



VICTOR HIKING TRAILS

FINAL DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

JANUARY 2016



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INTRODUCTION

The Victor Hiking Trails (VHT) organization is a successful organization that has developed and maintained a network of trails in the Town of Victor, New York which is the envy of many communities. In 2014 the group was awarded a Capacity Building Grant from Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) which is a non-profit group that provides advocacy and promotion of parks and trails in New York State. The Capacity Building Grant is part of PTNY's Growing the Grassroots campaign to "enhance the long-term sustainability of park and trail not-for-profit organizations by helping them better fulfill their missions; improve their reach, effectiveness and impact; leverage resources, and increase community support for park and trail planning, development and/or stewardship."

Therefore, to continue the success and to ensure the sustainability of the VHT organization a Strategic Plan was needed. The purpose of the plan is to assess the current organization and to develop strategies to sustain and grow the organization into the future supported by the group's vision including goals and actions for future trails and other activities.

VICTOR HIKING TRAILS

The Victor Hiking Trail group was formed in 1991 with the approval coming from the Victor Town Board. While their basic mission is to preserve, protect and promote hiking and walking trails in and around the Town of Victor, they also want to preserve natural areas to improve the quality of life for the residents of Victor. In 1992 the group was formally incorporated as a non-profit group and their first trail opened in 1993.

Currently the VHT is responsible, in partnership with the Town, for more than 55 miles of trails. The trails provide recreational and physical fitness benefits to residents and visitors. Trails provide an alternative transportation option to connect residential areas with local and regional parks, other trails, schools and business areas.

VHT activities include, but are not limited to:

- Trail maintenance, trail improvements and building new trails;
- Working with landowners and the Town to develop trails;
- Sponsoring and promoting trail activities;

- Promotion of the trails and organization through a website, phone line, www.victorhikingtrails.org, and various brochures and maps;
- Provision of educational opportunities about trails or nature; and
- Administration of the non-profit corporation.

Leadership for the VHT is provided by a group of dedicated local resident volunteers that meet once a month and is governed by an official board. Many of the members have been part of the group since its inception and have provided stability, credibility and a lot of hard work to develop and maintain trails in Victor that residents in Victor as well a regional visitors have benefited from.

Anyone can become a member of the group for a nominal fee of \$10. The VHT's annual budget is approximately \$7,500 and is funded primarily through donations, grants and membership fees.

Trail maintenance is the group's largest expense and the group actively maintains the trails three times a week primarily between May and September. The VHT has more than 50 maintenance "events" annually that represent more than 600 hours of volunteer labor.

The current Vision and Mission statements for the VHT include:

VISION

- Create and maintain foot trails and multi-use paths in the Town of Victor.
- Promote a meaningful relationship with nature.
- Promote individual responsibility for protecting the environment.
- Provide recreational activity through walking, biking, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing.
- Provide education to the public through nature interpretation, historical information and proper use of trails.
- Promote good relationships with all people (landowners, government officials, adjacent townships, and trail users).

MISSION

- Trails of various terrain, landforms, views and habitats for various plant and animal species.
- Trails in various geographic sections of the Town of Victor with access by as many residents as possible.
- Trails of various lengths and difficulties.
- Trails for foot traffic and paths for multi-use including bikes.



ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Before the group developed goals and objectives for the future of the organization, it assessed its current organization and activities internally through a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. THE SWOT analysis was complemented by a resident survey.

VHT SWOT ANALYSIS

Members of the group met in April 2015 to perform a SWOT analysis and the results are included in Figure 1.



Figure 1. SWOT Analysis

Based on the SWOT analysis the most common themes from the meeting were:

- Preserve the current trail system and build upon it
 - Trails should be considered part of Active Transportation system, not just recreational
 - Cost/Benefit with future maintenance costs
 - Include and incorporate in Parks Master Plan

- Maintain a good relationship with the Town

- Develop a Future, Feasible Maintenance Plan
 - Keep trails maintained as well as they are today
 - Build future trails and potentially retrofit existing trails to require less maintenance
 - Is there a threshold metric that defines when a community may need to add staff vs. recruiting volunteers?
 - Consider changing maintenance time periods (late afternoon weekday?) to encourage more participation

