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Calling birds

Of seven swans spotted a-swimming last week at Douglas's Wade's Bayou Park, the one at left was most vocal making season's greetings heard. (Photo by Scott Sullivan)

Township wins trail grant, looks ahead

BY SCOTT SULLIVAN
EDITOR

Christmas came early for Saugatuck Township Blue Star Trail planners in the form of a \$300,000 Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund grant to advance nonmotorized path work there.

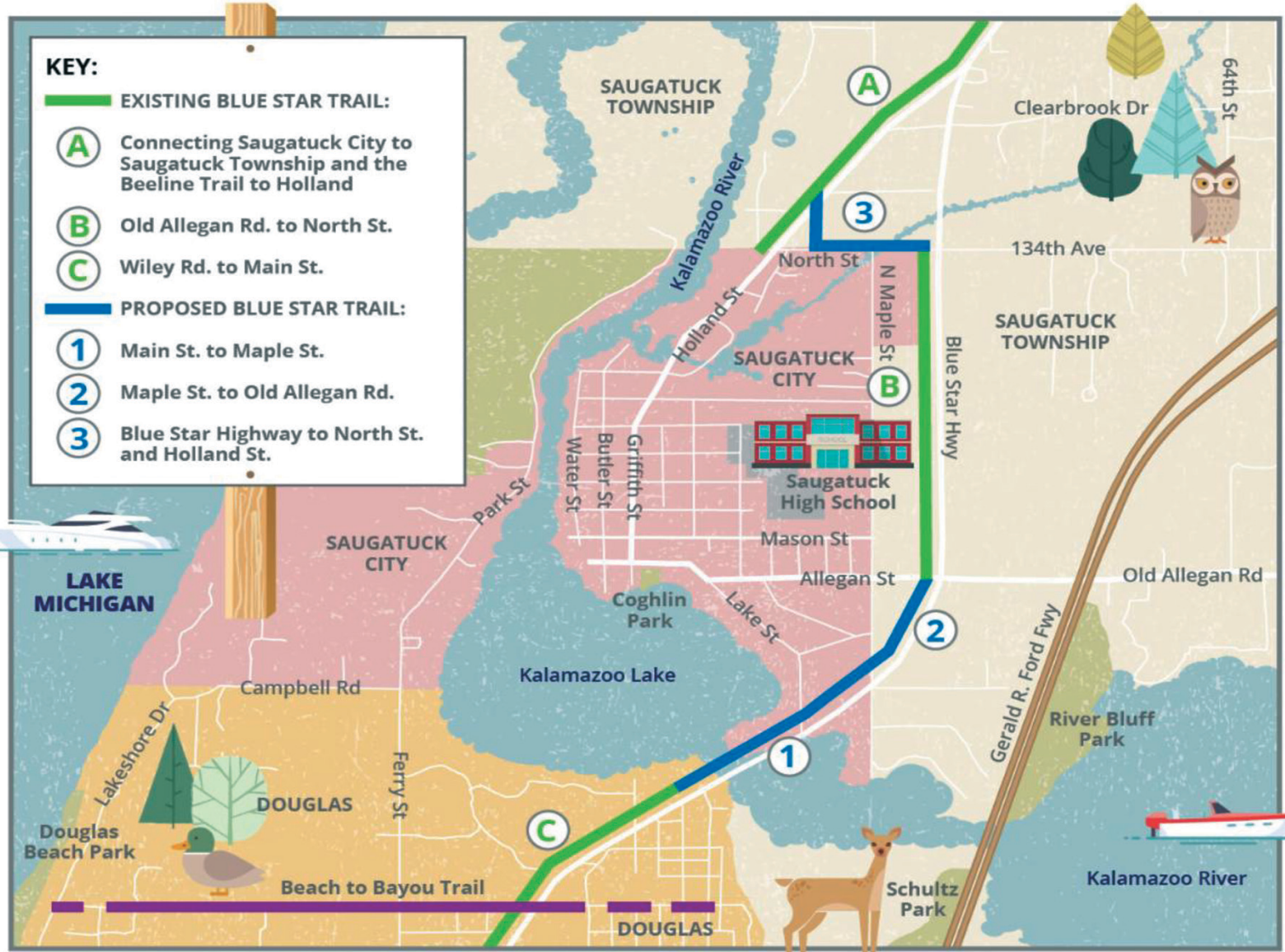
It was one of 53 recreational developments and land-acquisition projects awarded for \$27,339,100 total set for release in 2024, the DNR announced Dec. 13.

Bidding is competitive. The board this year considered 123 applications seeking more than \$59.1 million for local projects. Funds come from leasing public land mineral rights to private firms.

The second time proved charmed for the township, which last year saw Saugatuck city win \$300,000 to continue the trail's northern section within its boundaries, but not its request for same.

"We worked hard to refine and enhance our grant application," township manager Daniel DeFranco said. "Increasing

■ see Trail, Page A2



Will one grant help leverage more?

BY SCOTT SULLIVAN
EDITOR

During a busy Dec. 13 monthly meeting, the Saugatuck Township Board, in addition to action mentioned here elsewhere, also:

- Reviewed a 102-page draft of a 5-Year Tri-Community Parks and Recreation Plan up-

date due for presentation to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Feb. 1, 2024.

