

2026 Empire State Trail Town Program Application

Parks & Trails New York

Instructions

About the Empire State Trail Town program

The [Empire State Trail Town program](#) is an official designation available through a competitive application and certification process, with technical assistance provided by Parks & Trails New York, sponsored by the NYS Canal Corporation.

Selected communities will participate in a ten-month program as a “provisional trail town” to develop a network of partners committed to the Trail Town initiative, conduct research and assessment, develop promotional resources and strategies, and create and adopt an action agenda to guide future Trail Town work, all aimed at maximizing the economic benefits of being located close to the trail.

Please review the 2026 Empire State Trail Town Handbook available for download on the program website at ptny.org/empire-state-trail-towns prior to filling out the application for a detailed description of the program components, objectives and timeline.

Eligibility & Application Information

Eligible applicants include cities, villages or towns located directly on or in close proximity to the Erie or Champlain Canalway Trail. For both **cities larger than 25,000 people** and **towns of any population**, a proposed Trail Town sub-area should be identified as the focus area for the program. The purpose of this sub-area is to focus the program on a neighborhood or neighborhoods within a city or a hamlet or urbanized area within a town that cyclists traveling on the trail would be most likely to interact with.

Municipalities must demonstrate support for the application in the form of a municipal resolution (preferred) or a letter on official letterhead from the mayor or supervisor. Applicants must also demonstrate that they have the support of at least one community partner (non-profit or other community organization) willing to commit time and resources to the Trail Town planning process.

An informational webinar will be held on **Thursday, December 11 at 10:00am**. The session will provide an overview of the program and application process, as well as provide an opportunity for Q&A. The recording will also be posted on the program webpage at ptny.org/empire-state-trail-towns

Deadline: Monday, February 16 at 11:59PM.

Evaluation

PTNY will evaluate all submissions based on the extent to which they meet the Trail Town criteria, as well as the demonstrated commitment and capacity the community has to participate fully in the program. PTNY expects to select up to three communities or applications for participation in the 2026 Empire State Trail Town program. Applicants that don't yet meet all the criteria are still encouraged to apply.

Applicant Information

Trail Town Applicant*

Community name

Character Limit: 100

Municipal Representative Contact Information

PTNY requires that the Empire State Trail Town application be spearheaded by a representative of the community's municipality. In the past, the lead applicant has usually been part of the planning or economic development department, but in smaller communities, it may be the mayor, village manager, or some other position. This person will be assumed to be PTNY's primary contact with the municipality.

Municipal Representative Name*

Character Limit: 50

Municipal Representative Title*

Character Limit: 50

Municipal Representative Email*

Character Limit: 50

Municipal Representative Phone Number*

Character Limit: 25

Evidence of Municipal Support*

Attach a municipal resolution (*preferred*) or a letter on official letterhead from the mayor or supervisor in support of the application. In the case of a group application, attach a combined PDF containing all the resolutions/letters from each participating municipality. A sample resolution and a sample letter of support are both available for download.

File Size Limit: 5 MB

Supporting Community Organization

At least one community partner (non-profit or other community organization) must commit to investing time and resources into advancing the Trail Town initiative. Partner organizations in the past have included bicycle/pedestrian advocacy groups, Main Street Associations, and Friends groups of local parks or trails, but this list is not restrictive. PTNY requires letters or emails indicating support and commitment from any such partners. The community organization representative listed here will be assumed to be PTNY's primary contact with the organization.

Name of Community Organization*

Character Limit: 50

Community Organization Representative Name*

First and last.

Character Limit: 250

Title of Community Organization Representative*

Character Limit: 40

Community Organization Representative Email

Please provide the best email to reach the community organization's representative at.

Character Limit: 30

Other Supporting Organizations

If there are other community organizations who support the application and have provided letters of support, please list them here.

Character Limit: 2000

Letter(s) of Support*

Attach the letter of support from the community organization. If there are multiple supporting organizations, please attach a combined PDF of all letters of support. In the letter, please include the mission of the organization and how the organization will support the effort during the Trail Town process.

File Size Limit: 5 MB

Proposed Trail Town Steering Committee*

Provide a proposed Trail Town steering committee, including the names of potential committee members, along with their emails, and the organization, if any, that each member represents. Please ensure that you have spoken with any potential steering committee members before listing them on the application. This list is not intended to be binding or restrictive, but rather is intended to give an idea of who may be involved going forward.

Character Limit: 1000

Empire State Trail Town Criteria

These questions are designed to ensure that the community meets the baseline needs of trail users, and is set up to become an Empire State Trail Town. If your community does not meet the criteria for whatever reason, please describe any active efforts or alternatives that may be present in the community.

Note that this portion of the application is not intended to be a comprehensive list of assets present in the community (as that will be completed by the selected communities as part of the Trail Town Self-Assessment). Rather, the application should demonstrate what assets, attractions, or other factors make the community well-suited and/or unique for selection as an Empire State Trail Town.

