give the megaphone a seat, not just an earful.

LONGEST

The one who's been at every meeting since before the trail was a rumor. Institutional memory you can't buy.



"You can't catch fish if your worm's not wet."

Fish the whole community pond to fill your committee — don't just re-invite the same five names from every other board in town. **But once your line's in the water, keep it there.** Don't hop from pool to pool chasing new recruits every month. Sit still, show up, and let the committee actually take hold.



STEP 2

Know Your Baseline



Due Nov 15, 2026

“Funders don’t fund vibes. They fund numbers.”

The assessment is a plain-language inventory of what you have, what’s missing, and what’s in the way:

- ✦ Trail assets, amenities, and visitor experience — what’s actually on the ground today
- ✦ Barriers and gaps — the missing sidewalk, the dangerous crossing, the trailhead with no parking
- ✦ Baseline data — the numbers you’ll use to prove progress for the next three years



Miles of Trail



Gaps & Barriers



Visitor Counts

This becomes the needs statement in almost every grant application you’ll ever file.



STEP 3

Tell Your Story



Due Jan 31, 2027



Placemaking Workshop

A room full of stakeholders — government, business, trail users, residents — turns a wish list into a shared vision and a prioritized project list.

Deliverable: a workshop summary report — your engagement documentation for every grant narrative.



Promotion & Brand

One promotional or branding asset — a logo, rack card, trail map, social campaign, or webpage — that tells visitors and funders who you are.

Deliverable: your Trail Town identity, in hand — the visuals that make a grant application memorable.

This is the part where your trail gets a personality — and a business card.



STEP 4

Write the Plan



Due March 31, 2027

The Action Plan rolls your assessment, workshop, and branding into one document — specific action items, responsible partners, and timelines.



Priorities



Partners



Timeline



Measurable Goals

“An Action Plan is just a grant application wearing a trail-town costume.”

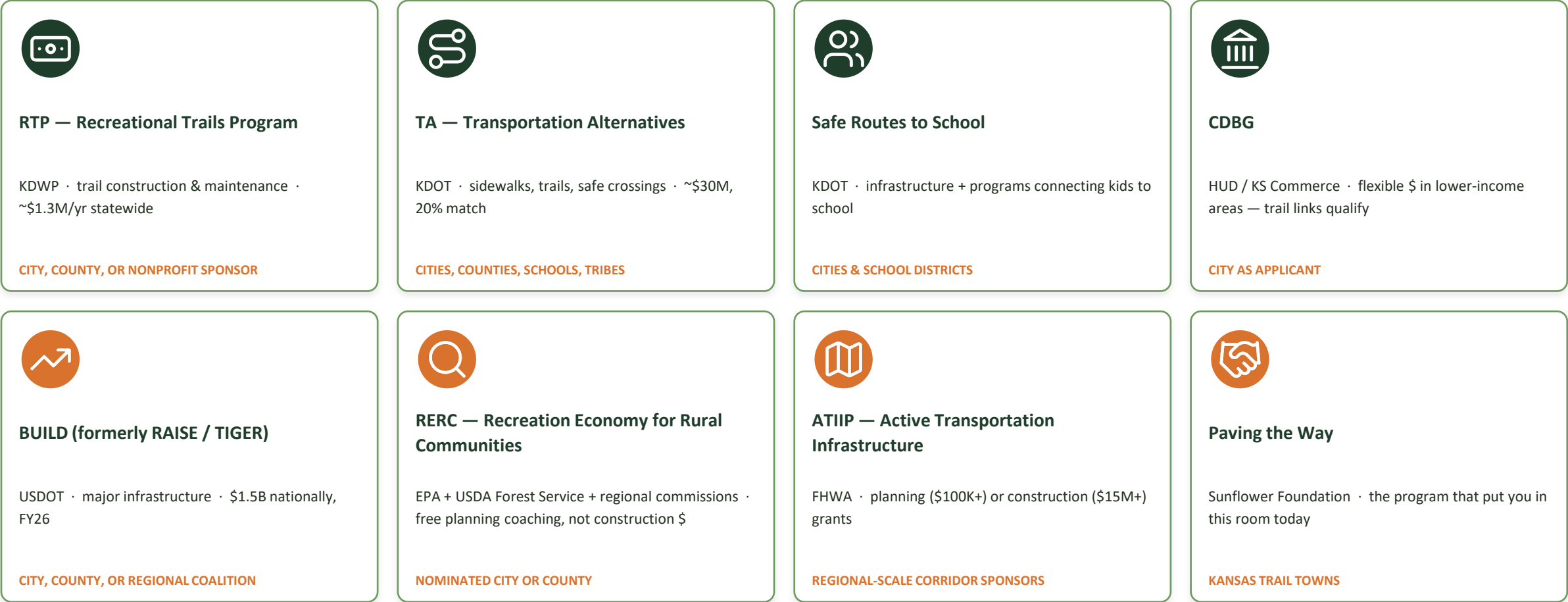
Prioritize what’s realistic in 1–3 years. Name the lead for every action item. Attach a rough cost and timeframe to each one — **and you’ve built a shovel-ready project list before anyone asked for one.**

Certification Is the Ribbon-Cutting.

This Is the Real Prize.



The Money Map: Where the Dollars Actually Come From



Notice a pattern? Almost every one of these needs a city or county as the applicant of record. Your committee builds the case — your city has to sign the form.

