

# Bainbridge, Aurora share vision for Cedar Fair land

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN

CVT 6/18/15

Bainbridge Township and the city of Aurora share the same vision for about 582 acres of vacant land owned by Cedar Fair.

That vision encompasses the best economic development for land that once was home to Geauga Lake Amusement Park and parts of the former Sea World of Ohio parking area.

Bainbridge Trustee Jeff Markley met last week with representatives of Aurora to discuss the future of the property that spreads across Bainbridge in Geauga County and Aurora in Portage County. Some of the land fronts on to Aurora Road (Route 43), a main thoroughfare through the area.

Mr. Markley said they are doing everything possible to get "the best opportunity for good growth on the Cedar Fair property. We share the same perspective," he said of the two communities.

Aurora Mayor Ann Womer Benjamin said after the meeting that the city has taken steps to establish the framework for what residents would like to see on the property.

**"Aurora has moved quickly to create conditions it needs to protect its interests and at the same time Aurora has been working with Bainbridge as it has proceeded in a similar direction," Mayor Benjamin said. "We continue to be excited about options for the property."**

Aurora voters approved a ballot issue last year that changed the zoning from industrial to mixed-use development. The city designated about 560 acres for mixed-use development, with about 322 of those acres owned by Cedar Fair. The Sandusky firm owns approximately 260 acres in Bainbridge.

The two communities are waiting for Cedar Fair to sell the property, which could then lead to proposals by developers, Mr. Markley said. The Meijer superstore chain of Michigan has expressed interest in building a 200,000-square-foot store on the Bainbridge side.

Bainbridge Trustees recently approved mixed-use zoning for the Cedar Fair property and the adjoining shopping centers on Aurora Road.

"Cedar Fair controls the land, and there are no plans for developing the site at this time," Mr. Markley said. "Their only interest is to sell it off. All we can do is watch and wait for development to occur."

The township has been interested in bring-

ing a movie production studio to the site along with medical and technology offices, small retail businesses and town homes or multi-family housing.

**"Aurora and Bainbridge are waiting for things to move forward on a request from a developer to buy land," Mr. Markley said. "Our role is to make sure standards for zoning are in place and to wait for Cedar Fair to sell the land."**

Meijer has an option to buy about 40 acres for its store on what was the parking lot for the amusement park closed by Cedar Fair in 2007. Bainbridge and Meijer representatives met on June 4 and outlined some of the township's expectations for developing the site.

Beyond the Cedar Fair property, at the adjoining Shops at North Marketplace, an Aldi grocery store is expected to be built, Mr. Markley said.

In Aurora, Mayor Benjamin said Denise Januska, planning, zoning and building director for the city, worked on the design standards for the property with a consultant after voters approved the rezoning.

Legislation was passed by City Council in December, setting forth the design criteria including building facades, sidewalks, lighting and parking areas, the mayor said.

"We're looking for a live, work, play community with retail, educational and recreational offerings," she explained. The plan would include a variety of options with some limited residential offerings.

K. Hovnanian Homes has expressed an interest, but there is nothing finalized, Mayor Benjamin said. The home builder is working with John Goodman to bring a movie production studio to the Cedar Fair property, she noted.

After the city learned Cedar Fair was selling off land, it was important to act quickly to put Aurora's requirements and restrictions on the property in place reflecting its vision for future re-development, she said.

Aurora representatives have been working with Bainbridge on similar visions and they would like to see complementary uses across the Cedar Fair property, the mayor said.

The rezoned area in Aurora stretches along the north side of Treat Road to Chillicothe Road (Route 306). Some of the rezoned land fronts on both sides of Aurora Road (Route 43) in the city as well.

So far, there have been no applicants with proposals for the property, the mayor said. A moratorium on development, giving the city time to put design standards in place, was lifted on Jan. 1, she added.