

# Trail Planning

Arrowhead Regional Development Commission



Recreational trails have many important benefits, both for communities and for individual users. They contribute to the quality of life, they contribute to local economies, build pride and put places “on the map”. They offer a wide range of rewards, physically, mentally and emotionally, many of which are directly transferable into both work and home environments.

This trail planning guide provides the trail enthusiast, local government authorities and community groups with information on how ARDC plans and develops recreation trails. It describes the trail planning process in a ‘step by step’ format.

This guide outlines the importance of good planning in trail development, to ensure that trails are well designed and supports the community’s desires.

## The Trail Planning Process

### DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 1) Establishment of a steering committee
- 2) Local government endorsement
- 3) Review of existing trail plans/inventory
- 4) Develop a project brief
- 5) Community involvement/input

### DECISION

Reconsider, or proceed with the plan

### FEASIBILITY STUDY

- 6) Management and maintenance plan
- 7) Concept design & cost estimates
- 8) Financial viability and funding sources
- 9) Recommendations and implementation plan

### FINAL DECISION

Implement, amend, or abandon the trail plan

### Step 1: Establishment of a Steering Committee

A steering or advisory committee will be formed to help manage and coordinate the planning process. The committee will provide a focal point for the key individuals who are essential for the trail project to proceed.

The committee will represent a wide spectrum of community interests, including Mn/DNR, trail user groups, residents, business owners, chamber members and local government representatives. A wide representation will result in more effective and successful trail planning and greater community ownership of the final project.

# Trail Planning

## Step 2: Local Government Endorsement

While local government may have been involved in discussions about the project, it is valuable to gain an official endorsement for the project. Endorsement of a project can include a resolution endorsing the project, or take the broader agreement concerning the development and maintenance of the trail. In either case, it is preferable to gain support for the project. The overall success of the trail project will be aided by developing strategic alliances and effective partnerships.

## Step 5: Community Involvement/ Input

As with many community projects it is best to involve the public and interested stakeholders as much as possible. Ideally the steering committee will have developed a clear message regarding the proposed trail and will be prepared to answer any questions from the public.

## Step 3: Review of Existing Trail Plans and Inventory

Prior to developing the trail proposal an inventory of trails in the area as well as trail generators, and trail facilities will be identified and mapped.



The following are highlights on how trails can benefit the community:

- Valuable local recreation resource
- Commuting option
- Economic benefits to the community
- Health and personal well being
- Promote an understanding of our natural environment
- Educational tool
- Local, state, regional links

## Step 4: Develop Project Brief/ Proposal

After the first steering committee meeting a clear project brief will be written so everyone involved in the project will have a clear understanding of the proposed project. The project brief will include the following:

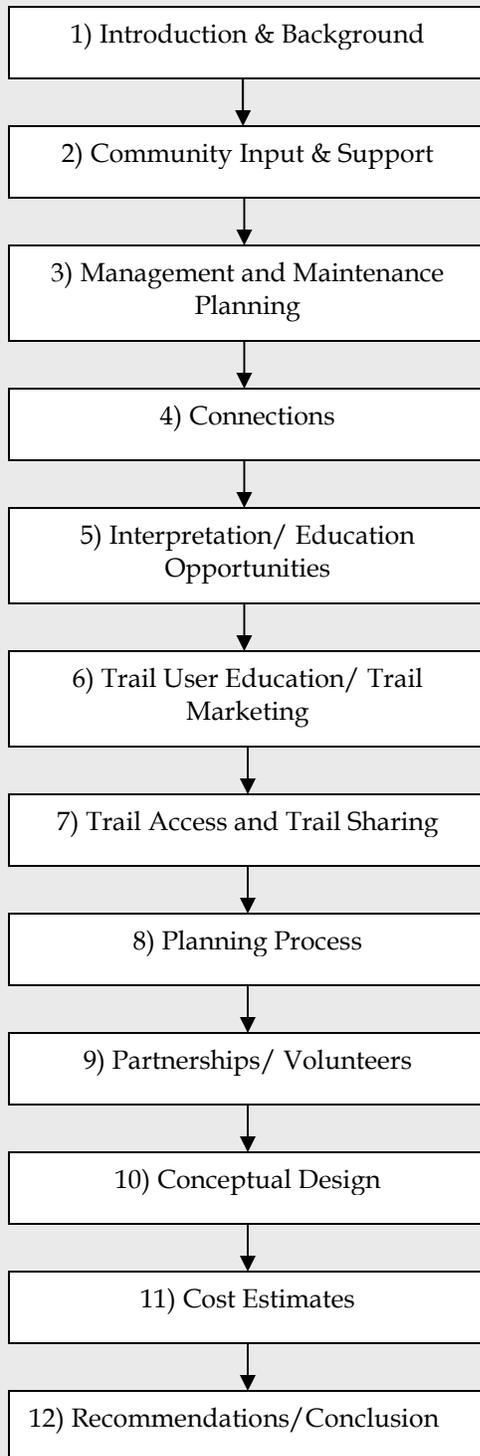
- The background and perceived need for the trail;
- The overall trail purpose, aims, objectives;
- Intended user groups;
- Timing and possible stages of development;
- Any background studies or reports relating to the proposed trail; and
- The public input process.

