

Trail Friends *have* sought fire input

The Commercial Record

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To the editor,

A letter to the editor last week complained that Friends of the Blue Star Trail have not “shared their proposed routing with the Saugatuck Township District Fire Board,” implying that we did not care about “incorporating in the trail-planning process ... the perspective of our STFD first responders.” Not true.

First, note that the author was expressing his personal opinion, not that of the fire board or fire department. (*Letter writer Dan Fox, representing the City of Saugatuck, is one of seven fire board members, but did not claim his views necessarily represented those of that entire body. Ed.*)

Second, safety has been one of the prime factors in our design of the Trail — just ask the engineers we pay to develop the designs.

Third, we recognized the Fire Department as a stakeholder early on in the process, and so have welcomed and sought its involvement. The Fire Chief was present during reviews with the Saugatuck City Council of initial route proposals in December/January.

We reached out to the Chief in March to present new proposed route designs (changed to address Council concerns and reduce cost), but the parties were unable to meet until April 17.

We then provided the engineer’s diagrams and related material. A follow-up meeting was scheduled with the Chief and his staff for May 7, but the Department cancelled the meeting, stating that they preferred to wait for direction from the City Council before spending additional time reviewing the designs. That direction was provided during the City Council Workshop on July 18.

Since that Council workshop, the Friends have met informally with members of the Department to discuss options for the 0.4-mile City segment, which are still under review as of this date.

Fourth, as for “sharing the proposed routing” with the Fire Board, the Board chair is a member of the City Council. During numerous meetings with the Council regarding the Trail over the past year, it was never suggested by any member of Council or the Fire Board (including the author of last week’s letter) that we consult with the Fire Board.

In any event, the design options are no secret, having been posted on our website for several months, reviewed in public Council meetings, and featured in articles in this newspaper.

A number of residents spoke on the record at the recent City Council workshop that conditions along the highway now — even without the Trail — are seriously unsafe.

We encourage you to attend the Fire Board meeting Aug. 19 to learn more about how the Blue Star Trail will *improve* the safety of pedestrians and bikers — and motorists — in the City.

Richard Donovan, Secretary

Friends of the Blue Star Trail