

Tell monopoly to take long hike

Relegating the old idiom, "Give an inch, and they'll take a mile," to the realm of gross understatement, Bainbridge Township has offered to give Meijer Inc. a significant zoning concession, but the big-box chain store is demanding a monopoly. Bainbridge Trustees shouldn't just say no. They should tell the bullies at Meijer, an operation that is nothing special in a township that already has its fill of undistinctive big-box stores, to take a long hike.

After nearly eight years of on-again-off-again conceptualizing for the future of the former Geauga Lake Park property off of Aurora Road (Route 43), early this month the township finally adopted a mixed-use-zoning plan for the 270 acres within its borders. The city of Aurora, where another 322 acres of the historic amusement-park land that Cedar Fair Entertainment Co. mostly abandoned in 2007, rezoned its portion last month.

Pointedly and prudently, the new zoning specifically prohibits big-box stores -- the type of high-volume use that detracts from the high-quality development being envisioned for the area. But faced with the credible threat of litigation by Cedar Fair, Bainbridge officials allowed the Meijer proposal to proceed -- hoping that the chain would at least exhibit a modicum of sensitivity toward the community by incorporating some nostalgic design elements in its structure.

While that reasonable request remains up in the air, the corporation, apparently believing that it's a wonderful gift to the township, has the gall to make bizarre and perhaps illegal demands in its zoning application to split 41 acres from the overall parcel. According to that application, Meijer wants a host of potential competing uses to be prohibited from the 592 acres of Cedar Fair property in Bainbridge and Aurora. Those uses include just about every type of retail activity imaginable -- from department stores, coffee and doughnut shops and gas stations to taverns, bowling alleys and tattoo parlors.

The residents and office workers that Bainbridge and Aurora hope to eventually attract to the Geauga Lake development should not be subjected to such deprivations in proximity to their homes and places of business. And no such monopolistic enterprise should be welcome in any respectable community.

Not only should government officials reject such anti-free-market infringements, but they owe their current and future citizens firm adherence to all applicable zoning and building regulations. That includes comprehensive storm-water planning and implementation, a maximum of 40 percent lot coverage and preservation of any and all wetlands on the property.

Based on the past compromised "commercial recreation" zoning for the area, Meijer does have a legal right to build there. But it doesn't have the right to walk all over the township.