## Decision

After these first steps have been taken a decision on whether to proceed further with the trail proposal, and spend further time, energy, and money on a feasibility study will need to be made.

# Trail Planning

## FEASIBILITY STUDY SUMMARY



## Feasibility Study

It is easier to attract funds and other support for a trail if a well researched feasibility study is undertaken. A feasibility study will refine the concept of a trail and then determine if it is practical and financially feasible. The key components of the feasibility study are listed in steps 6 to 10.

The elements that should be included in a trail feasibility study depend on the size and scope of the project, but the following topic headings give a guide:

**Introduction and Background:** How did the project come about? What is the proposed location? Is there a need for the trail?

**Community Input and Support:** Can it be demonstrated that the trail has support from the community?

**Management and Maintenance:** How will usage and maintenance issues be addressed? How will public access and operation be ensured in the long term? Who will pay for ongoing maintenance and operational costs?

**Connections:** How will the trail provide linkages to neighborhoods, community facilities, and other trails?

**Interpretation/ Education Opportunities:** Where will interpretive sites along the trail be located? How can the trail be developed to serve as an effective educational piece?

**Trail User Education/ Trail Marketing:** How will safety on the trail and marketing be addressed?

**Trail Access and Trail Sharing:** Does the trail accommodate a range of trail users? How will the different users share the trail?

**Planning Process:** Has the project been identified as a priority in any recreational plan or local/state/ regional trail plan? Has the plan been given any endorsements?

**Partnerships/Volunteers:** How will the project cooperate between trail users, private interests, and public agencies?

**Concept Design:** What are the physical concepts of the trail: length, width, trailheads, signage, interpretive stops?

**Cost Estimates:** What is the cost of construction?

**Recommendations/ Conclusion:** Why should the project proceed? What is required for the project to proceed?

# Trail Planning

## Step 6: Management and Maintenance Plan

The management chapter will outline the aims and objectives of the trail; the strategies used to meet the objectives; the evaluation methods used to measure performance; management structure; maintenance of the trail; costs associated with the trail; and a marketing strategy.

The maintenance chapter will outline the items that need to be maintained, by whom, how often, and any associated costs.

## Step 7: Concept Design and Cost Estimate

The physical concepts of the trail will be outlined in its own chapter. Some of the concepts that will be outlined include trail: length, width, trail heads, signage, interpretive stops, needed structures, and safety issues.

Cost estimates will be provided for each trail section based on the average costs for constructing a typical ADA accessible trail according to material and construction bids for similar projects.

## Step 8: Financial Viability and Funding Sources

One of the major constraints for a trail project is funding. There are numerous possible avenues for funding and development of trails. However if the trail can demonstrate wide community support it will be easier to attract support for the project. Project funding will be identified and a strategy for obtaining funding will be outlined.

## Step 9: Recommendations and Implementation

The recommendations and implementation chapter will outline the best course of action that should be taken to implement the trail. It will also outline what is needed for the project to proceed.

## THE FINAL DECISION

Once the feasibility study has been complete it will be the responsibility of the steering committee and or the local unit of government to weigh upon the options and decide whether to implement, amend, or abandon the trail proposal.

## ARDC TRAIL ASSISTANCE

There are a number of issues that arise simply in trying to form a group to get started on a trail project. ARDC can assist you with your trail planning process. Having encountered several issues that arise when planning a trail, you will find that ARDC's trail guidance can be valuable as you prepare and undertake your trail project.

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