

**CITY OF MARINE CITY**

**PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**

**AGENDA**

***Regular Meeting: Monday, April 13, 2015; 7:00PM***

**Marine City Fire Hall  
200 South Parker Street, Marine City, Michigan**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- 3. ROLL CALL:** Chairperson Rebecca Lepley; Commissioners Linda Gabler, Keith Jenken, Rudolof Menchaca, Rosalie Skwiers, and Thomas McKenzie; City Commissioner David Simpson; Building Official Brian Bayly; and, Acting City Manager Donald Tillery
- 4. APPROVE AGENDA**
- 5. APPROVE MINUTES**
  - A. Planning Commission Minutes ~ March 9, 2015
- 6. COMMUNICATIONS**

No Communications were received.
- 7. PUBLIC COMMENT** *Residents are welcome to address the Planning Commission. Please state name and address. Limit comments to five (5) minutes.*
- 8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**
  - A. Non-Motorized Transportation Plan
  - B. Trail Town ~ Presentation (Rough Draft)
- 9. NEW BUSINESS**
  - A. Fence Ordinance ~ Review
- 10. OTHER BUSINESS**
- 11. ADJOURNMENT**

**City of Marine City  
Planning Commission Meeting  
March 9, 2015**

A regular meeting of the Marine City Planning Commission was held on Monday, March 9, 2015, in the Fire Hall, 200 South Parker Street, Marine City, Michigan, and was called to order by Chairperson Rebecca Lepley at 7:00 pm.

After observing a moment of silence, the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairperson Lepley.

**Present:** Chairperson Lepley; Commissioners Jenken, McKenzie, Menchaca; City Commissioner Simpson; and, City Clerk Baxter

**Absent:** Commissioners Gabler & Skwiers

Motion by Commissioner Menchaca, seconded by City Commissioner Simpson, to excuse Commissioners Gabler and Skwiers from the meeting. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

**Approve Agenda**

New Business

Amend: Item #9-A Site Plan Review to #9-B

Add: Item #9-A Public Hearing

Motion by City Commissioner Simpson, seconded by Commissioner Menchaca, to approve the Agenda, as amended. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

**Approve Minutes**

Motion by City Commissioner Simpson, seconded by Commissioner Menchaca, to approve the February 9, 2015 Minutes of the Planning Commission, as presented. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

**Communications**

The following Communication was presented:

- ❖ Charter Township of East China

❖ Stephen R. Saph, Jr. ~ Board Member's Insurance Coverage

Motion by City Commissioner Simpson, seconded by Commissioner Menchaca, to accept and file the Communication. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

**Public Comment**

No residents addressed the Commission.

**Unfinished Business**

***Non-Motorized Transportation Plan***

No new developments reported at this time. Chairperson Lepley and City Commissioner Simpson commented the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan should be kept on the agenda for future meetings.

**New Business**

***Public Hearing ~ Special Land Use – Jet's Pizza & Future Retail***

Building Official Brian Bayly reported that Applicant Michael Morris was requesting site plan approval for Jet's Pizza and future retail. However, the project will be completed in phases. Mr. Bayly said the site plan appeared to meet all requirements and made the recommendation that the approval be granted.

Chairperson Lepley opened the Public Hearing at 7:05 pm.

Resident George Bukowski, 318 Chartier Street, said he lived across the street from proposed location and said he had no problem with the site plan, however, he was concerned with the lighting at night, as well as a potential for a garbage problem if not picked up regularly. Mr. Bukowski also expressed concern over the city sustaining seven pizza businesses in town. He wished the applicant good luck.

Chairperson Lepley closed the Public Hearing at 7:07 pm.

Applicant Michael Morris and his architect, Rick Konik, addressed Mr. Bukowski's concerns and said that the lighting for the restaurant will be shielded, per ordinance. Mr. Morris also addressed the trash concern and said it will be closely monitored.

Motion by Commissioner McKenzie, seconded by City Commissioner Simpson, to approve the Special Land Use, as presented. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

Motion by City Commissioner Simpson, seconded by Commissioner Menchaca, to approve the Site Plan as presented. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

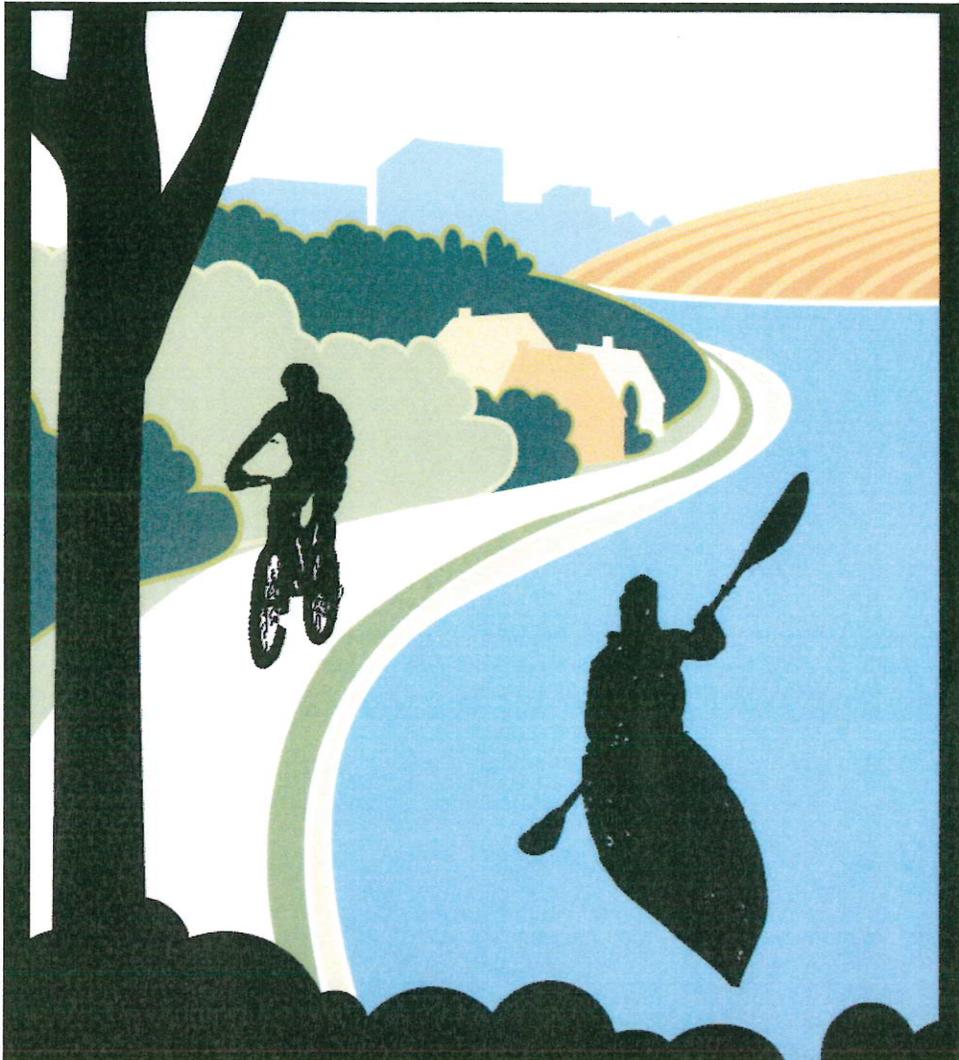
**Adjournment**

Motion by City Commissioner Simpson, seconded by Commissioner Menchaca, to adjourn at 7:28 pm. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Baxter  
City Clerk

8-B



# TRAIL TOWN

**MARINE CITY**



# Trail Town Plan

Capturing Trail Based Tourism  
Along Michigan's Thumb Coast

*DRAFT*

**PORT AUSTIN  
HARBOR BEACH  
PORT SANILAC**

**MILLINGTON LEXINGTON**

**PORT HUON**

**ST. CLAIR  
MARINE CITY**

**ALGONAC/CLAY TWP.**

This Plan was funded in part by the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Department of Environmental Quality Office of the Great Lakes and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.



Plan 1





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## Introduction

The human, health and community benefits associated with recreational trails have been widely studied and well documented. Trails can help encourage healthy lifestyles and active living by supporting recreational activities. Trails can help preserve the environment by protecting important human and wildlife corridors and reducing air pollution through alternative modes of transportation. Trails can help foster a strong sense of community and place, providing an opportunity for social interaction and access to community amenities such as parks, neighborhoods and schools.

Recreational trails can also have a significant impact on the local economy. Trails can help 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 is better understood, many communities are looking for ways to capitalize on their current trail networks. This document is designed to discuss and illustrate how coastal communities in Michigan's Thumb Region can better leverage their existing (and future) water and non-motorized trail systems to maximize trail-based tourism and economic development opportunities - to redefine each community and the entire region as a "Trail Town."

Due to its primarily rural setting, lack of heavy automobile traffic and relatively flat roads, the Thumb Region is an ideal location for bicycle-touring. In fact, *U.S. Bicycle Route 20* passes directly through the southern portions of the region. Therefore, this document will also highlight ways these coastal communities can maximize bicycle tourism.

### Trail Towns - A Michigan Perspective

The Trail Town concept is gaining traction in communities and along trails all over Michigan. In southern Michigan, the Clinton River Watershed Council and the Huron River Watershed Council recently launched independent Trail Town initiatives. The new initiatives are designed to help towns within each watershed leverage their riverside assets for water-oriented community development.

