



TOMPKINS PRIORITY TRAILS STRATEGY
A VISION FOR NETWORKED TRAILS
IN TOMPKINS COUNTY

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I am here to tell you about the Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy, a vision for developing Tompkins County's potential for outstanding trail-based recreation and transportation.

Origin:
Tompkins County Parks and Trails Network



So, why did we put this together?

Back in the fall of 2011 a group of local folks working on trails first got together at the Finger Lakes Trails and Greenways Conference. At that time development of most multi-use trails in the county was stalled in some way. The group kept meeting and honed in on this paper as a way to advance the development of priority trails which hold the potential to be linked into a countywide network. We have worked on behalf of the group to pull together information on all of the trails about who is involved, the current status of development, barriers, and key actions.

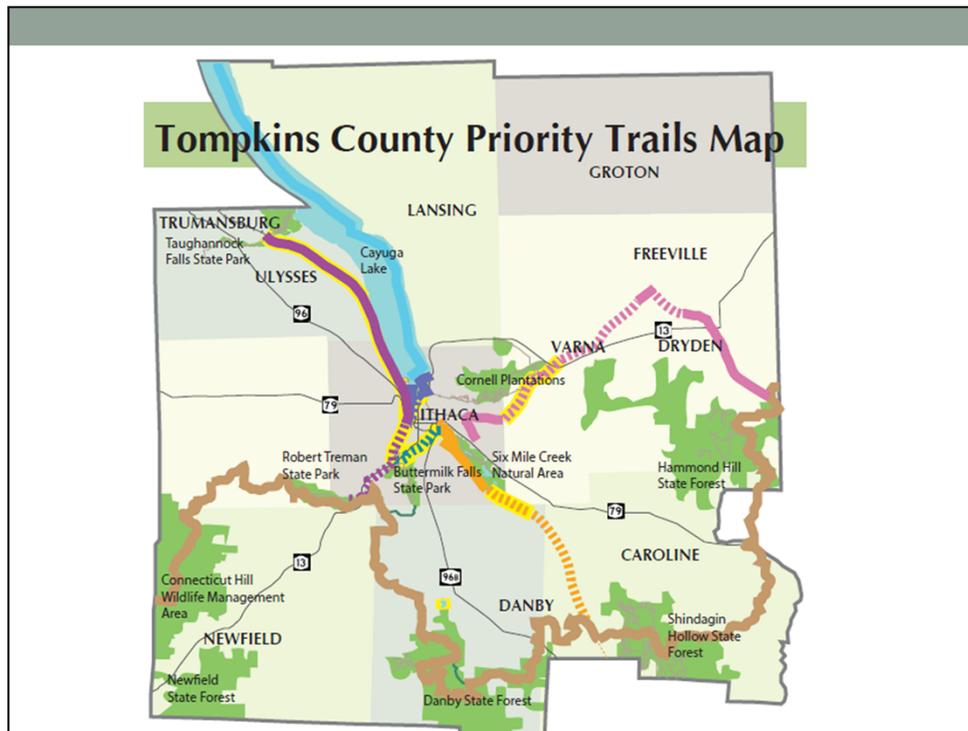


What can we do collectively in the next 2-5 years to develop our community's potential for multi-use trail and thru-hiker trail development?

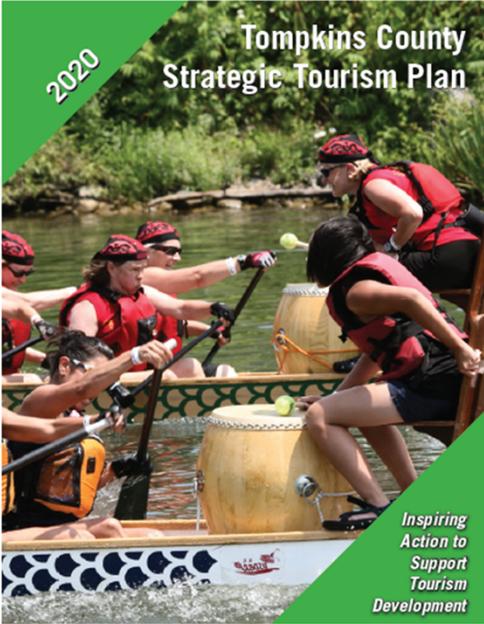
The paper works to answer this question:

What can we do collectively in the next 2-5 years to develop our communities potential for multi-use trail and thru-hiker trail development?

It establishes a shared focus on a small number of key actions that are short-term focused, feasible, and critical to achieving a vision of a connected county-wide trail network. In all, we identified 15 key actions to advance the development of 5 trail corridors and 8 actions to sustain the network.