Partnering with the township on it are neighbor Saugatuck and Douglas cities, plus Saugatuck Public Schools, whose leaders (Douglas Monday night) also are reviewing it.

- Using a \$15,000 Mich-

igan Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) department grant to conduct a public access and conservation lands study, matched as required by \$15,000 in township parks commission funds, to conduct a public lands and conservation study.

The investment is meant to

create an inventory of properties suitable for public use and conservation towards possible future acquisition and/or improvements.

Such documentation, combined with the completed Tri-Community 5-year Parks and Recreation Plan, are keys in applying for DNR Trust

Fund grants (See above story).

- Contracted the Outdoor Discovery Center for \$25,000, plus \$5,000 for maintenance, to conduct a prairie restoration project on 8.58 acres not plotted for gravesites at Douglas Cemetery. A 2.4-acre area

■ see Leverage, Page A2



Fall scene from existing Saugatuck Township Blue Star Trail stretch.

Trail from Page A1

our score was a priority, but we also believed it was critical to convey the importance of this project to the Trust Fund board in-person.”

Towards that end, he and parks commissioner Ken Butler made the township’s case in person to the board in Lansing. “I spoke of my own experience of being hit by a car while cycling,” said DeFranco, “and how the current lack of dedicated trail on Blue Star Highway puts cyclists and pedestrians at risk.

“While we don’t know for sure, we believe our personal comments helped secure this year’s grant,” he said.

The township board, apprised

at last week’s monthly meeting of the news, hired Prein & Newhof for \$49,000 to do Phase 1 engineering on the trail’s planned next leg: extending from Wiley Road in Douglas south along Blue Star Highway to M-89/124th Avenue, leading west to Lake Michigan and east to Fennville. Douglas will also be a fiduciary participant in that effort.

That work will include traversing the I-196 Exit 36 bridge.

Step by Step

For 13 years the 501c3 nonprofit Friends of the Blue Star Trail have raised funds to build a nonmotorized rec-

reation path linking current trails leading into South Haven 20 miles north to Laketown Township’s 16-year-built Beeline Trail, which in turn connects further north through Holland to Grand Haven.

Douglas and Saugatuck Township have completed segments of the Blue Star Trail’s northern 4-mile section, but former Saugatuck city leaders balked, citing safety concerns crossing the Blue Star Bridge north from Douglas and Lake Street. The status of the palette sign and post-construction maintenance costs were concerns as well.

With departures of 14-year city manager Kirk Harrier — who at one point warned without city hall approvals the Friends’ path through the tri-communities may be “a trail to nowhere” — and all seven council members from four years ago, that changed.

Saugatuck city joined Douglas and the township four years ago in a joint committee seeking to link the trail’s 4-mile northern stretch through this region.

The city, now as lead agent, sought a \$1.725-million federal Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grant toward the estimated \$2.2-million total project

costs, and with Saugatuck \$300,000 more each in Trust Fund grants.

Last year’s holidays were enlivened by notification the trail effort stood to be awarded \$1.344 million in TAP funds, plus the city had been successful in its \$300,000 trust fund grant application.

Now it’s the township’s turn. DeFranco said. Still to be completed stretches within its boundaries run from:

- Holland Street south on Cemetery Road, then east on 134th Avenue; and
- Along Blue Star from Old Allegan Road south to Maple Street.

Leverage from Page A1

that is plotted for grave sites will be treated for invasive species management.

The prairie restoration project, township manager Daniel DeFranco said, will improve cemetery aesthetics through native plantings,

create an area for meditative trails, create new habitat and improve storm water drainage.

The \$30,000 project, to be budgeted in the 2023-24 fiscal year, will be done in 2025.

• Accepted the retirement of electrical inspector Gord Bosch and hired Jeff Nyboer — a registered state inspector whom Bosch has been working with towards transitioning, to replace him for \$55 per inspection.

• Hired Jeanne VanOrder for a temporary, part-time finance position for \$35 an hour upon elected board treasurer Jon Helmrich’s retirement from those office duties. VanOrder, an experienced accountant, will

work no more than 24 hours week, per agreement terms.

• Upped township attorney Nick Curcio’s hourly fee from \$180 to \$190, meant, he said, to track with current inflation rates.

FEATURED PROPERTY

1223 ASH DRIVE, SOUTH HAVEN, MI 49090



5 BEDS | 5 BATHS | 4047 SQFT | \$2,050,000
LAKE MICHIGAN ACCESS

Exceptional contemporary home with a separate guest house on a double creekside lot, just a block from Sylvan Shores Lake Michigan private beach. Architect-designed and rebuilt in 2014, this showcase property boasts top-quality materials, designer interiors, and a unique deck with outdoor fire feature. The main house features a gourmet kitchen, French oak flooring, a 2-story bluestone gas fireplace, a sunroom, and a main floor master suite. The guest house, built in 1998, offers two offices/guest rooms, a galley kitchen, and a full bath. Both structures are surrounded by bluestone walkways and lush landscaping. Sold turnkey with custom-designed furniture, this home provides the allure of Lake Michigan without the challenges of lakefront living. Contact us today for your private showing today!



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