- Seek out Funding
 - Maintenance
 - New Trails
 - Trail retrofits

- Increase the number of involved members and/or sponsors
 - For maintenance and activities
 - 25-50 years
 - 45-55 years empty nesters ideal
 - Can local companies recruit groups of employees regularly to help out
 - “Adopt a Trail”
 - Scout help has been great – need to maintain relationship

- Promote the Group & Involvement
 - Brochure for local companies?
 - Update website – more interactive, organized and with a trail focus
 - Leverage Victor’s growth for more members
 - Social Media
 - Schools

- Document Historical Knowledge
 - Procedures
 - Maps
 - Easements

The ideas developed during the SWOT analysis provided a good starting point for discussions about the relevance of the organization and its sustainability into the future.

VHT SURVEY

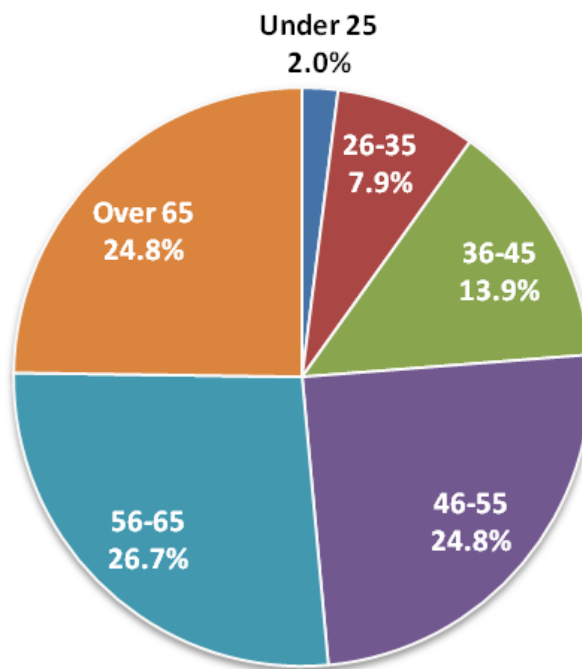
VHT members conducted a community survey to learn the community's opinions and ideas regarding the VHT organization, trails in Victor and potential future activities for the VHT. An online survey was launched in the summer of 2015 and residents could also fill in a paper survey and submit it to the Town. More than 100 people took the survey which provided valuable information to the VHT. Some general responses to the survey included:

- Most of the respondents, 66 percent, lived in the 14564 (Victor) zip code and a third lived in areas outside of Victor;
- 98 percent of respondents were aware of the trails in Victor, 91 percent were aware of the Victor Hiking Trails Organization and 98 percent actually used the trails;
- 96 percent support both maintenance of the existing trails in the Town and development of new trails;

Highlights of the survey which will help in developing goals and objectives for the VHT organization include:

- Most of the respondents were 46 years of age or older but the overall age of respondents was evenly distributed among the 26-45, 46-55, 56-65 and over 65 age groups which is encouraging for a group interested in a broader base of future volunteers:

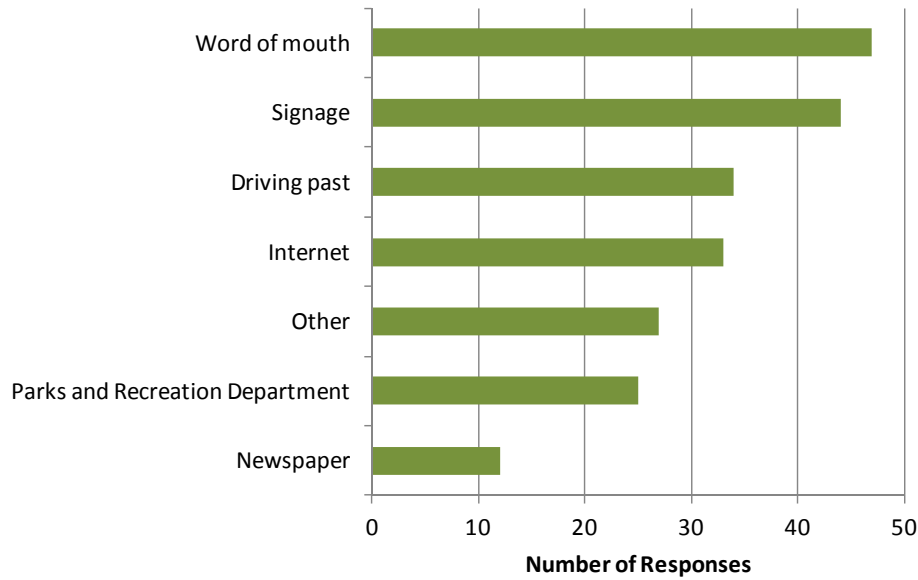
Age Group of Respondents VHT Survey



- There are a variety of ways people are aware the Victor Trails:

