

City Trail holdup makes no sense

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To the editor,

Many have eloquently pointed out the incredible gift that Saugatuck and its immediate surrounds provides to year-round residents, those who winter elsewhere and visitors who enjoy the region for just a few days or weeks. The area offers a unique experience to everyone who partakes of it.

This is no accident. It stems from many years of bold visionary leadership, hard work, adaptability, openness to fresh ideas and acceptance of diverse thinking.

Given this successful history, it is puzzling why we seem to be struggling mightily with what is a relatively straightforward and obvious opportunity.

I am talking about the Blue Star Trail. Ironically, the City of Saugatuck is the last remaining hold-up to the approvals needed to complete the Trail for reasons that are mystifying.

Given the terrific cooperation of towns and communities along the Trail, we are talking about approval for less than a half-mile of its route — an inconsequential length overall, but obviously critical to connect the Trail.

It does not take the boldest visioning skills to realize what a fantastic addition this will make to the overall enjoyment and use of our wonderful community.

For a town almost exclusively dependent on tourism, it is a mystery why we were not in the forefront of this bold plan, showing leadership and demonstrating to residents and visitors alike our commitment to ensuring we continue to enhance their experience while spending time in our community.

Given our dependence on tourism to drive our local economy, the business advantages to drawing bikers and hikers to our town should be obvious. Instead we have been the laggard community — seeing problems not solutions, raising objections rather than having determination to resolve any issues identified.

Thank goodness for the Friends of the Blue Star Trail. They have doggedly persevered, showing the kind of leadership and problem solving that we have the right to expect from our city leaders, but appears to have been lacking, at least on this opportunity.

Concerns have been raised on multiple fronts by our city's leadership. What is frustrating is that solving them has been left to the Friends with little observable problem solving coming from the city.

Again, this attitude is mystifying. How many bike paths cross bridges in the U.S. and globally? Tens of thousands, yet our leadership, for the life of them has been unable to solve for this problem.

Legacy maintenance cost of a 0.4- mile bike path that is being gifted to the city via state grants and other funding sources? This is not a credible objection given the nature of our town and the obvious benefits that come with getting this bike trail done.

Lack of support for this trail? I beg to differ – I have yet to encounter anyone who believes having a connected bike trail is a bad idea. I am sure there are some, but if this is being raised as a legitimate concern it begs the question of whether we have leadership with the right visionary qualities to get things done in a way that has long term benefits for our community.

The State of Michigan is all in on the benefits of bike trails and the benefits communities derive from them. Look at the Pure Michigan marketing campaign — almost every video features a trail as an attractive quality of Michigan.

Let's get on board and make this happen. More delays will simply embarrass us.

Brian B. Stephens

Saugatuck