

# Chautauqua County Greenways Group Action Plan

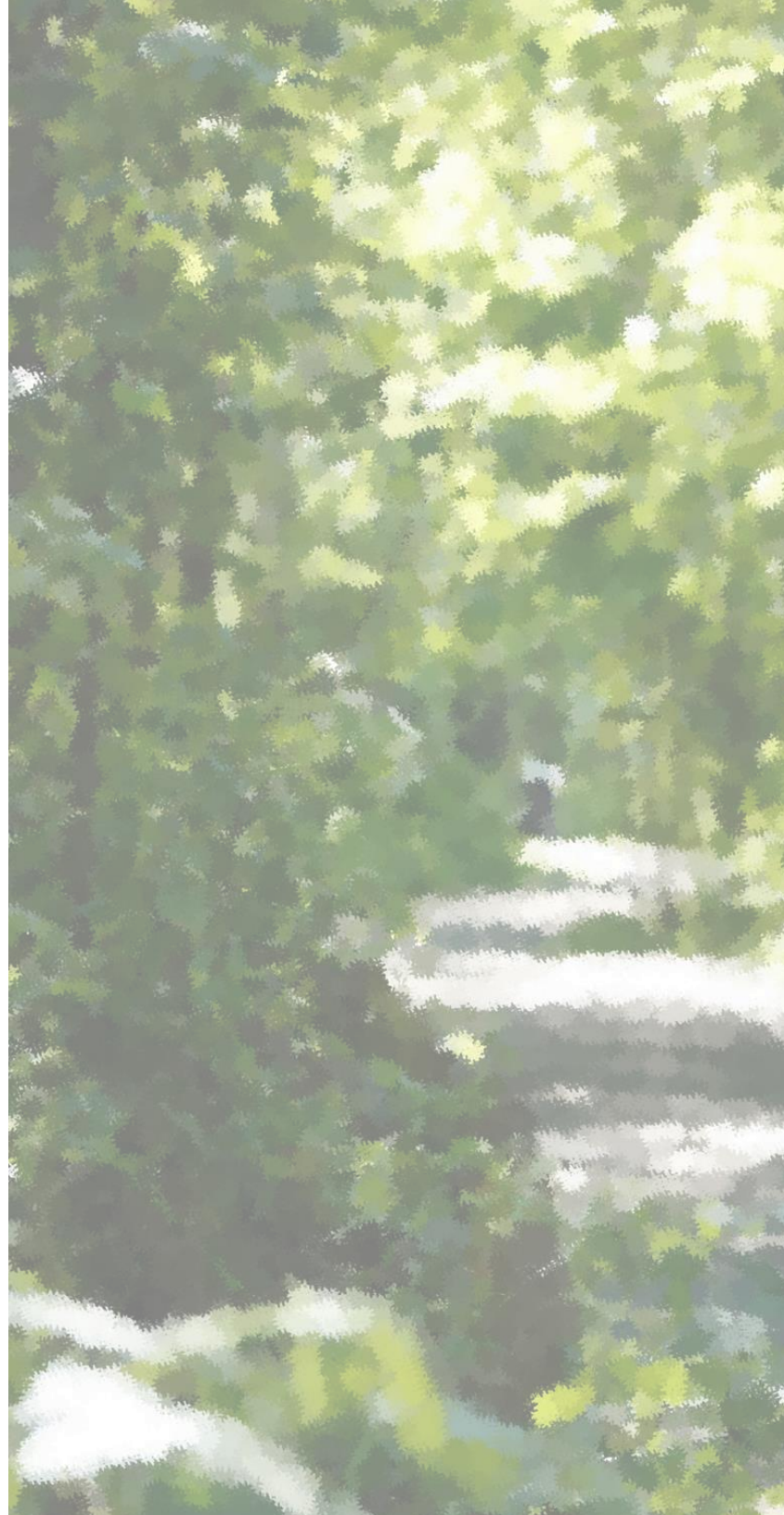
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Friends of the Chautauqua County Greenways

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## About Camoin Associates



Camoin Associates has provided economic development consulting services to municipalities, economic development agencies, and private enterprises since 1999. To learn more about our experience and projects in all of our service lines, please visit our website at [www.camoinassociates.com](http://www.camoinassociates.com).