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## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

Paddling advocates, local officials and regional economic development agencies are currently working together to develop formal Trail Town plans in ten separate communities along the Lake Michigan coastline. In Northern Michigan, the cities of Alpena, Atlanta, Grayling, Mackinaw City, Topinabee, Boyne City and Charlevoix have already developed formal Trail Town plans.

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA), under the auspices of the National Park Service, has a formal Trail Town Program. The program provides information and resources to local officials on how they can better promote their town to hikers of the North Country Trail. The NCTA has awarded official "Trail Town" status to 13 communities along the trail, including nine in Michigan.

In June of 2014, Governor Snyder signed into effect Public Act 210, which states that upon petition from a local official, the Director of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may designate a city, village or township as a "Pure Michigan Trail Town" provided the community meets certain criteria. As of this writing, DNR officials are working to determine the extent of the criteria, but it is expected to become finalized by June of 2015. A full copy of Public Act 210 can be found in Appendix A.

In an effort to better understand the Trail Town concept and develop useful strategies and recommendations for coastal communities in the Thumb Region, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. The literature review found a number of resources for specific components of the Trail Town concept, such as downtown design guidelines, walkability tactics and promotional strategies. However, only a handful of examples were identified that addressed how each of the specific components all work together to create a "Trail Town." The original source identified, *Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania*<sup>1</sup> (published by the Allegheny Trail Alliance in 2005), and the *Trail Town Manual for Communities in Northern Michigan*<sup>2</sup> (published by LIAA in 2013) were used as the basis for the master plan.

<sup>1</sup> *Trail Towns - Capturing Trail-Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania*. Allegheny Trail Alliance (2005)

<sup>2</sup> *Trail Towns - Capturing Based Tourism. A Manual for Communities in Northern Michigan*. LIAA (2013)



This document utilizes and summarizes portions of each Trail Town publication, applying specific concepts and recommendations to the coastal communities in the Thumb Region. However, in an effort to demonstrate or illustrate a specific point or suggestion, examples from other communities and trails throughout Michigan are highlighted and described throughout the document

This document recognizes the significant efforts that local business owners, municipal staff members, local officials, governmental bodies (e.g., Downtown Development Authority,) and regional economic development agencies already provide in support of tourism, economic development and trail building in communities throughout the Thumb Region. The strategies and recommendations outlined in this document are only meant to highlight new ideas and spark discussions about how coastal communities in the Thumb Region could better utilize its trail and road-biking assets to expand on and complement existing recreation and community development efforts. Furthermore, many of the strategies and recommendations outlined in this document support on-going local, regional and even statewide efforts to capitalize and leverage local assets for community and economic development.

## Trail Systems and Community Profiles

Due to their regional scope and connective qualities, the primary focus of this document is to highlight ways in which the coastal communities can establish Trail Town strategies around the *Tip of the Thumb Heritage Water Trail* and the system of water trails that make up the *Blueways of St. Clair*. However, several communities along the coastline have non-motorized trails. In addition, a number of communities are connected by the multi-jurisdictional *Bridge to Bay* non-motorized trail. In addition, as previously mentioned, each community is connected by a system of roads ideal for bike-touring. As a result, the recommendations outlined in this document are designed to address how *each* trail system can be used to leverage new Trail Town economic development strategies. A map of each trail can be found Appendix B.

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## Trail Systems

### Tip of the Thumb Heritage Water Trail

The Tip of the Thumb Heritage Water Trail encompasses 139 miles of Lake Huron coastline along Tuscola, Huron and Sanilac counties. The water trail passes by some of the most unique rock formations in the lower-peninsula. Access to the water trail can be found at 45 different launch/landing sites, spread throughout coastline of the three counties.

### Blueways of St. Clair

The Blueways of St. Clair is a regional water trail system made up of 16 unique paddling routes along nine bodies of water in St. Clair County. The paddling routes pass by several cities along the St. Clair River and through large natural areas, including an area known as the “St. Clair Flats” the worlds largest freshwater delta.

In 2014, the Island Loop Trail, which passes under the iconic Bluewater Bridge, was designated a National Water Trail by the National Park Service. This was the first such designation of a water trail in Michigan and one of only 18 National water Trail designations in the United States.

### Bridge to Bay Trail

The Bridge to Bay Trail is 54-mile paved pathway that runs through 13 different units of government - roughly from the Blue Water Bridge in Port Huron to the City of New Baltimore. Portions of the trail are made up of and connected by a combination of shared use pathways, paved road shoulders and on-street bike-lanes. St. Clair County is charged with helping to plan new sections of the trail and promoting the trail. However, each local unit of government along the trail corridor is in charge of constructing and maintaining their section of the trail.

### Lexington to Crosswell Bicycle Path

The Lexington to Crosswell Bicycle Path is a 5-mile paved pathway connecting the communities of Lexington and Crosswell. The pathway sits parrell to Michigan Highway 90.

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#### Blue Water River Walk

The Blue Water River Walk is a one-mile paved trail along the St. Clair River, in downtown Port Huron. New new trail ifeatures many historic elements of the former rail-road corridor and incorporates extensive habitate restoration along the river. The trail is owned by the Community Foundation of St. Clair County.

#### Harbor Beach Bike Path

The Harbor Beach Bike Path traverses a little over a mile, connecting Judge James H. Lincoln Memorial Park to the Harbor Beach Marina north of town.

#### Bicycle Touring

As previously mentioned, the flat and the mostly rural system of roadways throughout St. Clair County make it and ideal location for bicycle touring. Businesses, like Port Autin Kayak are working to leverage this system of roadways, even developing a series of “preferred bike loops” along their local network of roads for their customers.

U.S. Bike Route 20 also utilizes this system of roadways, directing bike-tourists north from Marine City (where it connects to the Canadian Bike Route) through the cities of St. Clair and Port Huron, and eventually east through Millington before it continues to Bay City and eventually Ludington along the Lake Michigan coastline. U.S. Bike Route 20 is part of a larger system of formal bike routes that bisects North America - linking bike-tourists to the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

### Communities

The focus of this Trail Town Plan is on seven communities that define the greater “Coastal Thumb Region” of Michigan: Port Austin; Harbor Beach; Port Sanilac; Lexington; Port Huron; Clay Township and Algonac. As previously mentioned, these seven communities are linked together by two water trails; the Tip of the Thumb Water Trail and the system of trails that make up the Blueways of St. Clair. In addition, each of these communities (along with Marine City, St. Clair and Maysville), participate in *Discover the Blue*, a publication and regional marketing program under the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.



## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

Together, the seven communities are home to about 47,500 people. However, given their location on Lake Huron, the population of each community increases significantly during the summer months. Most of the seven communities have a traditional downtown layout, with historic buildings centered along a “main” street, sidewalks, numerous waterfront and outdoor dining experiences, boutique-style shops, and art galleries. Most communities also have a fairly large marina, where paddlers can easily access the water. The largest city in the region is Port Huron. Often referred to as the “Maritime Capital of the Great Lakes”, Port Huron is the starting point of the famed Port Huron to Mackinac Sailboat Race.

The seven communities along the coast are framed by Huron County, Sanilac County and St. Clair County. Staff members from the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, in partnership with the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Michigan State University Extension and the Huron County Economic Development Corporation were instrumental in the development of this document and will be central agents in both local and regional Trail Town implementation efforts.

### **Nearby Regional Efforts**

#### Millington - Tuscola County

In an effort to include additional communities in this Trail Town planning effort, the project partners worked with local officials and trail advocates in communities along the Southern Links Trailway to develop Trail Town recommendations for the community of Millington. Located in Tuscola County, Millington is the northern terminus of the Southern Links Trailway.

The Southern Links Trailway is a 10.2 paved trail, connecting the towns of Millington, Otter Lake and Columbiaville. The scenic pathway traverses through open fields, wetlands, wooded forests and farmlands. The trail is unique in that it accommodates hikers, bikers and equestrian riders. The development, maintenance and promotion of the trail is directed by the Southern Links Management Council, a management entity made up of local officials and citizens of the three jurisdictions and two adjoining townships. Trail Town recommendations for Millington are located later in this document.

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#### St. Clair and Marine City

Last year, staff members of the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, in partnership with LIAA (a non-profit community service organization located in Traverse City) worked to facilitate a separate *Pilot Trail Town Planning Initiative* in the coastal communities of Marine City and St. Clair. Due to their proximity to several of the seven coastal communities studied for this plan and their participation in *Discover the Blue*, specific Trail Town recommendations for the two communities are also included in this document.

#### Regional Application

While these concerted Trail Town Planning effort focused on the ten communities listed above, the applicability of the concepts, the process of evaluation, the basis of the recommendations and the options for implementation serve as a model for other communities throughout the region that are adjacent to trails.

## What is a Trail Town?

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, a “Trail Town” is:

A destination along a long-distance trail. Whether on a rail trail, towpath, water trail, or hiking trail, trail users can venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of the nearby community with its own character and charm. It is a safe place where both town residents and trail users can walk, find the goods and services they need, and easily access both trail and town by foot or vehicle. In such a town, the trail is an integral and important part of the community.<sup>3</sup>

A Trail Town is an active, attractive, and interesting place with accessible and comfortable spaces, hosting a variety of activities that promote social interaction and a

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<sup>3</sup> Trail Towns - Capturing Trail Based Tourism, A Guide for Communities in Pennsylvania. Allegheny Trail Alliance (2005)



## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

strong sense of place. A Trail Town should meet both the needs of trail users and the residents of the community. A Trail Town has the physical amenities that support trail users and bicycle tourists such as bike/kayak racks, way-finding signs, wide sidewalks, drinking fountains, and benches with shade. A Trail Town also has the business amenities to support day-trip trail users and bike tourists (such as a bike shop, kayak outfitter, casual restaurant and ice-cream shop) and overnight trail users and bike tourist (such as a hotel, restaurant and laundromat).

