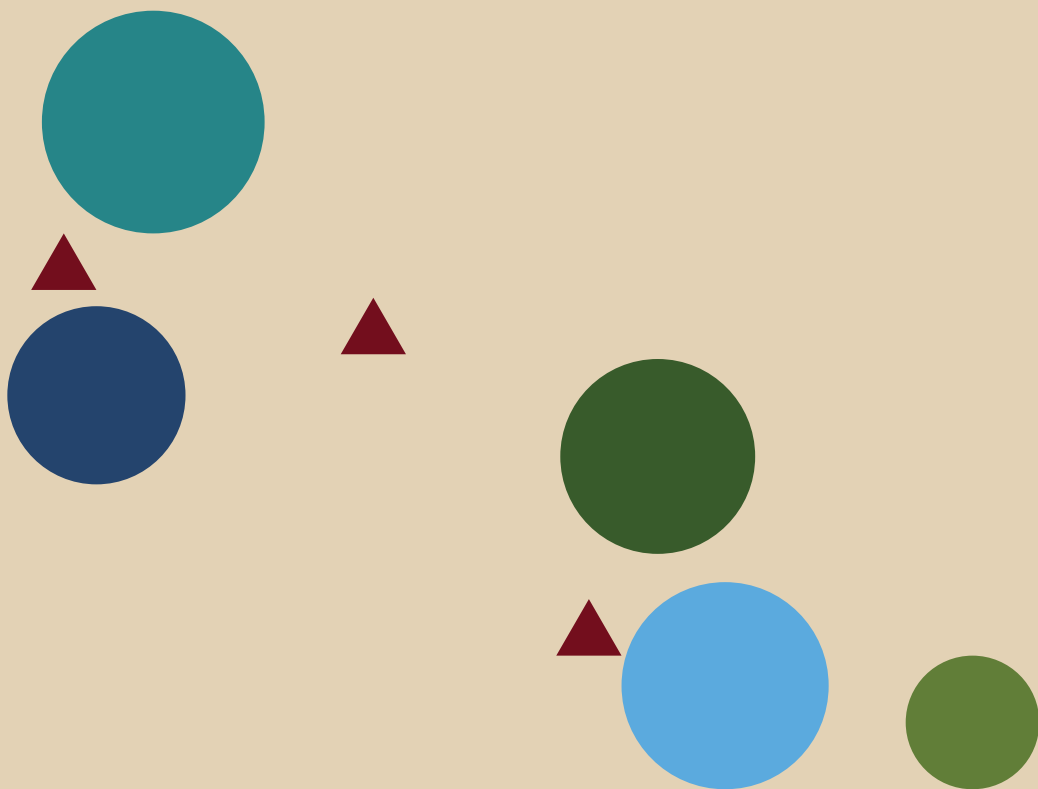


# Pathways to Dialogue

A Study and Guide  
for Implementing Interpretation on Trails to  
Connect Rural and Urban Audiences



Laura Frick

**Title: Pathways to Dialogue: A Study and Guide for Implementing Interpretation on Trails to Connect Rural and Urban Audiences**

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Museum Exhibition Planning + Design  
The University of the Arts

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A thesis submitted to The University of the Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master of fine arts degree.

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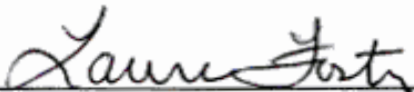
## Thesis Committee



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# Abstract

In the year 2018, “urban-rural divide” is a commonly-used phrase. While there are some very real differences in population, economy and cultural values between some urban and rural areas, even defining the two terms is difficult. Furthermore, the ties that connect them are intrinsic and permanent. Transportation; interdependency on natural resources and food; and the flow of money, goods, ideas and people are all part of the continuum of these areas. Dividing all people into two binary categories is a misrepresentation of the diversity of both rural and urban communities. By shifting the focus from opposing areas to interconnected regions, the ties between rural and urban can be explored more in depth, creating the potential for greater understanding and partnerships.

This thesis posits that the connective tissues of trails, punctuated with points of interpretation, can be a means to harness opportunities of exchange between rural and urban residents. Trails often stand as a physical representation of the historical and modern ties between urban and rural areas. These physical connections support personal connections as neutral linear spaces shared by disparate communities. The development and implementation of interpretation, including trail signage, public art or a mix of the two can be used to explore communities’ relationships with each other. The process of creating community-sourced public art, and the lasting impressions of provocative interpretation can be used to express the personal stories of the residents of these areas, and their relationships with each other.

The research undertaken in this thesis provides evidence of the many ways that these elements—urban/rural relationships, trails and interpretation—are, and can be integrated. Site visits and interviews with professionals in each of these areas, along with secondary research provided a framework for the broad considerations of these three elements. This collective information was then applied to an actual trail system, where further interviews with local stakeholders provided more detailed understanding of the considerations that would be necessary for integrating these elements in a real-world context. The findings of this study show that with the right structure, projects can bring together rural and urban communities along trails to facilitate explorations of these regional relationships through the process of creating art and interpretation.



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Last, but certainly not least, I'd like to thank my friends and family who encouraged me through this process. Shared experiences on trails, and with art, in towns both big and small shaped the impetus for this thesis. I wouldn't be where I am without you!

This thesis is dedicated to my mom, Mary. I know you were with me through this process, and I know you would be so proud.

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*It is understanding that gives us an ability to have peace. When we understand the other fellow's viewpoint, and he understands ours, than we can sit down and work out our differences.*

—HARRY S. TRUMAN, Thirty-third US President



## Trailhead: Introduction

This project will explore how trails between urban and rural areas can foster conversation about the relationships between these regions, through the language of public art and interpretation.

It is common today to hear about the rural/urban divide. How real is that divide, and if it exists, why is it there? The hyper speed at which many aspects of life are changing seems to be exacerbating the idea of fractured societies. “Rural vs. urban” is often an example of these chasms, framing the relationship between the two as binary. However, this is not the reality of many places, and research into the roles of these regions shows the future of a successful America includes an integration of rural and urban, with maintained conversation and collaboration between them. Further and wider discourse about the evolving roles of urban and rural is necessary; how can citizens join this conversation and express their perspectives to each other outside of an online forum? How can these regional relationships be explored and celebrated in a format that is accessible and woven into everyday life?

This thesis posits that one way to foster further discourse between urban and rural areas is by utilizing the strengths of trails and community-engaged interpretation toward increased rural/urban conversation and collaboration. Trails, which often connect urban and rural areas, could serve as neutral spaces for exploring regional relationships through networks of community-sourced public art and interpretation.





While this proposed project would not be suitable for all regions encompassing rural and urban communities, it could be a novel opportunity for some. The continuum of urban and rural sometimes falls along the spine of a trail. These areas embrace trails for different reasons, but as conduits of transportation, recreation, economic development, and increased public health they are attractive assets to any locality. Furthermore, their ability to cultivate community pride and identity in the regions that surround them allow residents to feel a deep sense of place. Each trail has a unique character, specific to its location, history, purpose and neighbors. By exploring the historic and modern partnerships of the urban and rural communities that sit along these trails, we can celebrate their role in the region as a whole. Instead of focusing on the opposing nature of these communities, the physical connections of trails can be used to support projects that strengthen their interaction.

A means by which trails do this is through the implementation of interpretation. Using provocation, revelation, and thematic unity, interpretation can create memorable trail experiences. Through the process of listening and connecting, community-sourced public art can ignite personal and collective transformations. Harnessing the strengths of both forms of interpretation allows for meaningful and dynamic interactions along a trail. Integrating these points of interpretation with the linear spaces of trails creates opportunities to unite audiences from distant areas who don't typically spend time with each other, and to promote shared story-telling along a regional pathway connecting urban and rural communities.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter will provide a brief study of the necessary elements for this proposed approach to re-interpreting regional relationships. These elements include: 1) the interconnections that exist in urban/rural relationships; 2) the role trails and trail systems play connecting urban/rural areas; and 3) the role of trail-based interpretive elements, like public art, or informational signage in fostering connections between urban/rural areas.

Interviews with professionals representing each of the three elements form a crucial foundation for this study. These first-hand accounts are integrated into this chapter as featured “Field Guides” (concise findings from interviewees in the sidebars) and as references and citations woven into the text. Several key secondary resources provide further context and support for the empirical research. Together, these studies create a well-rounded examination of the opportunities and challenges of the three elements— both as individual components and as related constituents. This creates a better understanding the “what” and “why” of the elements, so that the following case studies and project application can address the “how” and “when” of the thesis.

The second chapter is comprised of three case studies. These case studies each involve one or more of the above-listed elements and offer key findings for the proposed project. While these case studies were chosen partially because of their integration of the multiple key elements of this study, they were also chosen due to their additional valuable findings that fall outside of the focus of the three key elements.

The third, and final chapter of this thesis is a hypothetical application of my findings to an actual trail system—the Schuylkill River Trail and connecting Perkiomen Trail— in the Philadelphia region. This chapter integrates the findings from the first two sections with further research specific to this particular trail system. Such research provides an understanding of the



implications of applying this project to a specific trail—what are the additional constraints and affordances that arise when considering this project for a real-world scenario? The lessons learned from this application provide further guidance for this and other trail systems connecting rural and urban areas and inform the final take-aways and recommendations of this thesis.

The research conducted as part of this thesis, centered on the three elements outlined above, is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it develops enough of an understanding of each to contextualize the subsequent case studies, and eventually build a model for a trail-interpretation project connecting a region's rural and urban areas, through an existing trail system. It is the exploration of the integration of these components into a cohesive whole that this thesis is ultimately working towards.

### **Definitions:**

**Community:** A group of people living in an area; a group of people with shared interests living in a common area.

**Rural:** This is up to interpretation. The reader can choose to define rural as they wish.

**Urban:** See above.

**Interpretation:** A communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships in our natural and cultural heritage to the public through first-hand experiences with objects, artifacts, landscapes or sites. For the purposes of this study, interpretation can mean wayside exhibits, public art, or anything in-between.

**Wayside exhibits:** specific points of trail interpretation, relating a story relevant to that specific site to the viewer

**Public art:** Art in the public, which is distinguished by unique association of how it is made, where it is and what it means.

# 1 Convergence: Elements of Re-interpreting Urban/Rural Connections

Early research of this thesis indicated that three integrated factors offer unique insights toward a reinterpretation of regional connections between rural and urban areas. This research also indicated that if viewed together, these factors could form the basis of a project which offers a unique and compelling means of enhancing regional connections. What started out as an exploration of ways that museums and interpretation can address the perceived urban/rural divide evolved into a more pointed investigation of the potential of trail-based interpretation and public art to accomplish this task. This evolution was initiated by site visits and interviews with staff of Valley Forge National Historical Park, as well as the Brunswick Heritage Museum in Brunswick, Maryland who was hosting an exhibition from Museum on Main Street (a small-town outreach program from Smithsonian Institute's Traveling Exhibition Service). Surprisingly, both of these site visits revealed that trails play an important role in connecting the institutions' rural and urban audiences.



**Above:**

Many visitors to Valley Forge National Historic Site arrive via the Schuylkill River Trail. An employee of the park described it as a point of transition between rural communities and Philadelphia.

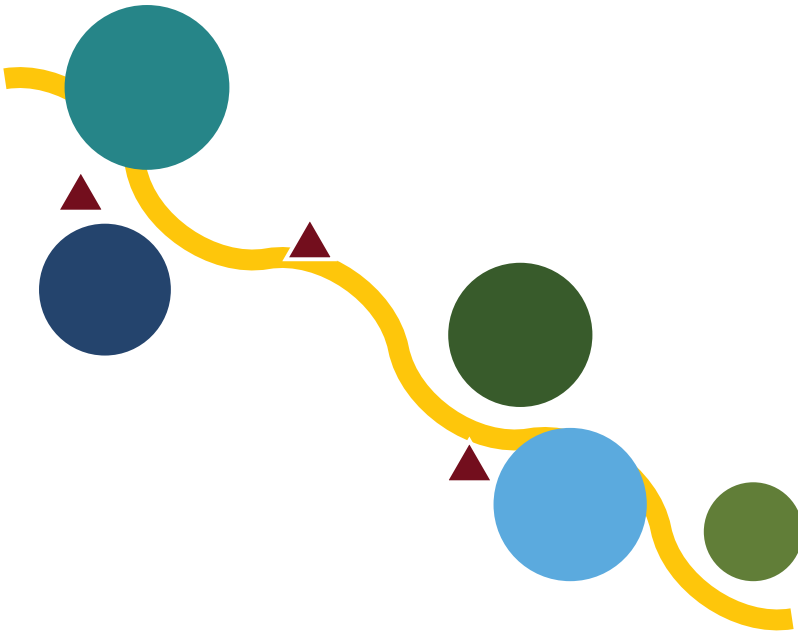
**Below:**

Sometimes visitors from more rural areas will drive to Valley Forge and rent a bicycle to ride into Philadelphia for the day.



## Areas, Linear Spaces and Points

To better understand the elements of this thesis, it is helpful to imagine them as a system of areas, linear spaces, and points. Tourism researcher, Geoffrey Wall uses this terminology to differentiate between types of tourism. He uses points to refer to places where high numbers of people are concentrated in a relatively small space, like a museum or church.<sup>1</sup> Area attractions are sites where many points of tourism are gathered, such as a historic city; and linear sites of tourism are those with physical linear properties that guide visitors along a path.<sup>2</sup>



While somewhat similar, this thesis adapts Wall's typology to fit its own three crucial elements. The areas addressed in the project are urban and rural—connected by linear spaces, or trails. Along these trails are points of public art and interpretation. This thesis expands upon that framework to delve deeper into each element, exposing the various ways in which they merge.

### **Areas: Rural/Urban**

A brief look at the historical and modern concepts of urban and rural and the importance of viewing the relationship between the two as interconnected, not binary.



### **Linear Spaces: Trails**

Examining the types, purposes and settings of trails—specifically in the urban/rural context. Then a look at the opportunities and challenges of trails in relation to this thesis.



### **Points: Interpretation**

Interpretation could be in the form of wayside trail exhibits, public art, or a blending of the two. This paper will examine some of the guiding principles of each, as well as some of their shared considerations.





An aerial photograph of a landscape showing a mix of green agricultural fields and a small town with buildings and roads. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Element #I

Areas: Rural/Urban

*Smart habitation is an integrated area of villages and a city working in harmony and where the rural and urban divide has reduced to thin line.*

–A. P. J. Abdul Kalam



What are rural and urban? Although these terms are used regularly, arriving at an agreed-upon definition of them is a complex task.<sup>1</sup> This section will briefly explore the concepts of urban and rural, and the necessary shift from viewing them as binary entities, to elements of interdependent regions. The concept of suburban is largely omitted from this paper because it is the shift in thinking around urban and rural relationships that is the heart of this thesis. While suburban is a key element of regional relationships, urban and rural are complex topics on their own and the capacity of this paper did not allow for a study of suburban areas. Suburban's role in the connectivity of these regions is assumed in this thesis, though it could be an area of further research outside of this study.

To explore the interconnected relationship of urban and rural we will examine three approaches—one historical and two modern.

One of the leading historical authorities on the relationship between urban and rural was sociologist Louis Wirth.<sup>2</sup> In the 1930's, he defined urban and rural using specific characteristics, and their resulting social behaviors.

**Size of Population**—Rural communities have smaller populations than urban areas, and it is likely that residents of rural communities know many or most of the other residents of that area. Residents of urban areas do not know most of the people who live in their settlements. Most urban residents have relationships with one another that are in specific “contractual” situations, i.e., one's banker or plumber.<sup>3</sup> The large size of urban settlements creates different social relationships than those in rural settlements. “The urbanite does not develop deep personal connections with these people but only interacts with them in terms of their roles. Personal relations become superficial and transitory. Urban life is marked by utilitarianism and efficiency. Transitions across groups are difficult, and numerous social orders result adding to the segmentation of urban life.”<sup>4</sup>



**Density**– When there are many people in a small area, specialization is necessary. Each person in a city performs a specific task in order to support themselves and make the city function as a whole. Areas of high density also increase competition between individuals and social groups.<sup>5</sup> So, residents of rural areas have less specialization and competition than those in urban areas. Less density in rural areas also means these residents have less sensitivity to “a world of artifacts”<sup>6</sup> as those in urban areas. Meaning, rural residents place less importance on symbols of people, such as uniforms, and pay more attention to the eccentricities of the person wearing the uniform.<sup>7</sup>

**Social Heterogeneity**– More populous settlements have greater diversity, so residents of these areas are more tolerant of diverse social behavior than those in rural areas. In rural settlements unusual professions, sexual orientations, cultural interests or other atypical actions may be noticed and scorned.<sup>8</sup> However, residents of urban areas may also feel that they are surrounded by people who are indifferent, causing them to feel more isolated than residents of rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

Much has changed since Wirth’s time, and these concepts are typically not applicable in developed societies today.<sup>10</sup> Social characteristics (such as those outlined above) of urban and rural areas are often overlapping, and rural residents have access to many of the same modern transportation and communication amenities that urban residents do.<sup>11</sup> In fact, sociologist Charles T. Stewart, Jr. used these same reasons to argue against the urban/rural dichotomy as far back as the 1950’s.<sup>12</sup> “The demographic distinction between urban and rural in terms of residential population has limited value. With increased local mobility, social and economic space no longer coincides with residence.”<sup>13</sup>

Deciding what is urban and what is rural has become a much more<sup>16</sup> complex task. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau's currently defines rural as: what urban is not.