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Partner Relations.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Organizational Scenarios.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Memoranda.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Action Plan.....</b>	<b>10</b>

# Introduction

The multiple recreational user groups in Chautauqua County, known as the Friends of Chautauqua County Greenways (or the Greenways Group), sought to develop an organizational structure that would allow them to cooperate and leverage financial resources. These resources, in turn, will help the organizations realize the primary objectives from the [2012 Chautauqua County Greenway Plan](#).

The goal of this group is that acting on the recommendations proposed in the Greenway Plan will create a new enthusiasm for active living and healthy lifestyles; promote outdoor activities; improve the quality of life within Chautauqua County; act as a catalyst for economic development related to outdoor living; and establish Chautauqua County as a destination center for outdoor adventure and lifelong learning opportunities.

To decide how to advance the goals of the group, Camoin Associates was hired in 2022 to review the current relationships between the individual trail groups and help them determine the most appropriate structure for a partnership between the trail groups, how they might best access funding sources, and how the group can leverage its position in the County's economic development network.

## Findings

Based on a series of meetings, interviews, and an in-person workshop, it was determined that it was most advantageous for an existing organization to help advance the overarching goals of the Friends of the Chautauqua County Greenways. Based on a set of criteria that evaluated the capacity of existing groups to act as an organizational host, it was determined that the Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth (the Partnership), was in best position to deliver on the needs and desires of the Friends of the Chautauqua County Greenways.

It was agreed that any host arrangement with an existing organization must simultaneously allow each of the individual trail groups to maintain their autonomy, while leveraging the voice and assets of the County for securing larger grant resources that will benefit trail systems across the region.

Contents of each section of this report is outlined below:

*Partner Relations:* This section provides an overview of the relationship between the trail organizations and the roles that each of them play for their constituents. This sets the foundation for understanding where there are strengths among the organizations, where there are weaknesses, and what organizational and administration functions will be needed to reach the collective goals of the Greenways Group.

*Organizational Scenarios:* This section establishes potential governance structures that the Friends of the Chautauqua County Greenways considered as a group. Each scenario is presented with pros and cons to assess the ultimate viability within the context of the County.

*Action Plan:* Following the recommendations for which organizational structure to pursue, Camoin provides guidance on the administrative instruments to set up to ensure success between all parties. These details will leave the Partnership and the Friends of the Chautauqua County Greenways with the roadmap to move forward.

# Partner Relations

The Greenways Group met several times via Zoom and once in person for a workshop to give input on how a new structure for the group should be organized and the role it should play in achieving shared goals and fundraising. In addition to facilitating these meetings, Camoin Associates conducted interviews with seven of the partner organizations to gain a deeper understanding of the groups’ missions and standard activities, decision-making processes, and to gather input on how the groups could communicate and work together more effectively.

## Interviews

Interviews were conducted with representatives from Chautauqua County Department of Planning & Development, Chautauqua County Equestrian Trail System, Western New York Mountain Biking Association, Chautauqua Rails to Trails, Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Boutwell Hill Ski Club.

Some themes that arose from interviews include:

- Additional funding would be useful
- Effects of climate change
- Aging of volunteers and staff
- Size/level of establishment for trail groups leads to different priorities/needs
- Partnerships exist between clubs, but less formalized overall
- Desire for each group to maintain unique identity
- Trail groups see it in their individual interest to collaborate with other trail groups
- County has limited staff and capacity to do trail work
- Groups that have had the most success have both committed leaders as well as distributed leadership and volunteer opportunities
- Coordinating with multiple government entities can be a challenge, e.g. between towns, county, DEC.

## Virtual meetings & In Person Workshop

At a virtual meeting with the Chautauqua County Greenways Group on May 11, 2022, Camoin Associates polled the 19 members in attendance about the types and intensity level of work they were doing related to trail and greenways. Fundraising and coordinating volunteers and events were the two activities that required the most time and energy of greenway leaders. The below table shows various types of work by intensity level of effort for those in attendance.