How are you Aware of the Victor Trails?

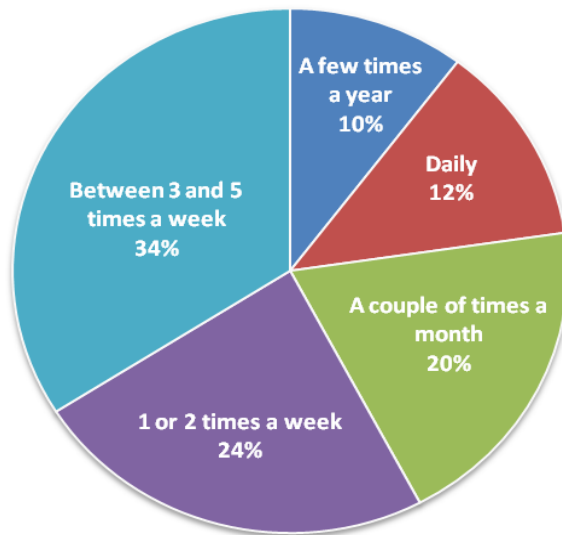
VHT Survey



- Frequency of use for the Victor Trails varies but most respondents use the trails multiple times during the week:

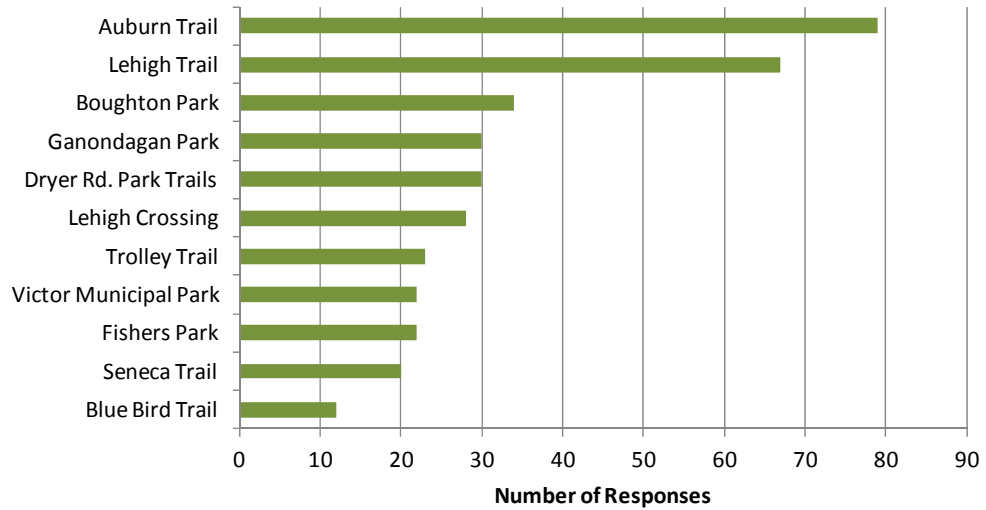
How Often do you use Victor Trails?