So, what then is urban? Starting with the 1950 census, the Census Bureau began defining urban as an area with a population of 50,000 or more.<sup>14</sup> In 2000, the Bureau expanded the classification to include two types of urban areas:

- “Urbanized Areas” have a population of 50,000 or more.
- “Urban Clusters” are areas with populations of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000.<sup>15</sup>

“Rural” is defined as all population, housing, and territory not included within an urbanized area or urban cluster.<sup>16</sup>

To determine what is urban, the Census Bureau considers:

- Tracts and Blocks– “Census tracts are small, relatively permanent geographic entities within counties.”<sup>17</sup> Tracts and Blocks– “Census tracts are small, relatively permanent geographic entities within counties.” Local officials create tracts. Blocks are usually delineated by Census officials, and are statistical areas bounded by visible features and non-visible boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Census officials look at both when configuring data.
- Density–areas must have at least 1,000 people per square mile
- Land Use– Beginning in 2010, the Census Bureau used land cover and paved surfaces to help identify nonresidential urban land uses. This includes airports which must have a minimum of 2,500 passengers annually and be located within a half mile of other qualifying territory to be included in an urban area.<sup>19</sup>

- Distance–Sometimes parks, small farms, shopping malls or other entities interrupt the continuity of urban areas. To accommodate these cases, the Census Bureau developed “hop” and “jump” criteria. According to the Census Bureau’s website, “The hop criteria allows for areas up to half a mile along a road corridor (with multiple hops) to be included. The jump criteria allows for the inclusion of areas up to 2.5 miles, but only one jump along a road.”<sup>20</sup>

The figure below, from the Census Bureau illustrates this.

#### Graphic Depiction of Urban/Rural Classification

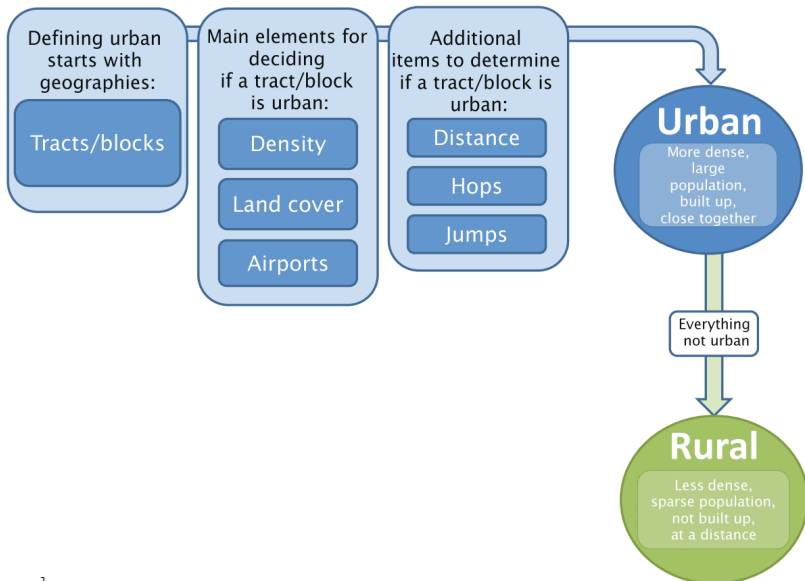


Figure 1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

While these distinctions are much more scientific and data-driven than Wirth’s primarily qualitative, sociological approach, the Census Bureau’s definitions still leave much ambiguity.

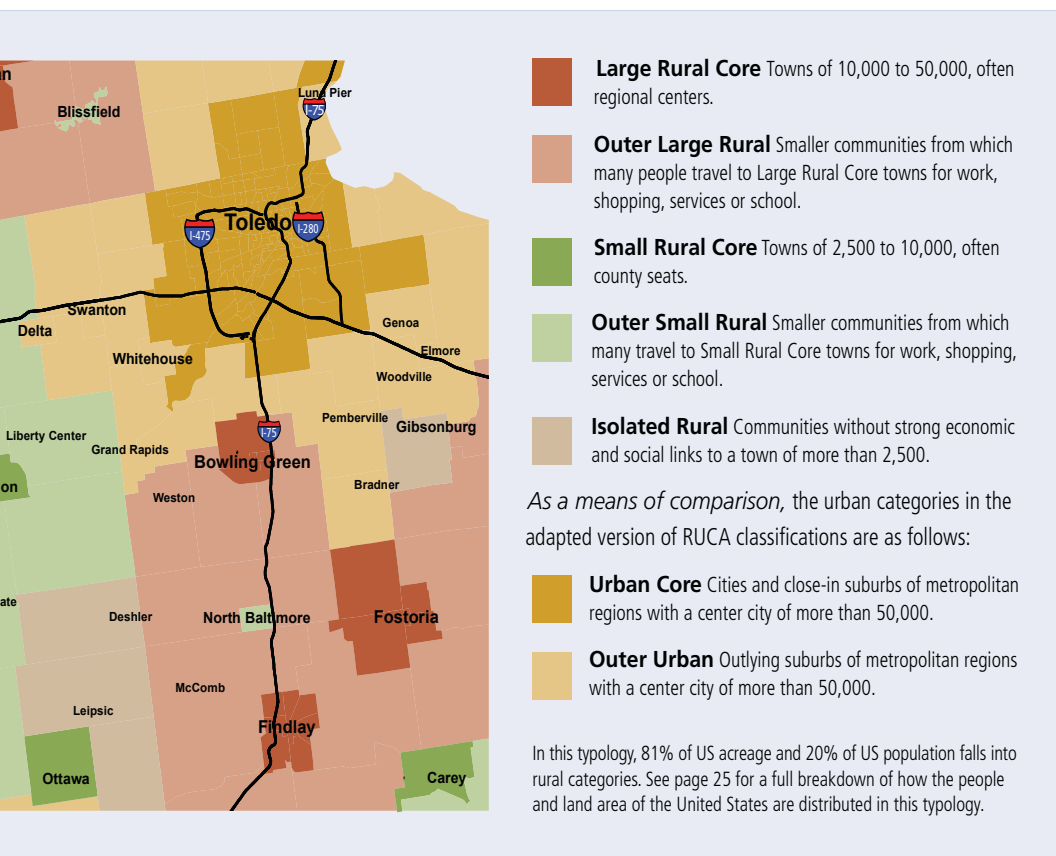


Figure 2  
Source: Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers Report

Models like the one above from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers Report may be a more realistic way of defining urban and rural areas. Moreover, such models are more applicable to a study like this, which considers travel between urban and rural areas.

Figure 2 was created based on data from the U.S. Department of Transportation's 2009 National Household Travel Survey. The USDA Economic Research Service used this data to develop Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) classifications to chart rural transportation patterns. Researchers at the University of Washington then adapted these classifications to identify five different types of rural communities, and two types of urban categories.<sup>21</sup>

The result of this data-synthesization is a classification system that “identifies urbanized areas and distinguishes between areas within an adjacent city’s area of influence and local rural areas.”<sup>22</sup> By adding another layer of information—transportation patterns—to a study of population, the Rural Urban Commuting Area classification offers a more nuanced way to distinguish between varying urban and rural areas.

The Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers Report uses this categorization to illustrate that not all rural places are the same:

“From exurbs to farm country to resort towns, rural America represents a wide spectrum of life.”<sup>23</sup> The report also notes that 25 percent of rural counties are exurban and “culturally and economically connected to nearby cities.”<sup>24</sup>

“From exurbs to farm country to resort towns,  
rural America represents a wide spectrum of life.”

– Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers Report

Although approaches to defining rural and urban may be improving and becoming more useful in some cases, how much difference does this make to most Americans?

In *The Rural-Urban Interface: New Patterns of Spatial Interdependence and Inequality in America*, the authors state, “Even when rural and urban classification schemes are formalized by government...their use is not adopted uniformly among scholars, public policy-makers, or politicians. And, for better or worse, these official definitions of urban (or metropolitan) arguably have little if any common meaning or understanding among most everyday Americans... Urban or rural are experienced differently across America.”

This vague use of terminology opens the door to speaking in generalities about groups of very different people. As noted in the *Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers Report*, “All small communities don’t fit in the same box. From exurbs to farm country to resort towns, rural America represents a wide spectrum of life.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, cities are made up of populations that are culturally, racially and ethnically diverse. Lumping all Americans into two categories to explain social attributes such as values and beliefs can reinforce stereotypes, which inherently leads to misunderstandings and ultimately discord.

**Right from top to bottom:**

Seattle, Washington; Warrenton, Missouri;  
Covina, California; and Buford, Wyoming



This is urban:



But so is this:



This is rural:



But so is this:



## A Different View of the Urban/Rural Relationship

If urban and rural are such fuzzy terms, why do we still treat them as binary entities?<sup>26</sup>

There are probably several reasons for this. Maybe it's just easier to talk about something in relation to what it's not. In *The Uses of Binary Thinking*, author Peter Elbow writes, "Binary thinking is the path of least resistance for human perceiving, thinking, and for linguistic structures. To perceive is to notice a category over against [sic] difference, and the simplest path is in terms of simple opposition. The easiest way to classify complex information is to clump it into two piles."<sup>27</sup>

Building off of that, maybe the terms urban and rural have been used so long (in addition to "suburban") that we can't break the habit of speaking of them this way. Perhaps if we had a different way of speaking about the relationships between urban and rural areas it would be easier for us to shift the way we think about them as well?

These could both be legitimate reasons for emphasizing the divide, but this paper would be insincere if it did not acknowledge some of the real divisions between urban and rural areas of the country. After the 2016 Presidential Election, many Americans (and many abroad) became much more attuned to rural and urban as opposing forces. The divisive election shed light on some real aspects of contention between large cities and their rural counterparts.

In the spring of 2017, the Washington Post-Keiser Family Foundation performed a survey which found the divide between urban and rural America is "rooted in rural residents' deep misgivings about the nation's rapidly changing demographics, their sense that Christianity is under siege and their perception that the federal government caters most to the needs of people in big cities."

<sup>28</sup> The poll of nearly 1,700 Americans (over half of which were from rural and small towns) also showed that while small town



# Guide to Urban/Rural

**Savannah Barrett**

**Director of Programs**

**Art of the Rural**



**Art of the Rural is a collaborative organization working on the ground and online to build the field of rural arts and reframe the way that rural is seen today with cross-sector partnerships.**

**Below are some thoughts on the modern relationship between urban and rural from Savannah Barrett, Director of Programs for Art of the Rural.**

- There are about 18 federal definitions of rural—all meaning “not urban”. When I’m asked “what is rural?”, I say, “Well, what is it to you? If you think you’re rural then good for you.” It’s all relative.
- Many people from urban areas have connections to rural areas and vice-versa. The differences between the two can be difficult to define, and no matter how people feel personally, these regions are interconnected.
- It’s really difficult to dislike a person and not care about their community if they’ve listened to you and valued your story— and connected that to a story that’s important in their own lives. When someone welcomes you into their community and you have a deep connection, you can’t hate those folks anymore.<sup>192</sup>

Americans feel a deep sense of kinship with their communities, many felt a “stark sense of estrangement from people who live in urban areas.”<sup>29</sup> Urban respondents to the survey felt less strongly about the divide—less than 20 percent of these respondents said that rural values are “very different” from theirs.<sup>30</sup>

So, while declining economic outcomes in rural areas is a driving factor of the perceived divide (the USDA reports that rural employment has rebounded less than half as quickly as urban employment since the Great Recession of 2007–2009<sup>31</sup>), many of the issues that respondents focused on were cultural and social. The poll found that, “the largest fissures between Americans living in large cities and those in less-dense areas are rooted in misgivings about the country’s changing demographics and resentment about perceived biases in federal assistance.”<sup>32</sup>

Trump and other candidates took advantage of American’s uneasiness<sup>33</sup> to divide and conquer, amplifying inherent tribal tendencies in voters. As stated on Breaking Down Ideological Battle Lines on WHYY Public Media’s Radio Times, we are tribal and have biases even if we think we don’t, and it takes actual cognitive energy to overcome biases.<sup>34</sup> It’s so easy to find sources that back up your own opinions today, creating and supporting confirmation biases. “If we are factually wrong about something, but part of a large group we will survive. If we are correct, but on our own, we may not be safe. So, our innate selves prioritize group identity over any sense of need for accuracy. It is increasingly rare that people spend time with those they don’t agree with.”<sup>35</sup>

As many were attributing Trump’s election to a rural uprising, others were quick to point out that while rural support played a large role in his victory, much of his support came from metropolitan areas.<sup>36</sup> However, these weren’t urban cores, as illustrated in the Rural Urban Commuting Area classification, but peripheral areas in the zone of influence of these cities.

In *The Rural-Urban Interface: New Patterns of Spatial Interdependence and Inequality in America*, the authors state, “the majority of all rural people (54 percent), as officially defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, now reside in America’s metropolitan areas. They live in the open countryside, on farms, and in unincorporated housing developments at the periphery of metropolitan cities and their suburbs. Metropolitan regions are expanding outward into the rural hinterland, gobbling up land along with rural people and communities. As such, rural and urban need to be treated as interdependent and mutually dependent.”<sup>37</sup>

So, yet again, the lines between urban and rural are blurred, resulting in typologies that may or may not accurately represent various populations.

*“Half of the U.S. population lives in metropolitan counties. Many rural areas are in metropolitan statistical areas because of commuting patterns. These are no longer distinct categories in many places.”*<sup>38</sup>

— Chuck Fluharty, President and CEO,  
Rural Policy Research Institute

The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) is the only national policy institute in the U.S. dedicated to assessing the rural impacts of public policies. Chuck Fluharty, President and CEO advocates for rural communities across the nation, and stresses that, “we need to start thinking bigger about smaller places. We’ve got to think more carefully about the interdependency between urban and rural. [We need to] lift up collective impact models, particularly in the creative communities that are lining the two.”<sup>39</sup>

RUPRI often supports these creative communities by working with Art of the Rural. Art of the Rural is “a collaborative organization with a mission to help build the field of the rural arts, create new narratives on rural culture and community, and contribute to the emerging rural arts and culture movement.”<sup>40</sup>

In a February, 2018 phone conversation with Savannah Barrett, Art of the Rural Director of Programs, she emphasized that while there are real differences between the cultural values and economic opportunities of rural and urban areas, defining them can be difficult and a distraction to the larger dialogue of their interconnected relationships.

“Only one to five percent of all national philanthropy goes to rural areas, and most metrics for measuring success are urban-centric, so I understand why people in small towns are frustrated. That said, no matter how people feel personally, these regions are interconnected.”

Savannah noted that rural areas control our nation’s food security and energy economy, steward our natural resources, control our water, and contribute vitally to our nation’s workforce. (“Our number one most valuable resource from rural areas to our country is young people.”<sup>41</sup>) So while the large cities of the nation may be the engines of economic growth in some ways (technology, innovation, services), Savannah argues that there isn’t any element of our society that you can’t claim doesn’t have some rural connection.

There are connections and similarities when it comes to hardships as well. “It’s dangerous to compare things in terms of race, class, or gender, but there are shared issues between say, poor white workers in rural areas and inner-city African-Americans. I think if the workers of the world came together and understood each other’s struggles, they’d get a lot further.”<sup>42</sup>

*More of the conversation with Savannah is highlighted in this elements Field Guide section on page 27.*

In summary, defining the relationship between urban and rural is difficult to say the least. Whether one is trying to distinguish between the two using population or cultural standards, there is no clear agreement as to what these terms mean. Outside of the difficulty of defining urban and rural for political or geographical means, the meanings of these terms can be tied up in personal experiences and vary widely from person to person.

These sometimes deeply personal connections to the identities of urban or rural can be used ideologically to divide populations. While some real political, cultural and economic divisions exist, tribal tendencies can be taken advantage of to amplify the binary relationship between the two areas, as seen in the U.S. in recent years.

Ironically, this emphasis on urban and rural divisions comes at a time when these areas are deeply interconnected. The flow of transportation, money, natural resources, goods, culture, and ideas create continuums between these areas that continue to grow. A shift from viewing urban and rural as opposing entities to regional partners creates opportunity for regions with stronger economic, cultural and communicative ties. Achieving this shift requires an understanding of existing opportunities, and an examination of the connective tissues between rural and urban.



**Above:** Outdoor interpretation by Art of the Rural

### **Element 1 Key Findings:**

- The terms urban and rural are not easily defined. There are varying systems of typology for doing so based on population, transportation and geography, but none that work universally.
- Cultural definitions of rural and urban vary widely and can be a very personal piece of one's identity.
- Urban and rural are sometimes used ideologically to divide populations. While some real political, cultural and economic divisions exist, tribal tendencies can be taken advantage of to amplify the binary relationship between the two areas.
- Rural and urban areas are deeply interconnected by the flow of transportation, money, natural resources, goods, culture, and ideas. Recognizing the importance of viewing these areas as regional continuums is important economically and culturally.





## Element #2

# Linear Spaces of Trails

*In a time of both great wealth and difficult challenges, trails offer a rare chance to connect the past, present and future.*

—JEFF OLSON, Millennium Trails: Honor the Past, Imagine the Future, ITE Journal, November 2000

*Trails consolidate and connect communities, rather than encourage them to expand and fragment.*

—DAVID BURWELL, President,  
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1997





When thinking about the continuum of rural and urban areas, and the flow of people, goods and ideas between them, what do you envision? Roads? Rivers? The streaming of data via the internet?

What about trails? These linear corridors play a role in connecting urban and rural communities by acting as conduits of transportation and spaces for recreation between them. They also bring economic development, increased public health, and even community pride and identity to the regions that surround them.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, trails are places that residents of both rural and urban communities share. Trails are neutral spaces that literally connect communities. While roads and online forums are strong connectors of urban and rural areas, they don't offer the same personal interactions that trails do. This isn't to say that roads can't act as trails themselves—scenic driving trails are a popular means of tourism and cultural interaction in the U.S.<sup>44</sup>, and an important piece of this thesis' Case Study 2 is a driving tour. Yet, without the barrier of a vehicle or screen, trail users have more opportunity for actual face-to-face interactions, whether that be on the trail itself or in hubs (businesses, parks, museums, etc.) along the trail.

*“Trails offer people a sense and ability to really get to know a place and its people in ways that roads may not. A lot of times if people are on a trail, they'll stop into a place that they don't know anything about, and they'll learn about something that they never knew to ask about. This usually involves them seeing and talking with other people—trails are very constructive that way.”<sup>45</sup>*

—Bob Thomas, Architect at Campbell Thomas & Co,  
and Board Chair of Philadelphia Parks Alliance

There are some challenges to using trails as connectors of urban and rural—how far will people travel on trails, especially without convenient points of access? How comfortable are people using trails? With so many competing opportunities for entertainment why would someone choose to spend their valuable free time on a trail? This section will explore the opportunities, as well as possible barriers to trail usage.