Type of Work	Intensity
Delegation/Contract	Light
Networking/Relationships	Light
Community Relations	Moderate
In Season Hours	Moderate
Intergovernmental Relations	Moderate
Logistical Duties	Moderate
Out in the field	Moderate
Out of Season Hours	Moderate
Fundraising	Substantial
Volunteers/Activities	Substantial

At an in-person workshop held on June 27, 2022, dozens of members of the Chautauqua County Greenway Group met to discuss potential structures for a new structure for the County’s greenways and trail groups.

The group decided on a set of non-negotiable features any new structure would need to include. These included: maximizing the ability to raise funds while allowing for a degree of autonomy to each group to fundraise as well; setting realistic goals the group could work together to achieve; agreeing upon a structure to respect and support each member group; and that any structure would need to be codified in writing in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between member groups.

# SPOTLIGHT ON GROUP VALUES

Operations	Sustainability	Collaboration	Promotion & Outreach	Purpose
Urgency Professionalism Efficiency Versatility	Preservation Continuity	Diversity Teamwork Equity Not Self-Serving Cooperation Respectful of Each Other & Trails	Consistent message Expanded promotional efforts	Physical/mental health Safe and accessible Outside/active lifestyle Multi-use trails Sense of community

## TAKEAWAYS

- Maximize fundraising potential as a group and retain individual group's ability to fundraise
- Set achievable goals that can be advanced through collaboration
- Respect and support for each group

# Organizational Scenarios

Based on discussions with Greenways Group members and an assessment of the group's needs, it was decided that keeping the status quo was not the preferred course of action. Instead, three options emerged: 1) create a pass-through organization, 2) have an existing organization take on a leadership role for the group, or 3) create a new 501(c)3 organization. Some considerations on the benefits and drawbacks of the potential options were considered by the full Greenways Group at the June 27 workshop.

## **SCENARIO 1. Pass through organization**

The pros of a pass-through organization are that it would streamline financial transactions and allow each of the individual trail groups to operate with the same level of autonomy they are used to. Drawbacks include having only limited ability to leverage shared resources (e.g. equipment, marketing, volunteers) or a shared vision, and that additional work would be created for a financial officer at the pass-through organization while at the same time being the most difficult option for hiring a dedicated person to prepare funding applications.

## **SCENARIO 2. Existing organization as lead administrator**

The benefits of using an existing organization as a lead administrator for the County's trail groups include the fact that an established organization could leverage existing knowledge of stakeholders and leaders in the region, it would be less resource-intensive to formalize, that organization would likely come with an established positive reputation, it would be an efficient way to hire a dedicated person on contract to advance trail organizations' interests, and such an arrangement could add credibility and assurance to funders considering funding requests from member organizations. Drawbacks include efforts potentially being limited by the vision of the existing organization, difficulties associated with the shift to accommodating new role/broader responsibility, and the need to create multi-layer governance structures between existing trail organization boards, which would require a written MOA.

## **SCENARIO 3. Form new 501c3**

The pros of forming a new 501(c)3 organization composed of member trail organizations include that it could be an independent entity able to generate its own mission and vision for the County. This type of organization could have strong advocacy and marketing message potential. Cons of forming a nonprofit include the high costs (in both time and money) of setting up and sustaining an organization, that a new nonprofit might overlap with the roles of existing nonprofits, that this new entity would take time to build standing in the community and with funders without an existing track record, and the fact that issues of control would be the most pronounced with a new nonprofit, possibly leading to mistrust and undermining the group's shared goals.

## **Greenways Group Meeting Discussion**

At a virtual meeting on August 5, 2022 the Greenway Group discussed these three options. The pros and cons of each of these scenarios is laid out on the pages that follow.

The conclusion of the conversation determined that Scenario 2, utilizing an existing organization as a lead administrator for the County's trail groups, was the most likely to be successful and could reflect the values agreed upon by the group. Based on this feedback from the group, Camoin Associates determined a set of criteria by which to assess the potential organizations that could assume the needed roles and responsibilities.

