

County to review mixed-use zoning proposal for Bainbridge

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN

BAINBRIDGE -- An "economic engine" is in the works for Bainbridge. The township Zoning Commission has initiated mixed-use zoning language which will be sent to Geauga County Planning Director David Dietrich for review.

Mixed-use zoning is being viewed by many as a means to ignite economic growth at the former Geauga Lake Park property owned by Cedar Fair of Sandusky.

Mr. Dietrich and the county planning commission are expected to make suggestions on ways to improve the proposed language. The township zoning commission will meet again and review the zoning on March 24 and hold a public hearing.

It will then go to the township trustees who will also schedule a public hearing in May or June. Officials want the new zoning in place by July.

Bainbridge Trustee Jeff Markley said the goal of the mixed-use zoning is to encourage "an integrated approach to mixing retail, office and residential uses and spur economic development."

The target area of this zoning is in the southwest corner, he said, on land currently zoned commercial recreation covering the former Geauga Lake Park and Sea World properties.

"Neither single-family, detached housing or big-box retail stores should be built on this property," Mr. Markley said. "I do support vertical housing in this area, however," he said of housing above retail and office spaces.

There are about 245 acres for sale in Bainbridge by owner Cedar Fair of Sandusky. The company also owns about 255 acres of adjoining land in Aurora.

That goal is also supported by Geauga Growth Partners. The organization has been working with Bainbridge to encourage economic development on the Cedar Fair property. Tracy Jemison of the Growth Partners said the mixed-use zoning would attract businesses to retain and grow jobs and strengthen the local economy.

Hopefully, it will be a location for work, play and living, Mr. Jemison said. "I think it's a wonderful opportunity and at the end of the day, I believe there will be wonderful economic opportunities."

The mixed-use zoning will not encourage

big-box stores, he said. The commercial area along Aurora Road (Route 43) already has vacant big-box stores, he noted.

"That property has so much potential for economic benefits," he said. The location is good and it has a unique history, he said of the Geauga Lake Park legacy. "People love Geauga Lake and they have their memories of the park. There are a lot of things that can happen there if it is done right," Mr. Jemison said.

Mr. Markley said his vision is for an integrated-professional, medical and technical campus that functions as a "live, work, play environment."

Aurora has already put in place its mixed-use zoning on adjacent vacant property Cedar Fair owns within city boundaries.

"We have worked with Aurora for a number of years on possible mixed-use zoning ideas," Mr. Markley said. "The goal of the township's rezoning is to stimulate economic activity, induce new uses that will contribute to positive redevelopment of that area."

The Cedar Fair land in Bainbridge being considered for rezoning is currently zoned commercial recreation which permits most commercial and retail uses but not residen-

tial or integrated mixed uses, according to Mr. Markley.

Mixed use will permit multi-family housing, offices, from technical and professional to medical and even hospitals. "We're not looking for just another retail center that consumes property," Mr. Markley said.

Professional offices and other business entities will draw people there, who will support the other uses, he said. "There would be housing, restaurants, micro-breweries, retail, public board walks and access to the lake, all integrated into a mixed-use community."

Each application presented to the township zoning office would have to be reviewed to determine if it specifically meets the mixed-use zoning, Mr. Markley noted. The expectation is that a comprehensive master plan would be submitted with phased development of different uses being the preference, he added.

"The goal is to get the zoning in place as soon as possible, so we have closure as to the redevelopment of that site," Mr. Markley said.

Cedar Fair continues to operate the Wild Water Kingdom Park in the summer so development would have to spring up around it.