Each of the eight communities that were assessed as part of this planning effort already have many of the physical and business amenities that day-trip and overnight trail users and bike tourists are seeking. Many of the downtowns feature pedestrian friendly streets with a variety of quality locally-owned restaurants, with outdoor seating. Most of the downtowns also have ice-cream shops, bars (some even have a brewery) and a coffee house where riders can casually spend an hour or two before getting back on the trail or the road. Many of the downtowns also feature a variety of boutique-style shops, with diverse and unique goods. The open and inviting storefronts and pedestrian friendly streets encourage trail visitors and bike tourists to casually stroll through the downtown.

All eight of the downtowns also have a number of physical amenities (public benches, bike racks, parks) that allow trail users and bike tourists to rest, relax, or just hang-out before getting back on their kayak or bike. For overnight trail users and bicycle tourists, there are a wide variety of accommodations (e.g., hotel, motel, bed-and-breakfast, camp-ground) within or in close proximity to many of the downtown areas.

### Trail Town Strategy

It is important for local and regional trail advocates, economic development professionals and public officials in the region to understand that these coastal communities are not isolated communities; they are linked together by the trails and biking routes, creating a regional destination for paddling, bike touring, horseback riding and other recreational activities. Typically, water trails tend to be used by people seek a couple-hour or half-day paddling excursion. However, some adventurous paddlers may be on the water trail for multiple days. Similarly, most bike

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tourists are seeking a half-day or entire day excursion. However, some bike tourists may be out for a couple days, visiting several communities, especially on weekends. In addition, although vacationers may visit (often repeatedly) the trail located at their primary destination or “hub,” they may access different sections of the same trail or different trails when they visit nearby towns throughout the duration of their stay.

Long-distance trails and bicycle friendly roadways attract tourists, especially trails and roads that pass by and through interesting towns, scenic areas or places of historic interest. Most trail users and bike tourists will require some degree of goods and services. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *studies show that the longer the trail, the farther people will come to use it, the longer people will stay, and the more they will spend. A day-tripper will spend four times as much as a local user, and an overnight visitor will spend twice the amount a day-tripper will spend.*

The Thumb Region is fortunate in that it is already popular with tourists, has many interesting towns and places to visit and has a very active and expanding network of water trails, non-motorized trails and bike friendly roadways. Local officials, economic development professionals, local business owners and trail advocates in each community should continue to work with each other and regional organizations like the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, MSU Extension, Michigan Department of Transportation and the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau to expand existing and make new trail connections, promote trail-based tourism activities and support positive trail experiences for the entire region.

It will also be important for local community leaders, trail advocates, business owners and regional economic development organizations to regularly communicate with each other, local businesses and participating state agencies about local road and trail conditions, safety concerns and trail/biking events. Regular communication can be especially useful when large paddle, bike or equestrian themed events and/or tours pass through the region.

Local officials in Millington (along with four adjacent jurisdictions) already participate in multi-jurisdictional cooperative management entity, making trail planning, promotional activities and communications efforts much easier.

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## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

Ultimately, Trail Town communities need to be a friendly places that support, celebrate and encourage paddlers, equestrians, bike tourists and other trail users to visit and welcomes them with warm hospitality. The basic elements of a “Trail Town Strategy” are described below.

### Basic Elements of a Trail Town Strategy

- Entice trail users to get off the trail and bike-tourists to get off the road and into your town.
- Welcome trail users and bike tourists to your town by making information about the community readily available at the trailhead or key entryways into the community.
- Make a strong and safe connection between your town and the trail.
- Educate local businesses on the economic benefits of meeting trail and bicycle tourists’ needs.
- Recruit new businesses or expand existing businesses to fill gaps in the goods or services that trail users and bike tourists need.
- Support and promote the “trail-friendly”, “bicycle friendly” and “pedestrian friendly” character of the town.
- Work with neighboring communities to promote the entire trail corridor and bike friendly roadways as a tourist destination.

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, it is also important to *understand that the Trail Town initiative must come from within your community. Becoming a Trail Town is as much about local attitude as it is about physical improvements.* Listed below are several considerations local officials, trail advocates and regional organizations should review in preparation of creating a dynamic regional Trail Town environment.



### Considerations in Creating a Trail Town Environment

- Local communities (and the region) can grow and thrive in new ways because of its proximity to trail and the bike friendly system of roadways.
- The more Trail Towns there are along a corridor offering hospitality and services, the more attractive the region will be for tourism; the success of one community is important to the success of all the communities.
- Leadership and initiative from within the community (especially the business community) will be necessary to turn each community into a Trail Town.
- A safe and well-maintained trail and roadway is the centerpiece, so it's important to cooperate with and support local trail-building and maintenance groups and public safety agencies.
- A core bicycle/pedestrian-friendly philosophy should be adopted by local officials and business owners.
- Trail users and road-bikers should be accommodated both physically and socially within the downtown area.
- Goods and services for trail users and bicycle tourists will be appealing to other types of tourists and local residents.
- Local law enforcement agents can be important ambassadors in the town, along the trail and rural roadways.

### Getting Organized to Create Your Trail Town

In order to create, plan for and implement a successful Trail Town initiative, it is important to have the right team assembled from the community. The following sections describe some of the important roles and activities that will be needed to



create and establish a Trail Town environment in each community. As local leaders, trail advocates, business owners and economic development professionals review these sections it can be important to identify where additional assistance might be needed. In addition, it will be imperative, at least initially, that regional agencies like the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, MSU Extension, Huron County Economic Development Corporation and the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau assist local leaders in several of these organizing and implementation efforts.

In Millington, local officials should continue to work with neighboring public officials, the Southern Link Trailway Management Council and members of the Southern Link Trailway Friends Group to assemble a local Trail Town Committee.

A. Define the Trail Corridor. Before any Trail Town initiative can get started, it is important that local leaders understand the physical and administrative structure of the trail(s). Local leaders and trail advocates should ask themselves a series of questions to better understand the trail system(s) located in their community. For example:

- What kind of trail is it?
- How long is the trail and where does it connect to?
- Who manages the trail and who is responsible for daily upkeep and annual maintenance?

A brief summary of the physical and administrative structure of each trail in the region is described on pages three and four. It was fairly clear in meetings with local officials in some coastal communities that many did not know about the physical and administrative structure of their adjacent water trail. In fact, some local officials were even unaware there was a water trail located in their community.

B. Assess Local Capacity. A Trail Town initiative could be part of comprehensive community revitalization efforts directed by downtown merchants, a Downtown Development Association, a Main Street Program, a municipal community development department or a combination of these organizations. Therefore, it is

important to understand how well your local leaders are able to plan and implement new programs or ideas.

Some coastal communities already have very active and successful Downtown Development Authorities, merchant groups, community development departments and civic-minded organizations. It will be important to tap into those agencies or groups of people who are eager and willing to participate. From a regional perspective, organizations like the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, MSU Extension, Huron County EDC, Michigan Department of Transportation and the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau can assist in providing support and capacity. However, creating strong local teams will be vital for the long-term viability of any local Trail Town effort.

Local officials and staff can utilize the following *Four Point Approach*<sup>4</sup> to create a successful “Trail Town” environment in their community.

Organizing gets everyone working toward the same goal. The tough work of building consensus and cooperation among groups that have an important stake in the downtown area can be eased by using the basic formula of a hands-on, volunteer driven program and an organizational structure consisting of a board and committees to direct the program.

Promotion sells the image and promise of a Trail Town to all prospects. Marketing the downtown’s unique characteristics to local customers, investors, new businesses, and visitors requires an effective promotion strategy. It forges a positive town image through advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out by the local volunteers.

Design gets a Trail Town into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets such as historic buildings and traditional downtown layout is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere created through attractive window displays, professional signage, well-maintained sidewalks, accessible parking areas,

<sup>4</sup> National Main Street Center: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>



## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

appropriate street lights, and inviting landscaping conveys a visual message about what a Trail Town is and what it has to offer.

Economic Restructuring finds a new purpose for the town's enterprises. 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.

C. Create or Enhance Your Local Organization. Everyone in the community has a stake in the future of their downtown. In order to be successful, local leaders must involve as many interested groups and individuals as possible from throughout the community. Citizens, paddlers, bicyclists, stakeholder groups, and local officials all need to support downtown revitalization efforts. Local leaders should also seek support from local civic groups, historical societies, financial institutions, religious institutions, business owners and civic organizations (both public and private) that have a stake in tourism and the downtown. Because of the residual health benefits trails provide to local residents, it can be helpful to seek support from local physicians or regional health care network.

D. Develop the Local Volunteer Base. A Trail Town initiative requires support from the entire community. In addition to mobilizing community organizations, it is important to mobilize local volunteers. Volunteers bring new and different ideas forward and can help carry out activities. In addition, volunteers can help promote the positive aspects of the Trail Town initiative through word-of-mouth. Local leaders in each community 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 trail use and appreciation. A marketing committee can be helpful in organizing these efforts. A catchy name for the organization is also helpful - something that lets people know what the organization does and is easily remembered. The marketing committee will need to develop a relationship with the local media. Explain to them what local leaders are doing and how they can help. It can also be helpful to submit articles (with photos) to local organizations in the community, speak at local civic and community

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service meetings (e.g., planning commission, city council, Rotary, Kiwanis), establish a social media platform and have a presence at community events and festivals.