The following pages show the pros and cons assessment from each of the alternative scenarios discussed with the Greenways Group.



# Least Desirable Scenarios

## SCENARIO 1: Pass-Through Organization

**Pros**

- ✓ Streamlines financial transactions
- ✓ Individual trail groups continue to operate autonomously

**Cons**

- ✗ Limited ability to leverage shared resources such as equipment, marketing, or volunteers
- ✗ No shared visioning
- ✗ Additional roles and duties for financial officer of pass-through organization
- ✗ Most difficult option for hire of dedicated point person to prepare funding applications

## SCENARIO 3: Form a New 501(c)3

**Pros**

- ✓ Independent entity that can generate its own mission and vision
- ✓ Strong advocacy and marketing messaging potential






**Cons**

- ✗ Time and resource intensive to set up and sustain—highest administrative costs
- ✗ Could overlap with the roles of existing nonprofits
- ✗ Entity would need to build standing in the community
- ✗ No track record to provide assurance to philanthropies and donors
- ✗ Issues of influence and control most pronounced and could pull groups apart




# Most Desirable Scenario

## SCENARIO 2: Existing Organization as Lead Administrator

### Pros

-  Leverage existing knowledge of stakeholders and leaders
-  Less resource intensive to formalize
-  Established entity with positive community reputation
-  Efficient way to hire dedicated person on contract to advance trail organizations' interests
-  Could add credibility and assurance to funders considering requests

### Cons

-  Could be limited by vision of existing organization
-  Perception shift for new role of the organization could be difficult
-  Multi-layer governance structures between board of existing organization and advisory group

# Factors for a Successful Organization

The following categories outline the requirements that Camoin assessed for the existing organization to take on the lead role in Scenario 2.

## Administrative support

To manage the growing portfolio of trail groups, activities and strategies, the entity must be able to support the additional administrative work that will come with taking on this role. This will include internal and external communication, coordination among stakeholders, advisement on grant funding, distributing funds awarded, among other roles.

## Fiscal management + reporting

As the groups seek larger funding amounts, there will be increased demand for reporting and compliance. The entity that takes on this role will need to be equipped to manage funds efficiently and effectively for all trail-user groups involved in the Greenways Group.

## Governance

The entity must be able to develop processes for stakeholders to participate in equitable decision making. It will also be beneficial for the entity to have access to locations with supportive technology to be able to operate in-person and virtual meetings. The entity will also need to begin to develop a set of criteria under which it will operate with the Greenways Group, which will eventually evolve into the bylaws of new structure.

## Accountability

One of the core premises of the Greenways Group is to provide a structure that operates with transparency. This includes

accountability in the process of receiving and reporting funds, identifying what projects to pursue, and communication with the group’s participants. The entity will also need management control to report out to the public, funding agencies, and other public and private stakeholders.

## Recommendations

### *Administrative Entity*

Based on these requirements, engagement with the Greenways Group and additional interviews, Camoin Associates finds that the Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth (the Partnership) to be the organization that is best suited to take on these additional responsibilities and formalize the operations of the current Greenways Group.

### *Sustainability / Longevity*

Camoin recommends that the Partnership enact a two-year MOU with members of the Greenways Group as a pilot to further incubate and grow the concept and potential of the Greenways Group. After the two-year time frame, parties can assess the success and functionality of the previous agreement and determine if there is an alternative path to pursue or if remaining within the current framework, perhaps with some adjustments, is advantageous.

### *Staffing*

Based on the level of participation, organization, and management necessary to handle the four issues noted, Camoin recommends that one part-time staff be assigned or designated this role. The responsibility necessary for this role exceeds the typical volunteer capacity and a staff person will maximize the role that this group can play across the County.

# Memoranda of Agreement and Understanding

To move forward with the Partnership as the convener it will be necessary to set up agreements between parties to 1) make sure that each participant is represented in the agreement and 2) ensure accountability of roles and responsibilities.

