

Fact check on Blue Star Trail

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To the editor,

I feel compelled to respond to several statements made by current Saugatuck City Council members during the Rotary-sponsored candidate forum last Friday. The full forum can be viewed on the Saugatuck-Douglas Rotary Club website.

Verplank: The only way for the trail to be safe is to build a new bridge for the trail across the Kalamazoo River.

Response: Not true. Designs provided by the city's engineers which utilize the existing bridge meet safety standards. In addition, any route design would be subsequently approved by MDOT engineers prior to grant approval/construction. Building a second bridge is a non-starter.

Johnson: We need to pay for the trail ourselves (without state grants) because the Fire Department requires an 11- to 12-foot center lane over the bridge, which would not leave enough room to meet MDOT standards for a multi-use trail.

Response: Not true. By letter dated Nov. 27, 2019 to the Friends (copied to the three local municipal managers), the fire department requested that the design for the trail over the bridge "maintain a minimum 10-foot center turn lane" for emergency vehicles, not 11 to 12 feet. The design proposed last year by the Friends and the city's engineer provides the necessary 10-foot center lane.

The master plan for the trail relies on state/federal grants for 75 percent of the construction cost. MDOT has confirmed that if any part of the trail does not meet government safety standards, other sections of trail may not be eligible for grants.

There is no need for the city to incur the cost of building the Trail. The Friends have repeatedly offered to fund the required local match (25 percent of total construction cost) for the grants as well as the engineering costs to build a trail that meets safety standards.

Bekken: I cannot support taking away the center lane over the bridge; I have seen no new plans in two years.

Response: Not true. Plans for the trail were discussed at council meetings on Jan. 24, July 18, Oct. 14, Nov. 25 and Dec. 23 of 2019. In December the Friends presented council and the fire department with a plan that retains a 10-foot center lane, which is what the department asked for.

Since the middle of last year, the Friends have unsuccessfully tried to present both this and an alternate plan to the council that provides for emergency vehicles by dropping the center lane, but adding a seasonal traffic signal at Lake Street remotely controlled by the fire department.

No trail route was approved. The conditional \$200,000 pledge (provided via the Friends) was allowed to lapse.

I look forward to working with the fellow members of the Tri-community Study Committee as soon as it is able to resume its activity.

John Adams, President
Friends of the Blue Star Trail