



# TRAIL TOWNS

GUIDELINES AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

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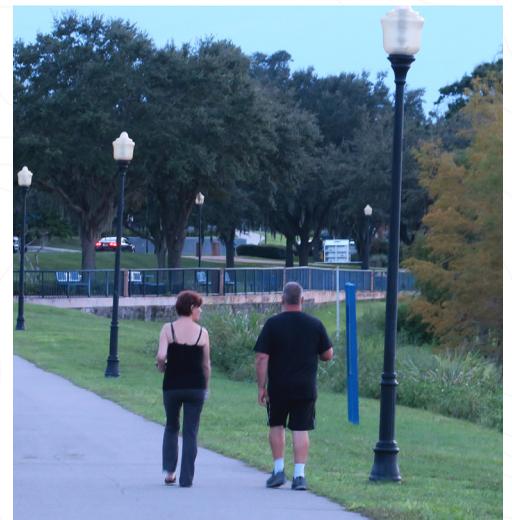
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## What is a Trail Town?

A Trail Town in Florida is a community located along or in proximity to one or more long-distance non-motorized recreational trails. Whether on a paved or unpaved multi-use trail, paddling, equestrian or hiking trail, recreational users can venture off the main path to enjoy the services and unique heritage of the nearby community. The town is a safe place where both town residents and trail users can walk, bike, jog etc., find the goods and services they need, and easily access both the trail and the town. In such a town, the trail is an integral and important part of the community.

A Trail Town is a vibrant destination where people come together. A Trail Town is a friendly place that encourages trail users to visit and welcomes them with warm hospitality. It may have outdoor equipment shops, restaurants, a grocery store, local shops and lodging. It has wide sidewalks, clean streets, bike racks and benches at convenient locations. The trail meets the needs of both the recreational users and the town's residents. Residents use the trail to access work, schools, parks and shops.

Trail Towns are not stand-alone communities; they are linked by a long-distance trail corridor. Trail users may be passing through a town on a day trip or longer journey, or may park and access other trails, such as a paddling trail. Trail users want to explore interesting and vibrant places in their travels and will need services that the town provides. Basic characteristics of a successful Trail Town include:

- Incentives to get trail users off the trail to explore the town
- Clear and safe connections between the town and trail
- Readily available information about the town
- Businesses that offer goods and services to meet the needs of trail users
- Festivals and events are held that draw people to the trail who may not normally be trail users
- Safe connections to work, schools, parks and shopping for residents
- Successful relationships with neighboring communities that promote the entire long-distance trail as a tourist destination

## Why Should Your Community Become a Trail Town

Imagine a town where trail based tourism is a driving economic force that shapes and sustains the surrounding communities. A place where trail users have every type of facility and comfort they could need to have an unforgettable experience. A place where the economy thrives because of the trail community, and the trail thrives because of the town's residents and businesses embrace it. A place where trails connect people to nature, citizens to their communities and towns to neighboring towns. This is the vision of a Trail Town.

Any trail, long or short, can be an economic asset to a community. Trails provide free recreation for people of all ages and fitness levels and offer opportunities to enjoy nature or local history. The Trail Town program, within the Office of Greenways and Trails recognizes towns that connect to long-distance destination trails. Trails that attract travelers from outside the local community and are not used solely by nearby residents. Studies show that the longer a trail is, the farther people will travel to visit it, the longer they will stay, and the more money they will spend. Studies show that a day-user on a trail will spend four times the amount of a local user, and is likely to make a return trip to the Trail Town. An overnight visitor may spend twice the amount of a day-user.

This manual is intended to guide you as you walk through a self-assessment process and to help you identify what your town needs to become a Trail Town. It will also provide guidance on how to work with or create a local group focused on downtown revitalization and give you the tools and ideas as you start this process. This guide is designed to assist managers and local leaders in these communities make the most of the economic opportunities that arise from trail users coming into and passing through their towns. The goal is to bring forth ideas that will help you transform your community into an unforgettable tourist destination, and at the same time, make your town a place where local businesses and residents thrive.

As you take this journey, remember that your town has its own personality and one size doesn't fit all. This guide is meant to offer suggestions to get you started. Adjust and modify these ideas in ways that best work for your town.



*“Our downtown merchants are excited and beginning to see the increase in their businesses by those trail users who eat, shop and enjoy our unique offerings.” Titusville Mayor Walt Johnson*

*“Our downtown has thrived around the trail and attracted folks of all ages and abilities. We like to think of the trail as the main artery of our community.” Dunedin Mayor Julie Ward Bujalski*

# Is Your Town a Trail Town?

## Self-Assessment

This self-assessment will assist your community in understanding the basic characteristics of a successful Trail Town and help you complete the application to become recognized as a Trail Town through the Office of Greenways and Trails.

