



January 23, 2019

BY eMAIL

Saugatuck City Council
c/o Kirk Harrier, City Manager
102 Butler St.
Saugatuck, MI 49453

Re: Blue Star Trail (“Trail”)

Dear Council members,

The Friends of the Blue Star Trail (“Friends”) look forward to the workshop on January 24. We thought it would be helpful to share in advance our goals and views.

As mentioned at the Council workshop on January 10, Jon Moxey of Fleis & Vandenberg has arranged (at our expense) for several renderings of the Lake Street intersection, which we expect him to share with you today as well. Jon will be available by phone during the workshop to answer questions regarding any of the routes under consideration. We are also providing, under separate cover, as requested by members of Council, the current schedule for building sections of the Trail and the outline of an agreement to address maintenance expenses.

The next section of the Trail that we plan to build is in Saugatuck Township, from North St. north to the existing trail at Holland Street. We and the Township have withdrawn from our grant application the section from Allegan St. south to Maple St., which alleviates Council’s concern about “dumping” Trail users at the City border.

In order to activate our pending TAP grant application with MDOT, the Township needs to file by February 20 a letter from the City approving an interim route (including permission to put up signs) while the Friends and the City complete evaluation of a permanent route. The corresponding grant application to DNR is due (with our assistance) on or before April 1 to be considered in 2019. We recite these facts not to pressure you but so that you are fully informed.

With this background in mind, we respectfully propose the following order of discussion for this part of the workshop:

1. Council poses any further questions to F&V or the Friends re the west side option proposed by F&V, including the new renderings;
2. Council comments on whether to approve the west side option subject to formally seeking public input;

3. If Council is in favor of the option, discuss means for and timing of seeking public input and taking a final vote;
4. If Council is not in favor of the option, proponents of the proposed “City” route explain the details of that proposal, ask F&V (Moxey) for input, discuss concerns.
5. Council poses any other questions;
6. Discussion of request to approve interim route;
7. Decide how best to proceed re permanent route.

The Reasons to Vote on the Letter to MDOT by Feb. 11

Following are the key reasons that we urge you to schedule the vote whether to provide the letter to MDOT:

1. The MDOT Grant Coordinator recently informed us that, due to the ongoing uncertainty in Saugatuck, in order for us to proceed with our grant application now, they require a letter approving the so-called interim route from the southern terminus of the Trail at Allegan St. along Allegan St. to Lake St. and then back to BSH. That route does not involve any infrastructure improvements in the City; the Township has agreed to install a sidewalk from BSH along Allegan St. to the sidewalk at Maple St. It would only require the posting of several signs, for which the Friends is willing to pay. We respectfully submit that the progress we have made in addressing Council’s concerns justifies approval of the interim route. It would seem that formal public input should not be necessary for this intermediate step.

The letter to MDOT need not indicate which permanent route the City expects to approve. The City would also be free to include any qualifying language, so long as the form is acceptable to MDOT.

2. You have amassed a strong record of careful deliberation; the process has not been rushed. We have had numerous meetings and communications over the last two years, all of which meetings have been open to the public (see Chronology attached). Council has asked many questions and articulated a number of concerns. The Friends retained and paid for the City’s engineers to study the matter and provide options. F&V has gone through several drafts of design plans, incorporating the input of Council. As Jon Moxey showed you, F&V has addressed all of your +25 stated concerns, and has opined that the west route option meets all safety standards and is the most reasonable cost-wise. The process has been well publicized in the local media.
3. F&V has provided conservative estimates of the cost to maintain the Trail section. The Friends has indicated its willingness to share that cost, and will be presenting our plan to do so.
4. The City would retain the right to approve all conceptual and construction designs and drawings for this short section of the Trail. This has always been the case with each section of the Trail—the government of the jurisdiction through which that section of the

Trail runs has the right to approve the design. We had always intended to go through this process with the City when the time came to build this section of Trail, working with the MDOT staff, the City's engineers, and the County Road Commission.

5. Given the delays this year, even with your support at this time, we do not currently expect to obtain the grant funding and begin the construction process for the section through the City until 2022. That would give Council plenty of time to consider final design decisions—e.g., whether to include a traffic signal, signage, the specific design of the bridge railing.
6. The City's apparent reluctance to continue to express its support for the Trail is jeopardizing the Trail's very existence. This has already resulted in the loss of the opportunity to obtain funding from MDOT's 2020 grant allocation. If we cannot submit our application by February 20, we will likely lose another year of funding. In turn, our inability to obtain grants means we cannot design or build the next sections of the Trail, which then makes it that much harder to raise private donations. Each year of delay is another year that residents of and visitors to the City are deprived of the valuable recreational opportunities that the Trail will offer.
7. As we have stated repeatedly, we want to be partners with the City and the other governments along the Trail route to create this benefit for all. Approving the letter to MDOT on or before your regular meeting on Feb. 11 would demonstrate that the City continues to be a willing partner in this worthwhile endeavor.

The Proposed New "City" Route

At Council's workshop on January 10, a new route was apparently circulated to the members as an alternate to the two routes developed by F&V, and that new route was commented favorably upon by several members. That route runs (traveling southward) from Blue Star Highway (BSH) > Allegan St. > Maple St. > State St. > Lake St. > Blue Star Highway.