Proof It Works: Two Playbooks, Two Zip Codes



Basalt, Colorado

Town Manager, 2012–2016

- ◆ \$7.5M public financing package for a regional innovation center
- ◆ 200+ public engagements in the “Our Town Planning” process — a national model
- ◆ \$7.1M Highway 82 underpass, with \$4M+ from outside sources
- ◆ 2x ICMA Community Sustainability Award (2014, 2015)



Osawatomie, Kansas

City Manager, 2020–2023

- ◆ \$60M+ capital program in a city of fewer than 5,000 residents
- ◆ \$4.5M in CDBG grants & loans for wastewater infrastructure
- ◆ \$600K Flint Hills Trailhead, financed through community engagement
- ◆ Seat on the FHLB Topeka Affordable Housing Advisory Council

Same playbook. Different zip code. The engagement process built the file that made the deal.

The MARC Connection: How Engagement Became Oz Commons



The City of Osawatomie partnered with the **Mid-America Regional Council (MARC)** through its **Planning Sustainable Places (PSP)** program to fund and guide a multi-phase downtown revitalization effort — the same community engagement muscle built through a Trail Town Committee, an assessment, a workshop, and an action plan.

This is Steps 1–4 from this deck — already lived out in real time.



500+

residents engaged in Phase I public input



\$80,000

initial PSP planning grant from MARC



Largest effort

in city planning since the 1990s

Osawatomie didn't wait for someone else's program to build a coalition — it fished the pond, wrote the plan, and MARC funded what came next.

Oz Commons → Clearing the Path: Three Phases, One Vision



2020–2021

PHASE I — OZ COMMONS

Broad downtown redevelopment strategy, community surveys on visual preferences, and initial active transportation integration.



2022–2023

PHASE II — THE HUB

Narrowed the planning scope to the downtown corridor, designing a multi-modal community hub and improving pathways for pedestrians and non-motorized traffic.



2024–2025

PHASE III — TRAILHEAD / MILE ZERO

Continued the momentum with long-term development plans tied to regional trail networks, anchored at the Flint Hills Trailhead — mile marker zero.



Already funded: \$1.5M in state Cost Share funding plus \$1.5M in federal Transportation Alternatives (TA) dollars — the same TA program on the Money Map — now under construction for sidewalks and trail segments through downtown.

The committee, the data, the workshop, the plan — Osawatomie did exactly what's in front of you. This is what it built.



Go Fish.
Keep Your Bait Wet.
See You at Certification.

Mike Scanlon — Executive Director, Kansas Trails Inc.

admin@kstrails.org · kstrails.org

Kansas Trails Inc. — statewide support for every step of this journey.

Breakout rooms & discussion

15 minutes: Let's Brainstorm! Talk with your group about trail assessment events!

Come back with:

1. Ideas for fun trail assessment events
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.



Trail Surveys: Understanding the User Experience

What can you learn?

- Who is using the trail?
- How often do people visit?
- Why do they use the trail?
(walking, biking, commuting, recreation, health)
- How satisfied are users with the trail experience?
- What improvements do they want most?
- What barriers keep people from using the trail?

How to Collect Responses

- QR codes posted at trailheads
- Online surveys
- Community events
- Intercept surveys on the trail
- Partner with local organizations and businesses

The Value

- Supports grant applications
- Prioritizes investments
- Measures community impact
- Tracks changes over time
- Gives residents and visitors a voice

Beyond Assessments & Surveys- Gathering Meaningful Trail Data

Observe how people actually use the trail

- Trail counts (manual or automated)
- User observations (activities, peak times, accessibility)

Review existing data

- Tourism and economic data
- Health and recreation statistics
- Community plans and GIS mapping

Collect stories and experiences

- Interviews with trail users
- Conversations with businesses and community leaders
- Focus groups and listening sessions

Leverage technology

- Social media check-ins and reviews
- GPS or fitness app heat maps
- Photo documentation over time



From Assessment to Action: Baseline Data Reports

Your baseline answers: "Where are we today?"

Include:

- Current trail assets and conditions
- Strengths to build upon
- Gaps and barriers
- Community priorities
- Existing partnerships
- Key metrics to track over time

Ask the Tough Questions

- Are we welcoming all users?
- What prevents people from using the trail?
- Are local businesses benefiting?
- Is the trail safe and well-maintained?
- Are we connected to downtown and neighborhoods?
- Who isn't represented in our planning?
- What does success actually look like?

Remember: A baseline is the starting point for measuring future progress.



How do Assessments inform Placemaking?

Trail Town Assessment

Understand Current Conditions

- Inventory existing assets and amenities
- Identify gaps and barriers
- Analyze trail connectivity
- Gather community and user feedback



Placemaking Workshop

Turn Data into Action

- Prioritize community projects
- Develop and design ideas
- Build partnerships
- Create an implementation roadmap (Action Plan!)



Let's talk about the benchmarks...

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

Benchmark for Trails Assessment - the benchmark for Trail Assessments is to complete a trail assessment! Please submit to Kelli by November 15, 2026. This assessment will feed your placemaking event as well as your action report.

What questions, concerns or strategies do you want to talk about?

- **Perform a Trail Town Assessment**
- **Form a baseline data report, based on what you learned**



What's next?

Next meeting: October 6 Virtual Session: Placemaking Workshops!

Open office hours: September 01 — 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



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Thank you!



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