## Trail

### Multi-use, non-motorized long-distance trail or a connecting trail into the larger system:

- What types of trail(s) are within two miles of your town? Unpaved - hiking, biking, paddling, equestrian Paved - shared use non-motorized This is important because you can effectively cater to the specific needs of your trail users.
- How long are the trails?
- Are they a part of a regional or state trail system?
- Do trails close to your town provide connections into a larger system? How long are the trails?
- Is there more than one trail or type of trail that passes through your town?
- Are the trail users likely to be day travelers?
- Are the trail users likely to be long-distance or overnight travelers?
- Will the trail users need:
  - Bike rentals or bike shops?
  - Kayak rentals or paddling equipment?
  - Lodging?
  - Restaurants?
  - Other supplies before they continue?

### Neighboring trails:

- What other types of trails are within five miles of your community?
- Distance of other trails to the central downtown area?

### Excellent and well-maintained trail conditions:

The trail(s) should be easy to use, safe and well-maintained. Maintenance is important if you want trail users to return to your town and if you want to attract more visitors. A trail user's visit should be enjoyable, safe and scenic.

- Is the trail in good condition?
- Who manages the trail(s)?
- Do you have a good working relationship with the trail manager(s)?

## Accessibility

A successful Trail Town has a trail near enough to the central downtown to be readily accessible by trail users. If the trail does not run directly through downtown, there should be a clearly identified path with distance information that leads trail users into town. Businesses and residents should welcome trail users and provide trail friendly services.

### Trail traverses the central downtown or is within two miles:

Depending on the type, a trail can be further removed from your downtown and still be accessible. With a biking trail, for example, a two-mile side trip to your town is not out-of-the-way. However, a hiking or paddling trail which is two miles away can be taxing.

- How far away from downtown is each trail type?
- If your town is a larger urban area, how far are essential services from the trail?

### Clearly mark the paths and distances from the trail to the central downtown area:

It should be clear to trail users that your town is located nearby. The farther removed the trail is, the more important directional signage will be. Wayfinding signs should describe the distance to your town and provide clear directions.

- Is there a path connecting the trail to your downtown?
- Is there directional signage guiding trail users to the town center?



*“The Trail Town designation confirmed our planning efforts and brought credibility to Inverness as a welcoming community. Our goal is to be the hub of activity on the Trail and be inviting to cyclists.” Inverness City Manager Frank DiGiovanni*

*“We are a bicycle / walkable community with kayak and canoe rentals and guided tours. Having the Florida Trail Town designation will only enhance our efforts to provide the best possible experience for our visitors.” Everglades City Mayor Howie Grimm*

- Is more wayfinding signage needed on the trail?

### **Facilities and amenities are convenient to trail users:**

Visible businesses benefit economically from trail users. Ideally, goods and services are located at or near the trail's entrance into the town. Trail users desire goods and services which are readily available.

- Where and what kind of trail-friendly goods and services are in town?
- What distance are each service provider from the trail?

### **Business owners and citizens are friendly and welcoming to trail users:**

Trail users may stay longer, make a return trip and contribute to tourism and the town's economy when they feel welcomed and well informed. It is beneficial when both business owners and citizens are well informed about the trail, the town, and the various businesses offerings and amenities.

- Do businesses offer incentives to trail users?
- Do businesses have maps and information available?
- Can business owners and citizens answer questions about the town and the trail?

## **Town Participation**

A common denominator of a successful Trail Town is a champion. The champion could be a town citizen, group of citizens, local government or non-profit organization or some combination. Upon receiving a Trail Town designation, the champion(s) can coordinate information with the participating businesses and citizen support groups; network with neighboring towns; and, facilitate trail events and marketing.

### **Community Support Organization or local trail advocacy groups:**

The champion(s) can help to assess the town's potential to become a Trail Town.

- Does your town have a champion?
- Is there someone who can coordinate and organize a Trail Town assessment?
- Is there an advocacy group that can create a Trail Town strategy?

### **Annual trail festivals or events:**

Events which take place on or near the trail (a race, a fundraiser, etc.), can be a draw to people who may not normally be trail users. Events boost the overall Trail Town economy via purchases from trail users and new visitors.

- What events are held on or near the trail?
- What is the estimated attendance?
- How many different types of events are held?
- How often do events occur?

### **Trail Town plan or local development plan which includes trails:**

A written plan with attainable goals is recommended for a Trail Town. A specific Trail Town Plan is not a requirement, although it is encouraged as a best practice.

