

Bainbridge trustees say Cedar Fair land development is at a standstill

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN | Posted: Wednesday, August 16, 2017 11:45 pm

BAINBRIDGE - Despite constant efforts over the past two years, development is at a standstill on the sprawling property that once was home to the Geauga Lake Amusement Park.

In reaction, trustees on Monday voted to not renew a contract at this time with inSITE Advisory Group, a planning firm that has been assisting Bainbridge in rezoning the Cedar Fair owned property.

“We are not making progress with Cedar Fair or (the city of) Aurora, as far as progression to developing, selling or providing the township with utilities on the property,” Bainbridge Trustee Jeff Markely said Monday. “We aren’t going to spend any more money trying to cultivate conversations or actions.”

Cedar Fair owns about 600 acres of former amusement park land that spans both Bainbridge and the city of Aurora.

Mr. Markley said the situation is beyond the township’s control.

Trustee Lorrie Benza said, “We have made some difficult decisions in the economic development arena as well as the legal arena. It is not beneficial for the trustees to continue to pay for legal or economic development discussions when there is zero communication or follow-up action by Cedar Fair.”

The township had been contracting inSITE Advisory Group services for the past two years to change the zoning from commercial recreation to mixed-use that would pave the way for a combination of professional offices, small retail, shops and some residential.

Though Jennifer Syx of inSITE offered a monthly contract not to exceed \$2,250 for about 20 hours of work, trustees declined.

Trustee Kristina O’Brien said with the standstill on the Cedar Fair land, “there is nothing to do there. We’re not seeing any development on that front.”

No projects have been proposed as of yet on the Bainbridge land, but Liberty Ford did purchase 14 acres of property from Cedar Fair for \$1.4 million in the city of Aurora to build a new \$10 million dealership at Aurora (Route 43) and Squires roads. It will be the first project on the Cedar Fair land since the amusement park closed 10 years and the water park closed about a year ago.

Mrs. O’Brien said there have been obstacles with the Cedar Fair property. A major issue has been the logging of a 40-acre parcel of Cedar Fair property that was under an agreement by Cedar Fair to leave in its natural state. The land was to serve as a buffer between the property and nearby homes in the township.

A Cedar Fair official told township trustees that the company will have a remediation plan for the property soon, but so far that has not happened, she said.

Another point of contention is a proposed joint economic development district between Bainbridge and Aurora. In the agreement, the city would collect income taxes from those who work in the businesses on the

property when it is developed and share the proceeds with Bainbridge. Townships cannot by law collect income taxes other than by joining with a municipality in a JEDD.

As of yet, the township and the city have not agreed upon the terms of the JEDD.

“We met June 30 concerning the logging incident and we needed a remediation plan before we could advance discussions on the proposed JEDD,” Mrs. Benza said. “The remediation plan was to have been received by July 10 and as of this week the plan has not been forthcoming and we have heard zero from Cedar Fair.”

Mr. Markley said it’s possible the township could use inSITE service in the future if the situation changes.

“Until we are able to receive a revenue stream on the Cedar Fair property and recoup money we spent we are spinning our wheels. There’s no point in continuing to spend with no end in sight,” he said.

“We have spent tens of thousands of dollars on trying to cultivate relationships with perspective buyers, the brokers and in developing master planning concepts. We haven’t seen any evidence we are on the right track,” Mr. Markley said.

“We are taking a hiatus from any further work that costs taxpayer money until we get some real development opportunity on the Cedar Fair property.”