By focusing on short term actions, several trail segments that are part of the big future vision are identified as areas for future action. So, its going to take longer than the 5 year time-frame of this strategy to fully implement the big vision, BUT the key actions in the strategy will move us significantly towards having 120 miles of continuously-connected trail in Tompkins County with 69 miles on the pedestrian only Finger Lakes Trail and 51 miles on multi-use trails - including the Black Diamond Trail, Cayuga Waterfront Trail, Gateway Trail, South Hill Recreation Way and Ithaca-Dryden Trail.



2020 Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Goal

Expand outdoor recreation and other tourism related to our outstanding natural amenities: Cayuga Lake, gorges and waterfalls, trails, parks and natural areas.

This complements a number of other historic and recent local planning efforts, not the least of which are a number of local Municipal Plans.

It also supports implementation of the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan, Tompkins County Tourism Strategy and the Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council's Long Range Transportation Plan.

I have had the privilege to work on this as the County's Tourism Coordinator to help advance one of the Critical Actions from the 2020 Strategic Tourism Plan.

Multi-Use Trail Benefits

- Tourism and Economic Development
- Quality of Life and Livability
- Public Health
- Environment and Conservation
- Transportation

What can our community gain by developing this trail network?

Multi-use trails have real benefits which have been demonstrated in other communities, that we are on our way to achieving here.

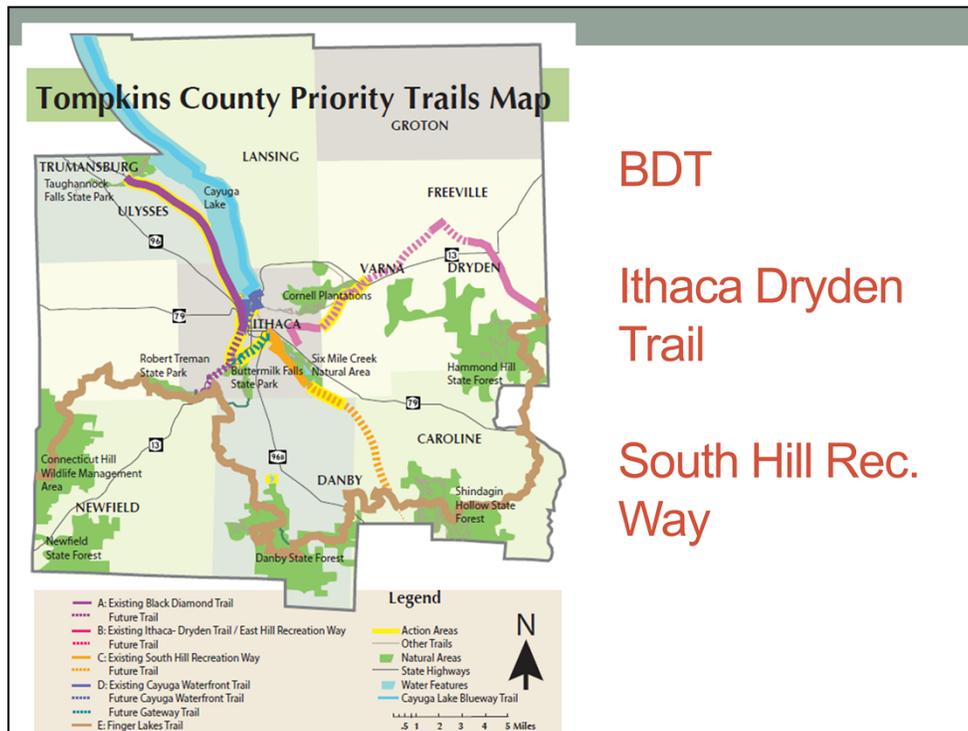
We touch on these a little bit in the paper; they can support a variety of shared community goals around tourism and economic development, quality of life, public health, the environment, and transportation.

Tourism and Economic Development



With the destination-quality multi-use trail system that we can develop here, we can attract more of the 100 million American bicyclists and 6 million Americans who cross-country ski.

In real numbers, annual visitor revenues generated in comparable communities hosting similar quality trails is between \$1.2 million and \$5 million. In Tompkins County, this represents about a 3% increase in annual visitor spending.