- Are trails included in some type of a local development plan for the town?
- What type of plan involving trails is currently available?
- Do you have a specific *Trail Town Plan* or strategy?

### **Coordinate with neighboring communities:**

As a Trail Town, proximity to a long-distance trail or connecting your town into a larger trail system is important. Coordinating with your neighboring communities can bring greater economic benefits by bringing in more trail tourism. Your neighbors can help organize and promote events.

- How are you working with your neighboring communities to promote the trail(s)?

- Are you working with others in your region to promote trails and trail events?

## Businesses

Trails have the potential to provide a significant economic boost to local businesses. Becoming a Trail Town provides a unique opportunity to take full advantage of the economic opportunities offered to your town through trails. After evaluating the types of trail users coming into your town, determine if your town offers the necessary goods and services they need.

### **Provide necessary and specific goods and services to trail users:**

Partner with your local chamber of commerce, economic development council, county/city commissioner's office or other relevant entities to discuss how to provide goods and services to trail users.

- What are the current businesses in your town which serve trail users?
- Are there gaps in the goods and services offered?
- How will those gaps be filled?
- Is the chamber of commerce or another group involved in developing a Trail Town economic strategy?

### **Coalition of local businesses that continue to grow and support the trail:**

Include businesses in the group that are advocating for the trail or create a central organization of businesses to assist with the development of the Trail Town economy. This group can formulate a plan for economic growth and expansion, agree on incentives and discounts to offer trail users, organize business participation in events, and coordinate with trail advocates, neighboring towns and other businesses.

- Does your Trail Town have a central business organization?
- Can you identify existing business partners with the potential to participate in developing the Trail Town?

### **Marketing to and discount for trail users as an**

### **incentive to come into town:**

Give trail users a reason to come to your town by offering them incentives at local businesses. Kiosks on the trail can include advertisements for local businesses, special offers for trail users or coupons for participating businesses. A small discount (10%-20%) can motivate trail users to visit or stay in your town.

- What incentives do businesses offer to trail users for goods and services?

## Amenities

A Trail Town is a friendly place which encourages trail users to visit and welcomes them with warm hospitality. Trail users want to explore interesting and vibrant places and while they travel, they will need certain goods and services.

### **Bike racks, boat docks and launches, hitching posts, etc.:**

Trail Towns often provide areas for storage of trail user's equipment while they are in town. This makes their stay much easier and enjoyable.

- Are there bike racks conveniently located?
- Is day-use parking available? If not, how will you accommodate trail users?
- Are there kayak launches and ways to secure kayaks, canoes and paddleboards?
- What other trail amenities are offered in your town?

### **Reasonably priced food with local influences:**

Give trail users an affordable taste of your town. Reasonably priced food is necessary and having local influences makes it all the better. Make sure that these restaurants are family friendly. Are restaurants:

- Easily located and accessible?
- Trail-user friendly?
- Family-friendly?
- Affordable?
- Offering local influences?

## **Easily accessible drinking fountains or potable water sources:**

This is crucial to the trail user's health and safety. Water should be available near or on the trail. If there are not water fountains near the trail, consider having water jugs or free bottles of water within businesses for trail users. This is a friendly way to invite trail users into the town and into businesses.

- Are public potable water sources readily available?
- Do businesses offer free water in bottles or access to water?

## **Food that can be purchased and easily packaged for trail use:**

Long-distance trail users require stopping points to refuel.

- Are there trail-friendly stores where trail users can restock?
- Are there stores or restaurants that offer prepared meals for trail users?
- Are food, water and other supplies easily accessible from the trail or town center?

## **Information**

Once your trail users are in town, having signage, maps or flyers available can direct them to businesses. This is a great way to inform trail users about the attractions and events your town has to offer. Make navigating your town easy for trail users.

## **Information available within the central business district:**

Provide information about what your town has to offer within the central business district. This is a great way to encourage trail users to enjoy all that your town offers and it promotes return trips.

- Do businesses keep free informational pamphlets and event flyers in their stores?

## **Safety**

Trail users want to feel safe and protected both on the trail and within your town.

## **Safe and navigable downtown business district and amenities:**

The town is well-lit, has wide sidewalks, protected bike lanes and crosswalks.

- Does your downtown area feel safe?
- Is it easy to navigate around town?
- Is your town family-friendly?
- Has your town reviewed or adopted the Florida Complete Streets guidelines?
- Is safety addressed in your current local development or Trail Town Plan?

## **Law enforcement is familiar with the trail terrain, length, and town:**

If an emergency occurs on the trail, first responders should be familiar with the trail and be able to reach trail users quickly.

