GATEWAY COMMUNITIES
Actions Needed for Success

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"People moving here all want to live near the park."

"Nothing will more directly and permanently affect the balance sheet of local businesses, and every other shareholder in our communities, than the quality of these planning decisions."

"Successful communities, like successful businesses, define the future they want to realize, then organize themselves to get there."

"*A municipality...shall have the power and their duty to take such action ….. to preserve the natural, scenic historic and esthetic values of the Trail and to conserve and maintain it as a public natural resource. Such action shall include the adoption, implementation and enforcement of zoning ordinances as the governing body deems necessary to preserve those values."* Pennsylvania Act 24 for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail

"Change is inevitable, but progress is optional" - Ed McMahan

"Tourism simply doesn't go to a city that has lost its soul," Arthur Frommer

For the past 46 years, I have worked in Washington, DC as a public lands conservation advocate, mainly focused on the national park system, but with useful work on BLM, USFS, and USFWS lands as well. I have worked for several NGOs, DOI, and, as a consultant for concessioners, engineering firms, and historic preservation and outdoor recreation organizations, and have served as a volunteer on numerous relevant Boards of Directors.

Across the country federal land managers and their community neighbors - referred to collectively as "gateway communities," co-exist, communicate, collaborate, cooperate, and/or fail to do so, with resultant mixed effects on the towns and on the public lands.

The political winds, moving like a swinging pendulum, have shifted back and forth many times in these past five decades. One of the most notable shifts, and one that is likely here for good, is that these federal public land agencies all recognize the necessity and desirability of working with local gateways communities to achieve mutual goals - sustainability, conservation, and economic benefits. In fact, the days of top-down dictates is over, with rare exceptions. Gateway communities and their adjacent federal land

managers MUST communicate and collaborate effectively for success in this otherwise polarized political world.

Many local communities have realized that these public amenities - lands owned by all of us - are an economic engine, not just for what can be extracted as timber, grazing, and mining, but for their permanently renewable recreation and tourism value - if these values are protected through local zoning and other land-use practices. Actually, the inherent conflict between competing uses of public lands may be the last barrier to long-term cooperative land use planning. The worn-out idea that every land use can occur in every place (one distorted interpretation of "multiple use") must be left behind in the dust bin of history if cooperative planning is going to have lasting, mutual benefits to gateway communities and federal lands.

Economic research has documented that the mere presence of a public resource - park, trail, museum, historic site, etc. induces appreciation in the real estate value of adjacent private properties. Builders and developers put a premium price on "amenity" properties, especially those with scenic views, or ones adjacent to large parcels of public lands that will not be developed. Landowners benefit at the time of resale, and local governments benefit from enhanced tax revenue.

All across the country, there has been a two-decade-long trend for companies to locate or relocate their businesses based on such factors as the prevalence of public amenities like parks and trails, in an effort to retain their workforce, enhance their quality of life, and be more competitive. Towns that seek relocation of businesses to their sites invariably promote the natural and cultural amenity values of their town and surroundings. Chambers of Commerce and tourism destination marketing organizations routinely rely strongly on the attraction of natural and cultural features to bring both business and recreational travelers to their vicinity.

The fact is, gateway communities - those adjacent to major national parks and other popular public lands, are growing faster that the general rate of community growth and development, and present unique challenges both to the land manager and to municipal and county leaders, as well as the townspeople who generally want to maintain their quality of life. Solutions to this development pressure require cooperation between the federal land managers and their neighbors, a shared vision for the future, and careful planning.

Gateway communities offer what big cities lack - a cleaner environment, less traffic, clear air, safe streets, and a friendly, small-town atmosphere. Most are and will continue to grow by attracting businesses that provide services to tourists, recreationists, and other visitors. Even in a down economy, gateway communities benefit from being adjacent to national parks - anchoring sources of jobs and revenue to keep communities afloat, or give rise to improving circumstances of local small businesses.

On the other hand, too rapid development and unplanned growth result in the same social, economic, and aesthetic ills that people are fleeing from the cities, diminishing the

quality of life for residents, reducing the allure for visitors, and adversely impacting national park and other public land's natural and cultural resources.