We saw in the previous section, *Areas of Rural and Urban*, that as the overlap between these areas grows, shifting awareness to the aspects that unite them, rather than those that divide, provides opportunities for strengthened regional relationships. Increasing partnerships and collaboration between these formerly disparate areas can have positive cultural and economic impacts.<sup>46</sup> As RUPRI's Chuck Fluharty said, “we need to lift up collective impact models [between urban and rural communities].”<sup>47</sup> This section explores why and how trails can be a part of these collective impact models, and the challenges that could arise from using them.

This trail exploration will start with an investigation of the different types of trails and their purposes and will then consider trails in the context of urban and rural settings. This is followed with an examination of the barriers of trail usage, and a look at the current state of funding for trails today.

## Trail Types and Purposes

As Dallen J. Timothy and Stephen W. Boyd point out in *Tourism and Trails: Cultural, Ecological and Management Issues*, “the number of trails, pathways, scenic routes and other linear resources is impossible to quantify for a whole variety of reasons, such as the ways they are classified, their different sizes, intensity of use, surface quality, ownership and management, locations, or the multi-jurisdictional aspects of many cross-border trails.”<sup>48</sup> However the authors do offer a conceptual model to portray the variances of trails and routes, as seen in Figure 3.

The nature of the trail user’s experience is at the center of the nested hierarchy of this conceptual model, which is shaped by the type and setting of the trail, as well as the wider environment of national, regional and local policies of which trail/route development is an element. These levels of influence are shaped by a number of factors including the scale, management, demand for, and impacts on the trail.<sup>49</sup>

While this model demonstrates the many factors which influence the experiences of trail users, the most important aspects to consider for the purposes of this thesis are the type and setting of the trail.

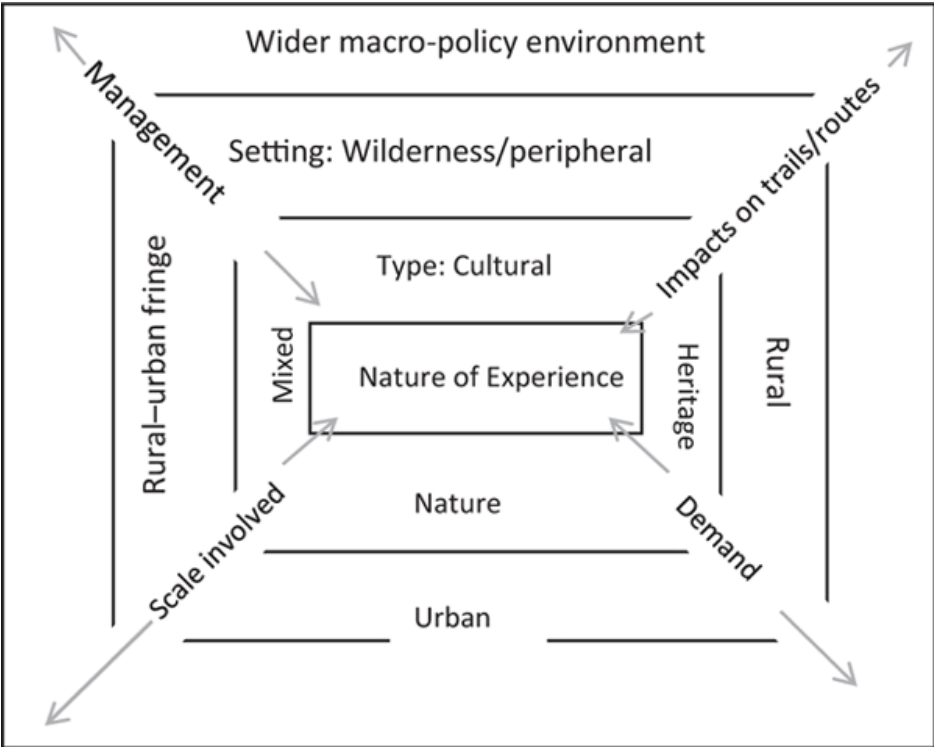


Figure 3  
Source: Tourism and Trails: Cultural, Ecological and Management Issues



## Types of Trails

In *Tourism and Trails*, Timothy and Boyd lay out three primary types of trails: cultural/ heritage, nature and mixed. They break down each type of trail into several different purposes, which are briefly reviewed below:

### Cultural routes and heritage trails

Cultural and heritage trails can be divided into two categories—organically evolved and purposive routes.<sup>50</sup> Organically evolved trails are based on routes of historic events such as trade routes and linear spaces of resource transport such as canals and railways. Examples of organically evolved linear spaces are Historic Route 66, which follows the former long-distance U.S. highway, and the Great Wall of China, which follows a former political boundary. Purposive cultural trails are short trails that can include urban heritage trails, film or music routes, and agricultural trails among other topics. One example of a purposive trail is a chain of historic sites in Shuri, Okinawa, Japan that create an urban heritage trail in the city. Another example is the Otago Goldfields Heritage Trail in New Zealand, which links several different mining sites and artifacts.<sup>51</sup>

Timothy and Boyd note that an interesting trend of purposive routes is that they come and go. According to the authors, one of the most common reasons that purposive routes don't last is "a lack of will to cooperate for the greater good of the connected region or community. ...some businesses and locations [may] fail to do their part in espousing the goals and purposes of the trail, thereby allowing the developed network to collapse."<sup>52</sup> These networks may also fail if partners feel they are not receiving rewards that were promised during the initial phases of the trail project, and therefore decide not to participate.<sup>53</sup>

Timothy and Boyd name four purposes for both organic and purposive cultural heritage trails in addition to recreation:

**1. Preservation of historic values and conservation of cultural resources and historic routes**

These routes provide information about, and commemorate, historical events, places and people.<sup>54</sup> This history is interpreted using a variety of tools including signs, plaques, leaflets, audio guides and maps. “Interpretation is a well-recognized method of increasing public awareness and education, and according to interpretation specialists, knowledge begets respect, which has a tendency to translate into increased public appreciation for resources and boosted efforts to conserve.”<sup>55</sup>

**2. Image enhancement and boosting of a sense of place**

Many cities have used trails to improve their reputation. The website of the Circuit Trails system in Greater Philadelphia boasts, “Proud to Trail. One of America’s largest trail networks is in your backyard.”<sup>56</sup> These efforts at building community pride “empower communities socially, psychologically and politically so they are better able to determine their own future development options, including tourism. Trail development also contributes to a deeper sense of place as important local events and cultures are highlighted for outside consumption.”<sup>57</sup>





### 3. Economic development

Trails can promote a place and are often featured in regional tourism campaigns and marketing. Trails have “economic potential for bringing income to the destination, providing jobs for locals and creating tax revenues.” Local economies are stimulated by service providers, such as participating organizations and attractions along these routes. Purposive trails especially seem to see benefits as they often link individual businesses and historic sites along a planned corridor.<sup>58</sup> Bob Thomas (see Field Guide 2) notes that small enhancements to an area can make a big difference—an up-tick of even 10% in profits can make a big difference to a business along a trail.

An example of this economic development is highlighted in the Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers Report: “The Great Allegheny Passage trail, running 141 miles from Homestead, Pa., to Cumberland, Md., in its initial years attracted 700,000 yearly users, who infused \$40 million into eight small towns along the way. Since 2007, 54 businesses catering to trail users have opened or expanded, creating 83 new jobs and paying out \$7.5 million in wages each year.”<sup>59</sup>

### 4. Instruments to exercise power and persuasion

The last purpose of cultural heritage trails that Timothy and Boyd articulate is the potential of trails to act as pawns for political gain. They note that these types of trails are often political in their very nature as the people that oversee them select the stories and histories that are interpreted. This can be done in a holistic, impartial manner like in the case of the Clerkenwell Trail in London that “emphasizes the heritages that have been largely ignored or written out of the official narrative of the city.”<sup>60</sup> This can also be done in a way that skews a story to benefit the image of a specific party. Timothy and Boyd point to the Sun Yat-sen Heritage Trail in Hong Kong, which “intentionally ignores most references to the colonial past.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Nature trails**

Timothy and Boyd use the term nature trails to refer to various trails that occur in natural settings whose primary purposes are outdoor activities or providing isolated experiences from areas of high population.<sup>62</sup> This category includes long-distance trails, water trails, forest canopy walks and wilderness tracks. As this thesis sets out to explore the implementation of interpretation and art along trails that are highly accessible to large numbers of people, this category will not be elaborated upon further.

### **Mixed Routes**

Though all trails have some degree of overlap of cultural and natural traits, Timothy and Boyd use the term “mixed routes” to refer to trails that “are an obvious intersection of nature and culture and present themselves as such.”<sup>63</sup>

These include:

#### **Discovery trails**

These are common in urban spaces. They are self-guided walks with aids like brochures, signs and maps to help visitors link parks, gardens, green spaces and historic sites.<sup>64</sup>

#### **Bicycle trails**

Cycling routes exist in many types of settings, and they are now common in cities as a means of linking green spaces.<sup>65</sup> These trails are often further connected to surrounding trail communities by bike lanes and routes on connecting streets.

#### **Greenways**

Greenways often link together parks, cultural resources and natural spaces. They are particularly important in urban and suburban areas as a setting for outdoor trails.<sup>66</sup>

### **Self-drive scenic byways**

Driving tourism has been an important part of the American identity since the automobile became widely available.<sup>67</sup> Timothy and Boyd refer to a 2003 issue of *Journal of Vacation Marketing* that laid out several factors of self-drive tourism. One of the more relevant findings from this publication for this thesis is the relationship between self-drive tourism and short-distance trips to see family and friends. The author of the journal suggests that “self-drive trails have the capacity to link regional communities together.”<sup>68</sup>

### **Rails-to-trails**

Many of former railways in the world, and particularly the U.S. have been converted into trails for public use. These re-imagined linear corridors have been called “a second national park system.”<sup>69</sup> One of the most prominent non-profits in this field, The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, works with communities to help develop trails. The steps of their process, as outlined on their website include: 1) Stakeholder analysis, 2) Public meeting facilitation, 3) Partnership and coalition building, 4) Organizing a “Friends of the Trail” group, and 5) Trainings.<sup>70</sup>



## Trail Settings

While the term “settings” could refer to a multitude of environments in the context of trails, for the purposes of this thesis settings will refer to a brief look at the particulars of urban and rural areas.

In many cases trails connect urban and rural areas.<sup>71</sup> Both areas embrace trails, though often for differing reasons. Trails provide urban areas with spaces of respite, and venues for exercise, transportation and appreciation for the city’s nature and history.<sup>72</sup> Rural areas use trails as access routes through areas of mixed ownership, as well as ways to preserve natural landscapes.<sup>73</sup>

There is much overlap between urban and rural trails, as many trails connect with each other to form regional trail systems such as the Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails in northeastern Pennsylvania<sup>74</sup>, or the Circuit Trails System in the Greater Philadelphia region.

Although many residents of both rural and urban areas support trail systems, sometimes there is opposition to trail development. This often comes in the form of NIMBY (Not in my backyard) opposition. Home and land owners sometimes worry about nearby or adjacent trails creating issues of safety, vandalism and liability.<sup>75</sup> According to Rails-to-Trails, this issues rarely materialize though, and these concerns can be addressed by creating a strong design and management plan, informing the public about the trail plan, and involving them in the planning throughout the process.<sup>76</sup> Further concerns of trail users in general are explored in the next section.

## Barriers

A trail can be beautifully built, but what good is it if no one can access it?

While some trails are meant to be challenging and secluded, those pertinent to this study would need to be highly accessible in order to engage as many residents and visitors as possible.

Timothy and Boyd refer to the field of leisure constraints to categorize barriers to trail usage. These barriers can fall into the categories of structural, interpersonal or intrapersonal constraints.

### Structural constraints

Physical impediments are the most obvious form of barriers to trail usage. The location of a trail is very important in people's decision whether or not to use a trail—people are more likely to use a trail closer to their home than far away. Furthermore, traveling a great distance on a trail is a large barrier to many people.<sup>77</sup> As we saw earlier, urban and rural can apply to many places. Some areas, even if they are close to a trail, are so far removed f

Difficult terrain, inadequate parking facilities and other physical impediments can limit trail usage as well. These considerations are especially important when considering trail accessibility for people with disabilities. The nonprofit American Trails are works to ensure trail accessibility to all. They “envision a network of trails within 15 minutes of every home, school, and workplace”<sup>78</sup> and they help promote and further the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) which helps trail developers assess and improve the accessibility of their trails.

Most trails are free to use, though some may require costs to get to them, such as fuel costs or bus fares. While trails may be one of the cheapest means of recreation and tourism<sup>79</sup>, these costs could be a barrier for some.

### **Interpersonal Constraints**

Most people use trails with friends or family,<sup>80</sup> so having no one to share a trail experience with could be a barrier for some potential users. The desire for a trail companion could stem from social or safety needs.

### **Intrapersonal Constraints**

According to Timothy and Boyd, one of the biggest complaints of trail users is overcrowding. This is especially heightened when bicycles and other wheeled devices share the trail.<sup>81</sup> People may be hesitant to use trails during inclement weather, but nice weather is more likely to create issues of overcrowding along trails.

Safety concerns can limit trail usage as well. In urban areas high crime and busy streets are impediments; in rural areas wild animals and poisonous plants are concerns.<sup>82</sup>

Other intrapersonal reasons people may not use trails includes lack of physical fitness, and a lack of interest in the outdoors or cultural heritage. Interpretive trails have the potential to feel didactic, and even boring to some visitors.<sup>83</sup> Though as we will see in Element 3: Points of Interpretation, if done right, interpretive trails can stimulate and engage visitors.

### **Funding for Trails**

In February 2018, President Trump released a federal policy to build, and rebuild the nation's infrastructure, and Congress is debating the best ways to move forward with the plan. Groups like the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy are lobbying Congress to include "transportation networks that give more people the flexibility and opportunity to travel by walking and bicycling", and they proclaim, "robust investment in trail, walking and biking networks is an essential part of a balanced transportation system to secure America's future."<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, the federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) already gives funding to communities for transportation enhancements, bike/walk pilot programs, and safe routes to schools.<sup>85</sup> It also funds “non-traditional” projects designed to strengthen the cultural, aesthetic, and environmental aspects of the nation’s inter-modal transportation system.<sup>86</sup>

Considering all of this, as well as the fact that hundreds of millions of dollars in state and local funding were secured for trails in 2017 and early 2018, it seems that trails are increasingly important in the U.S.<sup>87</sup> This view of a growing demand and need for trails is shared by Timothy and Boyd in *Tourism and Trails*. “There is widespread recognition among land managers and researchers that trail use is on the rise, with nearly every form of trail and use increasing in popularity in recent years.”<sup>88</sup>

It’s not just urban areas that are investing in trails either. The oversimplification of the categories of urban and rural that we studied in Element 1: Areas of Rural and Urban can give a distorted view of the relationship of trails as means of transportation to urban and rural areas. This passage from the *Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers Report* emphasizes the connection between the continuum of rural and urban areas and the strength of trail systems:

“Dividing America into binary categories of urban and rural masks the real story [of America’s travel patterns]. The Rural Policy Research Institute emphasizes that there is more than one type of “rural” community, and the travel behavior and needs of rural residents vary depending on whether they live in an exurb, a tourist destination or an agricultural or mining community. In most cases, rates of bicycling and walking in rural communities are not dramatically different from that of large cities.”<sup>89</sup> This report notes that rural Americans walk at a rate between 58 and 80 percent of the overall national rate, and bike at a rate between 74 and 104 percent of the overall national rate.<sup>90</sup>



The continuum of urban and rural areas can be traced along many linkages, but trails offer a unique regional connective tissue. These neutral linear spaces between rural and urban areas offer opportunities for personal connections in ways that roads or online forums cannot. The additional benefits and growing support of trails make everyday face-to-face interactions all the more likely. The advantages trails provide to regional economies, personal health, and cultural and social engagement make them an increasingly attractive investment for federal, regional and local institutions—both in urban and rural areas.

Establishing and/or enhancing trails involves thoughtful consideration of their barriers and challenges. While these obstacles can vary, often they can be overcome by actively pursuing community input at all levels of trail development and expansion. By taking into account the concerns and needs of all stakeholders, these linear spaces become opportunities for meaningful and engaging dialogue.

Harnessing these opportunities for dialogue on trails requires a planned method or approach—by what means can this potential for urban/rural interaction be realized? This thesis proposes that a system of points of interpretation which engage locals and visitors offers a unique means of linking rural and urban areas along these linear spaces of trails.

## Element 2 Key Findings

- Trails offer neutral spaces for interaction between strangers.
- Using trails to interpret the historic values and conservation of cultural resources tends to translate into increased public appreciation for these efforts.
- Trail development contributes a deeper sense of place for nearby residents.
- Trails offer image enhancement for cities and regions.
- Local and regional economies are stimulated by trail development.
- Rails-to-Trails are often promoted as ways to enhance the connections between communities. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has a specific process to help communities develop trails: 1) Stakeholder analysis, 2) Public meeting facilitation, 3) Partnership and coalition building, 4) Organizing a “Friends of the Trail” group, and 5) Trainings.
- Greenways and bike trails often link urban and rural areas.
- Urban and rural areas embrace trails for different reasons, though there is often overlap of trails between these regions.
- There is sometimes opposition to trails by landowners and residents along the proposed route.
- Barriers to trail usage can be structural, interpersonal or intrapersonal—access to, and crowding on trails are two of the most prominent issues.
- Trail usage is growing overall, and funding for trails is substantial.