VHT Survey



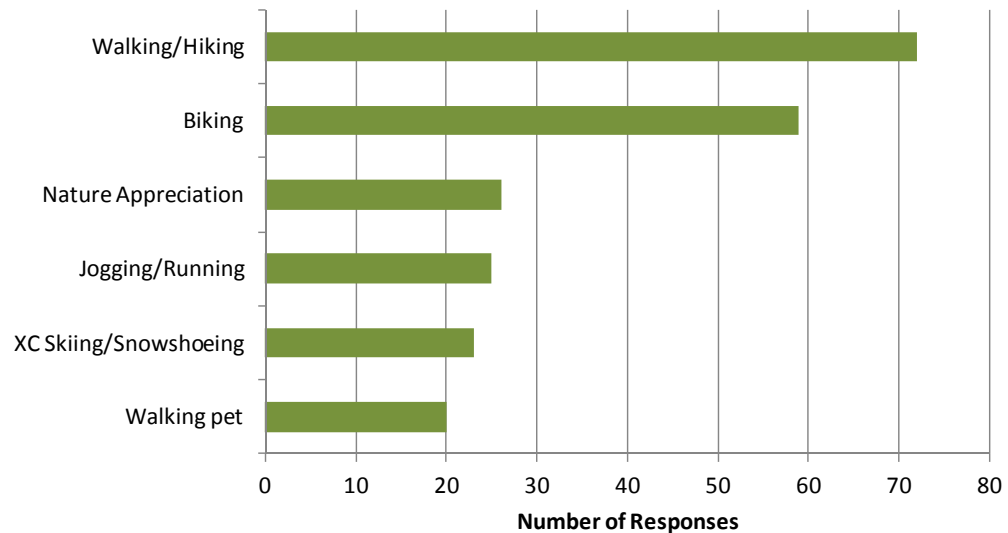
- The Auburn and Lehigh Valley Trails are the most popular trails in Victor but trail users take advantage of most of the trails (responses of 10 or more) in the Town:

What Trails Have you Used Most Often?
VHT Survey



- Most people use the trails for walking and biking but the trails are also used for a variety of other activities:

What is Your Primary Activity on the Trails?
VHT Survey



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

As part of the Strategic Planning process, several stakeholders that use the trail were interviewed to provide their opinions on the trails. Some of the most common responses included:

- Trails provide and opportunity for every level of experience
- Trails are well maintained, safe and not crowded
- Please maintain the trails natural appearance

Some of the needs identified by stakeholders included:

- More cross country ski opportunities
- Trailheads near other recreational activities in the parks – get them there
- More Events:
 - Recycle existing events among other trails
 - Kid events will brings parents
 - Sponsored events will increase participation