Blending human needs with cultural heritage, environmental conservation, and appropriately sited economic development is the proper role of gateway communities, which can only be achieved by community visioning, comprehensive planning, and zoning or other land use policy and regulation enacted at the local level, but with technical assistance and small federal grants to achieve locally agreed upon goals.

Long established linear parks such as parkways, scenic rivers, and long distance trails have completed some of the best and most extensive work with their gateway communities, including NPS units such as the New River Gorge National River, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

For most older public lands, the realization that there are mutual benefits derived from working closely with adjacent communities has come only in recent decades.

Some very good examples of more recently established public site designations that began working closely with adjacent gateway communities from the beginning, will be described in this paper, in particular, the *Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.*

Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

"Trail Towns"

Congress authorized the *Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail* in 2006 as a unit of the national trail system, though not as a unit of the national park system. The Trail itself is entirely on water, the main stem of the Chesapeake Bay and its major tributary rivers, including the James, York, Rappahannock, Potomac, and Susquehanna, as well as other smaller rivers that were first charted by Captain John Smith and his crew during their explorations and mapping in the 17th century. Today the Bay and its tributaries are blessed with many miles of shores that still resemble what the Captain and his crew saw on his voyages of exploration of them in 1608-9. These cultural landscapes and the numerous towns that line the Bay and river banks are integral to the future of the Bay and to the economic vitality of these "trail towns" as they are being called.

Trail Town is a designation or recognition applied to existing communities that lie in proximity to officially designated national scenic or historic trails, and which provide, or have the potential to provide, supportive and complementary services for visitors, tourists, and local residents to better access, enjoy and understand the natural, cultural, and recreational resources offered to the public in the area.

For the *Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail*, *The Chesapeake Conservancy* makes the trail town designation, based on a set of criteria for selection/designation for such trail towns, and works in cooperative partnership with each such town to optimize the array of benefits of such designation.

In partnership, the National Park Service can offer small federal grants to these towns to improve public access to the Bay, offer educational signage, beautification projects, and other supportive amenities at the request of the trail town.

Trail town designations for small towns along the John Smith Trail carry significant benefits - economic, social, recreational, and environmental - that accrue to the community, its businesses and its citizenry.

While the Chesapeake Bay is already a well known estuary around the world, it has had relatively sparse public access to its shores. Establishment of the John Smith Trail has meant that a great deal of public support has been focused on improving that access. The existence of public amenities like the Trail will continue to attract increased visitation, both for outdoor recreation and cultural heritage tourism. Where such attractions and destinations occur, visitors stay longer and spend more. As visitors spend more and stay longer in a Trail Town, local private business will be the primary beneficiary.

When a Trail Town is designated, it will often get support for increased funding and technical assistance for improved signage, wayside exhibits, media marketing and web site enhancements, through Gateway grants and other competitively awarded funds. Public school teachers in Trail Towns will have the opportunity to utilize the Trail and its natural and cultural resources for teaching core curricula in an experiential manner, a proven approach that deepens learning and retention.

Congress authorized a Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trail grant program in 1999. Since inception of this grant program for the Bay, over $30.5 million has been appropriated and 362 Financial Assistance awards have been made, spread across the six States of the Bay watershed. The grant program has served over 125 communities in the watershed; some projects, especially many early water trail development projects, covered hundreds of miles and served multiple communities.

A key benefit for Trail Towns is coordination and support for a tailored set of activities and events in the Town, that highlight not only the resources of the Trail but the amenities of the Town. Branding of these events in the Town with their connection to the Trail and its heritage will greatly enhance participation and success. Official Captain John Smith Chesapeake Trail Towns have a prominent and widely appreciated marketing tool readily available to them - not only the affiliation with the Trail, but the expanded cooperation that partnership with NPS and the Chesapeake Conservancy and other non-governmental partners will afford.

Trail Town selection criteria include:

- Formation of a local community Trail advisory committee comprised of a combination of elected officials, local visitor service industry businesses, recreation outfitters, non-profit education organizations, and conservation leaders.

