

Trail opportunity now at hand

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To the editor,

The Nov. 24 issue contained a story about Fleis & VandenBrink, the City of Saugatuck's regular engineering firm, terminating its contract with the Friends of the Blue Star Trail to analyze options for the Trail through the City. F&V did not discuss with FOTBST the reasons for terminating the contract before it did so.

The article quoted Fleis emails stating that that the firm terminated the contract on its own, but after seeking "some direction from Council on if and when they would like us to proceed with this ... project" and after receiving "input from Kirk (Harrier, the city manager)."

In any event, the immediate problem is that the donors of a \$200,000 pledge to the Friends have recently confirmed one of their original conditions *first announced in May*: that the pledge will expire on Dec. 31 if the City has not approved a route option. Before it will decide on an option, the City understandably wants input from the Saugatuck Township Fire District. (The Mayor specifically requested at a July 18 workshop that the Fire Chief provide input after reviewing the options with F&V and the FOTBST.)

Ignoring for the moment why that meeting did not occur between July and November despite the Friends' efforts, the group last week again asked the Fire Department to meet, and Chief Greg Janik promised a response once he has met with his officers.

On Nov. 17, the FOTBST wrote Saugatuck and Douglas city mayors and managers, plus the Saugatuck Township superintendent and manager to urge them to take immediate action so that this valuable pledge is not lost. (Douglas should be a part of these discussions because it owns half of the Kalamazoo River Bridge; the Township should be involved because its residents south of the Bridge rely on emergency responders navigating that corridor.)

At a Nov. 21 workshop and Nov. 25 meeting, the Friends again urged the Saugatuck City Council to take steps to obtain the Fire Department's input and select an option for the Trail.

The Council gave no response. F&V's response regarding a meeting is that "we will be taking direction ... from City Council going forward." In a Nov. 22 memo to the Council, Fleis noted the "end of year deadline" and reiterated its willingness "to help assist in finding an acceptable route ..."

The FOTBST has done all that it can to satisfy the conditions of this generous pledge. If we lose this opportunity, we will be obliged to reconsider our plans going forward, which may include redirecting our efforts to other communities whose governments truly want to work *with us*.

John Adams, President
Friends of the Blue Star Trail