# Guide to Trails

## **Bob Thomas**

**Architect, Campbell Thomas & Company  
Board Chair, Philadelphia Parks Alliance**

**The firm of Campbell Thomas & Co. Architects serves private, nonprofit and public clients to support community development, urban revitalization, energy conservation and trail and greenway development.**



**Here, Bob Thomas explains his perspective on trails and their relationship to urban/rural connections.**

- Trails connect all different kinds of cultural and physical landscapes, and really do pull people together. There are towns that didn't see visitors from anywhere else before, and now they're seeing people who are coming from all different types of areas. Historic sites and bed and breakfasts along these trails are pulling people from urban and rural areas, and they are talking to each other.
- Trails today are a lot more accommodating to visitors than they used to be. Long distance trails that pass through towns often have concierge businesses that will carry hikers' and bikers' bags—making them more accessible to people who may have physical difficulties.
- I think trail interpretation expressing a community's identity is essential because if you just use a trail as a pretty place to walk, bike or ride a horse, you're not going to get the same level of interest— with interpretation you will understand it better.<sup>191</sup>

## Element #3

### Points of Interpretation

*“Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part. Interpretation is conceptual and should explain the relationship between things.”<sup>91</sup>*

— Freeman Tilden, “Father of Interpretation”

*“Our shared spaces can better reflect what matters to us as individuals and as a community. With more ways to share our hopes, fears and stories, the people around us can not only help us make better places, they can help us lead better lives.”<sup>92</sup>*

— Candy Chang, urban planner and leader in participatory public art



# LAND

American patriot Patrick Henry reportedly proclaimed, "He is the greatest patriot who stops the most gullies." Contour strip cropping in conjunction with grassed waterways and proper crop rotation are practices that reduce soil erosion. Without these conservation practices the soil eroding off the field would more than double. Staff from Sauk County Conservation Planning & Zoning Department works in partnership with landowners to install contour strips that follow the natural contours of the land. Wisconsin has a long history of private-public conservation partnership, especially in this area of the state dating back to 1933 when the first federal soil conservation projects in the nation were carried out in southwestern Wisconsin.

Now that the areas of urban and rural, and linear spaces of trails have been explored, attention can turn to the points of interpretation. For this thesis, interpretation is defined two ways: wayside exhibits or community-driven public art. The creation process and form of the two art forms can differ greatly, however, there are occasions where the lines between wayside exhibits and public art are blurred. Many of the practical considerations that are important for one will be applicable to the other as well, and both forms of interpretation offer visitors a unique connection to a space, place or time.

Before going further into this section, it is important to recognize another point of interpretation, separate from outdoor signage or art. These are what could be described as community hubs. “Hubs” are businesses, museums, cultural centers and other institutions and organizations that occupy physical space/buildings along a trail. Throughout this thesis various forms of hubs have been, and will continue to be referred to, as they are pertinent to many aspects of this project. While these hubs are certainly important to this thesis because of their ability to link trail communities, host interpretation, and provide basic comforts and amenities they are not specifically included in this section, and are instead threaded throughout the study.

This section will first cover some guiding principles of wayside exhibits and interpretation, followed by an overview of public, and community-sourced art. Finally, some of the practical considerations of both forms of interpretation will be reviewed.





## Wayside Exhibits, or Trail-Based Interpretation

If you were asked to close your eyes and imagine trail interpretation, what would you see?

For a lot of people, it's probably something like this:



Or maybe this?



Perhaps even this?

Maybe you're wondering what the heck trail interpretation even is?

According to John A. Veverka, in *The Interpretive Trails Book: Effective Planning and Design*, “interpretation is a communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships in our natural and cultural heritage to the public through first-hand experiences with objects, artifacts, landscapes or sites. Building off of that, trail interpretation should involve multiple points that share a focused theme.”<sup>93</sup>

Wayside exhibits are specific points of trail interpretation, relating a story relevant to that specific site to the viewer. For this thesis we will use the two terms interchangeably, while “points of interpretation” is used as an over-arching term for both wayside exhibits and later, public art.

Odds are, trail interpretation probably isn’t something you pay a whole lot of attention to. According to the National Park Service’s *Wayside Exhibits: A Guide to Developing Outdoor Interpretive Exhibits*, the average time span at a wayside exhibit is 30-45 seconds.<sup>94</sup> Yet there is extensive thought and preparation that go into creating and maintaining trail-based interpretation. *Wayside Exhibits* lists four key factors that create a good wayside opportunity:

1. **A significant landscape feature**

“Within the first three-second glance at a wayside, visitors should see a connection to the landscape.”<sup>95</sup> There should be something unique about the site and or landscape.<sup>96</sup>

2. **Site-specific graphics**

Photos or illustrations should be a part of the narrative that the interpretive signage is telling. Often, these can be images of events that happened in that precise location.<sup>97</sup>

3. **Visitor access and safety**

“Consider landscape plans and the space needed to give visitors a comfortable, safe and accessible area to gather without disrupting the flow of foot traffic or spilling into automobile or bike traffic.”<sup>98</sup> Audio, tactile elements and/or

Braille should be incorporated in consideration of visitors with visual impairments. Signage should be at a height and angle that is appropriate for wheelchair users. Providing areas of rest, such as benches also makes wayside exhibits more accessible.

4. **Regular maintenance:** The NPS requires that panels on wayside exhibits be replaced every 5 years on average. They should be inspected and cleaned twice a year at a minimum. Depending on the exhibit, trail maintenance and vista clearing may be necessary as well.<sup>99</sup>

The guide also lists when NOT to use a wayside exhibit:

1. **Intrusion on the landscape**  
Depending on the location, waysides may be an intrusion. This can be the case in a natural or historic site.
2. **Sensitive sites**  
As waysides draw attention to the areas they occupy, it is best not to place them in potentially sensitive areas like archaeological digs or nesting sites.
3. **Complex stories**  
“Waysides do not tell complex or dynamic stories well.”<sup>100</sup>  
Events or activities that cover a vast expanse of land, complex human interactions or other complicated narratives do not work well for wayside exhibits and may be best addressed by other media.

To address those situations where wayside exhibits are not appropriate, other media such as brochures, phone applications or audio can be effective. Keep in mind that incorporating multiple forms of media at once can be overwhelming for visitors though.<sup>101</sup>

## The Importance of Interpretation

While complex stories may not be the best subject matter for wayside exhibits, it doesn't mean that these exhibited narratives can't be emotionally affective to the visitor. In *The Interpretive Trails Book: Effective Planning and Design*, Veverka says "... the interpretive planner [should] think of the trail as more than simply a connection between points A and B. It should be a work of communication art. Interpretive trails are designed to help the visitor laugh, cry, smile, discover, understand and explore along the way."<sup>102</sup>

As the last section explained, trails serve several purposes, some of which (preservation of historic values, conservation of cultural resources and historic routes, place-making) are most fully achieved through the use of interpretation.<sup>103</sup> By increasing public awareness, interpretation can translate into increased public appreciation for the subject at hand.<sup>104</sup>

However, interpretation is not just a matter of providing information. Freeman Tilden, who was an early leader in shaping visitor experience for the National Park Service, and who has been referred to as the "soul of interpretation"<sup>105</sup> said, "The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation."<sup>106</sup>

In his book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Tilden presented *Principles of Interpretation* that have become a widely used guide for practitioners of the field.<sup>107</sup>

Veverka summarizes these interpretive principles in *The Interpretive Trails Book*, noting that the construction and presentation of the message in both text and graphics needs to:<sup>108</sup>

- **Provoke** the attention and curiosity of the visitor.
- **Relate** to the everyday life of the visitor.
- **Reveal** the essence of the story through a unique or unusual viewpoint.
- **Address the whole** – contribute or help illustrate the main interpretive theme.
- **Strive for message unity** – use sufficient but varied repetition of cues to create and support the interpretive theme, mood or aura.<sup>109</sup>

Best practices of museum exhibitions can also be an excellent reference point to ensure interpretation—no matter the location—most effectively meets the needs of visitors. In *Judging Exhibitions: A Framework for Assessing Excellence*, Beverly Serrell lays out four criteria for critiquing exhibitions. These criteria, (with a fifth added by Polly McKenna-Cress) can also act as guides when assessing trail interpretation:

**1. Comfortable** – *An excellent exhibit helps the visitor feel comfortable both physically and psychologically. Good comfort opens the door to other positive experiences. Lack of comfort prevents them.*<sup>110</sup>

Though some may purposely be raising their heart rates and sweating through their clothes, trail users, park visitors and other guests to outdoor locations still need to feel comfortable. In addition to basic amenities like benches, bathrooms, and water fountains, these visitors should feel a sense of safety and ease. This could mean anything from ensuring the trail is maintained and stable, to creating art and interpretation that the visitors feel they comfortably understand.

A key component of understandable written interpretation is simplicity and clarification of message.<sup>111</sup> This means keeping design and content of written interpretive panels as efficient and “punchy” as possible. Veverka notes that “unless helped, we often fail to find, see, or comprehend.”<sup>112</sup> It is the interpretive planner’s job to help visitors make connections to the subject matter and/or environment.

**2. Engaging** – *An excellent exhibition is engaging for visitors. It entices them to pay attention. Engagement is the first step in meaning-making.*<sup>113</sup>

Just like exhibitions in a museum, successful public art and interpretive signage will draw visitors in and keep them interested. This brings them closer to relating it to their own experiences, therefore creating a more meaningful connection with the



interpretation. Veverka points out that visitors to interpretive trails are usually there for a “recreational learning experience.”<sup>114</sup> Meaning, visitors will engage in the interpretation for enjoyment, and will self-select those pieces that they find interesting.<sup>115</sup>

**3. Reinforcing** – *In an excellent exhibition, the exhibits provide visitors with abundant opportunities to be successful and to feel intellectually competent. In addition, the exhibits reinforce each other, providing multiple means of accessing similar bits of information that are part of a cohesive whole.*<sup>116</sup>

An individual piece of interpretation or even public art, if done correctly, considers the visitors’ experience and meets them where they are intellectually by providing accessible and understandable content. If these individual pieces are part of a whole, like a thematic interpretive trail, reiterating their core messages throughout the series allows visitors to understand these messages in a broader context. Veverka notes that interpretive trails are most effective when they have, “one focused interpretive theme...which all trail stops work to support or illustrate.”<sup>117</sup>

**4. Meaningful/Relevant** – *An excellent exhibition provides personally relevant experiences for visitors. Does the exhibition explore contemporary issues or implications of the topic? Beyond being engaging and feeling competent, visitors find themselves changed, both in a cognitive and affective way, but also in immediate and long-lasting ways.*<sup>118</sup>

An interpretive trail exploring the historic relationships between communities provides one layer of relevancy for those who live in or near those communities. Relating that historic relationship to the communities’ connections today would add a contemporary view, and arguably a more relevant experience.

A fifth criterion, added by exhibition developer and designer, Polly McKenna-Cress can also be a helpful consideration for those developing trail-based interpretation:

**5. Expectation** – What are the assumed (or known) expectations of the visitors coming in the door? (Or on the trail?!) This can be affected by several factors:

- Marketing or advertising
- Context of the institution.
- Operations, safety and “authority” assumptions visitors may make.
- Front-end evaluations provide critical information on visitor expectations that need to be addressed.<sup>119</sup>

What do trail users expect from their experience? Depending on the type of trail this could vary widely. Is it widely marketed to draw in tourists to the area? Is it a nature trail that offers respite from cities and other population centers? Do visitors assume the trail will be maintained and free from impediments? Trail users’ expectations could also include the behavior of others—is there a certain type of etiquette that is exchanged and respected by all trail users?

Like museum exhibitions, wayside interpretation can benefit greatly from visitor evaluations. Wayside Exhibits recommends the use of interviews and/or focus groups of potential visitors to better understand the audience, what they want to know, and how best to present that interpretation to them.<sup>120</sup> An article about successful trail exhibits on American Trails website makes the point that, “The success of your project may hinge on identifying who is presently using the park, who is not, and who should be encouraged to come.”<sup>121</sup>

# Community-Sourced Public Art

Like trail signage, public art is a form of outdoor interpretation that can powerfully engage audiences,<sup>122</sup> but what exactly is public art?



**Above:** A Love Letter For You, Mural Arts, Philadelphia

**Right:** One of Vik Muniz and community's landfill portraits.

Like urban and rural, developing a fixed definition of public art can be difficult as the field evolves. The Association for Public Art describes public art as distinguished by the “unique association of how it is made, where it is and what it means.”<sup>124</sup> It is placed in the public and expresses community values. Public art can take many forms: mosaics, murals, sculptures, memorials, digital media, architecture, even performances.<sup>125</sup> Public art can be temporary or permanent and can take a wide range of size and scale.

Also like trail interpretation, public art is usually site-specific. It can address the history of a site and its people, or current issues facing the area.<sup>126</sup> In one example of site-specific public art, Brazilian-born artist, Vik Muniz collaborated with workers at the world's largest landfill in Rio de Janeiro. They created a series of gigantic self-portraits made out of millions of recyclable materials picked out of the trash site. A portion of the money from the sold portraits goes to the workers, and the project offers them a new way to view themselves.<sup>127</sup>



Community collaboration, like that in Muniz's project, is a frequent feature of public art. Liesel Fenner, public art program manager for Americans for the Arts, asserts, "With public art the community becomes the owners of the art work -- they protect it and consider it a part of their place -- and because of this the art becomes more understood."<sup>128</sup>

While not all public art is community-sourced, community engagement is an important aspect of this thesis, so it is this type of public art that this section will focus on.



## It's All About Process

For many projects and organizations, the most important part of the integration of community and art is the act of creating and developing, and less the finished product. ArtPlace America sees arts and culture as a key tool of community planning and development. ArtPlace is a collaboration between several foundations, federal agencies and institutions that focuses on creative placemaking—“projects in which art plays an intentional and integrated role in place-based community planning and development.”<sup>129</sup> ArtPlace’s approach to creative placemaking focuses more on the ways that artists and creative interventions can be a part of the process, and less on the resulting outcomes.

Mural Arts in Philadelphia also emphasizes the importance of the process over the end result. While the artwork that is created can tell stories and inspire, it is the creation process that really drives their model.<sup>130</sup>



**Above:** Mural Art's Peace Wall in Grey's Ferry neighborhood

*“Mural Arts is transformative. It is a key partner in restorative justice and the art produced by the program beautifies our urban landscape. Mural Arts brings together people who would not normally come together, and it’s one of the best assets of the city.”<sup>131</sup>*

—Philadelphia mayor, Jim Kenney

Mural Arts uses murals and other public art to create change in communities by stimulating dialogue about critical issues and building “bridges of connection and understanding.”<sup>132</sup> They do this by using a collaborative process between community participants, partners and themselves. They describe their process in these steps:

1. Look– See the big picture and find the issues that need addressing.
2. Listen– Hear what communities have to say. Mural Arts “asks questions and fosters dialogue between disparate groups.”
3. Connect– Mural Arts connects people who might not normally meet with each other to create necessary dialogue over important issues. For example, after racial violence incidents in Grey’s Ferry neighborhood, Mural Arts worked with members of the community from different racial backgrounds to create a mural, called Peace Wall which brought them together. (See photo on left.)
4. Celebrate– Reflect on the collaboration that “creates hope and optimism for a different future.”<sup>133</sup>
5. Repeat



Savannah Barrett, from *Art of the Rural* (see Element 1: Areas of Rural and Urban) approaches her process in the same way, “Those things that alter the built environment are really important and offer a way for folks to understand what can happen; but ultimately, I think the most important thing that results from this kind of work is intrinsic–personal transformation and collective transformation.

This isn’t to say that these processes are easy. Mural Arts notes that creating connections between people and institutions that don’t normally talk to each other are not always easy or convenient.<sup>134</sup> Americans for the Arts writes in their former publication, *Monograph*, “Given the complexities of developing and managing public art programs, working as a professional in the field, and connecting public art with a broad and diverse audience, critical issues abound. Discussing complex topics such as selection processes, funding, conservation, contracts, copyright, and insurance could fill a book...”<sup>135</sup>

When considering public art that is trail-based, many of the same issues arise. Laura Griffith, Associate Director of the Association for Public Art remarked that creating trail connections and interpretive art along them is like any other project working with the public realm in general. There are multiple owners or custodians of different sites that need to be addressed, and the community is one of those.<sup>136</sup>

A project she had been working on recently with the Delaware Water Development Commission in Philadelphia aimed to create connections between areas along the Delaware River waterfront using public art. While they had a large master plan for the project, it was being completed in sections, as more of a piecemeal effort. This approach was necessary due to the large number of stakeholders in the project, and the resulting complicated logistics.

*“It’s an intricate interdisciplinary field, public art. It’s all about collaboration with other related entities.”*<sup>137</sup>

– Laura Griffith

Associate Director, Association for Public Art

On the other hand, community engagement has the potential to really enhance these projects. Michelle Perch, Program Associate from the William Penn Foundation also shared her experience working on a trail-based public art project. She explained that in this project with Fairmount Waterworks in Philadelphia, their goal was to get people to think about the river in a new way. One thing that was really interesting and useful to them in this project was their public engagement process. After an initial RFP process, they selected three final artists to create sculpture on the trail. They then they funded these artists to develop prototypes, which the artists set up along the Schuylkill banks near where the art would be installed. They caught people as they came by down the path and asked them questions like, “What does this make you think of?” “Is this aesthetically pleasing to you?” They developed a rubric based off the feedback to quantify it, and that’s how they selected their final artist.<sup>138</sup>

Programs such as Mural Arts have found much success in the implementation of their community-based art practices. According to their 2016 annual report, Mural Arts has employed 250 artists, paying the \$1.9 million in wages. Their restorative justice program which re-introduces formerly incarcerated individuals has given \$196,000 in wages to youth and re-entering citizens. After the program, 75 percent of re-entry program graduates found employment or moved to educational opportunities. Work in art education, mental health programs, tours and other forms of public art and civic engagement have been similarly successful. Each year, 12,000 visitors and residents tour Mural Arts’ outdoor art gallery—making Philadelphia known internationally as the “City of Murals.”<sup>139</sup>

*“There are a lot of ways the people around us can help us improve our lives. We don’t bump into every neighbor, so a lot of wisdom never gets passed on. But we do share the same public spaces, so over the past few years I’ve tried ways to share more with my neighbors in public space....”*<sup>140</sup>

–Candy Chang, TEDGlobal, July, 2012

Candy Chang, an artist and urban developer who has worked on Mural Arts projects in the past, has participatory public artmaking at the center of her work.