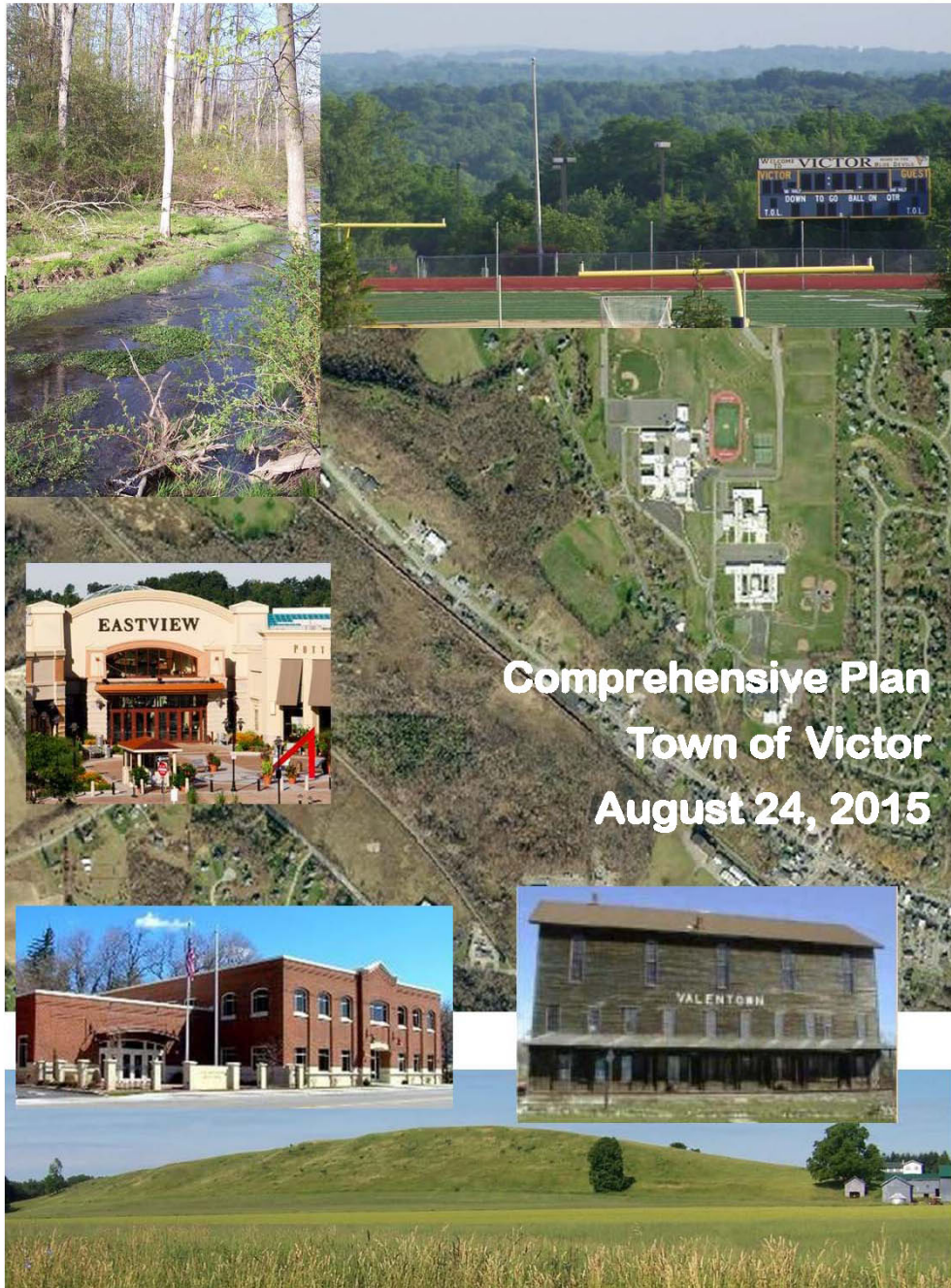


Staff of the Ganondagan Museum were interviewed as key stakeholders

SUPPORT OF TRAILS IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANS

Both local and regional planning documents were reviewed to regarding the support of trails in Victor. Plans included the Victor Parks and Recreation Plan, the Genesee Transportation Council Trail Plan, and the recently adopted Victor Comprehensive Plan. A summary of the relevant trail recommendations from the plan include:

- The need for an Alternative Transportation Network Plan (walking, biking) for Victor that will interconnect existing sidewalks and trails;
- VHT will work with Town and Genesee Transportation Council to prepare a long term trails master plan including:
 - Trail routes
 - Connectivity to regional trails
 - Construction/Maintenance Standards
 - Funding/Implementation
- Including the provision or accommodation of trails or trail connections in Planned Development District (PDD) criteria of the Town Code
- Promote connection of residential developments with trails to connect people to activity centers and recreational ways;
- Trails should be a key element of a “Green Infrastructure” system in the Town;
- The VHT “will be a key resource and stakeholder in preparing the Pedestrian/Bicycle plan” recommended as part of the Comprehensive Plan;



The recently adopted Town of Victor Comprehensive Plan included multiple recommendations and references to trails and an active/alternative transportation system in the Town.

TRAIL ORGANIZATION BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking was also performed as part of the Strategic Plan process to understand the operations of the VHT in comparison to other trail groups. It also provides an opportunity to learn other practices from those trail groups.

Table 1. Trail Benchmarking – Local Trail Groups

Metric	Victor Hiking Trails	Crescent Trails Perinton	Friends of Webster Trails	Penfield Trails Committee	Saratoga PLAN	Pittsford Trails	Kingdom Trails, Vermont
Community Population	14,327	46,462	43,121	36,525	32,537*	29,577	1,171
Median Household Income	\$76,115	\$78,508	\$66,033	\$78,069	\$67,232	\$106,134	\$49,167
Miles of Trails	55**	35	22	15	23	42	40+
Number of Trails	12	12	10	15	9	10	70+
Membership Fee	\$10+	\$5	\$10		\$10+		\$75+
Number of Members	282	50	187		200+		
Volunteer Maintenance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Municipal Assistance w/ Maintenance	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Fundraising /Donations – Individuals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Fundraising /Donations – Organizations / Businesses	✓		✓		✓		✓

* County level organization

** Genesee Region of Cyclists (GROC) maintains approximately 15 miles of Dryer Road Park trails; 28 miles of trails are maintained by VHT and the remainder are maintained by the Town

Generally, the Victor Hiking Trails group metrics are equivalent to other trail groups in larger communities. However, it should be noted that a municipal trail organization is unique to the Rochester area in Upstate New York. Most other trail organizations in Upstate New York and other states are regional in nature.