- Agreement by the community to host at least an annual community-wide event celebrating the Captain John Smith Trail and associated local heritage, including opportunities for visitors to directly experience the river and Bay waters of the Trail.

- development of one or more Trail-related education or service-learning programs that will engage a broad swath of the community.

- development of a community-based service function (such as a conservation corps) that can provide volunteers or trainees for maintenance, clean-up, visitor education, and other support functions for the Trail.

- development of a school-based education program that engages youth on the Trail, in which experiential learning strengthens classroom instruction.

- Community land use plans, zoning ordinances, development guidelines, and related governmental procedures should take the conservation of the Trail into direct consideration, with the explicit intent of protecting vistas, access, and water quality.

- Stated intent of the community to express its support for the Trail publicly, including beyond the local level.

Current Examples of Effective Collaboration
by
Some Units of the National Park System
And
Gateway Communities

Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee
Land-of-Sky Regional Council is a multi-county, local government planning and development organization in North Carolina. It is one of 17 such organizations in the State and serves the counties of Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania. All four of these counties abut portions of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and thus actions taking in these counties have direct effects on the scenic quality and resource integrity of the parkway.

Land-of-Sky Regional Council is made up of chief elected officials, mayors and county commission chairpersons and alternates - from member governments, one private representative of economic development interests in each county, and two at-large members. Members meet monthly to plan programs and set policies and goals to benefit the entire region.

The Council's mission is to *"work with local governments, the region's leadership, state and federal agencies, service providers, and volunteers to foster desirable social, economic, cultural and ecological conditions in Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania Counties."*

One of the most relevant elements of the Council's work was its establishment of the *Regional Green Infrastructure Network*, an interconnected network of lands and waters valuable for their ecological systems and services and their significant contribution to regional and local economies. The network is comprised of high priority lands that provide wildlife habitat and support biodiversity; contribute to clean water in rivers and streams; and support local farm and forestry operations. The Regional Green Infrastructure Network was created through a collaborative process involving over 40 partners throughout the region.

Green Infrastructure is seen locally as the community's life support system □□ an interconnected network of forests, meadows, ridge tops, valleys, rivers, wetlands, and other natural features that is primarily comprised of "hubs" and "corridors." Hubs are large blocks of unfragmented natural lands that anchor the network. They provide space for native plants and animal communities and an origin or destination for wildlife, people, water, nutrients, and energy moving through the system. Corridors connect these hubs and tie the system together, providing paths for plants, animals, water, and nutrients to move between hubs. Corridors help to mitigate the effects of habitat fragmentation and enhance the overall resiliency of natural systems in the face of natural and human disturbances.

The first step in identifying the region's green infrastructure was to determine the location and condition of the region's land and water resources. To accomplish this, resource assessments were conducted that identified highest priority lands based on their value for water quality, wildlife habitat and biodiversity, and agriculture (farming and forestry).

Network hubs were created by extracting the highest ranking lands (i.e., lands that ranked between 7 and 10 on a scale of 1□10) from each resource assessment. The threshold size for hubs was set at 100 acres – and hubs smaller than this were dropped from the model. Hubs larger than 100 acres from each resource assessment were combined with protected and publicly managed lands in order to identify areas with multiple resource values (e.g., lands valuable for their contribution to clean water and their function as wildlife habitat).

Highest priority hubs are those which contain highly ranked lands (values 7□10) in all three assessments. It turns out that hubs containing highly ranked lands from two assessments are primarily forested landscapes that function to maintain water quality and serve as wildlife habitat. Likewise, about 90% of hubs from one resource assessment were priority agricultural lands.

Corridors were identified using a least cost path analysis. This approach identifies the shortest distance path between the hubs that has the highest resource value. A corridor assessment approach was incorporated to broaden the corridor width from 30m to a range of widths depending on the resource values. In this analysis, the primary role of corridors is to provide lands for the movement of plants, animals, and ecological processes between hubs. Thus, corridors were derived solely from the Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity resource assessment. A total of 12 connecting corridors were identified throughout the region.