**Below:** *Sidewalk Psychiatry*  
**Opposite Page:** *Career Path*











**Top:** Before I Die, New Orleans, Louisiana

**Below:** Kissing, Crying and Freaking Out in Public









Candy's experience leading community-curated projects led her to co-found Neighborland, a web-based community-collaboration platform. This online tool allows civic organizations to collaborate with residents by asking them questions about their opinions on proposed or actual community projects. The administration tools are easy to use, and the platform is easy for residents to understand. Neighborland aggregates data on projects and community feedback from development to final stages of projects. This data is then available for administrators to export into multiple formats.

In a conversation with Neighborland Co-founder and CEO, Dan Parham on March 5, 2018 he explained that incorporating a user-friendly web-based platform means you can get a lot more people involved—people who might not be able to attend meetings or be involved otherwise. In addition, having a tool that can do a lot of the leg-work (surveys, analytics, additional forms of public discussion) is very helpful. A web-based platform, however, is not a substitute for traditional forms of public advocacy. Simple tools like stickers and whiteboards that visitors can write their opinions on and share are also an incredibly important tool used in Neighborland's process.<sup>141</sup>

Savannah Barrett had some helpful advice on how to approach and work through community engagement. She spoke about her work on the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange, which is a state-wide network of partnerships integrating voices in the arts, agriculture and small business.<sup>142</sup>

“For us, it's all about partnerships.”<sup>143</sup> citation Savannah said they always have regional host partners with similar missions to theirs, who work with the host's respective communities. “What we found important in attracting partners is to be able to communicate the opportunity to collaborate on a really relevant issue.”<sup>144</sup>

**Right Top:** Neighborland's analog tools in action  
**Right Bottom:** A page from Neighborland's online platform



Market Street Prototyping Festival

[Update](#) [About](#) [Projects](#) [FAQ](#)



# How can we make Market Street a more connected and vibrant place?

Asked by [Groundplay](#)

PROGRESS

**Market Street Prototyping Festival Promo**  
from [Jacqui Campbell](#)



03:49

**Participants (267,626)**



**The Legacy**  
For over 150 years, Market Street has been the internationally-renowned main artery of San Francisco. But a street as wide and busy

**Topics**  
[Animals](#) [Art](#) [Bikes](#) [Culture](#)

Like Laura Griffith said, public art is an intricate interdisciplinary field, and engaging the community in the process can make it even more challenging. There are countless forms that these processes can take, and this section has taken only a brief look at a few of them. However, these complicated and sometimes difficult procedures are still frequently put into practice by organizations and individuals because the reward for doing so is great. Incorporating residents' voices in the creation of artwork in their community can give them a real sense of pride and ownership of that community. If these individual artworks are pieces of a whole, like the murals of Mural Arts in Philadelphia, a collective sense of pride between communities can develop.





In Element 3: Points of Interpretation, we have reviewed guidelines and strategies for wayside exhibits and community-sourced public art. Both of these forms of interpretation can create meaningful and engaging experiences for both local residents and visitors to a trail. While the considerations and methods of developing each form of interpretation were explained to convey the strategies most typical to each, that does not mean that these strategies are exclusive to either form of interpretation. In other words, practices typical of the development of community-sourced public art can be used in the development of wayside exhibits and vice-versa.

For example, the practice of engaging communities in the development of interpretation isn't necessarily reserved just for public art. Opportunities can be created to involve area residents in the development of wayside exhibits as well. At Lydgate Park in Kauai, Hawaii, leaders of the native group, Kauai Nui Kuapapa collaborated with trail planners to develop interpretive signage. These panels are part of an educational walking tour that interprets Hawaiian history and culture. Planners encourage the signage project as a “jumping off point [for locals and visitors] to create their own action”<sup>145</sup> The county continued to take comments from residents and visitors about recommended changes even after the signage had been installed.<sup>146</sup>

Paralleling that, interpretive signage can be an important accompaniment of public art. Showing the process by which a community came together to create the art could be a revealing and inspiring addition to the artwork.

## Practical Considerations of Trail-Based Interpretation

No matter what form of interpretation is chosen to accompany a trail, there are many aspects that need to be planned in its creation and implementation. While we have discussed some dimensions of the content development and community-engagement of interpretation, there are several other factors that are crucial in this process. These factors are fields of study within themselves, so for the purposes of this thesis we will just take a brief look at some of those considerations.

### Location

- Wayside exhibits and public art need physical space that may be hard to obtain due to mixed ownership of land along trails. Even if a trail itself is owned by one authority, the amount of land owned by entity may not be sufficient to support interpretive signage.
- Impacts to the trail need to be considered – do the sites of interpretation have the capacity to handle the number of expected visitors? The health of the natural environment should be thought about carefully.
- As we saw in Element 2: Linear Spaces of Trails, because there can be opposition to trails, it's important to consult with relevant community members before developing them. The same approach can be followed when implementing wayside exhibits and public art.

### Production and maintenance

- Developing, designing, fabricating and installing interpretation can be resource-intensive. These resources include time, money and man-power.
- The design and layout of interpretive panels should keep in mind the interpretive guidelines discussed earlier in this section as well as best practices for accessibility.

- Graphics and text each have specific considerations of their own. Text lengths, and font sizes, styles, colors and weights are all important factors.<sup>147</sup> For graphics, illustrations or photos that best relay the interpretation need to be chosen, and rights to those images obtained.
- The materials used can depend on several factors including desired longevity of the piece, expected changes or evolution of the interpretation, and capacity for maintenance.<sup>148</sup>
- Who will do the planning, designing and fabrication?
- When is the best time to create and install the interpretation and how long will it take?
- Someone will have to maintain the interpretation and the area around it—who is responsible for that?

The time, money and thought that goes into planning interpretive trails is substantial, so it is important that the end result provide an experience that is provoking, engaging, reinforcing, relevant, accessible, and comfortable. A thoughtful interpretive theme that is supported by a creative story-telling approach and eye-catching form has the potential to transform an ordinary trail visit into a meaningful experience. Incorporating input and stories from the many communities that use the trail—communities both rural and urban—would create a relevant, engaging and unifying interpretive encounter.

The examples of wayside exhibits and public art explored in this section show that interpretation can bring together people from different backgrounds and even geographical regions; and interpretation can also be a way of engaging trail users. Points of interpretation have the ability to serve as opportunities for processes of collaboration, and as reminders of shared experiences and relationships.



## Element 3 Key Findings

### Wayside exhibits:

- Create interpretation that stimulates the visitor.
- Create interpretation that explains the relationships between things.
- Identify significant landscape features, sites of stories or vistas.
- Identify sites that give visitors a comfortable, safe and accessible area to gather without disrupting trail traffic.

### Public art:

- Community-engagement is not easy, but it is worth the work. Engaging community voices can create connections between disparate groups, promote a sense of pride and ownership in one's community.
- Having good partners to work with is key.
- Tools such as online platforms, stickers and whiteboards can make the facilitation of community-engagement exponentially easier.

### Both:

- The attributes of public art and wayfinding exhibits need not be mutually exclusive. There are interesting ways to combine them, and probably many solutions to this that have not been realized yet.
- Interpretation should be site specific.
- Know the audience. Perform evaluations on trail users and communities that line the trail.
- Make sure that all interpretation fits the criteria of comfortable, engaging, reinforcing, meaningful, and considerate of trail users' expectations.
- Consider maintenance of the interpretation.
- Consider cost of the interpretation.
- How can amenities like benches, water fountains, trashcans and bathrooms be utilized as interpretation?
- Are there opportunities for audio, an app or other technology?
- Avoid intruding on a landscape and sensitive sites.

# Guide to Community Collaboration

**Genevieve Coutroubis**  
Director of Artist Programs  
Center for Emerging Visual Artists

The Center for Emerging Visual Artists (CFEVA) is an organization based in Philadelphia that provides area artists access to resources while creating opportunities for local communities to connect to artists.



**These are some key words of advice from CFEVA's Director of Artist Programs, Genevieve Coutroubis:**

- Find the common ground between the different participants of your project. What age are the participants? What does this mean for how you should approach the project? Do demographics matter? Do they not? Address it.
- Look at what other institutions have done. What has worked? What hasn't?
- Discover the "Friends of" groups or other already-formed groups in the community.
- Allow your project to evolve. In some cases history will repeat itself unless you learn from those incidents. Think about what may change and plan ahead for that.<sup>192</sup>

Chapter 1 has explored the three essential elements of this thesis—rural/urban connections, trails and interpretation— and the ways in which they relate to each other. As we saw, the examination of each element reveals many opportunities for connecting them.

The complex nature of defining urban and rural and explaining their relationship to each other forms the basis of Element 1. We have seen that this typology has been a subject of debate for many years, and while defining urban and rural can be helpful in some fields such as policy-making and social geography, it can be vague and even offensive to use such broad terms when it comes to describing residents themselves. The people that live in “rural” and “urban” areas are incredibly diverse and represent millions of traits.

While there are some contentious issues that play out between these areas, emphasizing their differences to promote adversarial views of the two does nothing to help this matter. The reality of the interconnectedness of these regions is indisputable. The flow of people, goods, natural resources, ideas and culture create bonds that cannot be broken. The increasing spread of metropolitan areas into rural spaces, and the almost universal access of information and transportation has accelerated the development of urban-rural continuums in this country. Highlighting this interconnected relationship has the capability to strengthen the economy, culture, and personal relationships of residents of these areas.

Promoting a regional view of urban and rural areas instead of a binary view involves an examination of their connections. Early thesis research into the neutral spaces between urban and rural areas led to the discovery of the potential of trails. Trails often link urban and rural areas and promote personal interactions in ways that roads and online forums cannot. Layering the linear spaces of trails onto the areas of urban and rural creates physical connections that have the possibility of becoming personal connections.

Element 2: Linear Spaces of Trails provided an investigation of trail types, purposes and settings. The use of trails to preserve cultural resources, enhance a region's image and sense of place and promote economic development among other purposes, makes them a uniquely appropriate choice to explore rural and urban connections. While there are challenges to trail usage and development, these can usually be overcome through consultation with the communities involved.

Continuing this integration of community in the application of Element 3: Points of Interpretation, creates opportunities for residents of urban and rural areas to examine and discuss their historical and modern ties. We saw that this can be accomplished through the application of wayside exhibits or public art. While wayside exhibits are more traditional forms of trail interpretation, they can still be used to engage and provoke trail users, and to give them a sense of place. Community-sourced public art involves communities in ways that allow them to explore challenges by engaging in discussion and collaborating on solutions. While these processes can be very challenging they can also change preconceived notions and create new relationships between formerly disparate groups, like those from rural and urban areas. The art at the end of the process allows for reflections on those shared experiences.

Though trail-based interpretation comes with challenges, layering these points of interpretation on linear spaces of trails and areas of urban and rural creates an integrated framework of a meaningful project.

The case studies that follow in Chapter 2 will investigate two real projects that integrate the elements of urban/rural, trails and interpretation. These case studies provide further research based off of Chapter 1.

## 2 Lead by Example: Case Studies

To illustrate how the three elements—areas of urban and rural, linear spaces of trails and points of interpretation—can work together and provide insight into some of the thought-processes and challenges of doing so, two projects that actually incorporated these elements have been selected as case studies. Each includes at least two of the following qualities:

- 1) demonstrate the need for an understanding of urban/rural connectivity,
- 2) involve trails,
- 3) include interpretation as a means of connecting communities.

Each case study begins with an overview of their relevancy to this thesis and interview or research questions. The answers to these questions and any additional findings are noted at the conclusion of each case study.





# Case Study #1:

## Museum on Main Street

Museum on Main Street (MoMS) is relevant to this thesis because it addresses all three of the Essential Elements of this project:

1. MoMS exists to bring attention to under-served rural communities, and to create a larger dialogue about the importance of rural areas today.
2. The small-town museum visited for this case study receives many visitors from outside areas (including the cities of Washington D.C. and Baltimore) in large part due to a commuter trail that goes through the town.
3. The interpretation in the MoMS exhibits is designed so that the hosting communities are sharing their personal stories within the context of a larger national narrative.

The unique model of Museum on Main Street offers an example of successful partnerships between a facilitating entity and small-town museums. These partnerships enable participating communities to express their unique experiences and perspectives to a wider audience.

Though the points of interpretation of MoMS are in the form of hubs (exhibits based in small-town museums) versus trail interpretation, this case study shows the importance of trails for connecting urban and rural audiences

This case study sought explanations of the structure of the program, the structure of the exhibits, and the experience of the host institutions.

Museum on Main Street is part of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. MoMS is “a Smithsonian outreach program that engages small town audiences and brings revitalized attention to under-served rural communities. [They] partner with state humanities councils to bring traveling exhibitions, educational resources and programming to small towns across America through their own local museums, historical societies and other cultural venues.”<sup>149</sup>

MoMS exhibits relate to rural audiences through a variety of exhibitions focusing on specific topics including, Hometown Teams (sports), The Way We Worked (jobs of the past), Water/Ways (connections to water), New Harmonies (music), and Key Ingredients (food). In September 2018 the MoMS exhibition, Crossroads: Change in Rural America will open. This exhibition confronts the notion that rural communities are “endangered and hanging on by a thread”<sup>150</sup> and serves as a platform for small towns to highlight the changes that have affected them over the last 100 years.<sup>151</sup>

Crossroads will show that although these economic and demographic changes have been felt forcefully in many cases, small towns are harnessing their creativity and focusing on their unique traits to “create their own renaissance.”<sup>152</sup>

**Previous Page:** An installation from Case Study 2: Wormfarm

**Below:** Panels provided by Museum on Main Street



## Conversation with Carol Harsh

In a conversation with Carol Harsh, Director of Museum on Main Street on August 22, 2017 she explained some of the ideals and practices behind MoMS. Some her interview responses have been summarized below:

**I am curious about the realities of the “urban/rural divide.” What are your thoughts on this?**

“There needs to be a lot of work on what rural means to our country now. The writings of Wendell Berry are very relevant to our work examining the changes in small town America. He writes about how the feelings of self-reliance, unity and belonging of small rural towns that were present just a decade ago are evolving—these feelings have been changing for a while, but now they’re changing at hyper speed.”

“Rural areas have systematically been overlooked— only 3% of U.S. foundations’ money goes to rural environments. Federal funds help with poverty and education in urban areas, but typically not in rural.”

“I would contend that urban communities depend on rural areas for food and don’t even recognize it, and possibly that goes the other way in regard to goods and services.”<sup>153</sup>

A project that highlights the continuum of urban and rural could be a way for communities to realize these and other undiscovered connections. And while the discrepancy in federal funding is correct, there are areas with high levels of poverty in many cities too. This another example of a shared experience between urban and rural areas, albeit a shared challenge.

**Can you tell me about the logistics of MoMS? How does it work, and who puts together the interpretation?**

“The design of the MoMS exhibits is taken very seriously. They do come with some objects, but it is pretty much a requirement that the communities put their own objects into the exhibit. MoMS is intended to be a springboard for the communities— a way to work with their existing local projects.”<sup>154</sup>

Although not in the context of a trail, this structure integrates some of the aspects of interpretive signage with community collaboration in an interesting way.

Carol mentioned that MoMS trains states humanities councils to work with individual organizations and schools to implement their exhibits. Planning meetings offer networking and sharing opportunities for communities.

**Do you know of any projects like yours in which urban and rural communities have collaborated?**

Carol explained that it's rare that urban and rural communities/museums would work together on projects like these—that the MoMS exhibits aren't designed for that. If these communities did come together to work on these projects could it have a positive impact on regional relationships as Element 1: Areas of Rural/Urban pointed out? Could a MoMS exhibit about urban/rural connections create some valuable regional partnerships?

Carol did note that one successful example of their work promoting urban/rural crossover was when Reedsburg, WI hosted the MoMS exhibit, Key Ingredients in 2010. They used the exhibit to launch other projects that are a “funky blending of urban and rural arts communities.”<sup>155</sup> (See Case Study 2.)

## Visit to the Brunswick Heritage Museum

After the conversation with Carol, a visit to the Brunswick Heritage Museum in Brunswick, Maryland provided an opportunity to see the MoMS exhibit, The Way We Worked. Additionally, residents of Brunswick who had been involved from the implementation of the exhibit gave first-hand accounts of their experiences with MoMS.

A docent in the exhibit and two museum employees (one the former mayor!) all agreed that the Brunswick Museum's experiences with MoMS have been extremely positive– this was the second MoMS exhibit they had hosted. After being trained by MoMS, representatives of the Maryland Humanities Council came to Brunswick and trained locals on how to put the exhibit together and how to pack it up. The staff seemed very pleased with all of their interactions with MoMS and the representatives, and they were very impressed with the organization of both the planning for the exhibits and the physical structures of the exhibits as well.

The very friendly docent at Brunswick noted that MoMS requires that there always be a docent with their exhibits, and that the museum keeps a record of both volunteer time and how many people come in the door. The museum then reports that information to MoMS.







A questionnaire at the end of the exhibit allows MoMS to collect visitor feedback of the exhibits. Again, here is an example of evaluation playing a key role in the structure of interpretation.

When asked about visitors, the staff said that most of the people who visit the museum in general are visitors to the region, and not as much the local community. Brunswick was built up around a train line and still is a commuter town—many people from surrounding communities come there to take the train to Baltimore and D.C. A regional bike path that goes through Brunswick also brings many outsiders to the town, and to the museum. This directly parallels the research from Element 3: Points of Interpretation—as a “hub” of interpretation located adjacent to the bike path, the museum is able to bring in visitors from all areas, including urban.

The staff noted that locals do like visiting the museum when MoMS exhibits are there because it's free! (As a free institution, the Smithsonian requires that MoMS exhibits are free to the public.) They were also enthusiastic about the community activities that the MoMS exhibits have helped the Brunswick Museum promote—like local teens interviewing elders for oral history projects, and an annual event about playing games.

**Left:** Brunswick Heritage Museum docent, Dan explains coal mining of the past.  
**Right:** MoMS displays are well-integrated with the museum's exhibits.



## Revisiting the case study questions:

### 1. What is the structure of MoMS? How does it work?

MoMS is part of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and works with state humanities councils to reach small towns to host the exhibits. By working with a regional partner, MoMS creates connections to smaller entities. Getting Smithsonian exhibits into small towns brings in visitors from many areas around, including large metropolitan areas.