The benefits of a local trail group are that members have a stake in the trail system and are therefore motivated to participate in trail maintenance and other trail activities. However, the disadvantage of a local trail group is that the number of members is limited and there is no formal system for coordinating trail improvements or connections among different communities. In addition, multiple local trail groups are competing for the same grant funds instead of having a long term plan, and funding, for key sections of a regional trail network. At a minimum, a County trail organization, like the one in Saratoga, advances a regional trail approach.

It should be noted however that there are some regional or multi-county trail networks within the Rochester metro area including:

- Genesee Valley Greenway (several Counties)
- Ontario Pathways (Ontario County)
- TrailWorks (Wayne County)
- Finger Lakes Trail (Statewide)
- Mendon Foundation

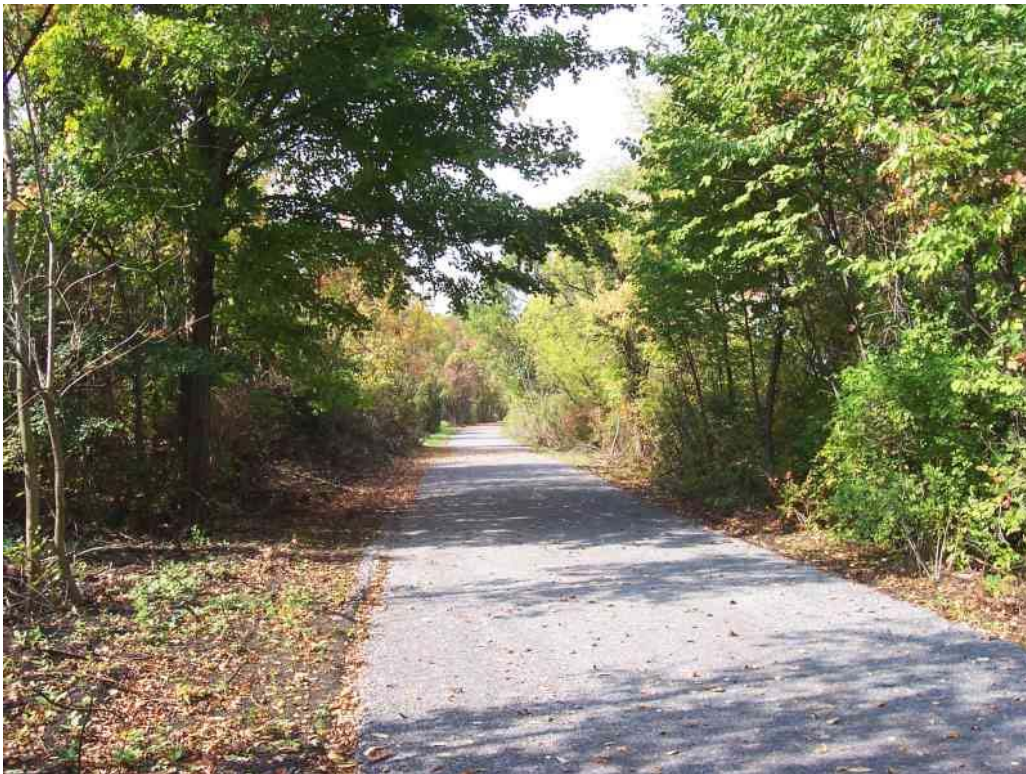


Table 2. Trail Benchmarking – VA, PA, MD

Metric	Chester County Trail Club http://www.cctrailclub.org/	Allentown Hiking Club http://www.allentownhikingclub.org/	Old Dominion Appalachian Trail Club http://olddominiontrailclub.onefireplace.org/	Garrett Trails http://garretttrails.org/index.html
Community Population	509,648	119,104	Multiple Counties	29,679
Median Household	\$86,460	\$35,560	-----	\$45,206
Miles of Trails	61	10	19	150
Number of Trails	4	1	1*	37
Membership Fee	\$7	\$10 \$15 Families	\$15 \$20 Families \$250 Lifetime	Gold - \$100 Silver \$25
Volunteer Maintenance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipal Assistance w/ Maintenance	✓	✓		✓
Fundraising /Donations – Individuals			✓	✓
Fundraising /Donations – Organizations / Businesses				✓