The *Regional Green Infrastructure Network* project is organized into 5 distinct steps:

1. Develop broad-based partnerships and recruit community leaders to participate in the following four steps of the project.

2. Gather data, conduct ecological assessments and develop maps for key elements of our region's natural systems (i.e., green infrastructure), including water resources, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, recreation and conservation lands, and cultural resources.

3. Develop a science-based green infrastructure network for the region based on the assessments and data collected above.

4. Create a Regional Network that incorporates future development and natural disturbance factors into the green infrastructure network developed above.

5. Identify implementation strategies for the Regional Conservation and Development Network and engage partners in these activities. Public outreach events are scheduled throughout these 5 steps to solicit feedback on all phases of the project and share our results with the regional community.

Elsewhere along the Parkway, NPS staff also have worked closely with the City of Roanoke, VA on an interconnecting trail system that bring visitors and residents into the park without need of a car. More importantly, such connecting trails build better understanding of both the community's and the park's land use practices and needs.

In addition, non-profit partner organizations such as the Conservation Trust of NC are protecting viewsheds and vistas by acquiring easements, many of which are identified through the Council process.

Appalachian National Scenic Trail (14 States - Maine to Georgia)

The AT has achieved the highest degree of success with the trail town model for community engagement. The *Appalachian Trail Conservancy* (ATC), the official partner of the NPS for the AT, has entered into formal agreements with some 46 adjacent communities, formally designated as *"AT Communities."* Perhaps of greatest importance, the ATC, the NPS and individual AT hikers recognize these communities as assets - for hiker support amenities, for building awareness of the trail and its significance, and for further protecting this trail through local actions. Criteria are established, a review and designation process is in place, annual events are scheduled, and positive results are much in evidence in 12 of the 14 AT trail states. Others are continuously applying to ATC, being reviewed, and designated.

ATC makes the decision to affirmatively designate an *AT Community* upon successful application by the community, through both an on-line application and direct community contact by AT staff and local trail club representatives. As with trail towns on the rivers of the northern forest and on the Allegheny Passage, *AT Community* designation is intended to stimulate local economic development, enhance public recognition, improve access, and lead to trail-related education. However, *AT Community* designation is both more formal, more selective, and expects more from the designees.

In nearly all instances, the initiative for *AT Community* designation comes from a local leader. Though not always begun by a local official, the application must include an affirmative decision by the local town or county council, or other governing body to seek designation. The application also must include endorsement by a local ATC trail club. The application must explain in some detail how the community intends to meet the "selection criteria," which includes requirement for establishment of a local advisory committee, plus a commitment to at least one of three additional criteria - hosting an annual trail volunteer project, event or celebration; or establishment of an AT-related educational or service learning program; or including protection of the AT in local land use plans, ordinances or guidelines. The application form also requires the community to list all of its amenities that provide services or attractions for hikers, such as lodging, outfitters, ATMs, restaurants, laundry, showers, Post Office, public restrooms, etc.

ATC considers such *AT Community* designation to bring a variety of benefits to the area, both short and long term. These include:

- Inclusion in a national network
- Recognition and increased visibility through signage, traditional and social media, and publications
- Local teacher eligibility for ATC place-based education and service-learning program support
- Partnerships with local public land managers and with community trail volunteers
- Enhanced community economic development because of the AT affiliation
- Improved community environmental and land use stewardship
- Enhanced sense of place and cultural viability.

In more practical terms, *AT Community* designation provides (from ATC) aluminum street signs; its own web page on the ATC web site; the *Trail to Every Classroom Program;* use of the ATC trademark; a complimentary subscription to the AT *Journeys* magazine for the local library; a toolkit and staff support for an annual AT community event; and inclusion in various ATC media releases, as well as on Facebook and Twitter.

In addition, the State of Pennsylvania enacted SB 24, the Appalachian Trail Protection Act in 1978 and amended it in 2008, which directs each local government in PA along the AT corridor to establish zoning ordinances or other means to assure that the visual and resource integrity of the Trail is protected. Actual protection decisions are left to local government. The non-profit manager of the AT, under partnership with the NPS, is the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) which has hosted planning workshops, has hired a planner, and has raised funds for mini-planning grants to local governments that choose to pursue AT protection decisions. Stroud Township has enacted an AT Scenic Overlay District zoning ordinance for areas along the AT in its jurisdiction. ATC designates selected gateway communities as “Trail Communities,” and includes accomplishments in AT corridor protection as one of the selection criteria.