### 2. What is the structural form of the physical exhibits?

The exhibit components that MoMS provides are made of durable materials that travel and pack up well—mostly thin temporary walls. The host institutions integrate their own exhibit components (cases, recreated historical spaces, objects, etc.) that work with those from MoMS to tell their own personal stories.

### 3. How do the host institutions feel about the MoMS exhibits?

Based on the visit to Brunswick, it seems that the host institutions really appreciate the MoMS exhibits. Staff at the Brunswick Heritage Museum are impressed with the program's practices and structure, and really seemed to enjoy working with the Maryland State Humanities Council. They really appreciate the programming support from MoMS, and the way it promotes events in their town.

## Other key findings:

- The bike trail which runs by the Brunswick Heritage Museum brings in many visitors from other regions. These visitors often stop into the town unplanned and visit the museum.
- The exhibit serves as a “springboard” off which communities can jump into their own project development.
- Defining rural today requires a lot of work, and re-thinking.
- Providing a planning support system really helps ensure smaller organizations’ success.
- Rural and urban neighbors may not realize how interconnected they are.
- Evaluation is important.
- Keeping cost low means more visitors will come.
- Incorporating public events helps attract many more visitors and stakeholders.

**Below:** The bikepath that runs by Brunswick, MD brings in visitors from areas near and far.



# Case Study #2:

## Wormfarm Institute

Wormfarm, particularly their annual Fermentation Festival is relevant to this thesis in that it touches upon each of the Essential Elements of this thesis:

1. Part of their mission is to connect rural spaces and people with urban visitors.
2. They use a driving tour as a linear pathway to make these connections.
3. Points of interpretation along the driving tour are the crucial facilitators for interactions between the rural and urban participants.

Wormfarm offers a unique approach to addressing the modern relationship between rural and urban in their region. By placing emphasis on shared cultures (both food and social) of the neighboring communities, Wormfarm unites large cities and small towns. Incorporating provocative and relevant interpretation allows visitors and locals to explore their relationships with each other in new and exciting ways.

This case study sought to find out how Wormfarm brings these rural and urban audiences together, how visitors experience the driving tour and what form the points of interpretation take.

This case study did not involve an interview by the author. Instead, it is based on information gathered from Wormfarm's website, and a podcast that featured Donna Neuwirth, Executive Director of Wormfarm Institute.

**Right:** An installation from the Driving D-Tour



Founded in 2000, Wormfarm Institute is a 501(c)(3) working farm based in Reedsburg, Wisconsin whose mission is to integrate culture and agriculture along the rural/urban continuum. Wormfarm's work, *"brings together farming, ecology and the arts to rekindle the cultural and enhance the economic possibilities of our region while celebrating its unique natural and human history."*<sup>156</sup>

Their mission is met in three primary ways:

**1. Artist residencies**—Executive Director, Donna Neuwirth refers to these as "engagements in the life of the working farm."<sup>157</sup> Three artists are selected each year to stay at Wormfarm from mid-May to mid-October—the growing season. They spend their mornings working in the garden, often doing "Zen" work like picking beans. They spend their afternoons and evenings working on their art.<sup>158</sup>

**2. Roadside Culture Stands**—Artists design and build these mobile farm stands, which sell produce and local art in rural and urban environments. The urban stands are located in inner-city neighborhoods that have little access to fresh produce.

**3. Fermentation Fest**— Originally part of the Museum on Main Street exhibit, Key Ingredients in 2010, and funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, this "Live Culture Convergence is an annual celebration of live culture in all its forms, from dance to yogurt, poetry to sauerkraut."<sup>159</sup> The festival celebrates "art practice as a social pro-biotic".<sup>160</sup> Performances, food tastings, cooking classes, art events and more are part of this 10-day festival, which is used as a way to encourage conversations between rural farmers and visitors from the city.<sup>161</sup>

By emphasizing the shared region of urban and rural communities, Wormfarm supplants the binary relationship, and has created meaningful relationships between Reedsburg community members and visitors from urban areas. In fact, Wormfarm stresses the importance of “culturesheds”. This term, coined by Wormfarm’s co-founder, Jay Salinas has three definitions:

**CULTURESHED** (kul’cher-shed) n.

1. A geographic region irrigated by streams of local talent and fed by deep pools of human and natural history.
2. An area nourished by what is cultivated locally.
3. The efforts of writers, performers, visual artists, scholars, farmers and chefs who contribute to a vital and diverse local culture.<sup>162</sup>

As areas can be defined as watersheds or even foodsheds, they can also be defined as culturesheds. Salinas and Neuwirth identify Wormfarm, Reedsburg, and the surrounding cities of Chicago, Minneapolis and Milwaukee as part of the “Upper Midwest Cultureshed.”<sup>163</sup>

The aspect of Fermentation Fest (and Wormfarm) which best informs this thesis is the biannual Farm/Art DTour. This 50+ mile, self-guided driving tour through scenic working farmland around Reedsburg features Art Works (temporary art installations), Field Notes (educational signs), Farm Forms (creative participation by landowners), Roadside Culture Stands, Pasture Performances and Roadside Poetry.<sup>164</sup> Research from Element 2: Linear Spaces of Trails showed that self-drive scenic byways are a popular type of mixed-route trail, and Fermentation Fest supports Timothy and Boyd’s findings that “self-drive trails have the capacity to link regional communities together.”<sup>165</sup>

Earlier research also showed that evaluations and other forms of data collection are great tools for gathering community feedback (William Penn’s work with Fairmount Waterworks surveying on the Schuylkill River Trail) and then backing up your project to others (Neighborland’s tools for aggregating data for participating





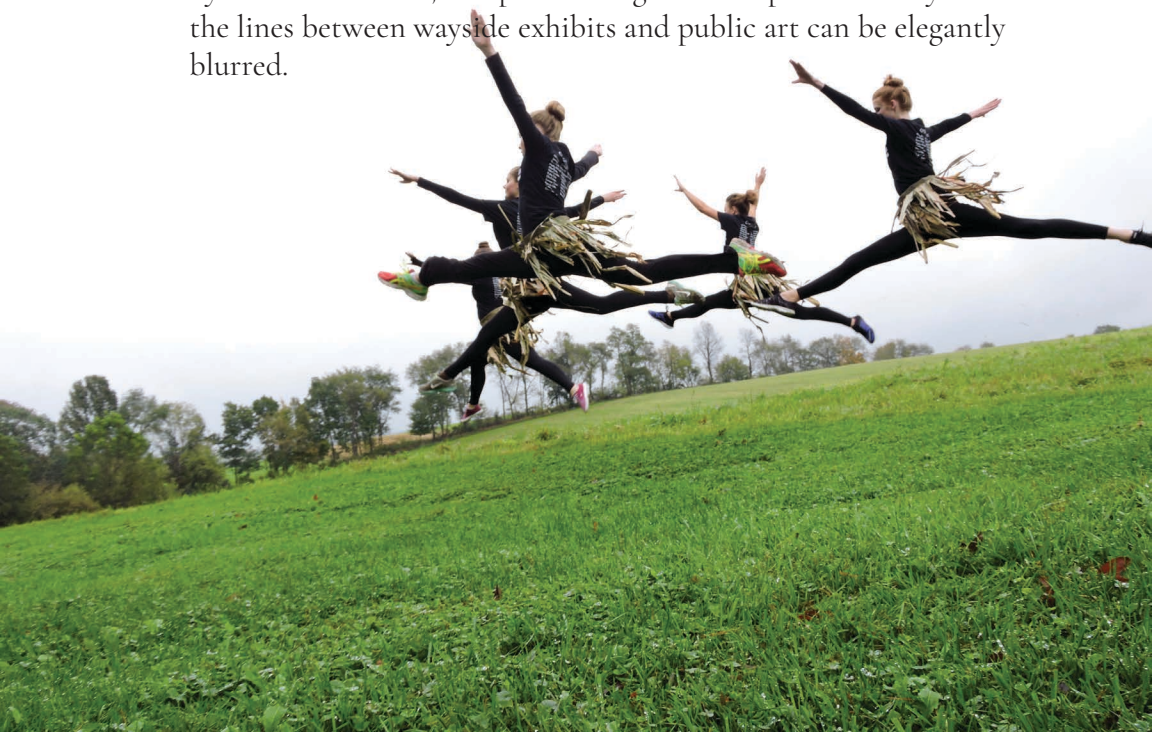
*“We want to capture this moment when urban people are paying a lot more attention to where food comes from, and a lot more attention to what happens to land to seed a movement that’s much more regional in its outlook.”* <sup>171</sup>

–Donna Neuwirth

**Above:** A roadside stand created by Wormfarm Institute artists  
**Right:** A roadside performance from the Driving D-Tour

organizations). Wormfarm has been able to do the same by incorporating evaluations. The festival has grown every year for the seven years that they've had it. In 2016 over 22,000 people attended. Evaluations have shown that 60% of visitors have driven 50 to 100 miles to get to the festival, many from the cities of the Upper Midwest cultureshed: Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis.<sup>166</sup>

This flow of urban visitors through rural areas strengthens the region's personal connections. Face-to-face interactions force urbanites and country dwellers to consider each other on a deeper level than "hicks" or "citiot's".<sup>167</sup> (Yes—that's a combination of "city" and "idiot.") A common, but unplanned point of urban/rural interaction on the Farm/Art DTour are the Field Notes. These signs explain the hay, corn, land or other rural aspect they are adjacent to, and are a favorite spot for local farmers to camp out and watch the urban visitors.<sup>168</sup> While they partially do it for entertainment, these interactions often involve farmers sharing knowledge about the land with the urban visitors. Earlier research into interpretation showed that the average time span at a wayside exhibit is 30-45 seconds<sup>169</sup>, and that interpretive trails have the potential to feel didactic, and even boring to some visitors.<sup>170</sup> Wormfarm's spin on interpretive signage creates a simple, yet dynamic final form, and provides a great example of the ways that the lines between wayside exhibits and public art can be elegantly blurred.



## Revisiting the case study questions:

### How does Wormfarm bring these rural and urban audiences together?

Wormfarm brings urban and rural audiences together through artist residencies, artist-designed Roadside Culture stands that bring rural food to urban environments, and by hosting a huge event, Fermentation Fest each year. Using the common language of food, Fermentation Fest encourages the interaction of urban and rural residents with various artistic expressions and a focus on cultivating new relationships.

### How do visitors experience the driving tour?

Although the Driving D-Tour is automobile-based, visitors are encouraged to get out of their cars to experience the points of interpretation. Creative and engaging artwork in various forms visitors to see rural in a new perspective.

### What form do the points of interpretation take?

The points of interpretation take the form of interpretive signage, dance, poetry, sculpture and farm stands.

### Other key findings:

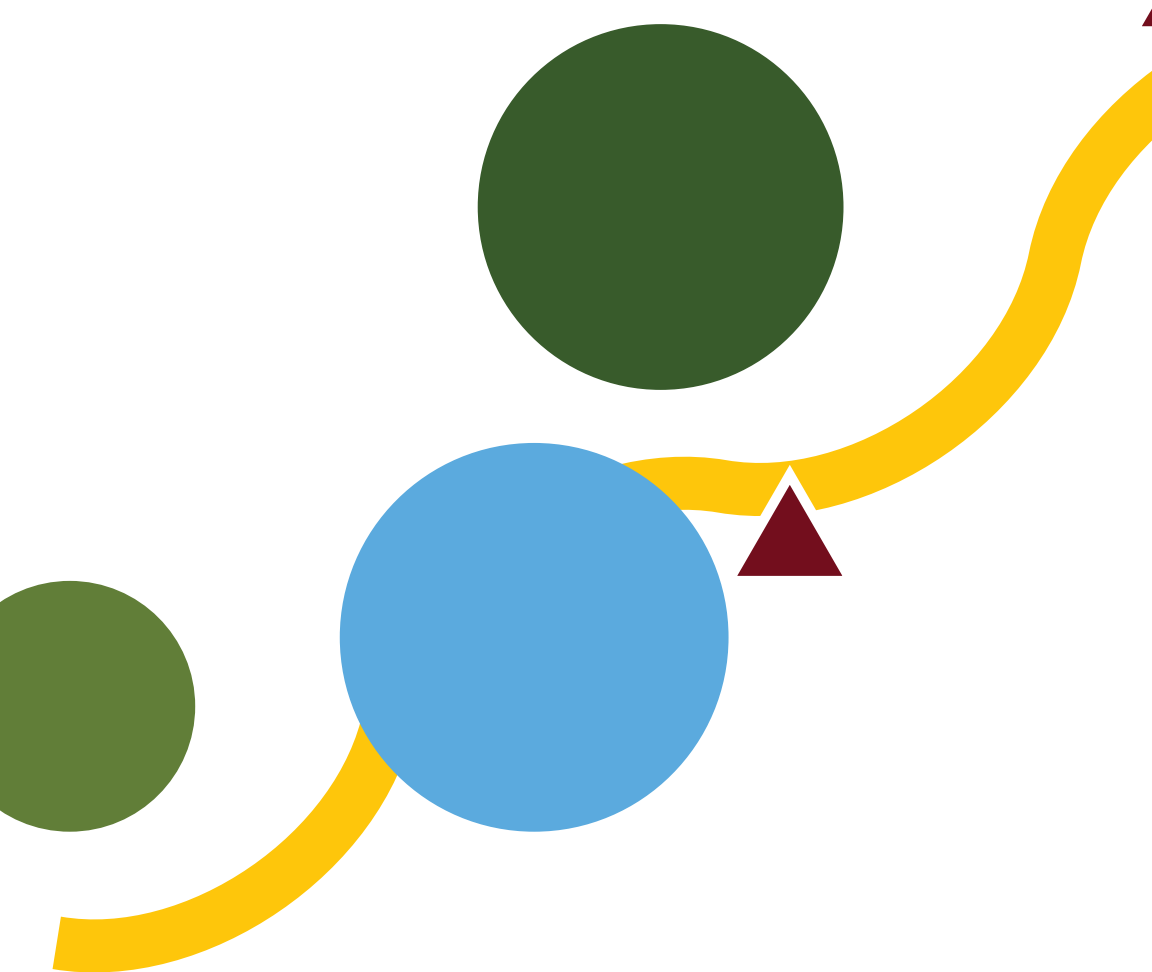
- Creating opportunities for face-to-face interactions is very important.
- Early buy-in from widely-trusted community members is key to success.
- Trail interpretation can be developed in artistic and surprisingly creative ways to engage audiences.

**Right:** Installations from the Driving D-Tour

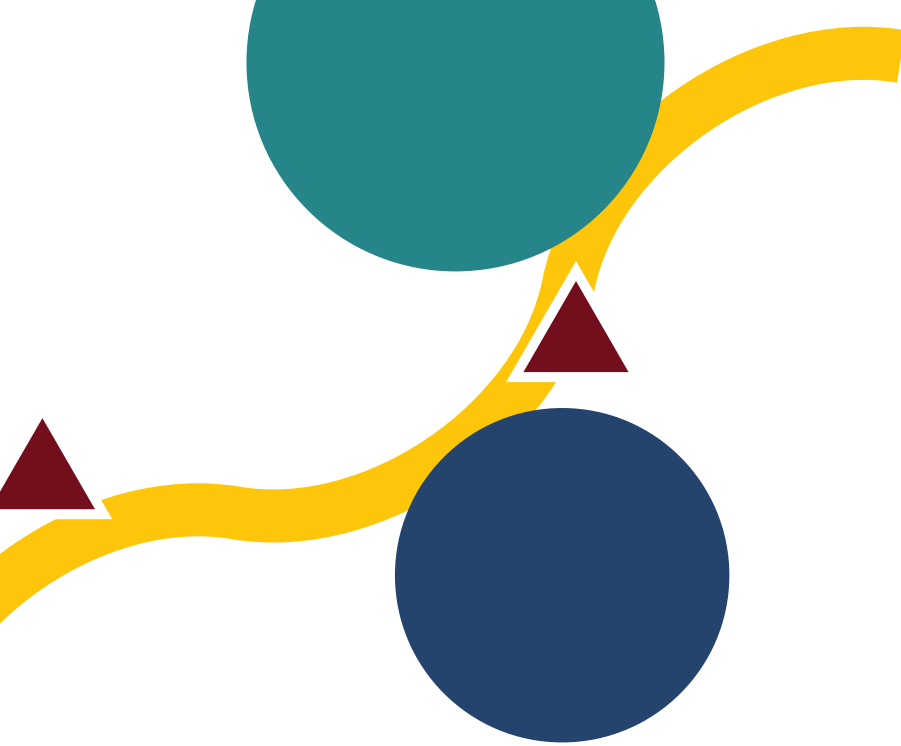




### 3 Path Forward: The Application of the Framework







The first two chapters of this thesis combined the need for viewing urban and rural areas as shared regions with the community-engaging opportunities of trails and interpretation. Findings from this thesis revealed that viewing urban and rural communities as partners in a shared region opens the doors to increased communication and sharing of resources, and that both trail development and public art contribute to a deeper sense of place as important local events and cultures are highlighted for outside consumption.”<sup>172</sup> Layering these areas, linear spaces and points of interpretation creates a framework that has potential to bring social, economic and aesthetic enhancements to a region, and opens the doors to new partnerships and understanding between the involved areas.

In order to most effectively illustrate this framework, this paper will now propose an application of its findings, loosely based on an actual trail system. Keeping in mind the lessons learned from the case studies and essential elements—urban and rural areas, trails and interpretation— this project explores a theoretical path forward for the application of this framework.

This application is not intended to be prescriptive, rather it is a suggested framework informed by the research completed in this project. It serves as a way to understand how all of the previous research might be applied to an existing trail system. The goal of this application is take the findings from the three elements and two case studies and organize them in the manner that would provide a logical set of guidelines. By relating these guidelines to an actual trail system, the methodology and decision-making process becomes clearer. Sharing these lessons learned in the structure of a project application lays out groundwork for the future application of a similar project no matter the practitioner or location.