Organizations like the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, MSU Extension, Huron County EDC and the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission can be helpful in promoting the entire region as a Trail Town destination. These organizations have the ability and capacity to not only promote the Trail Town activities within the greater Thumb Region, but also throughout the State of Michigan, the Midwest and into Ontario.

F. Build Partnerships. As previously stated, implementing a Trail Town initiative requires support from the entire community. Building partnerships with existing community groups and stakeholders will help to develop broad-based local interest and buy-in as the initiative moves forward. Local leaders in each community should work to identify existing community groups, business owners and key figures and discuss ways to unite the community around the Trail Town effort.

As previously mentioned, it will also be important for local Trail Town teams to work with and coordinate efforts with neighboring Trail Town teams, regional planning agencies and economic and community development organizations.

G. 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 the local, county, state and federal agencies. These financial aid programs may include Michigan Trust Fund Grants from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grants from the Michigan Department of Transportation, Rural Development Grants from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and grants from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Local financing tools, like Tax Increment Financing (TIF), may also be utilized.

Funding may also be secured from local and regional Community Foundations, regional trail and recreation advocacy organizations, friends groups and local

### Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

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. As previously mentioned, it will be imperative that local leaders work with organizations like the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, MSU Extension, Huron County EDC and the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission in identifying and securing grant opportunities.

Building relationships and partnerships with local business owners is also critical in securing funding for Trail Town initiatives. Local businesses (especially, restaurants, bars and hotel/resort) may be willing to sponsor special trail-related events and promote Trail Town activities within their own networks. Furthermore, local businesses may be willing to take on the cost of providing and building trail amenities and supports services.

H. Take One Step at a Time. It is important to understand that a Trail Town initiative does not happen overnight, it develops and evolves over time. This may be especially true in the communities where there is not a local organization already working on building trails or economic development initiatives. Fortunately, there is already a great deal of local and regional support and enthusiasm in most of these coastal communities (and Millington) and local trail, paddling and bicycling advocates and supporters have long been very pro-active. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *the activities that the community undertakes should be evaluated by their outcomes, not outputs. You may want to start implementation with a small project with good potential, one that might have good "bang for the buck."* Use resources prudently on projects that are well thought out and their potential impact thoroughly evaluated.

## Trail Town Design Issues

An important step in preparing this plan was to assess the physical characteristics of each central business district and its relationship to the nearby trail(s) and road network - a *Trail-to-Town Assessment*. The assessment helps local officials, trail planners, business owners and economic development professionals better understand the physical challenges a trail visitor may encounter in their quest to visit the downtown. The results of the trail-to-town assessment for each community is summarized later in this document. The following pages describe the physical elements that were evaluated as part of the trail-to-town assessment.

**Determine the Type of Trail in Your Community.** The first item to evaluate in assessing the physical characteristics of a town is to determine the type of trail that runs through (or in close proximity to) the central business district. While the water trail primarily accommodates kayakers, most of the paved trails accommodates a wide-variety of non-motorized uses (i.e., cycling, hiking, walking, observing nature, etc.). Although they are not groomed for such uses, in the winter months some of the paved trails are often used by snowshoers and cross-country skiers. It is important for local leaders and trail planners to understand which types of users are on the trail and at which time of year.

Understanding how the trail is used during different times of the year will help local officials better provide for supporting trail infrastructure. For example, if a lot of people are paddling in the shoulder months (early spring and late fall), then perhaps local municipalities might consider installing kayak launch facilities earlier in the year (prior to Memorial Day) and taking them out later in the year (after than Labor Day). It can also be helpful when planning specific trail-associated events or promotional activities. This information can also help local business owners better understand potential trail clientele.

**Understand Trail Geography.** As previously mentioned, another important item to assess is the physical relationship between the trail and the central business district (the *trail-to-town relationship*), which includes factors such as linear distance and



elevation change. According to the *Allegheny Trail Alliance*, the linear relationship can be described in one of three ways: (1) Internal Trails; (2) Adjacent Trails; and (3) Removed Trails.

Internal Trails are located directly through the central business district.

Adjacent Trails are located immediately adjacent to the downtown, usually within a half-mile of the central business district.

Removed Trails are located up to two miles away from the central business district.

In each coastal community, their water trails are considered “adjacent trails.” In communities with non-motorized trails, some are considered “internal” whereas some are considered “adjacent.” In some instances, portions of multi-jurisdictional trails like the Bridge to Bay Trail are considered both “internal” and “adjacent” depending on which community its passing through.

Understanding the elevation change or “grade” between the trail and the central business district is also very important. This can be especially important for long-distance trail users who may be carrying heavy loads of gear or parents pulling kids in trailers. In addition, grade will be important for paddlers if they have to carry their kayak to a lock-up area or their automobile.

Certainly, weather can play a significant role in the pace in which paddlers can move along the water trails. High winds can create significant waves which can be treacherous to paddle through. In addition, a stiff head-wind can slow the pace of a paddler tremendously - turning a relatively moderate hour-long paddle into an exhausting two-hour paddle.

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**Identify Key Connecting Elements.** In addition to understanding the physical relationship between the trail and the central business district, it is also important to understand the function and inter-relationship of the six *connecting elements* – the physical components that make up and define the connection between the trail and central business district. The following pages summarize each of the connecting elements. A full assessment and map of the connecting elements in each community is summarized later in this document.

**Trailhead.** The Trailhead is the area where users can access the trail by road, providing parking and amenities for trail users. In many instances, the Trailhead is the point at which the trail user may first come in contact with the community and the point at which trail user will decide whether or not to venture into the downtown. Therefore, it is imperative that local officials and trail planners in each community work to make the Trailhead a positive and welcoming place.

One of the most important items trail planners and local officials should provide at the trailhead is information about the community. This might include a listing of area businesses, a description of local attractions or historical information. Any description should include at least one photo of the downtown, preferable an image of a bustling downtown with lots of people.

By providing such amenities as water and toilet facilities, the community welcomes visitors, showing hospitality and inviting them to visit the town. Whenever possible, these amenities (see more below) should be available to trail users all year round (or at least when the trail is being actively used). It is also important to consider providing amenities at the trailhead for each user group. For example, each trailhead along the Southern Links Trailway should include a hitching post and water pump for equestrian trail users.

#### *Trailhead Amenities*

- Bathrooms
- Water
- Benches
- Trash Receptacles
- Picnic Tables
- Shelter
- Parking (w/shade)
- Wi-Fi
- Pop Machine
- Directional Signs

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## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

- Welcome Signs
- Trail Map
- Community Information
- Dog Waste Bags
- Hazard Warnings (if needed)
- Bike Rack/Kayak Rack

### *Trailhead Amenities - Bathrooms*

One of the most important amenities for any 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 jurisdictions close their traditional brick-and-mortar bathrooms during the winter months, even if the trail is still being actively used all year round. If year-round access to bathroom facilities is not feasible, local jurisdictions should work to provide portable (and accessible) bathroom facilities.

### *Trailhead Amenities - Signs*

Signs and markers are essential components on any trail system and should be incorporated into local and regional trail planning efforts. *Informational signs* direct and guide users along trails in the most simple and direct manner. *Directional signs* inform the trail user where they are along the trail and the distance to specific destinations and points of interest. *Interpretive signs* offer educational information about the trail and/or the surrounding area and community. *Warning signs* alert trail users to potentially hazardous or unexpected conditions. *Regulatory signs* inform trail users of the “rules of the trail” as well as other rules and regulations.

Whenever feasible, a combination of all the sign types listed above should be provided at each trailhead and major access points in the downtown to convey accurate and detailed information about existing trail conditions, available facilities and nearby downtown amenities. In researching best practices for trailhead signs for this document we found that the *Bikeway and Trail Design Standards and Planning Guidelines*<sup>5</sup> from Fredrick County, Maryland, provided a comprehensive set of recommendations for information about the trail (see Figure 1.1 next page).

<sup>5</sup> Bikeway and Trail Design Standards and Planning Guidelines (2003) Fredrick County Parklands, Fredrick County Department of Parks and Recreation

