

City trail 'support' is step backward

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To the editor,

As the saying goes, *what one hand giveth the other taketh away*. At Monday night's meeting, the Saugatuck City Council unanimously approved a resolution presented by the city manager that the city "supports" proceeding with the north section of the Blue Star Trail in conjunction with Saugatuck Township and Douglas.

But the resolution — with no input from the Friends of the Trail — imposes conditions that make it actually a step backward, as several speakers at the meeting noted.

We asked council to table the resolution, for several reasons:

1. The Friends were not consulted about the content or timing of the proposed resolution, which we first received late Friday. The extremely short notice did not allow time to confer with our board. That failure shows a lack of respect not just for the Friends organization — which has been working with the city for over 21/2 years on this project — but also for the more than 2,000 people to date (over 250 of them in the city) who have signed a petition of support for the trail.
2. The resolution had not even been discussed at a public council workshop.
3. The timing is suspect. After 21/2 years of effort and \$28,000 in engineering fees, the resolution was presented just weeks before an election that will put two or three new members on the council. At the recent public forum, all council candidates expressed strong support for the trail and most said it would be their first priority.

A few problems with the resolution are:

1. It unilaterally imposes significant conditions on the Friends without our input, including new financial commitments. One is a "fully funded endowment ... for maintenance" in an amount to be determined by the three communities with no input from the Friends.
3. It restricts possible lane options for the Blue Star Bridge when those options are still under discussion with Michigan Department of Transportation and fire department, rejecting options that the city's own engineers have opined are safe.
4. It does not endorse a specific route option, which is required by MDOT to obtain grant funding. Without that commitment, we will likely lose the conditional \$200,000 pledge we have received.

The Friends have the money and human resources necessary to obtain the matching grants and are most familiar with the design issues and the grant procedures. We have a fiduciary duty to spend our donors' money wisely, and that requires we be an equal partner.

Most residents want the three governments to accept our offer to provide a major new recreation/ transportation facility with no up-front taxpayer investment. Why do current city council members continue to resist, imposing unfair and unrealistic hurdles?

The Friends stand ready to sit down with the three community managers, with professional help, to agree on a route option, review a timeline of steps for grant applications and construction, and negotiate a fair allocation of rights and responsibilities for the project, to be approved by the governing bodies.

Do you want the trail or not?

John Adams

Friends of the Blue Star Trail President