- Are responders and law enforcement familiar with where the trails are located?
- Do the trails have access points for emergency vehicles?
- Does your town have law enforcement visible on the trails?

## **Medical services for trail users:**

Depending on what type of trail is near your town, trail users might need specific types of medical services.

- For mountain bike trails, you may need emergency medical services with off-road vehicles.
- For paddling trails, you may need a rescue boat.
- For hiking trails, you may need a golf cart or universal terrain vehicle to pick up injured or stranded hikers.
- What type of medical services and equipment for trail users are available?

# Trail Town Questionnaire

Use the Self-Assessment to assist with completing the questionnaire.

## Trail

What types of trails connect to or are located near your town? (hiking, biking, paddling, shared use non-motorized, multi-use, equestrian, etc.)

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List any neighboring trails and their proximity to your town.

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Who maintains your trail(s)? Please identify each trail and the manager.

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List types of trail users are on the trails (day use, long distance pass through, overnight, etc.) Can trail users refill supplies and repack their bags to continue their journey? Describe how your town accommodates these trail users.

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## Accessibility

How close is the trail to your town? Is there easy access from the trail into the business district? Please describe.

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Can trail users easily recognize that your town is near the trail? Is there direct signage on the trail leading into your town? Please describe.

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What kinds of amenities are directly at or near the trail entrance into your town?

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Are your business owners and citizens aware that there is a trail near your town? Are they well informed about the trail? If not, what steps will you take to accomplish these goals?

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## Town Participation

Do you have a trail-oriented Community Support Organization or a local trail advocacy group? If so, please identify them. If not, please describe who has expressed interest in supporting the community by becoming a Trail Town.

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What events take place on or near your trail? Please specify the purpose of the event, local participation, who hosts it, and how often it occurs.

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Do you have a Trail Town plan or a local development plan that includes trails? Please describe.

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Describe the citizen initiatives in your town that foster and maintain trail growth and traffic.

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Describe any efforts that have been made to coordinate with neighboring communities for events and trail connectivity.

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## Businesses

Do businesses provide goods, services and incentives to trail users? Please list the name of the business, the owner and the goods and services and incentives provided.

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**For each of the following, list the contact person and their telephone number:**

Chamber of Commerce:

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Visitor, Tourism or Economic Development Council:

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Mayor or City Council or City Commissioner's Office:

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Does your town have a coalition of local businesses that support the trail? Please describe. If not, please list which businesses you have contacted to support the Trail Town.

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What kind of discounts, deals, or special packages are offered to trail users?

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## Amenities

List any amenities such as bike racks, boat dock and launches, hitching posts, etc. provided in your town. Describe any other planned amenities that will be provided.

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List the restaurants near your trail that cater to trail users. Describe types of food, distance from the trail, and incentives offered.

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List overnight accommodations available to trail users and any plans for expanding these options. Describe the types of accommodations (hotel, campground, bed and breakfast, Air B&B, etc.). Include any special rates or packages offered for trail users.

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List all water fountains/spigots available for trail users and their distance from the trail.

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Can food be purchased and easily packaged for trail use? Please list all locations and their distance from the trail.

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## Information

Is there clear signage and wayfinding on the trail with information about the town? Please describe.

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Describe directional signage leading from the trail into town.

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Describe signage in the town with information about amenities.

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Describe information or other material that businesses have about what your town offers. Please list participating businesses.

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## Safety

Check the boxes if correct:

- YES  NO  Does your town have wide sidewalks (10-12')?
- YES  NO  Does your town have protected bike lanes?
- YES  NO  Does your town have crosswalks?
- YES  NO  Is your downtown business district well-lit?
- YES  NO  Is your downtown business district safely navigable by foot or bicycle?

Are your law enforcement officers and first responders familiar with the trail location, terrain and length? Please describe the extent of their knowledge and any training they have received in this matter.

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For each of the following, list your contact person and their telephone number.

Fire Department:

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Police Department:

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Medical Services:

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List all medical services available to trail users, including specialized equipment, specialized training and facilities.

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## Statement of Intent

It is the intent of \_\_\_\_\_ (name of community, town, city etc.) to recognize this community as a Trail Town. By execution of this consent, the undersigned confirms the community's desire to participate in the Office of Greenways and Trails' Trail Town program.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Signature of community leadership]

Mail or e-mail to:

Office of Greenways and Trails

Department of Environmental Protection

3900 Commonwealth Blvd., Mail Station 795

Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

[Officeofgreenwaysandtrails@fldep.gov](mailto:Officeofgreenwaysandtrails@fldep.gov)

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