* Appalachian Trail in Blue Ridge Mountains

Garrett (MD) Trails

<http://garretttrails.org/index.html>

The Garret, Maryland Trail group is an interesting model for the future growth of the Victor Trails group. Although the group operates in a small county of less than 30,000 people, it is very active and successful. Garret County is located in the western tip of Maryland near the Pennsylvania border and the group is responsible for 37 trails with 150 miles of hiking opportunities.

The primary difference with the Victor Hiking group is that the organization is a County based organization. In the future, a County based trail group may be a logical step but they have established a model for the kind of activities outlined in some of the recommendations in this report:

- Four levels of business sponsorship: Platinum \$4,000, Gold \$3,000, Silver \$1,000, and Bronze, \$500. There are currently 10 sponsors;
- Multiple fundraising events including a Taste of Garret fundraiser where there is a Taste of Garrett supporter for \$5,000;
- Adopt-a-Trail Program open to schools, youth groups, scout troupes, churches, businesses, families or individuals;
- Several volunteer opportunities for different interests; and
- A well organized website (see link above).



STRATEGIC PLAN

The following key initiatives will address many of the objectives of the Victor Hiking Trail group as it moves forward in the next phase of its journey. Initiatives have been divided into four categories:

1. Promotions and Partnerships: Initiatives to increase the awareness of the organization and to boost both membership and donations.
2. Organizational Capacity: Initiatives to increase volunteer memberships, encourage internships and document the historical knowledge of the trails organization.
3. Development of New Trails: Establishing a process to support future trail grant applications.
4. Stewardship: Develop a long term process to support trails in Victor for the future.



PROMOTION AND PARTNERSHIPS

GOAL: INCREASE THE AWARENESS OF THE VICTOR HIKING TRAILS (VHT) ORGANIZATION TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Strategies:

- Upgrade website and make it mobile friendly and interactive
- Develop a new brochure that is consistent with website (appearance, etc.)
- Presentations to schools to increase interest by younger audiences
- Prepare YouTube videos about the trails including the potential use of drone videos to provide an aerial “tour” of the trails
- Develop a VHT mobile app potentially with the help of a college student

GOAL: MAINTAIN AND GROW PARTNERSHIPS

Strategies:

- Continue beneficial relationships with the Town of Victor
- Continue and develop partnerships with related groups:
 - Land Conservation / Farmland Preservation
 - Natural Resources
 - Recreational
 - Fitness
 - Tourism
 - Hotels

GOAL: BEGIN TO ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL AND REGIONAL COMPANIES

Strategies:

- Develop VHT Brochure specific to businesses providing information on VHT and opportunities for sponsorship, donations and volunteering
- Distribute brochure to Victor businesses and regional businesses (i.e. Wegmans) that may have an interest in fitness, healthy lifestyles and/or nature.
- Request to speak to groups of employees interested in trails
- Distribute or continue to distribute brochures to Dick’s Sporting Goods, Northface, EMS, Athletica, LL Bean and pending Bass Pro.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

GOAL: GROW THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE ORGANIZATION BY RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS SO THE VHT GROUP IS SUSTAINABLE INTO THE FUTURE**Strategies:**

- Continue or initiate efforts to have membership applications at trails, recreational facilities, fitness centers, and, if possible, at schools
- Work with local and regional companies to recruit employees to become members to advance their community involvement and public relations goals
- Provide “tailored” volunteer opportunities. Some examples include fundraising, promotions, administrative, skilled trades (i.e., carpentry) and equipment use.

GOAL: DOCUMENT THE VHT HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE**Strategies:**

- Meet with current active volunteers and Town staff to document the procedures for maintenance
- Collect and organize easement or property documentation and convert to digital format if feasible.
- Place geographic information – alignments, easements – in a Geographical Information System
- Prepare a guidebook for new volunteers including basic information about VHT and operational guidelines.