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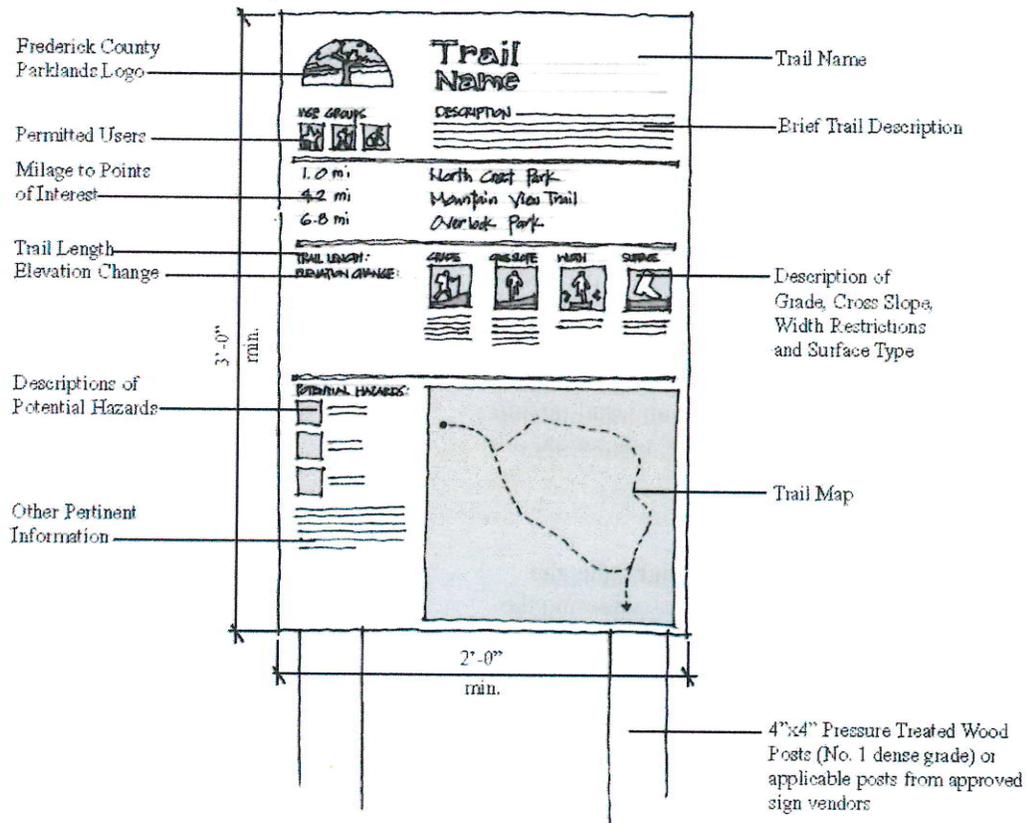


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Whenever possible the style (design, color, materials) of the trailhead sign should reflect the history and/or culture of the community. For multi-jurisdictional trails, the style of the trailhead sign should be consistent in each community and reflective of the history and culture of the entire region. The consistent appearance of the trailhead sign (especially if it includes a logo) can help to reinforce regional and local branding efforts. The trailhead sign should also include the word “welcome” somewhere prominent on the sign.

Figure 1.1



Trailhead sign design should use the Michigan's T



Trailhead sign design should use the Michigan's T



*Trailhead Amenities - 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. 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 enter the town.

Depending on the location of the trailhead and the size of the town, the sign may include a simple base map of the community with icons that identify what types of services the town has (e.g. fork and knife for restaurants). The sign could also include a more 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 mark the trail 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 restroom building or marina office. Business amenity signs may also be viewed by bicycle tourists at key entryways into the town.

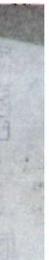
*Trailhead Amenities - Cultural Heritage Signs*

Trailheads can also be an excellent place to display information about the unique historical and cultural aspects of your community. Local officials and trail planners in each community should consider how to incorporate the City's historical or cultural aspects into new signs at the trailhead or in downtown.

*Trailhead Amenities - Art*

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

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### Water Trailheads

The Tip of the Thumb Heritage Water Trail has 44 access points (or trailheads) along the entire trail. The system of water trails that make up the Blueways of St. Clair has around 50 access points scattered throughout St. Clair County. The quality of amenities at these paddling trailheads often depend on its location. For example, a trailhead located in a marina may include large areas for parking, restrooms, showers, and an accessible kayak launch, whereas a trailhead at a rural road ending may only have a small path from which paddlers can access the water. This document is not suggesting a minimum amenities standard at all paddling trailheads. However, urban areas (near downtowns) should have at least one trailhead with an accessible launch and kayak rack/locker and as many amenities as possible (see list on page 19 & 20).

In 2014, the National Park Service developed a guidebook<sup>6</sup> *Prepare to Launch* to assist in the development of canoe and kayak launches. The document provides a comprehensive summary and recommendations for designing kayak launches.

### Accessible Water Trailheads

Guidelines for newly designed, constructed and altered recreation facilities issued by the ADA in 2002 require that that all public boat launches (which include fixed and floating structures of all sizes) comply with ADA Accessibility Guidelines. A copy of ADAAG *minimum* standards for boating facilities is available online through the National Park Service<sup>7</sup> and should be consulted when developing new or re-purposing old launch sites. However, the more holistic and inclusive *Universal Design* concepts should also be considered. Universal Design expert Cindy Burkhour of *Access to Recreation* is an excellent resource for communities throughout the Thumb Region.

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<sup>6</sup> *Prepare To Launch - Guidelines For Assessing, Designing And Building Access Sites For Carry-In Watercraft* (2014) Prepare to Launch! is a joint project of the NPS Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance Program and the River Management Society

<sup>7</sup> Logical Lasting Launches. (2004) National Park Service  
<http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/launchguide/title.pdf>

## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

### Universal Design Concepts - Launch Sites For:

- All people of all abilities
- All Ages
- All Skills
- Independent Use
- Safety
- Intuitive
- Easier to use by everyone together

### Equestrian Trailheads

One of the most important amenities for equestrian trailheads is parking. Parking lots should be shaded and large enough to accommodate large groups with multiple trailers - easy drive-in and drive-out parking lot are preferred. In addition, it can be helpful for the trailhead to include loading and unloading ramps, tie-up areas, fresh water, small corals and accessible ramps. If the trail accommodates equestrian riders in addition to other multi-use activities, it is important to separate these amenities from those used by other trail users - it's not only safer for the horses, but also reduces potential user conflicts.

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

In some instances, it may be more appropriate to place informational signs about downtown businesses (see page 22) at the Portal rather than the Trailhead. Local officials and trail planners should work closely with downtown merchants or organization like the DDA to develop signs that are inclusive (that is, they include all businesses) and are of a size and design that is complimentary to the surrounding landscape and character of the community.

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Portal - Pictures (A) and (B) are good examples of signs that have captured all the local businesses along the White Pine Trail in Ewart and the Little Traverse Wheelway in Petoskey. Picture C shows a less desirable example of a business sign, exclusive to just one business, tacked up along the North Central State Trail in Gaylord.



3. Pathway. The Pathway is the corridor that trail users follow from the Portal to the central business district. Depending on the location of the trail, the Pathway could be just a few block or several miles. If the trailhead is several miles away from the central business district, the Pathway could include a combination of paved shoulders, bike lanes, and/or sidewalks or other pathways.

The Pathway may also 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 or the library. Local officials should continually assess the Pathway for cleanliness, safety, lighting, physical condition and interaction with traffic.

4. Gateway. The Gateway is the point at which trail users enter the 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. It is important to note that points along each major road coming into the central business district will serve as the Gateway for bike tourists. The Gateway area(s) should welcome trail users and visitors into the central business district and be the point where directional signs to individual attractions and businesses within the district begin.

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## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

In general, gateways into the central business districts of each of the communities assessed for this document are undefined, lack distinguishable features and do not include directional signage.

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 facades should also be regularly assessed for best practice (see retail building form later in this document). Additionally, the Center should be assessed on the availability of amenities that help trail users enjoy their experience (i.e., bike racks, outdoor seating at restaurants, ATM machines, free WiFi, free air at gas stations, and public restrooms).

Center: The Center should include amenities that help trail users and bike tourists (both day-trip and overnight) enjoy their experience. Picture (A) shows outdoor seating at a restaurant right at the Gateway into downtown Marine City. Picture (B) shows an internet café in downtown Harbor Beach.



6. Nodes. Nodes are points of interest along or near the Pathway or in the Center that will be visited or utilized by the trail users. Nodes may include businesses that cater to the specific trail user (a kayak rental shop), lifestyle interests of the trail user (a hobby shop or an antique shop), the duration of time the user will spend 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.). Local leaders should continue to identify existing

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and/or potential nodes along each existing and potential pathway into their downtowns.

#### Putting It All Together

Local officials, business owners, volunteers and municipal staff in each community worked together assess and map the connecting elements of their trail-to-town corridor. A summary and map (see example below) of each community assessment can be found later in this document.

#### Connecting Elements Map (Port Austin).

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### Public Amenities

As previously mentioned, another important step in becoming a Trail Town is to have public amenities that support day-trip and over-night trail users and bike tourists. It will be important for each community to have amenities like well-marked and accessible crosswalks and working pedestrian signals, bike racks, kayak lockers, drinking fountains, benches, bike stations and wayfinding signs within their downtown. Many of the coastal communities assessed for this document have a number of public amenities that support trail users and bike tourists - however, gaps remain. Local leaders should continue to develop these types of amenities as resources and funding become available.

The responsibility of some public amenities fall under the authority of regional or state agencies. For example, the County Road Commission oversees and maintains road shoulders and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) oversees crosswalks and traffic signals on state highways. It is imperative that local leaders in each community continually communicate with regional and state agencies about their local Trail Town planning efforts and improvements. One way to ensure their participation is to include their staff members in the local Trail Town steering committee.

In most instances, the local municipality is responsible for providing public amenities. However, the purchase, installation and maintenance of these public amenities is expensive. Local leaders should look for opportunities to partner with stakeholders groups, local business owners, non-profit organizations, and regional community development agencies to share in the cost of providing these essential amenities.

In addition, local officials in each jurisdiction should examine if local zoning regulations inhibit the development of quasi-public amenities. For example, does the community have zoning regulations that do not allow restaurants to offer outdoor seating?

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*Public Amenities - Wayfinding Signs.* Wayfinding signs are one of the most important public amenities local jurisdictions can provide for trail users and bike tourists. Wayfinding signs direct visitors to the primary assets and features of the community, and the local trail systems should be treated as such. A comprehensive wayfinding signage system should include signs located along major thoroughfares and pedestrian-mounted signs on local sidewalks. Wayfinding signs should also be placed on the trail, directing trail users to the central business district.

