

# Bike Trail Group Pitches Interim Path To Saugatuck City Officials For Grant Try

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The differing views about the Blue Star Trail between Saugatuck City and representatives of the organization behind the 20-mile bike trail project from South Haven to Saugatuck - Friends of the Blue Star Trail - were expressed at Monday night's city council meeting.

In order to apply for a grant, Friends say they want Saugatuck leaders to sign off on an interim bike pathway—a temporary alternate route that circumvents the intersection of Lake Street and Blue Star Highway, an intersection that for Saugatuck officials and some residents poses serious traffic challenges and safety risks.

The interim route would not entail new infrastructure, but use existing sidewalks and roads.

By approving the interim trail, Friends argue, Saugatuck officials will demonstrate commitment and their willingness to collaborate with Friends to later come up with a permanent route.

But Saugatuck leadership says before signing any commitment, they want a completed engineering study of the proposed pathway as they have been asking Friends to provide from the get-go about three years ago, but Friends have yet to provide it or agree they will pay for it.

“What they (Friends) really need is approval of an interim route on paper to show ‘connectivity’ in order to apply for the grant to further construct the trail from Old Allegan Road south to Maple Street heading into the City of Saugatuck’s jurisdiction, funneling pedestrians into the extremely dangerous intersection at Blue Star and Lake Street (by the pallet sign),” noted Saugatuck City Manager Kirk Harrier.

“This is the very section the city has been warning the trail organizers and Saugatuck Township about over and over during this process that needs in-depth review and pre-engineering study before proceeding further.”

During his brief presentation at Monday’s meeting, John Adams, the newly appointed Friends Board president, told the council, “I feel like we are stuck; you have a pretty firm position.” He went on, “Yes, there are real issues (Saugatuck City leaders have about traffic concerns, safety issues and legacy costs and that Friends acknowledge), but we can’t guess what options and solutions there are.”

Adams continued, comparing the situation to hiring an architect to constructing a building, but not providing the architect with a design plan or guide to how to construct that building.

Later on, during council comments, Saugatuck City Council Barry Johnson countered that notion with, "It's the architect's job to find a way to get it done."

Despite the contrasting views, both Saugatuck leaders and Friends say they want to continue to move the conversation forward and want to collaborate with one another.

Meanwhile, Saugatuck officials acknowledge the "reality" that segments of the Trail have been completed in the municipalities south and north of Saugatuck, Saugatuck Township and Douglas. Also, U.S. Bike Route 35 runs through Saugatuck and is not part of the Blue Star Trail and is not as wide.

In consideration of those two facts, it makes logical sense, says Saugatuck officials, to work with Friends to make that connection.

Friends Board Member John Ludlow, who described himself as a neurologist and avid cyclist, expressed support for the trail, noting, "The Blue Star Trail is about the health of our community, it's about the mental health of our community, it's about the economic health of our community."

In contrast, Saugatuck City Planning Commission Member Dan Fox backed the council's decision not to consider an interim route until further information and an engineering study is conducted.