

# Forum makes candidates' trail stands clear

The Commercial Record

October 15, 2020

To the editor,

Saugatuck residents have cited connection of the Blue Star Trail as a high priority for multiple reasons.

Cycling has grown increasingly popular with our residents and proven to be a major draw for tourists in surrounding communities, necessitating the need for a comprehensive trail system in our town.

Most importantly, there is a need to ensure safe passage for pedestrians and cyclists, both tourists and residents, across the Blue Star Bridge and at the Lake Street intersection. As someone who has made this trek on her bicycle many times, I can attest to the perils during the busy summer season.

Over the past three plus years, multiple trail options have been presented to the Saugatuck City Council, but none has been approved. At this point, the primary concern voiced by council members is the need for emergency vehicles to have safe passage across the bridge.

The Friends of the Blue Star Trail and the city engineers last year developed two approaches to address this concern.

One solution would reduce the number of traffic lanes over the bridge from 3 to 2, add a seasonal traffic signal at the Lake Street and Blue Star intersection, and allow emergency responders to control the traffic signal.

When emergencies arise, the fire department would be able to turn the signal to red, thereby halting all vehicular traffic on the bridge, creating an unobstructed passageway across the bridge. Brilliant!

This also would address the related need for a signal at this busy intersection during tourist season, as it is currently unsafe for all vehicles when traffic is heavy.

The second solution would retain a 10-foot-wide center lane over the bridge with 11-foot north and south traffic lanes and a bike lane, with pedestrians using the

existing sidewalk. This meets the needs of the fire department but has yet to be approved by MDOT.

Thanks so much to the Saugatuck-Douglas Rotary Club for hosting the city council voter forum Friday, Oct 9. While all incumbent council members claim to support creation of the trail, their responses to residents' questions indicated they are not deeply committed to the goal. They included the following inaccurate statements:

- There is no way the current bridge will support both a trail and emergency vehicles. There can be no trail until we build a separate bridge for cyclists and pedestrians.
- The bridge must retain 3 lanes and the center lane must be 11-12 feet wide to accommodate 9-foot-wide fire trucks traveling at 45 mph. This leaves inadequate space for a trail that meets MI standards for supportive funding for our trail. Therefore, Saugatuck must forego state funding. (This would make the trail prohibitively expensive and effectively quashes the trail.)
- No new ideas have been presented in over two years that address the need for the trail to accommodate emergency vehicle access.

More telling, there was not a single comment by the incumbents addressing the current unsafe conditions or their failure to secure a \$200,000 pledge for the trail. In contrast, the challengers voiced enthusiastic support for the trail and are eager to work promptly and collaboratively to find a solution that works for all.

As council candidates have voiced their true level of support for the Blue Star Trail, voters can now make an informed decision when they cast their ballot.

Nancy Kimble  
Saugatuck