The model could be useful to any stakeholder who might be interested in initiating a similar project. These stakeholders could include:

- One, or multiple urban neighborhoods or rural communities or organizations wishing to strengthen connections with regional neighbors.
- A potential major facilitator who may see this project as an economic development, community-building and/or political tool. This could include major arts-funding organizations, trail-interest groups, city governance bodies/officials, state- or federal-wide organizations or individual donors or philanthropists.

However, there are limitations to this application:

- Its examples are specific to a particular trail system, whose conditions and circumstances may vary mildly to widely from any other trail system. These circumstances and conditions could be any of a large number of variables including physical conditions of the trail, financial resources, and willingness of stakeholders to participate.

- As the research of each essential element—urban and rural areas, trails and interpretation— was relatively brief, there are certainly factors that have not been discussed in this paper which would affect the implementation of this framework.
- This is only one possible way of carrying out this scenario. There could be other models that could be explored.

The application of this framework involves several steps identified and influenced by the research of the first two chapters. These steps loosely following those of The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's process for working with communities to help develop trails. The steps of their process include: 1) Stakeholder analysis, 2) Public meeting facilitation, 3) Partnership and coalition building, 4) Organizing a “Friends of the Trail” group, and 5) Trainings.<sup>173</sup>

These steps for this application are:

- 1) Selection of the trail system**
- 2) Investigation of the key stakeholders**
- 3) Consideration of the project process**

This step includes a section on collaborating with communities and artists. This is comprised of guiding lessons and potential questions for discussion informed by some of the key findings of the elements and case studies.

The following part of the project process looks at practical considerations. This is a summary of some of the interviews with officials of the Perkiomen Trail and Schuylkill River Trail who discussed some of the realities of actually implementing this project to this trail system.

The end of this section gives a brief look at some of the possible funders for implementing this project on these trails.

# 1) Selecting the Trail



Findings from Element 2: Linear Spaces of Trails helped determine that scale, type and setting were important selection criteria for the trail. Proximity to the author was also a deciding factor. After using these criteria to choose the trail, other positive aspects that make it a good fit for the application were revealed.

The type and scale of the trail for this model were important considerations. The trail couldn't be too small– a local historic site trail likely would not span the distance to hit both rural and urban areas. On the other hand, a National Scenic Trail like the Appalachian Trail would not work well as the model for many reasons. These trails often cover rough terrain that is either not accessible or desirable to many people. Furthermore, a large part of the appeal of these trails is their secluded nature, providing respite from obvious signs of other humans. Placing public art, or even additional interpretation on these trails could be considered disrespectful and outside of their intent. As noted in Element 3, Interpretation, wayside exhibits should not be implemented when they are an intrusion on the landscape.

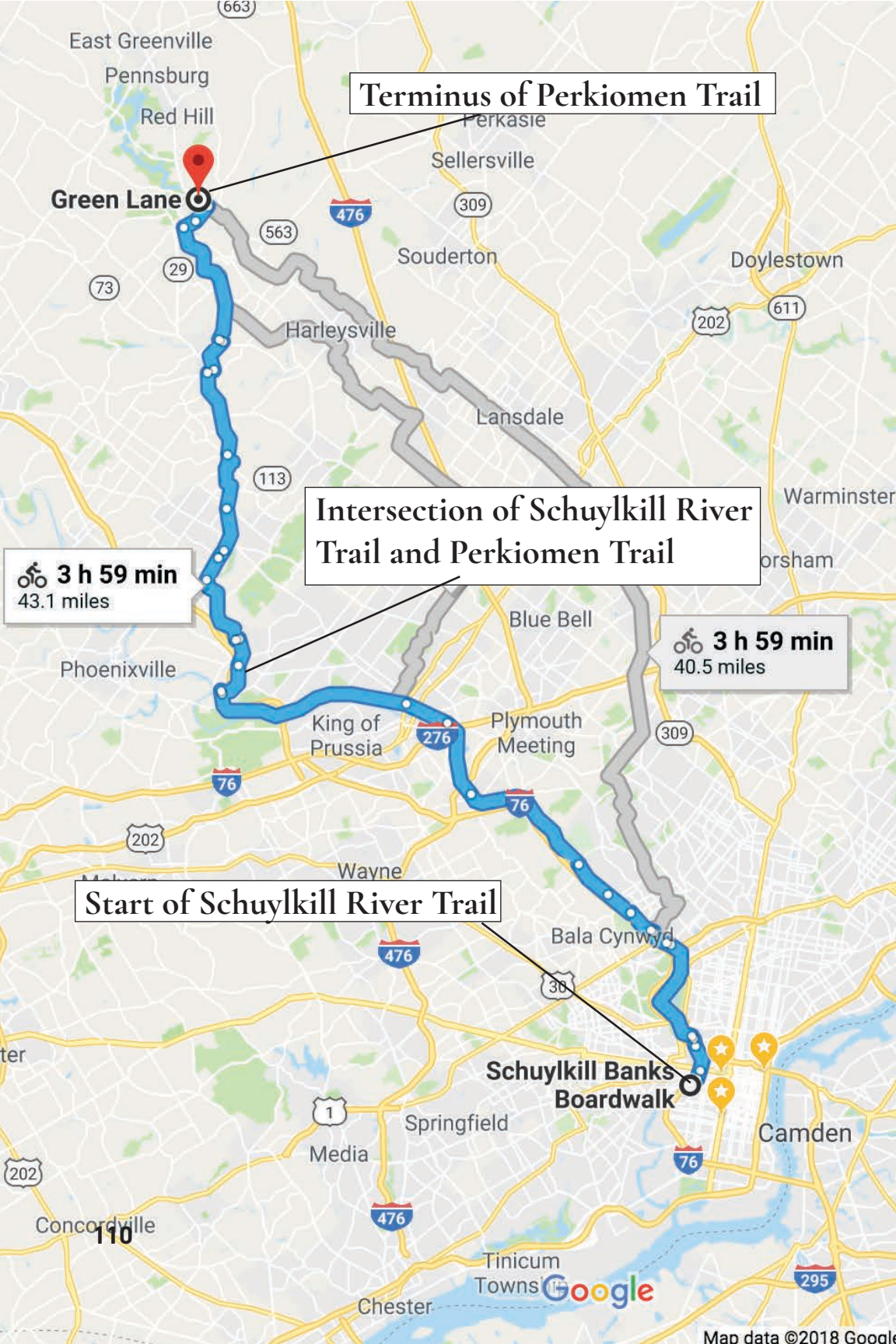
A cultural-heritage route or mixed-use route were preferred for this application. A cultural-heritage route would likely already have interpretation, so could provide lessons based on the experience of the development and implementation of that narrative. A mixed-use trail like a greenway or bike trail would likely connect urban and rural areas and may not already have interpretation. This could be advantageous in that it would allow for the exploration of the reasons why interpretation was not established, and what future steps would be necessary to do so.

The setting of the trail was also critical to the trail selection; as mentioned in the other criteria, it was necessary that it connect rural and urban areas. There are many examples of trails which connect urban and rural communities in the U.S. and abroad. Here in the U.S. there are examples in every region of the country.<sup>174</sup> For example, the Mountains to Sound Greenway in Washington state connects the metropolis of Seattle to communities throughout the adjacent Snoqualmie Valley. In Missouri, smaller trails in St. Louis link to the Katy Trail (a former railway), which cuts across the center of the state. Several cities and towns of various sizes are linked by this trail.

The trail chosen for the project application is the Circuit Trail System of Greater Philadelphia. The site, type, setting and proximity to the author's home in Philadelphia make it amenable as the project application. The trail system is comprised of bike trails and greenways, and while some pieces of it include interpretation, other parts do not.

Within the Circuit Trail System, the Schuylkill River Trail (SRT), and the connecting Perkiomen Trail have been chosen as the specific model trail for the thesis project. From the end of the SRT at the Schuylkill Banks Boardwalk in central Philadelphia to the end of the Perkiomen Trail in Green Lane, PA the trail stretches just over 43 miles. While the trail begins in very urban Philadelphia, the area around the terminus in Montgomery County is rural, connecting many communities along the way.





**Terminus of Perkiomen Trail**

**Green Lane**

**Intersection of Schuylkill River Trail and Perkiomen Trail**

**3 h 59 min**  
43.1 miles

**3 h 59 min**  
40.5 miles

**Start of Schuylkill River Trail**

**Schuylkill Banks Boardwalk**





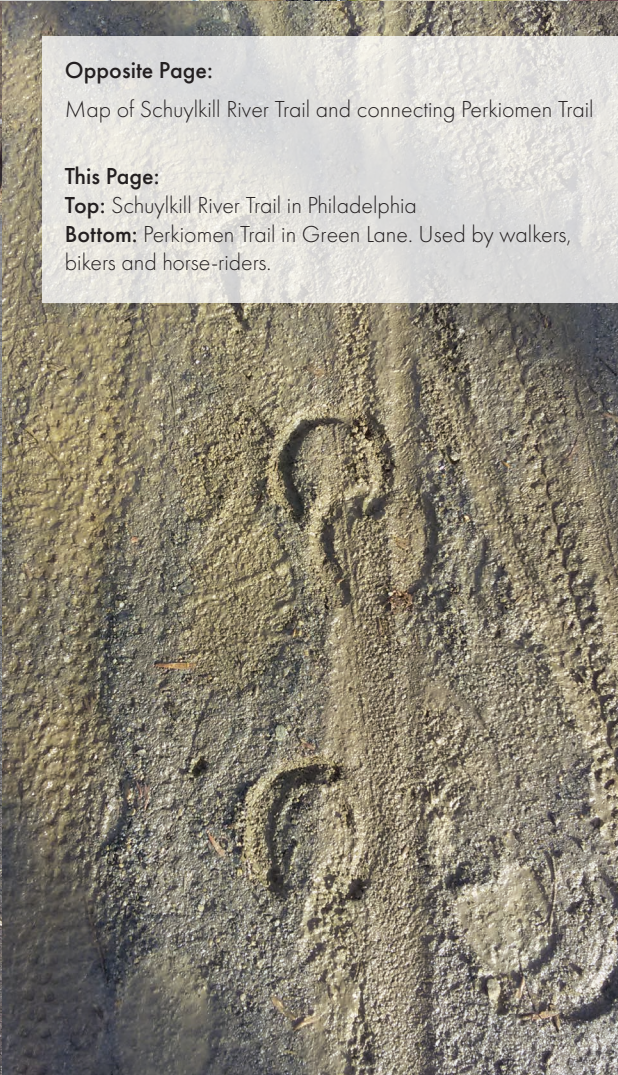
#### Opposite Page:

Map of Schuylkill River Trail and connecting Perkiomen Trail

#### This Page:

**Top:** Schuylkill River Trail in Philadelphia

**Bottom:** Perkiomen Trail in Green Lane. Used by walkers, bikers and horse-riders.





Several other factors make the SRT and Perkiomen Trail systems a solid basis for this project application:

- The Circuit Trail System of Greater Philadelphia is one of the largest trail networks in America,<sup>175</sup> and is continuing to grow. In fact, at the end of January 2018, \$11.9 million of the federal Transportation Alternative Planning (TAP) funds was allocated to the Philadelphia region through the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). This funding supports community-based “non-traditional” projects designed to strengthen the cultural, aesthetic, and environmental aspects of the nation’s intermodal transportation system.<sup>176</sup>
- Several hubs—businesses and organizations—line the areas near the trail for most of its length. As seen from the components and case studies, local support of a project like this would be key, and institutions lining the trail would have a strong voice in the process.
- Philadelphia has more public art than any other city in the U.S., and is home to the Association for Public Art, the nation’s first private nonprofit organization to integrate public art and urban design.<sup>177</sup> Philadelphia was also the first city in the U.S. to implement a Percent for Art Program, which requires developers to commission art as part of the development process.<sup>178</sup> This strong support of public art is shared by several other organizations in the city including the Mural Arts Program.



- The Montgomery County Division of Parks, Trails and Historic sites is seen as an exemplary model of engaging communities and art with their trail system. Joseph Syrnick, President & CEO of the Schuylkill River Development Corporation (SRDC) called them the “poster child for good trail development” and said that the SRDC looks to Montgomery County as inspiration. The case studies and elements made it clear that strong partners are crucial to the success of project of this scale.



Theoretically, this framework could be used for many different trails. However, each trail would have its own particular players and circumstances to consider. The unique stakeholders and circumstances of the Schuylkill River Trail and connecting Perkiomen Trail are the examples used for these guidelines.

**Left:** The iconic Love statue in Philadelphia.

**Above:** The Perkiomen Trail in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

## 2) Key Stakeholders

As the essential elements and case studies pointed out, a project like this would involve several layers of stakeholders, and the communities represented should be at the heart of the project. This is seen with the work of Museum on Main Street. By working with state humanities councils, who then work with the participating organizations, a strong project structure is established.

Furthermore, this structure allows the communities to sit at the center of the process. As Carol Harsh said, “MoMS is intended to be a springboard for the communities— a way to work with their existing local projects.”

A system of partnerships, like that of Museum on Main Street or Art of the Rural’s Rural-Urban Exchange would be necessary. In this thesis, the stakeholders other than the community members include overseeing facilitators of the project, partnerships made of regional organizations (representing both rural and urban communities), and artists or designers.

Identifying, and earning buy-in from the stakeholders for a project like this could be a complex task. Conversations with several Philadelphia and Montgomery County trail and public art officials made this evident for the Perkiomen Model. However, I also learned from these conversations that it would not be an impossible task, especially if the right people have interest, and the potential for enhancing regional partnerships, trail aesthetics and economic development were emphasized. Maintaining flexible expectations of aspects such as the structure of partnerships and the particulars of the interpretation would increase the likelihood of seeing the project through.

**Right:** Some of the key stakeholders in CFEVA’s Senior Partnership Initiative are Philadelphia seniors and local artists.





## Facilitator(s)

As the Museum on Main Street case study shows, a project of this size would need a large-scale facilitator to broadly oversee it. In the case of MoMS, the Smithsonian Institute Traveling Exhibitions Service worked as the facilitator with smaller cultural organizations and museums. What organization(s) would potentially serve as this facilitator for this project? It could be a partnership between various stakeholders, however it is probably best if just one entity oversees the project as a whole. Laura Griffith (Association for Public Art) explained that if you want an integrated end product, it's better to have one person or organization that oversees the whole thing, including the artist selection process. Otherwise you're reliant on the whims of the community, and they may not match up to your objectives, goals or ideas. There needs to be quality control—someone needs to be responsible for a cohesive project.

Even with one stakeholder leading the process, it is important that they have the support of other key voices before developing the project. It is necessary to first identify these stakeholders.

In regard to the Perkiomen Model, Joseph Syrnick, President & CEO of the Schuylkill River Development Corporation helped identify the stakeholders directly involved with the aspects of this proposed project. It is likely that these groups would be there to advise and support the project, but probably not lead it themselves:

- City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation—This is the entity that oversees most of the Schuylkill River Trail.
- Montgomery County, Pennsylvania—This is the entity that oversees part of the SRT and all of the Perkiomen Trail.
- City of Philadelphia, Office of Arts and Culture—This office is the final decision-making body when it comes to putting art on the SRT in Philadelphia County.

- Schuylkill River Development Corporation—They are responsible for trail signage that goes on the SRT in Philadelphia County.

In Philadelphia, there are some groups that can be considered as the potential overseeing entity in the Perkiomen Model based on their missions and work on similar projects in the area:

- Mural Arts—As discussed in Chapter 1, Element 3, Mural Arts is one of the leading arts groups in Philadelphia, focusing on community-engaged processes of creating public art in Philadelphia. Currently, Mural Arts is doing a project with Bartram's Gardens on the far south end of the SRT that involves public art.
- Center for Emerging Visual Artists— As we explored in the second case study, CEVA's biennial event, Art in the Open involves the creation of public art with the Philadelphia community on the Schuylkill River Trail. Their experience bringing youth and seniors together through the NewCourtland Fellowship could also provide guidance for this project.
- Association for Public Art — From their website: “The Association for Public Art (aPA, formerly the Fairmount Park Art Association) was established in 1872 and is the nation's first private, nonprofit civic organization dedicated to creating a “museum without walls” by integrating public art and urban design. By engaging diverse segments of the community, the aPA seeks to respond to the conditions of our time, creating a legacy and maintaining a heritage for future generations, while promoting Philadelphia as a premier city for public art.”<sup>179</sup>

## Regional Partners/Communities

Once the facilitators have been identified, and brought on board with the project, it would be necessary to identify potential partners within the region. As we've seen from the first two chapters, partnerships between facilitators and smaller representative groups is necessary.

While the role of the facilitator(s) is to oversee the project as a whole, regional organizations would be the intermediate bodies which connect the community members to the project.

To represent as much regional diversity as possible, the project would involve the participation of several different regional partners, from varying urban neighborhoods and more rural towns along the trail. These organizations would serve to coordinate their community members, and to be the representative of their interests in this project. These organizations could be museums, like with MoMS, or a wide range of organizations like those involved with Neighborland's many projects. Creating partnerships between museums and other organizations who don't normally interact with each other could establish relationships that benefit the partners, their communities and the region as a whole far into the future.

But how are these representative organizations chosen? How do seemingly disparate communities come together as partners for a project?

Likely, a facilitator with a strong reputation to help build and develop partnerships. Whatever facilitator is chosen for this project would have existing connections to community organizations that they could start with. However, if there is no strong facilitator, a more grassroots approach could be implemented.

In the case of the Kentucky Urban-Rural Exchange, which involves bringing people from urban Louisville together with people from

rural areas of the state, Art of the Rural started with relationships they already had with community members. By visiting different residents of different communities, an initial partnership between Art of the Rural and one smaller organization evolved into the network that is today the Urban-Rural Exchange.<sup>180</sup>



**Above:** Providing opportunities for partnerships and networking is key for Art of the Rural's Kentucky Urban-Rural Exchange.



Taking a survey of and getting to know the existing community organizations in the region would be another essential tactic for developing partnerships. Like Donna Neuwirth said about Wormfarm, early buy-in from widely-trusted community members is key.