If there are multiple trails in the community, each trail should be included in the local wayfinding sign. In addition, the name of the trailhead and any identifying trail logo should be included in the local wayfinding sign. Furthermore, the distance to the trailhead (or to the downtown from the trail) should also be included in the wayfinding sign. The distance to the trail in rural areas can be displayed in miles. However, wayfinding signs in urban settings should be displayed in blocks.

Wayfinding Signs - In urban settings, the distance to the trailhead or the downtown should be indicated by the number of blocks in the wayfinding sign. Picture (A) is a wayfinding sign in Omaha, Nebraska. Picture (B) is a wayfinding sign adjacent to the Huron River Water Trail in Rochester Michigan.



## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

*Public Amenities - Cultural Heritage.* Local officials in each community 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 trail itself should be celebrated in the central business district. One way to do this is with public art. A sculpture, symbolic of the community's cultural heritage, could be placed at the trailhead. Another sculpture, symbolic of the trail could be placed in the central business district or near the Gateway.

Picture (A) shows a sculpture of iron workers along the Iron ore Heritage Trail in the Upper Peninsula and Picture (B) shows a sculpture of trail users near the Gateway into downtown in Traverse City.



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. As previously noted, interpretive signs should incorporate a design reflective of a unique cultural aspect of the community.

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*Public Amenities - Bike Racks.* Bike racks not only provide a secure place for trail users to store their bike as they visit the town, but they also support local residents and bike commuters. Although they are located at the trailhead, kayak lockers do the same thing. Although sometimes they are less efficient, decorative bike racks (especially those that incorporate cultural themes into the design) further enhance the image of the community as a Trail Town.

Sometimes, if a bike rack is too elaborate, it can appear to be public art, resulting in lack of use (see Port Huron below). Be sure to engrave a bicycle on the bike rack to denote that it is indeed to be used as a bike rack.

Bike Racks - The bike rack is shown below (A) in Port Huron is hardly used because it is often mistaken for public art. The artistic bike rack shown in downtown Boyne City (B) is engraved with a bicycle denoting it is to be used as a bike rack.



## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

*Public Amenities - Public Transportation.* For many trail users and bicycle tourists, time and distance may limit the likelihood of visiting other communities in the region. Some paddlers may only be comfortable paddling 10 miles over a two-day period, whereas bike tourists may only have enough endurance to peddle 30 miles over a two-day period. However, trail users and bicycle tourists may still like to recreate on other segments of the trail and visit other communities during their stay in the region.

Local leaders should work with regional economic development agencies and transportation agencies to explore opportunities to establish a seasonal “trail transportation” program in which the public transportation agency would transport trail users and their equipment to stops at trailheads in communities throughout the region. This concept may be more feasible in St. Clair County, as it is already served by a robust regional transportation agency, Blue Water Area Transit. Perhaps a similar service could be provided by a private outfitter in Huron and Sanilac Counties?

### **Business Amenities**

The local businesses that will be of interest to the trail user and bike tourist will be primary service based businesses. Trail planners, local officials and regional community development agencies can help local business owners in each community better understand the needs of the trail user and bike tourist. In addition to providing goods and services to trail users and road bikers, 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 public and have “trail special” menu item of drink special. Waiters and hostesses should be able to talk about the trail and describe how to get to the trailheads. Gas stations near trailheads should offer free air. Motels should have trail maps in their lobby and offer bike cleaning stations and a secure bike storage area. Retail establishments should have friendly hours of operation, trail-related merchandise and offer to ship their merchandise to trail tourists’ home town. It is also important that all downtown businesses, especially restaurants, accept credit

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cards - gone are the days of “cash only”. It may be helpful to host “service trail day” in which community service workers are given tours of the trail so they can better describe and recommend it to tourists.

The enhancement of existing businesses and development of new business opportunities are important elements to becoming a Trail Town. Many businesses in the region already provide goods and services geared toward trail users and bike tourists. Hopefully, 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 form of city blocks, the size of the public realm and the architectural elements of the buildings all contribute to the Trail Town/pedestrian-friendly character, sense-of-place and retail viability of a downtown. In addition, the character and pattern of the storefronts and buildings help create a sustainable and thriving retail environment. The following section highlights some “best practices” for the design of buildings and storefronts, as noted by Robert Gibbs in his book, *Principles of Urban Retail, Planning and Development*<sup>8</sup>. The following section is only meant to highlight examples of building form elements in the region that are working and examples of where building form can be improved.

#### Awnings

- Define the first-level storefront
- Reinforce brand
- Brings attention to the business

<sup>8</sup> Gibbs, Robert. *Principles of Urban Retail Planning and Development* John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (2012)

#### Best Practices

- 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 8-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 more than 6 to 8 feet deep and have a pitch of no more than 25-degrees

#### Windows and Doors

- Help advertise goods
- Reinforce building form
- Add interest to pedestrians
- Draw people in to the store
- 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 – 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

#### Signs

- Should be well-designed
- Should be properly scaled
- Should support continuity but encourage individuality

#### Best Practice

- Should be limited to 1 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 and materials should reflect the character of the building

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## Economic Restructuring for Your Trail Town

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

### A. Understanding Your Trail User - The Customer

According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *in any downtown development effort, understanding your customer is one of the most important and central activities local business leaders can undertake*. Often, local officials need formal metrics to justify their budgets or invest in capital improvements. 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 many small communities. A better approach is to get a general sense of the economic impact of trail users by asking local business owners what are trail users buying, where are they staying and where are they eating? A good story about the economic impact of just one trail user can go a long way.

Broad information on the social-economic and lifestyle preferences of trail users can be found in reports from trail user associations (e.g., International Mountain Biking Association). Another way to better understand the characteristics and spending habits of trail users is by surveying them. Many communities have conducted formal trail user surveys to get a better idea of who is on their trail and what kind of experience they are having in the community.

In 2014, the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission administered an on-line survey on the county's website. Survey questions developed by Michigan State University were used to inform the questions on the county survey. At the conclusion of the three month survey period, 189 people had responded. A summary of the results of the county survey (at least those questions that had multiple-choice answers) can be



## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

found in Appendix C. Some of the survey results provide at least a glimpse of who is using the trail systems in St. Clair County. For example, most people who use recreate on trails travel at least two to five miles each time. In addition, about 15% of the trail users love more than 15 miles from any trail. Local leaders, in partnership with regional planning and community development professionals, could re-administer the on-line survey again or conduct a more thorough survey of trail users at the trail, using volunteers. Once the socio-economic and lifestyle preferences of the trail customer base are somewhat better understood, local leaders, regional community development agencies and tourism organizations can begin to make decisions about how to best attract potential trail customers into the community.

### Understanding Your Trail User - A Closer Look at Cycling

In 2014, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources delivered a presentation on bike tourism in which they profiled three basic types of bike tourists, noting their demographics, biking tendencies and spending preferences.

#### 1. The Shoestring Cyclist

Shoestring Cyclists tend to be younger and more self-contained. They will typically ride between 75 and 100 miles per day and prefer low-cost options for lodging and meals, spending no more than \$30 a day. When traveling, Shoestring Cyclists seek campgrounds near town and low-cost access to showers.

#### 2. The Economy Cyclist

Economy Cyclists tend not to be age-specific. They will typically ride between 50 and 90 miles per day and prefer eating their meals in restaurants, spending no more than \$50 per day. The type of lodging preferred is typically dictated by the weather and location. When traveling, Economy Cyclists seek discounts for local tourist attractions, and campgrounds near town or other low-cost lodging options.

#### 3. The Comfort Cyclist

Comfort Cyclists tend to be older (between 50 and 65) and highly educated. They will typically ride less than 50 miles per day and are looking to stay in communities that offer the full vacation experience (beach, shopping, restaurants, full-service

hotel, and museums). The typical Comfort Cyclist has a high amount of discretionary income, on average spending over a \$100 a day.

These three bike tourist profiles are just one example. Due to its proximity to the water, each of the coastal communities is visited by paddlers and boaters. In Millington, the trail is used by equestrians. It will be important to try understand the needs, desires and spending habits of each trail users that travels to the community.

B. Assess 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 a full list can be found in Appendix D. Local leaders should continue to work with regional partners like MSU Extension and the Huron County Economic Development Corporation continually assess if and to what extent their community is providing these goods and services.

C. Encourage Related Business Opportunities. As previously stated, trail users and bicycle tourists 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. Again, regional partners like MSU Extension and the Huron County Economic Development Corporation can be a very helpful partner in helping local business expand to meet new market

D. Assist the Local Business Community. Local leaders and regional partners like the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, MSU Extension and the Huron County Economic Development Corporation have committed to working with local business owners to explore ways to encourage economic restructuring around the regional trail and recreational assets.

One way local and regional leaders can assist local businesses is to develop an “economic gardening” approach to business development issues related to the trail. According to the Allegheny Trail Alliance, *under the economic gardening approach, one or more members of the committee would develop an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the trail-user customer base and the trends in the activity itself.*

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*Then, through informational bulletins and educational sessions, the Trail Town concept is nurtured and grown in the community. Businesses that cater to this customer base will also flourish. The committee may also wish to provide funding to ensure that magazines, books, and publications that provide current information about the trail activity are available in the business section of the local library.*

## Promoting Your Trail Town

The Allegheny Trail Alliance recommends that communities utilize and implement three primary marketing strategies (as outlined in the *Main Street Four-Point Approach*) to create an effective promotional campaign for a Trail Town.

