

Geauga Lake area design standards expected in Aug.

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN | Posted: Wednesday, May 4, 2016 11:45 pm

BAINBRIDGE - With the Meijer superstore zoning application now expected to move through the township zoning process, overall design standards for the land that was once Geauga Lake Park are being developed.

Township Trustees last week gave Zoning Inspector Karen Endres approval to process the Meijer application including splitting off a 41-acre site from the property owned by Sandusky-based Cedar Fair for the super grocery store. Cedar Fair has more than 200 acres in Bainbridge.

In the process, the township will be working on deed restrictions that Meijer requested for property surrounding its site.

In addition, Cedar Fair, whose land also spreads into the city of Aurora, has agreed to fund a development master plan for the land in both communities.

Crisman Jones, real estate manager with Meijer, said his company was “excited to hear” the application is moving forward. “We’ll now continue with items such as land subdivision, traffic studies and grading plans as required to complete the township’s application process,” he said.

“Our project’s design and permitting will continue for the balance of this year and most likely into the next,” he said, which will give the company “a more clear picture of when our construction will commence.”

Jennifer Syx, of inSITE Advisory Group, is working with both communities on the planning for the Cedar Fair land. She noted that the master plan for the Cedar Fair property will be a joint effort between Aurora, Bainbridge and Cedar Fair and will reflect concepts based on zoning.

Both communities will look at ideal uses for the land that will ultimately be put in the master plan that could be done by August. Land in both Bainbridge and Aurora is under mixed-use zoning. Mrs. Syx and Mrs. Endres will be working on the proposed standards with a goal of providing continuity to the area.

“It is designing a walkable community with these design standards,” Mrs. Syx said. The idea is to create a new destination to work, dine and live in, she noted.

There are plans to establish a joint economic development district or JEDD between Aurora and Bainbridge for the mixed-use zoned property. Townships do not have the authority under state law to collect income taxes unless it is in partnership with a municipality under a JEDD agreement. As part

of the JEDD, Aurora will extend utilities to the Cedar Fair property in Bainbridge.

The JEDD board could oversee the design guidelines for the Cedar Fair property as well, Mrs. Syx said.

Bainbridge Trustee Kristina O'Brien said it is good to have Cedar Fair working with Aurora and Bainbridge to create continuity between parcels that will promote an attractive area as well as economic growth to benefit both communities.

Trustee Lorrie Benza said she hopes the design standards would result in a turn-around in the area to yield more productive property.

Township Trustee Jeff Markley said he envisions an attractive streetscape along Aurora Road (Route 43). "This is for the whole area."

Townships do not have the authority under law to review architectural plans, Mr. Markley said, but Bainbridge would have that power through the design standards under the JEDD.

Design standards will cover areas such as lighting, signage, benches and trash cans in the parking lots, flower boxes and trees as well as pavement treatment, he said. Banners can be displayed along the Aurora Road corridor as well as in the mixed-use development itself.

Other standards could include building heights and styles of architect, Mr. Markley said. "It will be important to define a Geauga Lake style and work it into the design standard so you can see the nostalgia."

Requiring design standards has never been done with a development in the township, he noted. The goal is to have a high-end, high-quality environment.

Meijer is being permitted to develop its plan under the former commercial recreation zoning because big-box stores are not allowed under the mixed-use zoning.

Mr. Markley said he sees a "campus of activity" in the mixed-use area with small restaurants near the lake, and people working in the offices and businesses and living in condominiums and even apartments above the commercial buildings.

A movie production studio has surfaced as one idea for the area. Mr. Markley said a proposal in the Ohio Legislature would increase tax credits for film production and this may help Northeast Ohio attract a movie production studio.