

# City first to sign onto new joint trail plan

The Commercial Record

January 2, 2020

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Planning for the Blue Star Trail through Saugatuck and Douglas cities and Saugatuck Township moved forward Dec. 23 when Saugatuck City unanimously approved a Joint Study Committee for the non-motorized path project.

Douglas and the township still need to sign on to the committee that will set the scope of construction, maintenance and operation of the trail.

The 501c3 nonprofit Friends of the Blue Star Trail are working on a 20-mile recreational trail from South Haven to Saugatuck. Douglas and the township have constructed portions, but the 0.4-mile Saugatuck city stretch has not been built and remains controversial due to safety concerns at Blue Star Highway and Lake Street plus the number of vehicle lanes on the Blue Star Bridge.

The Friends need support of all three municipalities to receive a \$200,000 pledge toward completing the section through the communities.

“It was gratifying to hear, at the recent meeting of the drafting committee, the desire of all three communities to collaborate on this worthwhile project,” Friends president John Adams wrote in a Dec. 16 letter to Saugatuck city.

Saugatuck city organized a stakeholders meeting Sept. 19 that included representatives from it, Douglas, Saugatuck Township, Ganges Township, Allegan County and road commission.

The meeting, not open to the public, resulted in an Oct. 14 resolution approved by Saugatuck city that supports the project but imposed fiscal and safety conditions the Friends said were unacceptable. For it to become a joint resolution, it needed Douglas and township approvals also.

The township Nov. 6 tabled the resolution and created the joint resolution committee Dec. 5 that resulted in the new group.

Saugatuck city's Dec. 23 resolution reaffirms support of the trail, sets membership on the Joint Study Committee as the three municipalities, Allegan County Road Commission and Friends, and assures its meetings will be open to the public.

The Joint Study Committee will draft an intergovernmental agreement that describes the scope of the project, responsibilities for grant applications, bidding and awarding contracts, insurance, expenses for the construction, maintenance and operations of the trail, funding options, the trail route and the engineer of record. This work is to be completed by July 1.