

# What's the hold-up on bike trail?

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To the editor,

My name is Mike McGuigan and I've lived and owned property in the community much of the past four decades. I am a retired engineer who spent 40 years managing, designing and approving major capital projects for GE Power and Water.

Last week I got the Fleis & Vandenbrink documents for the Blue Star Trail completion. Having spoken with the firm's engineer Jon Moxey, my opinion is the trail is well engineered and will easily last for centuries.

Based on the information in those docs, I attended the Jan. 24 Saugatuck City Council review and came away wondering if I'm missing something.

Why would every community along the trail embrace and approve the project, but Saugatuck (so far anyway) continue to delay the final section? The annual costs of upkeep are unbelievably small (probably less than it will cost to maintain the new police cars) for an asset that is virtually free to the community.

The offer is pretty simple. Accept a gift to the community that is worth millions of dollars in added tourist visits for virtually no cost. These trails appeal to every millennial with a family and a bike rack. Today they are a requirement, not an option. A walk/bike trail will pay back in added tourists.

If only a few of the under-40 tourists decide to come back, I calculate the net present value of this gift will be \$4.7 million or greater.

As a business owner, the refusal to move on this project is a slap in the face to my wife and me. This continued resistance will impact the money we pay in rents, taxes and salaries for three year-round and numerous seasonal employees who mostly live in Saugatuck.

Since 2010 the State of Michigan has had record growth in tourism. Saugatuck has been a different story. The number of visitors to downtown has dropped at a time when the rest of Michigan is enjoying record growth.

We've lost numerous events and assets without replacing with new attractions. We are not bike-friendly. Our median age has risen from about 39 years in 2010 to more than 50 by 2016. The numbers are alarming. A demographic shift like this is an indication that we are seriously underperforming.

I polled business owners and residents after the meeting and not one was opposed to completing the project. Many thought it was already decided.

One can only conclude that this resistance is the result of misunderstanding or inflating future cost estimates.

Is it possible that the loudest negative minority are running the show here? It's more likely caused by the reluctance to embrace a future tourist who wants to park the car for the week and walk, bike or call an Uber.

The future does not look very good if we continue to lose or ignore opportunities to increase visitors to downtown. First we'll lose the bikes, then the boats in the harbor.

I urge council to move forward with this project. Choose the west road option now. The other choices are awkward, confusing and potentially unsafe.

The west road option is sensible and safe. It frames the entrance to Saugatuck and tells everyone we are a walker- and tourist-friendly town. In addition, it can reduce parking problems.

If you can't cooperate enough to accept the gift of this small section of recreational trail, how in the world will you be able to get the harbor dredged?

Cooperate, choose the west option to finish the trail and don't waste another minute!

Mike McGuigan

Saugatuck