In addition to the great land use planning fostered in PA, some of the other AT States have taken actions to foster land use compatibility. Hanover, NH and Norwich, VT has each adopted land use regulations that specify avoidance of adverse impacts on scenic resources including the AT. Waynesboro and Front Royal, VA gateways at opposite ends of Shenandoah NP and of the AT through the park have Land Use Guidelines that seek AT protection. Warwick, NY zoning code identifies the AT corridor as a “designated protection zone.”

Great Smoky Mountains NP, North Carolina and Tennessee

Numerous Tennessee ridge-tops in view of the park that were being developed, haphazardly, into cabin rental complexes, with much erosion and stripping of vegetation. Local outcry - “a blight on the community” - caused Sevier County to impose an overlay district zoning standard on these ridge top locations. In 2007 Sevier County produced a *“Preferred Directions Report: the Sevier County and Municipalities Hillsides and Ridges*

Study." This report recommended that each community adopt standards to protect hillsides and ridgelines from inappropriate development, including limits on vegetative clearing, building design standards and detailed review procedures to limit or avoid adverse visual impacts. Putting the Hillside Overlay District in place avoided unnecessary regulation by first identifying the aesthetic and scenic resources to be protected so that when development is proposed in these locations, additional review and design strategies would be utilized that do not apply equally across the jurisdiction.

The "Gatlinburg Gateway Foundation" promulgated voluntary architectural standards for new development to protect/improve quality in that gateway town - which are generally being followed. Townsend - a smaller adjacent town, has developed set-back requirements and other land use policies for aesthetic protections.

Rocky Mountain NP, Colorado

Rocky Mountain National Park duty-stationed a full-time community planner with the City of Estes Park nearly 30 years ago to assist in a city wide compatibility improvement effort. The park, Larimer County and the Town of Estes Park did a regional transportation plan 10 years ago - which is being implemented today. A key feature is a major integrated shuttle system through town and into the park connecting to major trail heads and other attractions. The Town runs a hiker shuttle system into the park, using an "intelligent information system" to inform visitors prior to arrival about traffic conditions and timing. The shuttle system is a "turn key" contract, with the contractor owning its busses, provides maintenance outside the park, and is fully paid for by user fees.

Acadia National Park, Maine

The NPS has a full-time planner on staff at Acadia to work with communities and their planning initiatives. NPS has found that simply attending local community meetings aids in opening communications and sharing concerns with possible developments. The Town of Bar Harbor has adopted a night sky protection ordinance, and the County has approved an ordinance on cell tower location using visual analysis tools. Connector trails from town to the park have been jointly built, and have included donations of trail easements. The Island Explorer is a visitor access bus system that operates between the towns and the park, stopping at park attractions and in towns at numerous local businesses, hotels and lodges in particular.

Zion National Park, Utah

Zion has had a very popular visitor transportation system inlace for over 20 years, that runs along the main street of Springdale with stops and hotels and restaurants, and Neds at the park visitor center, where visitors transfer to an in-park bus or stops in Ion Canyon where private cars at not generally allowed. NPS staff has a regular spot of the Agenda of the monthly meeting of the Springdale Town Council, as well as at the monthly meeting of the local Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Washington County, Utah including the rapidly growing City of St. George and the gateway town of Springdale has adopted a *Vision Dixie 2035 Land Use and Transportation*

Plan, which includes provision to "guard our signature scenic landscapes." For example, the plan states that it *"provides a single cohesive vision for growth within Washington County and sets the stage for the development of a common and integrated land use and transportation strategy. The vision proposes a countywide commitment to the protection of signature landscapes that define the character of the area, including the Virgin River, and has as a key goal to focus growth towards existing city centers. This goal will protect undeveloped portions of the county associated with the Virgin River, both within and outside of designated wild and scenic portions, and help protect its numerous outstandingly remarkable values."*

Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Ohio

Ohio has been among the more progressive States in land use planning. The State has a "Balanced Growth Initiative" and offers local government planning grants. The State and EPA have fostered development of a Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan, focused on improving water quality. Resultant actions include riparian zone set-backs for new development along several tributary creeks that rise outside the park. The Cuyahoga River Community Planning Organization, a non-governmental organization funded by a grant from the Great Lakes Commission, is a multi-jurisdiction body that assists in community action plans, and supports open dialogue regarding development and zoning issues that will improve the condition of the river. NPS has a full-time planner on staff to participate in this process. The Town of Peninsula, including its historic district, sits in a "donut hole" surrounded by the national park, for which NPS has provided technical assistance in planning and zoning matters.

Congaree National Park, South Carolina

The park Superintendent serves as an ex officio member of the Richland County Development Roundtable, covering the County that surrounds the Park. The Roundtable serves as an informal advisor to the County Planning Commission, and is comprised of equal representation from conservation, development, and county staff. Richland County has adopted a comprehensive Code of Ordinance which includes both a Conservation Overlay District and a Floodplain Protection Overlay District, each of which takes into account the need/desire to protect the unique natural values of the national park.

BEST PRACTICES
in GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

All of the following concepts have been the basis of success in gateway communities, and could be implemented by mutual consent, or through a formal MOU between gateway towns and public land managers:

1. Develop a planning /visioning theme that reflects mutual interests, such as “preserving community character, assuring park health, and stimulating the local economy.”

2. The best land use planning in gateway communities comes ***after*** community visioning and broad agreement that includes both the NPS and community leaders.

3. Develop a park protection/scenic compatibility overlay zoning district.

4. Develop a transportation system into the park that is based in the Town, operating under contract, paid for by fees.

5. Develop a local area attractions information system, such as via “LodgeNet,” with kiosks in park visitor centers, and other key locations.

6. Successful gateway communities think beyond conventional zoning. They use education, incentives and voluntary initiatives, not just regulation. They also use design standards, form-based codes, density bonuses, transfer of development rights, and other innovative techniques that foster walkable, mixed use neighborhoods, and well-designed visitor services facilities.

7. Form a community-based “Friends” group that is sustained by a balance of 3 parts - volunteerism, fundraising, and advocacy.

8. Focus on existing community amenities, especially revitalizing any historic district,

9. Tourism involves much more than marketing. It also involves making destinations more appealing. This means conserving and enhancing a destination’s natural tourism assets. In other words, protecting the environment. It is, after all, the unique heritage, culture, wildlife, or natural beauty of a community or region that attracts tourists in the first place.

10. Communities know they are in trouble when new development shapes the character of the community, instead of the character of the community shaping the development.

11. Precisely because of the rapidity of growth and public popularity, gateway communities are “ground zero” in the struggle between haphazard development and planned growth. Recognize the development pressure, and be proactive with the community.

12. Progress does not demand degraded surroundings. A number of gateway communities have already implemented successful initiatives to cope with rapid growth and high visitation. Across America, dozens of gateway communities are demonstrating that economic prosperity doesn’t have to degrade natural surroundings, rob them of their character, or turn them into crowded tourist traps.

13. No place will retain its special appeal by accident - planning is what it takes to retain community character.

14. We sometimes forget that every building has a site, every site has a neighborhood, and every neighborhood is part of a community. Achieving a shared vision for each - site, neighborhood, community - will produce both compatibility and economic success.

15. A sense of place is a unique collection of qualities and characteristics – visual, cultural, social, and environmental – that provides meaning to a location. That is what will bring visitors back, and grow widespread awareness of the qualities of the gateway community.

16. A place for everything, but not everything in every place. Every gateway community can and probably should grow, but it must be planned, with new facility siting being critical.

17. Signs are “litter on a stick” (to quote Ed McMahon as Executive Director of Scenic America), when not planned, sited, and designed with community character in mind.

18. Recognize, and embrace, the fact that national parks serve as replacements for declining sectors of the past economies of communities.