We appreciate the effort to consider other options so as to advance the project. However, after discussing it with our Board, both engineering firms, and MDOT staff, the Friends has the following concerns:

1. The proposal, as we understand it, is to lay out a route that does not meet AASHTO standards, so no TAP grant money would be available for this or any other section of the Trail unless the City is able to obtain an "exception" from MDOT.
 - a. According to both F&V and Hurley Stewart, though MDOT recognizes the difficulty of building a trail through an urban environment, it would be a longshot for MDOT to grant an "exception" in this case, and the process will take 3-4 months.
 - b. There is a safe route (the west side route) that meets AASHTO standards and addresses all of the other concerns raised by Council.
 - c. Going "over the head" of the grants administrator/committee for this one section could hurt our relationship with them for remaining sections.

- d. Trying to bring political influence to bear on the process could take months, and we have learned of no precedent to suggest it would succeed.
2. There seems no good reason for deviating from the route along BSH and the design of the rest of the 20-mile Trail. The only reason of which we are aware is to avoid the Lake Street intersection at BSH. But the “City” route is not safer than F&V’s proposed west side route; F&V has opined that the crossing over Lake St. in its proposal would meet safety standards.
3. The proposed “City” route would take users through local streets, on a narrow trail width that would force cyclists and pedestrians together, and with little or no separation from automobile traffic. This approach seems unlikely to yield a Trail of which we or the City would be proud.
4. That route would appear to require removal and/or trimming of mature trees, to which Council members previously objected and residents would object.
5. Many trail users, not just “serious” bicyclists, will choose to stay on BSH as the more direct route, resulting in more traffic crossing Lake Street without enhanced safety measures in place.
6. We anticipate objections/concerns of residents along those streets, which are less likely to be an issue along BSH.
7. The grade on State St. is steep, steeper than on BSH. This would create additional safety concerns due to increased bicycle speeds in close proximity to pedestrians on a narrow trail.
8. That plan seems to contemplate using the existing, unaltered infrastructure leading up to and across the bridge, which would not be as safe as the F&V option, especially with the increased usage we expect the Trail to generate.

To properly evaluate the feasibility of this new option—similar to one proposed to and rejected by Council two years ago-- would push us at least into the next quarterly MDOT grant cycle, and possibly into the next annual grant award year. It would impair our ability to raise funds, and jeopardize the viability of the entire 20-mile project, unless you approve the letter to MDOT regarding the interim route in the meantime.

Of course, the City is free to study the viability of this alternate route prior to submission of the MDOT grant application for that section, which we expect in about three years. However, at this point we need the letter in order to sustain our fundraising momentum and complete the Township’s pending grant application for the next section in Saugatuck Township.

To reiterate, we respectfully request that at the upcoming workshop or Council meeting you set a schedule that includes a vote on or before the Council meeting on February 11 as to whether to provide the requested letter to MDOT.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Clark Carmichael

S. Clark Carmichael, Vice President
Revised 1/20/19

Friends of the Blue Star Trail
CHRONOLOGY OF INTERACTION WITH CITY OF SAUGATUCK

DATE	ACTION
June 2008-2010	Visionary Committee (including Tony Vittori of City) holds +12 planning meetings
Sept. 13, 2010	City adopts Resolution 100913-A “endorsing the Saugatuck-South Haven Blue Star Trail Plan” for further development
July 28, 2014	Letter from Mayor to DNR and MDOT supporting the Trail while noting concern re “location in relation to the historic neon Saugatuck “Pallet” entrance sign.”
Sept. 28, 2015	Letter from Mayor to Hurley Stewart “in support [of] the Blue Star Trail project”, noting that this week Council members met with engineers at a workshop “together...exploring options along [BSH] and possible in-town routes for the section of Trail...”
2017	
Feb. 25	Council workshop attended by representatives of Douglas to discuss Trail and bridge
March 3	C. Peterson, J. Verplank, K. Harrier meet with C. Carmichael, T. Stewart, G. Janik to discuss possible routes and conduct walk of Allegan>Maple>State>Lake route
March 29	F&V response to City’s request for plan of action “how best to complete the missing link of the Proposed [BST] through Saugatuck”
April 26	Harrier letter to FOTBST listing unresolved issues and questions of Council
Aug. 15	Stakeholders Meeting at Township Office (attended by Council, FOTBST, et al.)
2018	
April 23	City letter to FOTBST, cc: MDOT expressing concern for safety of pedestrians at Lake Street due to Trail
April 30	FOTBST letter to City proposing interim route (Allegan St.>Lake St.) and proposing small working group of 3 members each to explore options
May 24	MDOT email to Harrier asking for letter or resolution approving interim route
June 20	F&V proposal “to evaluate options for... Council to consider” re Trail
July 2	FOTBST meets with F&V to discuss project
July 18	FOTBST letter to City re interim route requested by MDOT and terms for FOTBST to pay for F&V study

July 19	Council workshop re interim route and concerns re Trail; agreed to invite F&V to another workshop to receive comments
August 7	FOTBST letter to Council responding to comments from Council members
August 9	Council workshop with F&V to articulate concerns
Aug. 14	Contract signed between F&V and FOTBST to evaluate Trail options
August 27	City letter to FOTBST re “understanding of role to be played by the [F&V] study” and describing additional concerns
Nov. 8	Workshops with Council and Douglas at which F&V presented initial options for Trail
Nov. 13	Email from MDOT staff to Messrs. Harrier and Adams stating that “even if TAP funds are not used on certain sections, 'gapped' out sections using state/other funds to avoid AASHTO standards are not considered competitive nor would they be considered as having regional connectivity.”
Dec. 6	Council workshop: F&V presents refinements to west side option and new east side option
Dec. 26	Council meeting: F&V presents costs for east versus west side options, answers questions; FOTBST endorses westside option
2019	
Jan. 10	Council workshop re Parks Plan, discussion re next steps re Trail including reference to possible “new” City route (same as discussed in 3/17)
Jan. 24	Council Workshop re Trail Options

