

# Trail Friends will bail if city plan goes through

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The Friends of the Blue Star Trail will withdraw their support for the non-motorized path's north section should a Saugatuck City Council joint resolution passed Oct. 14 become effective, the group's board announced Monday.

Saugatuck Township and Douglas governments would also have to approve the measure to make it effective.

After a Sept. 19 meeting of government stakeholders in the entire trail — which as envisioned would stretch 20 miles from South Haven through Saugatuck — Saugatuck City Manager Kirk Harrier drafted a resolution based on a version previously passed by Allegan County, but differing in key respects from it and what the Friends, a 501c3 group working to build the non-motorized path for the past nine years, has been willing to commit to. The group was informed this draft was re-viewed with township and Douglas managers.

The Saugatuck Township Board and Douglas City Council could accept or reject the resolution as stands, request modifications or approve their own modified versions of it.

“The intent of the attached joint resolution,” said Harrier in his Oct. 14 cover memorandum, “is to confirm consensus of the three units of government regarding this approach” (one project, one government as lead, an intergovernmental agreement as to roles and responsibilities).

“We agree with that approach and with a joint resolution to that effect,” said Friends president John Adams. “The problem is that the city's resolution went significantly beyond that to impose conditions on the FOTBST without its input.”

Among other things, the group's commitments will differ as to each community depending on its circumstances and prior dealings.

Among Friends objections to the resolution passed unanimously Oct. 14 by Saugatuck City Council are:

- It does not reflect a role for the FOTBST going forward;
- It requires a "fully funded endowment or similar arrangement for maintenance" before any work can begin;
- It mandates that the trail design "not reduce the number of existing traffic lanes," even though engineers have identified other safe designs; and
- It purports to rescind all prior agreements and letters of support.

"The Friends' role," said Adams, "has always been to act as a catalyst among the governments and grant agencies, and to raise the funds for the local match (approximately 25 percent of construction cost) and engineering fees.

"Among other things," he went on, "the Friends' support takes some of the load off local government staffs and budgets.

"But *it is unthinkable* (emphasis his) *that the FOTBST would make this commitment if it is not a full participant in the project with the local governments,*" the Friends head continued. "We have a duty to our donors and volunteers to be a full participant."

*"Without the financial and human resource contribution from the FOTBST, there is no way the trail will be built.* (again, emphasis his).

"The township would be left with the existing 'trail to nowhere' as some call it. None of the communities has the human resources to manage the entire project, and the only public source of funds would be a millage that is most unlikely to pass given recent history."

The township Board is expected to have the resolution on its agenda for the Nov. 6 meeting, and Douglas for its Nov. 18 city council meeting.

The Friends will ask each body to defeat the resolution or direct its manager to rework the resolution with participation of the FOTBST, Adams said.