- Establish a Trail Town image for the community
- Hold special events that highlight and celebrate the trail and the community
- Conduct retail promotions to entice people into the downtown

Establish a Trail Town Image. The first component to an effective promotional campaign is to convince local residents, the larger region, and then tourists that you have an active and welcoming Trail Town environment. Most of the Trail Town strategies described in this document are based on drawing in visitors from beyond the local market. However, the full potential of the Trail Town concept may not be realized unless the local and regional population base is aware of it and what it can offer. Local officials and trail/recreation advocates need to make sure local officials and residents (the “community ambassadors”) are aware of their local trail systems and the regional paddling and bike-touring opportunities. Hosting local trail tours and implementing programs like “smart-commute week” are just a couple of ways to build up the trail friendly character of the community and garner local support. Local stakeholder groups and active volunteers can also help build awareness.

Local leaders, in partnership with organizations like the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission and the Blue water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau can help “brand” each community and the region as a Trail Town by developing attractive print marketing materials such as a brochure(s), map, billboards and advertisements.

Digital marketing pieces, including video, can developed for the on-line outlets, like the Discover the Blue website, kiosks and television channel. With these promotional pieces in-hand, these same regional partnerships can gradually work to promote the Trail Town region throughout Michigan, the Midwest and into Canada.

2. Hold Trail Town Events. The second component to an effective promotional campaign is to hold special events within the downtown or near the trail. 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. The Allegheny Trail Alliance notes that annual events held just before trail season can attract potential trail users into your community. Presentations, displays and/or workshops, or a tour of the local trail are examples of activities that could be included in a local event. Harbor Beach does a great job of incorporating a triathlon on the Tip of the Thumb Heritage water trail and into the downtown area.

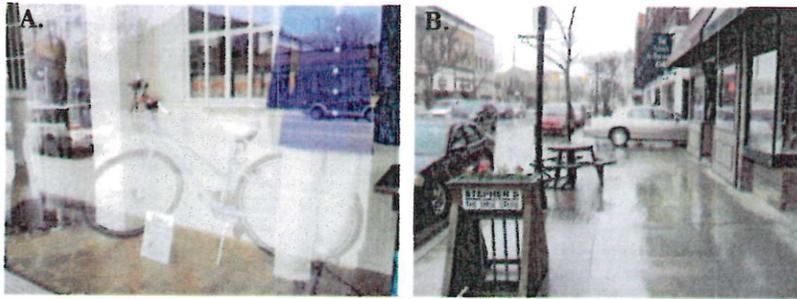
3. Conduct Trail Town Retail Promotions. The third component of an effective promotional campaign is to conduct special retail promotions. Seasonal or special sale promotions backed by cooperative advertising can help drive trail-related revenues to local businesses. As previously mentioned, local officials and trail advocates should work with at least one local restaurant or bar to name a sandwich or drink special after the trail. A restaurant may also be willing to sponsor a weekly trail ride or event.

As previously mentioned, it can be useful for local leaders to work with local groups like the DDA or just a small group of store owners to effectively plan for, conduct and promote any special retail promotions. It should also 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.



## Michigan's Thumb Coast Trail Town Plan

Retail Promotions - Several local retailers in Suttons Bay, Michigan (picture A) have incorporated the bicycle theme in their storefront window displays. In Alpena, Michigan, local merchants sponsor decorative bike racks (picture B) throughout the downtown.



### Retail Promotions - Some Thoughts about Signs

Signs advertising local establishments near or adjacent to the trail can help further strengthen the connection between the trail and downtown. However, it is important to consider that too many signs along the trail may negatively impact the trail user's experience. Inconsistent aesthetics and poor placement of signs can be regarded as an eyesore, negatively impacting the natural character of the trail corridor. In general, business signs along the trail should be a much smaller version of the sign that adorns the front façade of the establishment. In addition, the sign should be made of quality materials and provide direction to the trail user. Too many signs, signs with too much information, and signs with direct advertising should be avoided. These considerations can be addressed in the sign and off-premise sign sections of the local zoning ordinance.

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Marine City, MI Code of Ordinances

## CHAPTER 156: FENCES

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### Section

#### *General Provisions*

- 156.01 Definition
- 156.02 Unlawful construction
- 156.03 Height and material restrictions
- 156.04 Restriction on sharp extrusions
- 156.05 Electrical charge prohibited
- 156.06 Maintenance of nuisances; abatement
- 156.07 Board of Appeals

#### *Permit Provisions*

- 156.20 Required
- 156.21 Application
- 156.22 Fee

### GENERAL PROVISIONS

#### **§ 156.01 DEFINITION.**

For the purpose of this chapter, the following definitions shall apply unless the context clearly indicates or requires a different meaning.

**FENCE.** Any artificial permanent fence, partition, structure or gate erected as a dividing marker, barrier or enclosure.

(Prior Code, § 10-1) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967)

#### **§ 156.02 UNLAWFUL CONSTRUCTION.**

It shall be unlawful for any person to construct or cause to have constructed any fence upon any property within the city, except in accordance with the requirements and restrictions provided in this chapter.

(Prior Code, § 10-2) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967) Penalty, see § 10.99

### **§ 156.03 HEIGHT AND MATERIAL RESTRICTIONS.**

(A) (1) Fences located in residential districts shall not:

(a) Exceed 4 feet in height in the required front yard or setback.

(b) Exceed 4 feet in height in any part forward from the extreme rear line of the dwelling on the lot if the fence is built on the property line or within 5 feet thereof,

(c) Be of closed construction. Closed construction is defined as any construction which obstructs vision to a degree exceeding 50% of the surface area of the fencing.

(2) Fences located in the rear yard on the lot line or within 5 feet thereof may be built to a height of 6 feet without restriction on solid matter or closed construction.

(B) In other than residential districts, fences may be extended to 6 feet in height without restriction as to solid matter or closed construction, unless otherwise provided by the Marine City Zoning Ordinance.

(Prior Code, § 10-3) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967; Am. Ord. 83-8, passed 10-20-1983; Am. Ord. 84-10, passed 6-21-1984) Penalty, see § 10.99

### **§ 156.04 RESTRICTION ON SHARP EXTRUSIONS.**

Except on the top of fences having a height of 10 feet or more, there shall not be attached, affixed or placed any spike, nail, barb, (including barb wire) or other pointed instrument, and all cleaved selvages and sharp points on wire fences shall be removed or bent to eliminate any sharp extrusions.

(Prior Code, § 10-4) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967) Penalty, see § 10.99

### **§ 156.05 ELECTRICAL CHARGE PROHIBITED.**

No fence shall be constructed or maintained which is charged or connected with an electrical current.

(Prior Code, § 10-5) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967) Penalty, see § 10.99

### **§ 156.06 MAINTENANCE OF NUISANCES; ABATEMENT.**

Fences shall be maintained so as not to endanger life or property. Any fence which, through lack of repair, type of construction or otherwise, endangers life or property is hereby deemed a

nuisance. If an unsafe condition exists in regard to a fence, the Building Inspector shall serve on the owner, agent or person in control of the property upon which the fence is located, a written notice describing the unsafe condition and specifying the required repairs or modifications to be made to render the fence safe or requiring the unsafe fence or any portion thereof to be removed, and shall provide a time limit for the repair, modification or removal.

(Prior Code, § 10-6) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967) Penalty, see § 10.99

#### **§ 156.07 BOARD OF APPEALS.**

Upon appeal in writing by any person directly or indirectly affected hereby, the Zoning Board of Appeals of the city may, after a hearing in accordance with the established procedure of the Board, in its sound discretion and in the interests of the public health, safety or welfare of the inhabitants of the community, reduce or remit the requirements of this chapter in individual cases.

(Prior Code, § 10-7) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967)

### **PERMIT PROVISIONS**

#### **§ 156.20 REQUIRED.**

Any person desiring to build or cause to be built a fence upon property within the corporate limits of the city, shall first apply to the Building Inspector for a permit to do so.

(Prior Code, § 10-19) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967)

#### **§ 156.21 APPLICATION.**

Application for a permit under this chapter shall contain any and all information, including drawings, required and necessary for the determination of whether the erection of such fence would be contrary to the provisions of this chapter or the laws of the state.

(Prior Code, § 10-20) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967)

#### **§ 156.22 FEE.**

A fee in the amount established by resolution of the City Commission shall be paid for each permit under this chapter.

(Prior Code, § 10-21) (Ord. passed 1-5-1967)

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### Section 3.08 Fences.