GOAL: BEGIN DISCUSSIONS WITH TOWN ON VHT INTERNSHIPS**Strategies:**

- Provision of a college internship to assist VHT and Town on trail work
- Provision of summer students to help with trail maintenance

GOAL: CONSIDER PARTNERING WITH OTHER GROUPS ON TRAILS**Strategies:**

- Using Saratoga PLAN as a model, join groups interested in protecting areas for recreation and appreciation of natural and cultural resources to help preserve areas for future trail extensions and to increase interest in trails for those not focused just on fitness or recreation.

DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRAILS

GOAL: DEVELOP AN ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN THAT INCORPORATES TRAILS

Strategies:

- Apply for Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) funds to develop an Active Transportation Plan for the Town of Victor to connect trails with sidewalks, other trails, and bike lanes throughout the Town as well as developing concepts for new trails

GOAL: APPLY FOR FUNDING TO DEVELOP NEW TRAILS OR EXPAND EXISTING TRAILS

Strategies:

- Apply for grant funding to fund acquisition of land or easements, and/or to construct new trails:
 - Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)
 - Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
 - Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)
 - NYSERDA Cleaner Greener Program (as part of a larger project)
 - Parks & Trails NY



STEWARDSHIP

GOAL: CREATE ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DONATIONS, SPONSORSHIPS AND FUNDRAISING**Strategies:**

- Work with local and regional businesses to sponsor trail segment maintenance including cash donations and employee volunteer hours
- Formalize opportunities for Planned Giving through Legacy gifts from wills, trusts and retirement funds.
- Develop corporate sponsorships at additional levels above \$250

GOAL: DEVELOP A FORMAL CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**Strategies:**

- In coordination with the Town develop a plan that formalizes the VHT's strategy for short and long term trail maintenance for the existing trail system as well as opportunities for future trail expansion.
- Identify current deficiencies in the existing trail system especially as they relate to safety and bridge/water crossings.
- Provide cost estimates for each item over time
- Use information to plan and apply for grant funding

GOAL: INCORPORATE TRAILS INTO TOWN PLANS**Strategies:**

- Participate in the update of the Town's Parks Master Plan to insure trails are incorporated into the plan
- Participate in the anticipated Active Transportation Plan to insure trails are incorporated and to provide the community with information on VHT's efforts to date.

ACTION PLAN

While the Strategic Plan provides the overall goals for the VHT, the Action Plan items provide a Roadmap for short, medium and long term actions

SHORT TERM ACTIONS (0-2 YEARS)

- Update Website by using the latest templates from website software to organize and consolidate information under appropriate categories. There are several examples of good trail sites that are both easy to navigate and can be viewed on the desktop or mobile phones.
(<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/>; <http://www.saratogaplan.org/>; <http://baytrail.org/get-on-the-trail/>).
- Develop and distribute a new professionally designed brochure incorporating formalized donations (see below)
 - General
 - Business Focused
- Prepare trail videos for YouTube
- Begin discussions with partner groups (Land Conservation, Natural Resources, etc.) about joint projects to preserve natural resources
- Establish formal Business or Organization Donation levels above \$250; this may mean multiple donation categories
- Establish a formal Planned Giving procedure
(<http://www.saratogaplan.org/get-involved/planned-giving/>)
- Establish tailored volunteer opportunities

MEDIUM TERM (3-5 YEARS)

- Document Historical VHT knowledge
 - Property Information – easements, titles, right of ways
 - Geographical – property maps, trail alignments
 - Guidebook for Maintenance Procedures
- Establish a College Internship program with the Town utilizing students interested in trails from local colleges or by coordinating with schools (i.e. SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry) or programs (Environmental Studies, Planning, Forestry) focused on nature, multi-modal transportation or forestry.
 - Promotions, Administrative, Social Media – semester based
 - Summer trail maintenance
- Develop an Active Transportation Plan
 - Incorporate a Trail Capital Improvement Strategy in the plan

ONGOING

- Presentations to School Groups to the younger population interested
- Presentations to companies and company employee groups (lunch and learn sessions)
- Preparation of grant applications for trails