

Friends roll out \$10K trail matching grant

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By Scott Sullivan Editor

Friends of the Blue Star Trail, a 501c3 nonprofit working to build a nonmotorized from Saugatuck to South Haven, announced Saturday its board will match year-end donations up to \$10,000 towards that end.

“This contribution by our board,” said Friends president John Adams, “demonstrates commitment to building the trail and confidence that we are poised to take major steps forward.”

Adams pointed to recent events that have renewed members’ optimism for the project, stalled for two years by a Saugatuck city council balking at proposals here due to safety and maintenance cost concerns.

First, following the Nov. 3 election, council will now have a majority, four of seven of members, who have pledged to actively work with the Friends to reach agreement on a design for the trail within the city over the next few months.

According to new council member and top election vote getter Lauren Stanton, “We need more trails and bike paths so we can safely enjoy our most precious natural resources and unique downtown businesses.”

Second, the Tri-Community Study Committee — comprised of Douglas and Saugatuck cities, Saugatuck Township and Friends board members — will soon resume efforts to collaborate on a plan to complete a 4.5-mile trail stretch from Douglas over the Blue Star Bridge through Saugatuck city and township to the 2007-built Beeline Trail through Laketown Township which continues north to Holland.

Timely action by this committee and three governments will put the effort on track to submit grant applications to the Michigan departments of transportation and natural resources in 2021-22 and begin construction in 2023.

Third, Friends have retained the Abonmarche engineering consultants of South Haven to work with it and local stakeholders to develop a detailed route from South Haven north through Casco Township within the next two months. The group was able to secure a private donation to cover the fees for this engineering work.

Fourth, Michigan voters approved a referendum that will make more of the DNR Trust Fund available for development projects such as building the trail.

“Now more than ever,” Adams said, “we need trails. Among many other benefits, they will promote physical and mental health for us and our families, plus make our communities more attractive for prospective buyers.”

To learn more or donate, visit FOTBST.org/donate or visit the group on Facebook.