

■ SITE: EATON COUNTY

Eaton County is located at the center of Michigan, close to the state capital of Lansing. Despite its close proximity to urban cores, Eaton County is largely rural with some denser downtown locations such as Charlotte and Eaton Rapids. In recent years, the area has seen population growth, matching a rising local employment base. With an improving economy, higher population and an increasing percentage of elderly residents, Eaton County stands to gain much from a cohesive trail network.

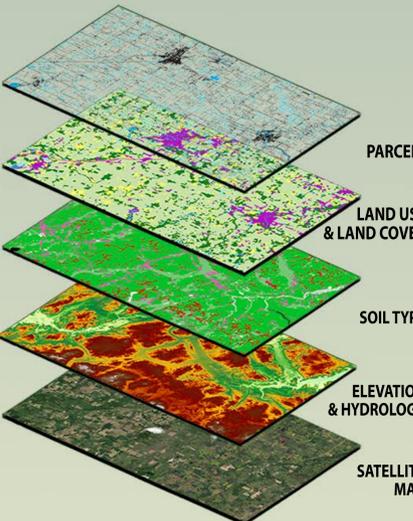
The county can effectively add to its overall sustainability with a developed trail connecting the downtowns of Charlotte and Eaton Rapids. First, easier access to outdoor recreation can help to promote an active community for all ages and incomes. This would benefit the overall health and sense of community for the area. Second, connections to both downtowns would help to attract more patrons to local establishments, an advantage to the local economy. Finally, by increasing the opportunities for non-motorized transportation, the county can work to cut down on vehicle emissions and noise pollution. These efforts would improve the quality of life for all Eaton County residents and would contribute to the area's identity as a place where people want to live, work and play.

■ ANALYSIS

The majority of land use throughout the span of the proposed route consists of agricultural land. Because of this, the MSU team actively sought to avoid locating the trail segments across these parcels. Other land uses taken into consideration included forests, wetlands, and urban settings.

Five major types of soils are found where the proposed trail intersects. These include: Alfisols, Histosols, Mollisols, Entisols and Inceptisols. Development can occur on all five types of soil, though buildability and trail maintenance may be effected by soil condition, especially on Histosols.

The elevation along the proposed trail segments varies from 868.5 feet to 933.0 feet. The landscape within the elevation range brings visual enjoyment of scenic views without causing extreme physical exhaustion and making the trail accessible for people of all abilities.



■ CULTURAL ASSETS

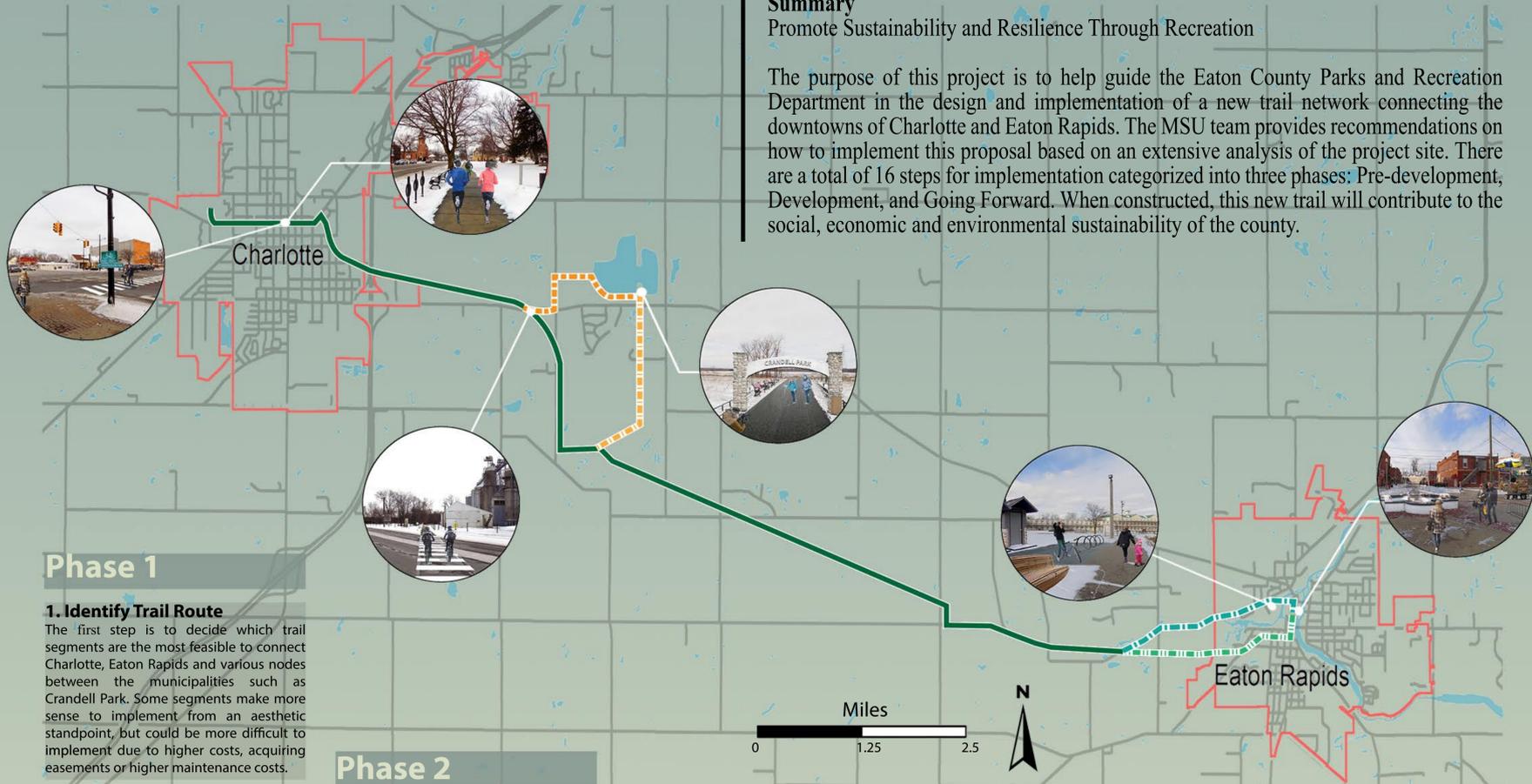
A variety of cultural sites exist throughout the project site, though most are located near the two downtowns. There are 367 acres of county-owned or operated parkland and more than 1,000 acres of recreational facilities that are run by municipalities, schools, or private entities in the county. Some of these serve as the primary nodes along the proposed route.