Community Location*

Is the community located directly on or near the Erie or Champlain Canalway Trail? (*The community must be within three miles of a trail access point, and preferably accessible via an off-road connector or on low-traffic roads.*)

Choices

Yes

No

Proposed Trail Town Sub-Area (For Cities with populations over 25,000 and Towns of any size)

Upload a map of the area being proposed for participation in the Trail Town program. This can be a PDF map or a screenshot of a map with the sub-area drawn on. Please use the text box to provide any additional context or justification.

Note: This may not be the final sub-area, which will be determined and solidified if the community is selected for participation in the program.

Character Limit: 1000 | File Size Limit: 10 MB

Describe the Route*

Describe the route for cyclists and pedestrians between the trail and the town center/downtown business district. Consider bike and pedestrian facilities, as well as whether there is currently any signage to direct trail users off the trail.

Character Limit: 1000

Bicycle Parking

Describe where trail users can park their bikes while exploring the community, including whether there are municipal bike racks or business-owned bike racks.

Character Limit: 500

Restrooms and Drinking Water Accessibility*

Describe where visitors can access restrooms and drinking water in the community. This can be a municipally operated restroom/drinking fountain or be a business whose restrooms are open to the public and/or that offers drinking water to trail users.

Character Limit: 1000

Overnight Accommodations*

What overnight accommodations are available and welcoming to trail users?

This can be a camping area, hotel, motel, hostel, bed & breakfast, etc. Check all that apply.

Choices

Camping area

Hotel

Motel

Bed & Breakfast

Hostel

Short Term Rental (AirBnB, VRBO, etc)

Warm Showers host

Other

List of Accommodations*

Give a brief list of the accommodations available for visiting trail users in the community or provide more context if needed. Indicate if any are certified Bike Friendly NY businesses.

Character Limit: 1000

Food and Beverages*

Where can trail users get food and drinks? This can be a grocery or convenience store or a restaurant that welcomes trail users. Check all that apply.

Choices

Cafe/Restaurant

Coffee Shop

Ice Cream Shop

Convenience Store

Grocery Store

Craft Beverage Establishment (brewery, winery, etc)

Other

Bike Friendly NY Businesses

Review the businesses participating in PTNY's Bike Friendly NY certification program at ptny.org/bfny. List trail- or visitor-oriented businesses that are Bike Friendly NY certified, and any businesses that would be good candidates for certification.

Character Limit: 500

Visitor Information Availability*

Where can visitors go for information about the community? This can be a visitors/welcome center, chamber of commerce, library, or village hall, or a regularly updated trail-oriented bulletin board or kiosk.

Choices

Visitor/welcome center

Chamber of commerce

Library

Municipal hall

Regularly updated, trail-oriented bulletin board/kiosk

Other

Visitor Information Resources

Describe where trail users can get information about the trail or the community. This can include in-person visitor or welcome centers and online resources.

Character Limit: 500

Trail Town Preparedness

The following questions seek to gauge the community's level of preparedness to promote itself as an Empire State Trail Town and readiness to commit to the planning work outlined in the 2026 Empire State Trail Town program handbook.

Why Should This Community Be Certified?*

What makes the community unique among trailside communities, including notable attractions, recreational opportunities, or festivals, events, and programs that currently serve or could potentially serve as a draw for trail users?

Character Limit: 5000

Planning Initiatives*

List and link to any relevant plans or planning initiatives (like DRI, NY Forward, BOA, Comprehensive Planning, trail feasibility studies, etc.) in existence or plans/development projects underway in the community, especially work that integrates or supports the growth of a trail culture.

Character Limit: 5000

Trail-friendly and Active Transportation Policies*

List and describe any trail-friendly or active transportation policies or ordinances in place or being pursued by the municipality. These could include a Complete Streets ordinance, Vision Zero policy, 25 mph municipality-wide speed limit, etc.

Character Limit: 5000

Challenges*

What are the biggest challenges or barriers to creating an enhanced connection between the community and its outdoor recreation assets, or to drawing outdoor recreation visitors?

Character Limit: 5000

Trail Town Goals*

What does the community most hope to gain from participating in the Trail Town program?

Character Limit: 5000

Why Now?*

Why is now the best time for the community to pursue Trail Town status? Are there any projects or other circumstances that may detract from the ability of the municipality to commit to the Trail Town program this year?

Character Limit: 5000

Underserved Populations*

Explain how a Trail Town effort in the community would incorporate historically underserved populations, such as low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, older adults and/or people with limited English proficiency.

Character Limit: 5000

Trail Town Images*

Submit at least one image (or multiple in a word document) that represents how your community is welcoming to trail users. These images will be used to promote the community's participation in the program if selected.

File Size Limit: 10 MB

Empire State Trail Town Handbook*

By checking the following box, I certify that I have reviewed the Empire State Trail Town Handbook and understand the scope of work. If selected, I agree to provide a meaningful level of commitment in an effort to achieve the goals, objectives and strategies laid out in the Empire State Trail Town handbook for the duration of the program.

Choices

Yes, I have reviewed the Empire State Trail Town Handbook.