

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Ask city to support west trail plan

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The Commercial Record

To the editor,

I write on behalf of the Friends of the Blue Star Trail to alert local residents that Saugatuck City Council will hold a workshop Thursday, Jan. 24, at 4 p.m. to consider any remaining issues regarding the proposed 0.4-mile section of the 20-mile Trail that would run through the city.

At virtually no cost to local taxpayers, the Friends seek to bring all the benefits of this linear park to residents and visitors. We encourage those who support the Trail to let the council know now or risk losing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our area.

The nonprofit Friends are asking the city to approve a design for the route along the west side of Blue Star Highway and across the Kalamazoo River Bridge. This is one of several options developed by Fleis & Vandenbrink, the regular city engineering firm, which was hired by the Friends for this project.

We have arrived at this point after the Friends asked the City in 2017 to renew its support for the Trail, which is one of the requirements of the Michigan Department of Transportation in order to obtain grant funding.

The City told MDOT that it had a number of concerns, which the Friends had expected to address a few years down the road when getting ready to build this section of the Trail.

MDOT then insisted that the City be on board before the Friends could seek grants for the next scheduled section of the Trail (connecting recently-completed Saugatuck Township segment north to previously existing trail, which continues north to the Beeline Trail and on into Holland).

That led to several months of intensive engineering and traffic studies by F&V and a series of public reviews by the Council later in 2018.

F&V has explained the proposed west-side route would retain existing traffic lanes on Blue Star Highway and Lake Street, retain the current stop sign for Lake Street at the intersection, and retain current aesthetics of the entrance to Saugatuck with the palette sign.

Moreover, the engineers have opined that this design would meet all safety standards for users of the trail and vehicular traffic.

F&V went on to tell Council this route provides the most natural connection to the existing trail sections in Douglas and in the township at Old Allegan Road (both located on the west side). Indeed, F&V provided Council with a checklist of more than 25 concerns members had raised and showed that this design meets every one.

For more details, click on “Saugatuck City Options” under the “Resources” tab on the homepage of our website, bluestartrail.org

The City also has the option of adding a traffic signal at Lake Street, which would only operate in season and be actuated only when a vehicle pulled up to the intersection. Other options discussed with Council would be prohibitively expensive, not qualify for MDOT grants, or be aesthetically displeasing.

This recommended route is projected to cost about \$1 million. Funding will be provided by state/federal matching grants designated for projects such as this in combination with local match dollars provided by the Friends. The Friends is also discussing with the City a plan to help fund anticipated maintenance for the trail.

We encourage local residents to attend this Jan. 24 public meeting, learn more about the potential route options, and voice your perspective to Council.

Without the City’s support, construction of this important community asset will remain stalled. If you are not able to attend in person, please email City Manager Kirk Harrier at kirk@saugatuckcity.com to voice your support for the Trail.

Clark Carmichael
FOBST Vice-president