

June 29, 2017

The Commercial Record

When in doubt writing about trail, try facts

To the editor,

We hope the community will soon have a chance to enjoy the newest section of the Blue Star Trail in Saugatuck Township. Thanks to your support as a Friend of the Blue Star Trail, this outstanding community asset is now available for all to enjoy.

Although we strongly believe that the Friends of the Blue Star Trail's mission is of great benefit to the entire lakeshore community, there will always be those who disagree. Unfortunately, occasionally misinformation is spread to support those views.

The May 11 Local Observer article "Allegan County No Longer Agreeing to Taking Financial and Ownership Control Over Bike Trail in Casco Township" is an example. This headline is not accurate. In fact, in a letter dated May 22, Allegan County Board of Commissioners chair Dean Kapenga stated that the resolution (of support) passed by the commissioners Sept. 25, 2014, "still remains in effect" and further, "the board has not changed its position."

A copy of the original motion of support approved by commissioners was attached to the correction. The May 22 correction letter was then forwarded to The Local Observer. Local government managers along with other key stakeholders received this correction letter as well.

The Local Observer statement, "earlier support was null and void because the organization (i.e. Friends of the Blue Star Trail) was pushing for the county support changed its funding and construction plans without consultation with the county") is also incorrect.

The timeline and change in location of the trail construction was adjusted for easement expediency, not financial reasons as stated by the Local Observer. Only one easement was needed in Saugatuck Township; several were needed in Casco Township.

It is not uncommon for trailway projects of our size with intersecting townships to re-arrange sections of a defined pathway as they move forward. This is primarily because of a host of mandated contingent (government) conditions that have to be met prior to construction approval.

Currently we have letters of support from Allegan County, Ganges, Casco and Saugatuck Townships, as well as the City of Douglas. These are on file with the two government applications we just submitted this spring. These applications include a required 5-year plan going forward, which identifies precise road sections of trail, timelines, estimated cost of construction, etc.

The Observer article also stated that the fundraising goals necessary for this project will not be achieved by the Friends group. Obviously not true. The trail now under construction is evidence of our ability to honor our commitments.

For the record, the Friends have paid all of the engineering fees, secured a federal government grant through the Allegan County Road Commission, provided funds for ancillary costs such as easements, and procured sufficient funds for Saugatuck Township's required community matching dollars. We are now engaged in fundraising for our next section of construction in the township.

The Observer article also discussed the expenses required to maintain the trail. We agree that trail maintenance is critical to its longevity and economics.

Maintenance investment is very cost effective in extending the life and utility of the trail. To that end, the Friends have examined survey responses of long-standing West Michigan trailway managers and have done a thorough review of pertinent literature.

Based upon our findings, it is held that non-motorized trails that are regularly used and cared for should not require complete resurfacing up to 20 years. On average, a cost per mile of \$2,400 annually is a reasonable estimate.

For further questions and ideas, we invite you to visit our website for continued updates in the trail's development. You can find us at fobst.org or just Google Blue Star Trail. Trail development maps, monthly board minutes, event postings and donor opportunities are all there for your review.

We welcome your interest and support as we continue to connect our lakeshore communities.

Friends of the Blue Star Trail Board directors: Jeanne L. Van Zoeren, John Adams, Clark Carmichael, Laura Jager, Rosie M. Burke, Sonia Hill (emeritus)