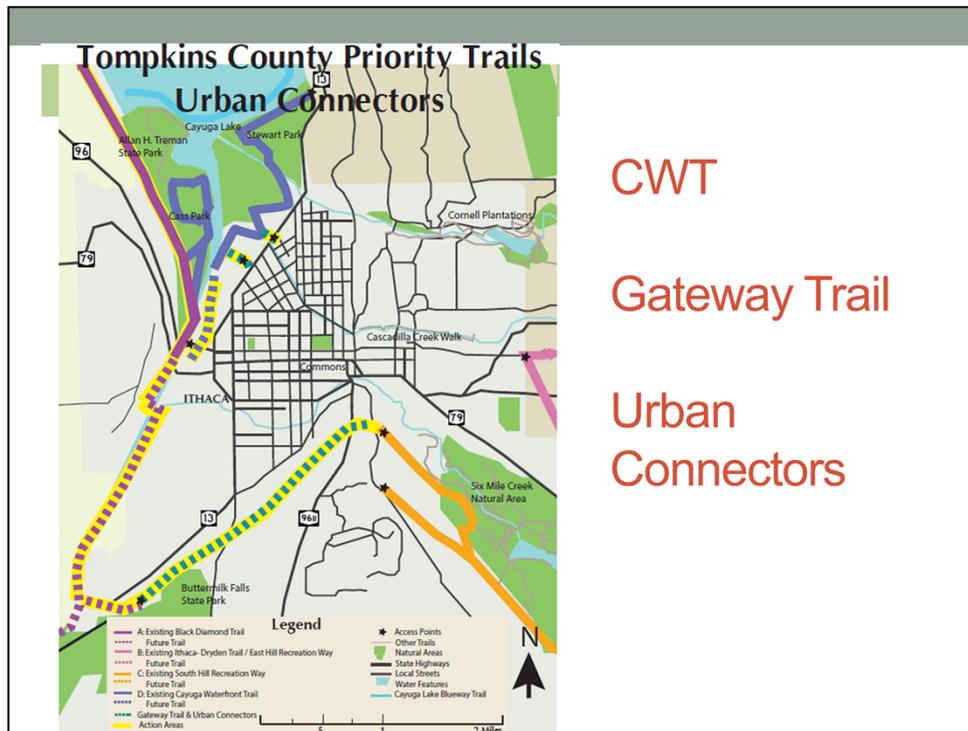


What specifically will it take?

For the Black Diamond Trail, it means supporting the existing collaborative work to complete the Northern section between Cass Park and Taughannock Falls State Park which we expect we will be able to celebrate the opening of next year. It also means supporting the City and State Parks to identify a funding strategy and project management plan for the section of the Black Diamond Trail connecting Buttermilk Falls State Park to the Waterfront Trail at Floral Avenue.

For the extension of the Ithaca-Dryden trail it means supporting the Town of Dryden and its partners to address concerns of the DEC game farm to allow the trail to be extended to Varna along with former rail bed.

For the extension of the South Hill Recreation Way to Banks Road in Brooktondale, it means developing accommodations for a landowner adjacent to the eastern terminus of the existing rec. way and supporting discussions by the four towns through which extension would pass about how the trail would be managed.



Completing and linking trail segments within the urban core will also be critical to providing a connected network. Key actions in the urban area include:

1. Staying committed to the completion of the Cayuga Waterfront Trail,
2. Supporting the development of the Gateway Trail from Buttermilk Falls State Park, up through the Emerson site to connect with the South Hill Rec Way.
3. And identifying and improving on-street and on-sidewalk connections between trails through the city.



The pedestrian-only Finger Lakes Trail is a unique county and regional resource which we can collectively continue to support and improve by securing protection and buffers for the trail corridor and developing a major Finger Lakes Trail Gateway in Tompkins County to enhance public access.

Sustaining the Network

1. Maintenance
2. Friends groups
3. Accessibility
4. Wayfinding and interpretive signage
5. Marketing
6. Formal Trail Advisory Board?
7. Encourage endorsement/recognition
8. Links to nearby attractions and services



This Strategy also identifies eight key actions to sustain the network. These are: ensuring appropriate funding for maintenance, supporting “Friends of Trails” groups, pursuing accessibility improvements, providing for wayfinding and interpretive signage, promoting the trail network to residents and visitors alike, establishing a formal role for a trail advisory group, encouraging partners to officially recognize the strategy, and developing trail link to attractions near the trail. Many of these are being pursued and others will need to be advanced incrementally as funding decisions and opportunities come forward.



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On Behalf Of:

- Tompkins County Parks and Trails Network

So, what does it mean for you to accept this strategy tonight:

First, you are not committing the County to specific future investment.

What you are doing is:

- Signaling support for this vision of a connected countywide trail network.
- Saying, “Yes, these are our shared priorities for trail development and we understand that these are the key short-term actions needed to move collectively towards this big vision.”
- And, providing encouragement for the variety of efforts being undertaken by municipalities in Tompkins County, state parks, and many other partners to implement these key actions.

Thank you.