There are many organized groups that work with specific communities in Philadelphia, and there are several organizations that represent specific communities and sites along the Schuylkill/Perkiomen Trail. Laura Griffith (Association for Public Art) suggested looking into the existing public art groups, or at least contemporary art groups in Philadelphia and the Montgomery County area, as it would be important to have members of the local arts communities participating.<sup>181</sup>

Other key partners to consider would be any hubs adjacent to the trail, or “friends of” trail groups. As discussed in Element 2: Linear Spaces of Trails, involving communities directly along or involved with a trail is necessary to mitigate any potential opposition. Letting businesses know that this project would likely be a source of increased foot traffic and revenue early on could encourage their support. Identifying “trail towns” in the region would also provide a good starting point as these towns make a point of encouraging trail users to visit their communities. Along the Perkiomen Trail, the towns of Schwenksville and Conshohocken are both identified as trail towns.

Another approach would be to look at the partnerships that already exist between community organizations, specifically those that have both urban and rural constituents. In the Perkiomen Model, there already are some existing partnerships between urban and rural organizations that are near the Schuylkill/Perkiomen Trail (Audubon Center and Strawberry Mansion Learning Center; Friends of Pennypacker Mills and Washington Avenue Green). It is likely that this would be the case for other regions and their connecting trail systems as well. These existing partnerships could be re-purposed to participate in the development of the trail

interpretation, and even serve as models for other partnerships in this project.

It will be important that whichever organizations are brought into the project are dedicated to seeing it through. In Element 2: Linear Spaces of Trails, we saw that one of the most common reasons that purposive routes don't last is "a lack of will to cooperate for the greater good of the connected region or community. ...some businesses and locations [may] fail to do their part in espousing the goals and purposes of the trail, thereby allowing the developed network to collapse."<sup>182</sup>

Genevieve Coutroubis from the Center for Emerging Visual Artists also made the point that giving potential partners incentives to participate is necessary. Will they get money? Will they get to work with a special artist? If you don't have incentives, it's hard to bring people on board.

Similarly, if the facilitator offers incentives, they need to follow through on them. Timothy and Boyd pointed out that networks may fail if partners feel they are not receiving rewards that were promised during the initial phases of the trail project. If this happens they may decide not to participate.<sup>183</sup>

## 3) Project Process

### Collaborating with Communities and Artists

How would the partner organizations integrate with the other key players– the communities they represent and the artists?

There are many different forms that this process could take, and much of that would depend on both the facilitators and regional partners of the specific project. Re-visiting some of the relevant lessons from the components and case studies can provide guidance to facilitators and regional partners on how best to move forward with this project.

### Guiding Lessons from Elements

#### Rural/Urban

The meanings of urban and rural can vary widely from person to person. Facilitators and partners in this project would need to remain sensitive to that. It is also important to keep in mind that there may be some real tensions between residents of these differing areas. Facilitators would also need to be sensitive to this and prepared to face or work through any potential challenges that may arise. Whatever region is chosen will include many different people who very well may not self-identify as “urban” or “rural”.

Facilitators and partners would need to be clear that the purpose of the project is to emphasize the interconnected relationships between the areas along the trail, not the differences. Rural and urban neighbors may not even realize how connected they are–this project is a chance for them to explore and celebrate these shared attributes or experiences.

## Trails

The residents that lie adjacent to the trail would need to be identified and consulted with to address any concerns they may have about the installation of permanent or temporary points of interpretation. Timothy and Boyd pointed out that one of the biggest complaints of trail users is overcrowding—would a project developing installations on the trail crowd the trail more? As mentioned in the previous section, Regional Partners, “friends of” trail groups, organizations and businesses, and “trail towns” would be great starting points for cultivating relationships with the trail neighbors.

Learn what these trail-lining communities would want out of this project. Are there specific amenities that are needed at these sites? Are there topics specific to this trail, like former railways or points of interest that would encourage them to participate?

## Interpretation

Creating effective interpretation means knowing the audience. Earlier, we saw that the William Penn Foundation’s project with Fairmount Waterworks found an interesting and useful way of incorporating community input by surveying trail users about prototypes of potential sculptures. By perform evaluations of and engaging in conversations with locals and visitors along the project trail, facilitators can gain an understanding of what form of interpretation would be most valuable to trail users.

As Laura Griffith from the Association for Public Art brought up, reaching out to local artist communities in these regions would be a way to incorporate artists and create relationships with partners.

Looking at other successful means of engaging community in the development of interpretation can jump start a process. Mural Arts’ process of identifying issues, fostering dialogue, connecting people and celebrating is one such model to study.

## Guiding Lessons from Case Studies

### Museum on Main Street

MoMS gives communities a “springboard” off which to jump into their own project development. By providing the theme, some exhibit components, and other resources, MoMS creates opportunities for communities to dive into and share their own experiences. Providing a planning support system and networks with other participating museums really helps ensure smaller organizations’ success. MoMS also has proven the value of incorporating public events. These celebrations revolve around the exhibit topic and attract many more visitors and stakeholders.

### Wormfarm and Fermentation Fest

Artist residencies create opportunities for urban artists to work within rural communities. Artist-designed and built mobile farm stands sell produce and local art in rural and urban environments. The urban stands are located in inner-city neighborhoods that have little access to fresh produce.

Donna Neuwirth of Wormfarm Institute said that some years they have relied primarily on RFP’s to recruit artists for the Farm/Art DTour, and other years they’ve directly invited artists to take part. However, for their biennial Fermentation Fest in 2018 they will use a combination of the two approaches– “We’ve learned a lot over the years.”<sup>184</sup>

**Right Top:** Museum on Main Street provides the basic structure of exhibits for communities to build off of.

**Right Bottom:** Artist residents at Wormfarm Institute





## Potential Questions for Discussion

In addition to considerations for a structure for the project, it's necessary to find the topics that communities will want to explore together. What are the important questions that should be asked and conversations that should be had, say in a public meeting or community potluck gathering, or over the discussion boards provided by a tool like Neighborland?

These conversations would likely involve contentious issues. Instead of avoiding these “hot topics”, this could be a real opportunity to embrace them— if done responsibly and with respect to all involved parties. A process and final product that don't shy away from difficult conversations will create opportunities for more honest and provocative experiences for all parties involved—from facilitators to trail-users.

These questions for community members and organizations, developed from the research into the three elements could be starting points for discussion and partnerships:

### Rural/Urban

- » How do residents of the areas lining the trail define urban and rural? Does it matter? What do people from other areas think about these definitions? Are they true?
- » What are the ways in which rural and urban areas from this region are interdependent? What unique ties do businesses, cultures, organizations, and people have to each other?
- » What are the hardships or good fortunes of these areas? What commonalities do they share?

## Trails

- » What are the values, people, stories or other important information that rural and urban areas would want to commemorate along their shared trail? Is there a common thread that these narratives share?
- » How could this trail system be a source of economic development to these communities? How could it be a source of pride?
- » Do you use the trail system? If so, how?

## Interpretation

- » Trail interpretation should be thematic—what would be the theme of this region?
- » What are the significant landscape features along this trail? What stories do they tell?
- » What specific sites along this trail are important to you? What stories do you have to share about these places?
- » How would you represent your neighborhood or town through public art? (Going off of the example from Monument Lab) What is an appropriate monument for this shared region today?
- » What hub in your community is important to you? Why?
- » What do you want to know about people from rural/urban areas of this region? What do you want them to know about you?

## Practical Considerations

Outside of the project structure and discussion questions for participating communities, the research has provided other key considerations to keep in mind. Conversations with trail officials from the Perkiomen Trail and Schuylkill River Trail shed light on some practical considerations of this proposed project.

In a conversation with Henry Stroud, Principal Trails & Open Space Planner of the Montgomery County Planning Commission on March 8, 2018, he said that while he is very interested in getting art on the trails in Montgomery County, doing so may not be any easy task to accomplish. He said that Montgomery County is really limited by the width of their easements on the trail, and the spots where Montgomery County does own larger areas of land along the Perkiomen Trail are interspersed and a little random. Some of these areas are “hemmed-in” by trees. This means creating a system of regularly interspersed art installations along the Perkiomen Trail would be unlikely.<sup>185</sup>

Conversations with other trail officials revealed that while finding adequate land owned by the county for interpretive installations might be difficult, reaching out to business owners along the trail could be a great solution. Some of these businesses occupy trail towns, and other have historical connections to the area. (One example is Chandler Bats, a historic baseball bat business that still gets many famous clients.) Using the land along the trail owned by these businesses would take the burden off the county. Creating artwork or interpretation with the input of these hubs could get their buy-in and they could even be regional partners of the project.<sup>186</sup>

Anne Leavitt-Gruberger, Assistant Section Chief of County Planning for the Montgomery County Planning Commission explained that past attempts at putting art on the trails in Montgomery County had failed largely due to lack of funding.

While they applied for many grants, they just weren't able to get them. They were able to try out one project in which they hung banners with artwork from local artists, although getting art from the artists was somewhat difficult. Because the department didn't have a lot of money for the project they weren't able to pay much. Like earlier sections pointed out, providing incentives is crucial to gaining buy-in from participants.<sup>187</sup>

## Funding

As seen from Anne Leavitt-Gruberger's experience, funding makes all the difference. No matter what structure or process is decided upon for a project, funding would be necessary. Within the context of the Perkiomen Model, there are several possible funding sources that could be investigated. While a deeper look into funding could be part of another study, a list of suggestions for the Perkiomen Model will be offered here:

- Transportation Alternative Funds through the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
- William Penn Foundation
- Mural Arts Project
- Art of the Rural, NEA (Art Works)
- The Pew Charitable Trust
- City of Philadelphia
- Knight Foundation
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

As this chapter shows, there is no one-size-fits-all for implementing a project like this—there are countless ways it could be implemented. It is about finding what suits the many parties involved best. The application of this framework is just a guiding tool for some of the major considerations, and a way to dig a little deeper into the realities of implementing it.

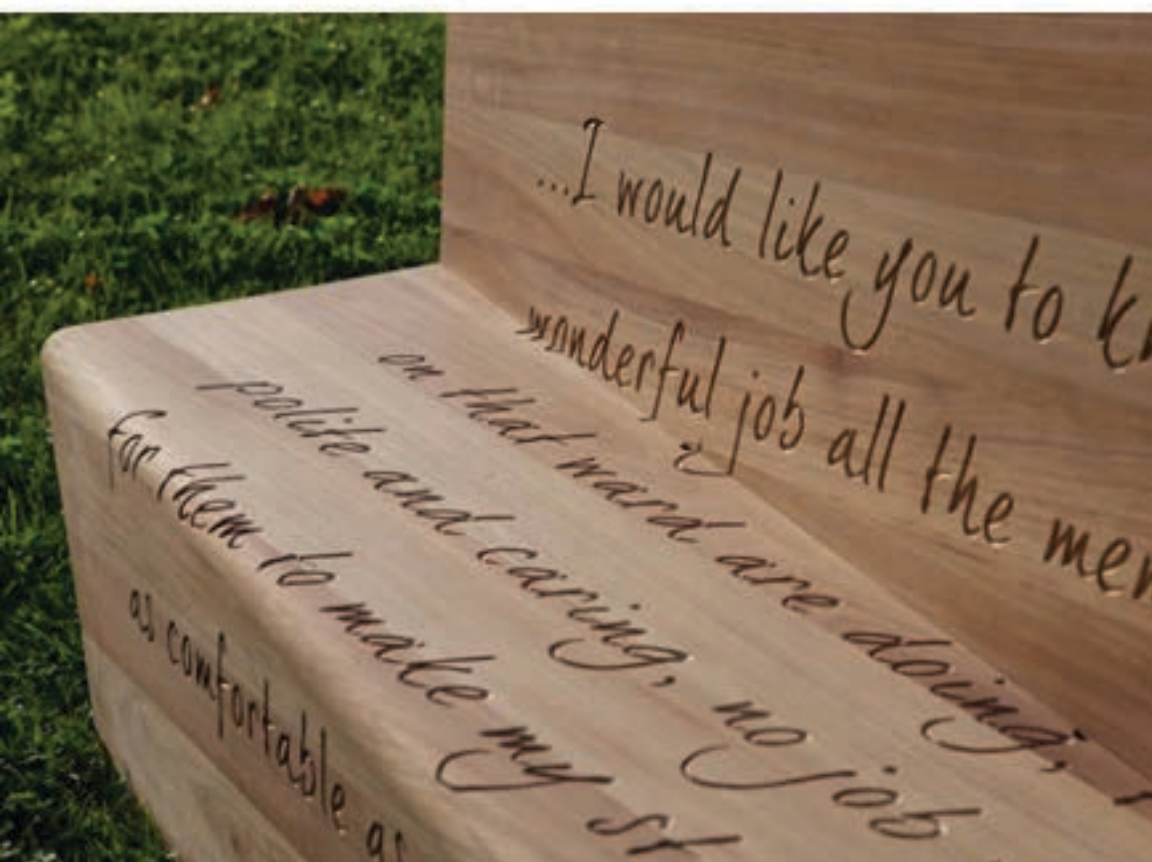


For the Perkiomen Model (and probably many others) it largely comes down to a matter of funding. However, it is evident that there is interest among interviewed parties, and as we saw in Element 2: Linear Paths of Trails there is funding going to trail projects.

This framework also shows that staying flexible is important. While using county land along the Perkiomen Trail is not suitable for a system of regularly interspersed points of interpretation, engaging with businesses and others who own land adjacent to the trail could be a way to access installation sites. Additionally, by doing so you are engaging the community, which we've seen from all elements of this project—urban/rural, trails and interpretation is crucial.

It would also surely be a learning process. Like Donna Neuwirth, Executive Director of Wormfarm Institute said about their evolving processes— “We’ve learned a lot over the years.”<sup>188</sup>

**Right:** A bench in Bristol, England delivers a personal message.



# End of the Trail:

## Conclusion

*“I think it’s really difficult to dislike a person and not care about their community if they’ve listened to you and valued your story– and connected that to a story that’s important in their own lives. You can’t hate those folks anymore once you’ve had a deep connection.”*

–Savannah Barrett

This study has shown that viewing urban and rural as a continuum isn’t just about benefits on a national or even regional scale, though these benefits are motivation enough to pursue partnerships between these areas. Seeing rural and urban as interdependent can bring benefits on a personal level—to the people who reside in these regions. Creating opportunities for face-to-face interaction and dialogue between residents of neighboring urban and rural spaces can create a greater understanding of both the ties and distinctions between them. Discovering the facets that unite urban and rural people—whether that be historical ties; an interdependency of goods, services and food; shared challenges; or anything else—can allow residents to realize that “us vs. them” is really a larger “us”.

In a different manner, in-person discussions on elements of discord—whether that be changing demographics, religious beliefs, politics<sup>189</sup>, or anything else—can allow residents of differing areas to humanize the views that oppose their own.



The tools that this thesis proposes can create that dialogue—trails and interpretation— both rely heavily on community engagement. By involving area residents in the development of trails and interpretation, deeper, more meaningful projects can be created; the inherent nature of each to connect and engage is what makes them great candidates for facilitating urban/rural dialogue.

Both of these tools also promote a deep sense of place. The site specificity of wayside exhibits and public art merged with the more expansive character of trails creates linear spaces with a unique collective identity—one that is full of the nuanced and multi-faceted natures of urban and rural communities.

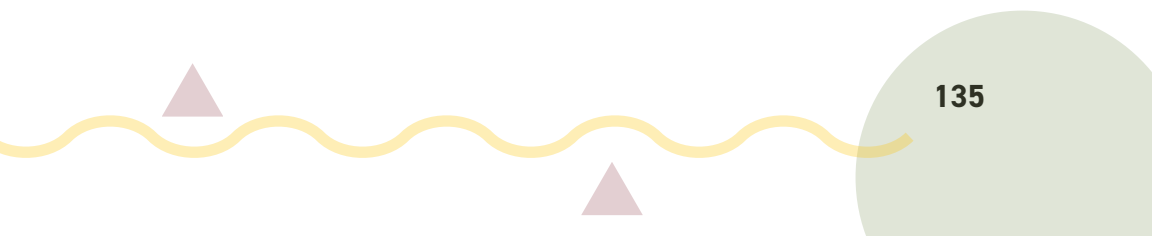
Though this study has shown that each element of this thesis comes with its own challenges, it has also shown that each provides unique strategies to look past the binary view of urban and rural. The case studies and applied framework of this thesis provide evidence that when used in concert these elements can provide a re-interpretation of regional relationships. Thoughtful integration of the areas of urban and rural, with the linear spaces of trails and points of interpretation can create unique moments of regional dialogue.



# Appendix

- Nomenclature
- Endnotes
- Bibliography
- Image Credits





# Nomenclature

**Community:** A group of people living in an area; a group of people with shared interests living in a common area.

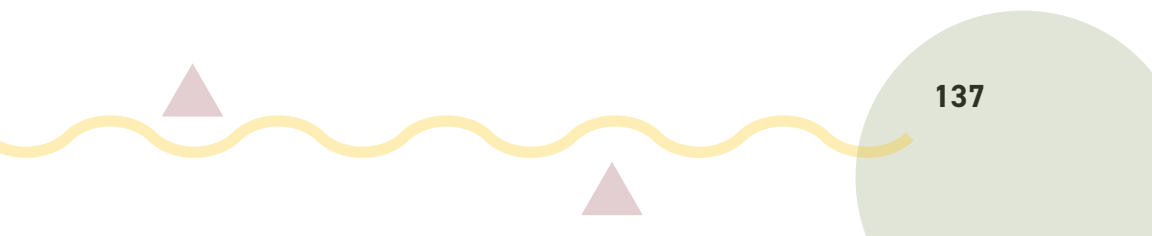
**Rural:** This is up to interpretation. The reader can choose to define rural as they wish.

**Urban:** See above.

**Interpretation:** A communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships in our natural and cultural heritage to the public through first-hand experiences with objects, artifacts, landscapes or sites. For the purposes of this study, interpretation can mean wayside exhibits, public art, or anything in-between.

**Wayside exhibits:** specific points of trail interpretation, relating a story relevant to that specific site to the viewer

**Public art:** Art in the public, which is distinguished by unique association of how it is made, where it is and what it means.



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