■ VARIOUS TRAIL ACTIVITIES



■ PROPOSED TRAIL & PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS



Summary

Promote Sustainability and Resilience Through Recreation

The purpose of this project is to help guide the Eaton County Parks and Recreation Department in the design and implementation of a new trail network connecting the downtowns of Charlotte and Eaton Rapids. The MSU team provides recommendations on how to implement this proposal based on an extensive analysis of the project site. There are a total of 16 steps for implementation categorized into three phases: Pre-development, Development, and Going Forward. When constructed, this new trail will contribute to the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the county.

Phase 1

1. Identify Trail Route

The first step is to decide which trail segments are the most feasible to connect Charlotte, Eaton Rapids and various nodes between the municipalities such as Crandell Park. Some segments make more sense to implement from an aesthetic standpoint, but could be more difficult to implement due to higher costs, acquiring easements or higher maintenance costs.

2. Work with Property Owners to Acquire Easements

While many of the trail segments are located along public right-of-ways, the majority pass through private property. The entity tasked with implementing the trail will have to work proactively to obtain all necessary easements before construction of the path begins.

3. Ensure Compliance with Local Zoning Regulations

Review all applicable zoning ordinances for Eaton County, Charlotte, Eaton Rapids and, if applicable, all townships, to ensure their regulatory language allows for all of the trail components going into the new development.

4. Establish Partnerships

Implementation and upkeep of the new trail will require public buy-in as well as sources of funding for maintenance, upkeep and programming. Identify local businesses, non-profits, civic organizations and community leaders that may be interested in partnering with Eaton County.

5. Solidify Maintenance Plan

It is important to designate, before the trail is built, who will be in charge of trail upkeep and how it will be paid for. Maintenance relates to such practices as repaving the trail, snow removal, facility and amenity upkeep, as well as debris removal.

Phase 2

6. Develop the Trail

The typical width of a multi-use trail is 10 ft with an additional 2 ft for shoulders. To account for runoff and to accommodate bikers, rollerbladers and skateboarders, the trail material should be asphalt. Asphalt provides a smoother surface and easier ADA compliance compared to other materials such as mulch and compacted stone.

7. Name the Trail

In order for the new trail to instill a sense of place, it should have a name that gives visitors and locals an idea of the local identity. This name could relate to unique natural features present along the path, an homage to the local history or the direction that the area is heading.

8. Develop Trailheads

Each location should be outfitted with bathrooms, all trail information including maps, seating, bike racks, wayfinding signage, welcome signage, parking, shelters and water. The trailheads are not only locations for people to park and access the path, but they can also play a key role in future events and programming.

9. Provide User Amenities

People need to have their basic needs taken care of and should also be presented with interesting points along the route to supplement their trail visit. It would be a good idea to create a unified theme for trail infrastructure along the route. Signage, seating and other infrastructure should share similar materials, color schemes and design.

10. Add Wayfinding

Wayfinding should orient trail users to their location in proximity to a variety of important sites. Wayfinding can be an important factor in getting people from the trail to downtown where they can visit local retail, food and drink establishments, thus helping the local economy. Signage should be clear, themed and visible.

11. Include Safety Features

Trailheads should have warning signage and map imagery describing any potential hazards along the route. These warnings should also appear near the hazards themselves. LED lighting can be utilized at trailheads and possibly throughout the trail if possible. Proper lighting can help deter criminal activity.

12. Develop Gateways

The trail should present a gateway to signify that visitors have arrived to the central business district of either Charlotte or Eaton Rapids. This landmark should distinguish that the trail users are near local attractions and should contain signage that points them to restaurants, parks and other related establishments.

Phase 3

13. Market the Trail

It's important that people from within the Eaton County area, as well as potential tourists, know how to get to the new trail, what to expect in terms of accessibility, parking, amenities and allowed uses. If done effectively, marketing can help make the trail a key asset for the community as a contributor to economic, environmental and social sustainability.

14. Add Programming Centered Around the Trail

A new trail provides opportunities for community events and educational opportunities. This can help promote tourism spending in the region, instill a sense of health and wellness locally and develop an outdoor-friendly identity.

Legend

- Proposed Trail
- Crandell Park Alternative #1
- Crandell Park Alternative #2
- Eaton Rapids Alternative #1
- Eaton Rapids Alternative #2
- Roads
- Rivers & Lakes
- City Boundary

15. Connect the Trail to the Downtowns

To provide a full trail experience, people should have the ability to quickly access local establishments during or once they are finished with their outdoor experience. Besides serving visitors and local trail users, this also helps to stimulate local business activity.

16. Measure Trail Impact

Understanding the economic effect that the new trail has on the region can be useful for maintaining public support and financing mechanisms for an extended period of time. The county can measure impact in a multitude of ways, such as meeting with business owners, collecting data on tourist dollars spent, or tracking property values adjacent to the trail.