

Firm hired to help draft mixed-use zoning for Geauga Lake Park land

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN

Bainbridge Trustees last week hired inSITE Advisory Group to assist the Zoning Commission with the proposed mixed-use zoning for the former Geauga Lake Park and surrounding land.

Trustees voted unanimously on Dec. 15.

The mixed-use zoning is geared to transform the property to an economic-generating area, according to Trustee Jeff Markley.

The zoning has to be crafted to stimulate economic development, he said. The area is currently zoned for commercial recreation.

InSITE will be paid approximately \$3,750 for crafting the language in the township's comprehensive zoning resolution.

While Kendig Keast Collaborative Inc. has been hired by the township to rewrite the township's general zoning resolution, the mixed-use language will be specifically for the commercial recreation land owned by Cedar Fair and areas around it including the Marketplace shopping center.

The township has placed a 120-day moratorium on any development in the commercial recreation district until zoning is in place, Trustee Christopher Horn said.

There is adjoining Cedar Fair property in Aurora which has mixed-use zoning in place.

Aurora and township representatives have been meeting to discuss similar zoning for the area. The city has a moratorium in place that expires on Jan. 1.

"Both communities are doing the same thing in order to do it right," Mr. Markley said.

InSITE created the mixed-use zoning for Aurora.

In a presentation to the township board of zoning appeals Dec. 18 about the mixed-use provision, trustees said there has been a proposal for single-family houses on the property. All three trustees said they do not support housing or large-box retail development at the site.

"There are already big-box stores in the area and some vacant buildings that previously housed big-box retail. We have vacancies right now," Mr. Markley said.

An important component of mixed-use zoning is that it will give the township Board of Zoning Appeals the ability to review site plans for anything proposed in the future, Mr. Markley said. It is something the Geauga County Planning Commission does now.

"We ordinarily don't have local site plan review and this gives us that ability. We might be more sensitive to certain issues in the township," he said.

"We want to be more involved," he said of the development of the property. "We definitely need architectural and site-plan review authority."

The planner from inSITE will take the mixed-use zoning from the Kendig Keast plan and adapt it to the township's current zoning.

The township will then be ready to rezone the land when the moratorium expires. That moratorium could be extended, Mr. Markley said. "We didn't want applications coming in for proposed developments until we knew what we wanted," he said.

Mixed-use zoning will allow office, residential and retail, some all in one building. "And we want to develop some kind of medical or technology campus setting, bringing in high-wage earners," Mr. Markley said.

Tracy Jemison, president of the Geauga Growth Partnership, is working with a developer from Bainbridge for the motion picture industry who is in talks with Cedar

Fair in regards to the Geauga Lake property. Trustees favor this idea.

And then there's the lake. "My hope is that we create public access areas along Geauga Lake and perhaps even with a marina of some type," Mr. Markley said.

Some entities have expressed an interest in using the lake as a marketing theme, focusing on the history of the amusement park and incorporating it into development, Mr. Markley said. The old dance hall, for example, could be preserved along with the history of the park.

Mr. Markley also is in touch with a group that wants to save the Big Dipper roller coaster, still on the Cedar Fair land.

There are about 350 acres of Cedar Fair property in Bainbridge, and the Wild Water Kingdom is part of that land. The remaining Geauga Lake land for development in Bainbridge is about 200 or so acres, Mr. Markley said.

The Meijer grocery store chain reportedly is interested in buying property that is part of the former parking lot of the amusement park.

Cedar Fair has not shared any information on the Meijer's proposal or a proposal by a housing developer. Cedar Fair just wants to sell the property, Mr. Markley noted.