The next page is a visual representation of the relationship between the Partnership, a subsidiary of the Chautauqua Region Economic Development Corporation (CREDC), and the Greenways Group.

Central to the success of the new direction will be to agree upon and codify the primary roles, responsibilities, and understandings. Two documents (Memoranda) will memorialize these decisions and guide future direction.

## 1. Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)

This document forms the basis for why members of the Greenways Group have come together and describes conditions for how they will more formally relate to one another. This is, quite literally, the agreement among the members to move forward as a group.

## 2. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

A second document provides the business arrangement between the newly aligned members of the Greenways Group with the Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth. This is a formal understanding for specific services and deliverables to be delivered to the Greenways Group by the Partnership, as well as conditions and basis for operating on the Greenways' behalf and delineates reporting and accountability measures.

# TRAIL GROUPS

**ROLE**  
Individual groups continue to advance individual missions and goals, in respect of and in coordination with other partners

## MOA

MOA between the Greenways Group and Individual Partners outlines membership responsibilities and expectations, how to equitably and fairly prioritize projects across all user groups, conflict resolution process, process for selecting co-chairs and length of terms, process for accepting new members.

# GREENWAYS GROUP

**ROLE**

- Collaborative membership group (*not legal entity*)
- 2 co-chairs selected by membership
- Identifies priorities, shares knowledge/expertise
- Mechanism for sharing of individual resources/equipment
- Other stakeholders like the County, NYS DEC, and private businesses participate but do not vote
- Aligned/affiliated with Partnership's Placemaking Work Group

## MOU

MOU between CREDC/Partnership and Greenways Group outlines:

- scope of staff and consultant support
- terms of funds management support
- overall support offered by Greenways Group and individual partners

**ROLE**

- Provides contract employee to provide support/ coordination to Greenways Group
- Oversees resource development including fundraising and grant development
- Provides project identification/development support
- Provides funds management services for collaborative grants and for individual partners under separate negotiated agreements
- Advances broader outdoor recreation/quality of life marketing campaigns in coordination with Chautauqua County Visitors Bureau and other partners

# CREDC / PARTNERSHIP

# Action Plan

Based on our findings, we propose the following set of actions to set the implementation plan into motion.

## Chautauqua County Friends of the Greenways Action Plan

TOPIC	ACTION	TIMEFRAME
Principles for Collaboration	The Partnership will <b>lead the formalization of the principles</b> identified by the Greenways Group during the in-person workshop.	60-90 Days
Structure and Management	<b>Determine and document advisory board composition</b> - Initially, the board will be made up of 1 representative from each of the groups that have been engaged during this process. A 10-12 person advisory board is the ideal size.	90 Days
	<b>Execute the Memorandum of Agreement</b> between the Greenway Group members and the Partnership.	90 Days
	<b>Develop the Memorandum of Understanding</b> to establish the specific services and deliverables that will be expected of the Partnership, as well as each trail group.	90 Days
Fiscal Management	<b>Determine fiscal responsibilities</b> - the Partnership will collaborate with the Greenways Group to lay out scenarios for fiscal management and responsibilities.	90 Days
	<b>Determine level of administrative fees</b> , and what nominal amount is necessary to help cover management costs, if any.	90 Days
Structure and Management	<b>Execute the MOUs</b> between the Partnership and the Greenways Group members.	120 Days
Structure and Management	<b>Establish the qualifications</b> for a position to support the Partnership act as convener for the Greenways Group. Pursue part-time hire to execute on plan.	Through 2023 Q1
Prioritizing Group Goals	<b>Review the priority project list from Greenway Plan Addendum</b> , come to agreement on priorities, and determine the need to revisit list and/or update Greenway Plan.	Through 2023 Q1
Fiscal Management	<b>Create a plan for 2023-2024 funding streams</b> , and determine where the Partnership may act on behalf of the group and where individual groups will continue to pursue their own funding.	Through 2023 Q1
Marketing	<b>Determine marketing goals</b> and create marketing plan that coordinates with existing efforts.	Through 2023 Q1