1. Residential Fences. Residential fences are permitted or required, subject to the following:
  - a. Fences on all lots of record in all residential districts, which enclose property and/or are within a side or rear yard, shall not exceed six (6) feet in height. This height shall be measured from the average established grade to the highest point of the fence. No fence, wall, or hedge shall rise over four (4) feet in height in front of the house or in the required minimum front yard, whichever is greater; the measuring technique employed shall be the same as stated above. In addition, no fence, wall, or hedge shall be located within a public right-of-way, occupy a clear vision zone established by Section 3.04, or interfere with visibility from a driveway. The Zoning Administrator is hereby empowered to cause all such obstructions to be removed in the interest of public safety.
  - b. No obscuring fence or wall shall be located within the front yard. Decorative fencing which does not materially impede vision shall be permitted in a front yard provided it does not exceed a height of four (4) feet. Non-obscuring decorative fencing does not include chain-link fencing.
  - c. Fences shall consist of at least one side that is of "finished" quality. The term "finished" refers to the covering of raw material so as to protect it from the natural elements; this includes but is not limited to the painting of metal, and the painting or staining of wood. A finished side of the fence shall be exposed to all adjacent properties. The finished side shall generally be the side without post exposure or with the least post exposure. The Building Inspector shall determine the "finished" side.
  - d. Fences not used for farm operations shall not contain barbed wire, electric current, or charge of electricity. All fences shall be constructed of treated wood, plastic, aluminum, or galvanized metal or similar materials as approved by the Building Inspector and/or Zoning Administrator. Temporary fencing, such as chicken wire or plastic snow fencing, shall be prohibited as permanent fencing material.
  - e. All fences shall comply with the requirements of the all applicable building and zoning codes.
2. Nonresidential Fences
  - a. Fences located in other than residential districts or on the boundary between such districts shall not exceed eight (8) feet in height, measured from the surface of the ground.
  - b. Fences, which enclose public or institutional parks, playgrounds, or public landscaped areas, situated within an area developed with recorded lots, shall not obstruct vision to an extent greater than twenty-five (25) percent of their total area.
  - c. No fence, wall, or hedge shall be located within a public right-of-way, occupy a clear vision zone established by Section 3.04, or interfere with visibility from a driveway. The Zoning Administrator is hereby empowered to cause all such obstructions to be removed in the interest of public safety.
  - d. Fences located within twenty-five (25) feet of an intersection shall not exceed thirty (30) inches in height.
  - e. Fences shall not contain barbed wire, electric current, or charge of electricity. In the case where the security of industrial and commercial property is concerned, the Planning Commission may approve a fence eight (8) feet in height with barbed wire attached to the top of such fence as part of the site plan review process.
  - f. All fences shall comply with the requirements of the Building Code.

### **Section 3.09 Greenbelts.**

1. **Intent.** Landscaping, greenbelts, and screening are necessary for the protection and enhancement of the environment and for the continued vitality of all land uses in the Township. Landscaping and greenbelts are capable of enhancing the visual environment, preserving natural features, improving property values, and alleviating the impact of noise, traffic, and visual disruption related to intensive uses.

Screening is important to protect less-intensive uses from the noise, light, traffic, litter and other impacts of intensive nonresidential uses. The purpose of this section is to set minimum standards for the protection and enhancement of the environment through requirements for the design and use of landscaping, greenbelts, and screening.

2. **Scope of Application.** Except as otherwise specified in the Ordinance, the requirements set forth in this section shall apply to all uses, lots, sites, and parcels requiring site plan review. No site plan shall be approved until said site plan shows landscaping consistent with the provisions of this Section. Furthermore, where landscaping is required, a building permit shall not be issued until the required landscape plan is submitted and approved, and a certificate of occupancy shall not be issued unless provisions set forth in this section have been met or a performance bond has been posted.

In cases where the use of an existing building changes or an existing building is changed or otherwise altered or re-occupied, all of the standards set forth herein shall be met.

The requirements of this Section may be reduced, increased or otherwise altered at the discretion of the Planning Commission, based on the size and shape of the property and based on anticipated impacts on or of the proposed use, the surrounding uses or the anticipated surrounding uses based on the zoning for the surrounding sites.

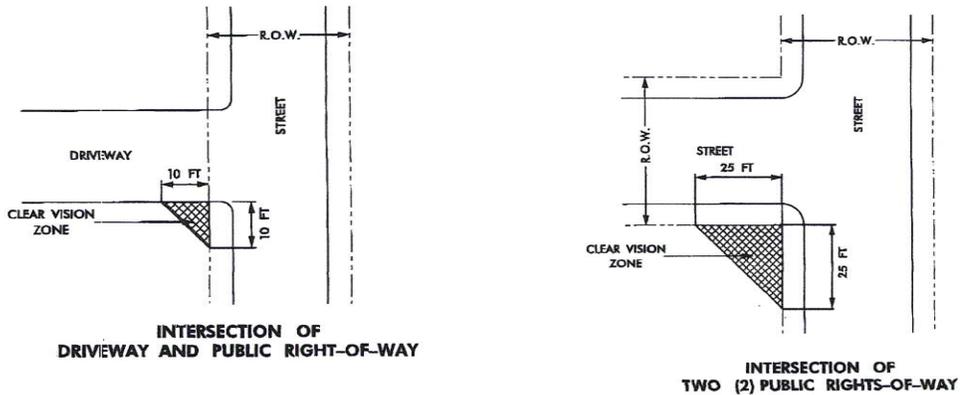
3. **Required on outer perimeter.** Greenbelts shall be required on the outer perimeter of all lots or parcels, extending to the lot or parcel boundary line as defined by Appendix A. Greenbelts shall not be located on any portion of an existing or dedicated public or private street or right-of-way.
4. **Illustrations.** The illustrations set forth in Appendix B to this chapter graphically show the specifications of each greenbelt. Any person wishing to develop upon a parcel of land, shall be required to provide a greenbelt conforming to those set forth in Appendix B between such parcel and any adjacent parcel as specified in Appendix A. If appropriate the Zoning Administrator, after negotiations with the developer, may reduce the greenbelt requirements for residential and commercial uses down one (1) alphabetical letter from that required in Appendix A.
5. **Installation responsibility.** All required greenbelts shall be the responsibility of the proposed higher intensity use and shall be installed prior to the issuance of any occupancy permit providing for such higher intensity use. When a use of lesser intensity is proposed adjacent to an existing higher intensity use that has not provided the required screening, the Planning Commission shall require the lesser intensity use to provide screening. The Commission shall determine the type and extent of screening.
6. **Greenbelt location.** Only one (1) greenbelt shall be required between uses. Where different uses are proposed, the greenbelt shall be located on the lot of the higher intense use. Where similar uses are proposed the required greenbelt shall be centered on the common lot line separating the similar uses. Where the higher intense use exists, a modified greenbelt will be required on the lot with the lower intense use. In the latter case, the modified greenbelt shall be approved by the planning director.

### **Section 3.04 Corner Clearance and Visibility.**

No fence, wall, structure or planting shall be erected, established or maintained on any corner lot which will obstruct the view of a driver of a vehicle approaching the intersection, excepting that shade trees

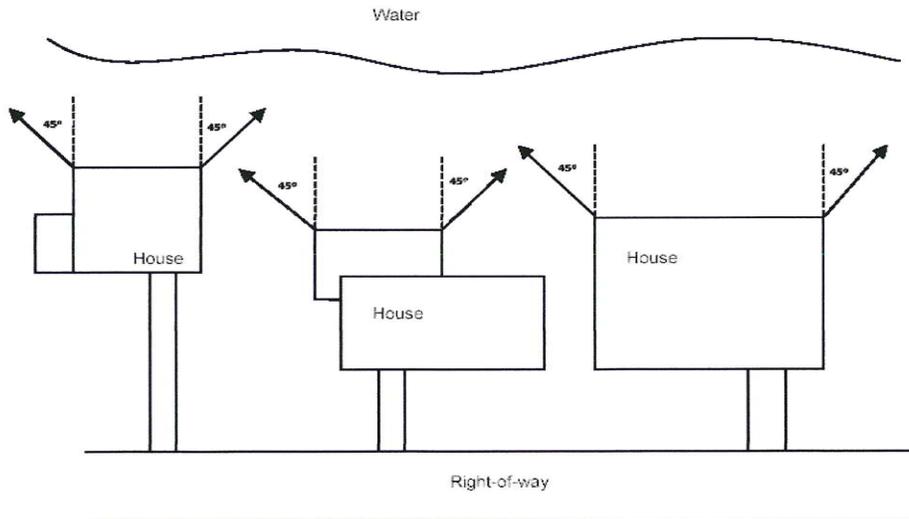
would be permitted where all branches are not less than eight (8) feet above the road level. Such unobstructed corner shall mean a triangular area formed by the street property lines and a line connecting them at points twenty-five (25') feet from the intersection of the street lines or in the case of a rounded property corner from the intersection of the street property lines extended. In the case of driveway/street intersection, the aforementioned technique shall also be used, however a ten (10') foot dimension shall be utilized situated along the driveway and property line. Decorative fencing which would be approved on a corner could include open weave, split rail or similar fencing. Refer to illustration 3-1.

**Illustration 3-1 Corner Clearance and Visibility**



**Unobstructed Yard Space:** For purposes of this Ordinance, it shall include a yard space 45 degrees out from the corners of the main exterior wall most parallel to the water, void of all buildings, watercraft, or structures (other than a flag pole, bird house or bird feeder). Grass, sod, shrubs, hedges and similar landscaping shall be permitted provided they do not create a physical or visual barrier over three (3) feet in height. Deciduous trees shall be permitted provided the trees are pruned of branches to a minimum of eight (8) feet from the base. Fences, walls or similar barriers may be permitted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Please refer to illustration 2-8

**Illustration 2-8. Unobstructed Yard Space**



**Interpretation of Section 3.08 – paragraph 1b (Fences)**

December 18, 2008 – The Clay Township Zoning Board of Appeals interprets Clay Township Zoning Ordinance #126 Section 3.08 (1b) to mean chain link fencing is prohibited in the front yard.

**Interpretation of Section 3.08 – paragraph 1b (Fences)**

December 19, 2013 – The Clay Township Zoning Board of Appeals interprets Clay Township Zoning Ordinance #126, Section 3.08 (1b) to mean for lots which have an accessory building in front (roadside) of the main building, no obscuring fence or wall shall be located in the space between the public right of way and the nearest point of the accessory building.