

# City should OK new trail plan

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To the editor,

I recently attended a meeting at Saugatuck High School discussing the latest developments of the Blue Star Trail. The Friends of the Trail gave an excellent presentation on this bike trail project. It was clear this group had invested an enormous amount of effort and money on engineering studies, empirical research, topographical designs, fundraising, etc.

The Friends' latest proposal is an impressive plan that would benefit the entire lakeshore corridor from Saugatuck to South Haven. Details of it can be found at [fotbst.org](http://fotbst.org).

Unfortunately, it appears the entire project will soon fail if the Saugatuck City Council does not approve the half-mile portion that passes through Saugatuck and will belong to the city after its construction. Although there is support from other lakeshore communities, most of the public funds needed to complete the Trail are dependent upon Saugatuck joining the group.

In addition, the anonymous private donor who has pledged \$200,000 to complete the portion of trail passing through Saugatuck has made their donation contingent on city council approval in 2019.

To date, the Saugatuck City Council has withheld its support citing various questionable concerns. For instance, members claim they are worried about possible taxpayer burdens under the plan.

Under the latest proposal, the city will pay little or nothing for either the Trail's construction or ongoing maintenance. The construction will be funded entirely by private donations and public grants. As for the costs of future maintenance, the Friends have offered to set aside funds to assure the city that it not be liable for these expenses.

Council members also claim they are worried about proposed changes to the Blue Star Highway blueprint, specifically around the Lake street intersection. The Friends have worked diligently with the city's engineering firm to find the least-invasive pathway through this congested area. I believe the latest proposal preserves the aesthetic character of the entrance to Saugatuck without impeding traffic flow. View the website and you'll find the latest design.

Nonmotorized trails that are well designed and maintained are valuable community infrastructure assets. They promote healthy activity, reduce carbon emissions and congestion related to transportation, and generate economic activity by attracting active visitors to the area.

We who live in this lakeshore corridor have a great opportunity to take advantage of available public funds and generous private donations. It would be a big mistake to let this opportunity slip away.

Joe Russell  
Douglas