

No replanting needed in Bainbridge logged area, expert says

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN | Posted: Wednesday, September 27, 2017 11:45 pm

BAINBRIDGE – Township Trustees learned this week that the best way to mend the area where trees were felled contrary to a court restriction is let nature take its course.

This past May, logging was done on part of a 44-acre site that is under a judgment entry to remain natural to serve as a buffer between private homes and Cedar Fair property where Geauga Lake Amusement Park was located. Trustees questioned Cedar Fair who approved the logging and what would be done to remediate it.

Trustees learned that the Elk River Export was the broker of the trees that were cut by an Amish logging crew. Cedar Fair hired a forester to survey the area.

Lynne C. Ebel of Custom Forestry Inc. said in a letter to trustees that there is no need to replant. The trees will grow better now that the top vegetation is gone and the sunlight can now reach the lower levels. Nature will take its course, she said.

Elk River Export said it will grade the trail used during the timber harvest, seed it to restore the grass area and seed and straw the area where the logs were placed prior to being removed from the property. In addition, a check for \$7,500 will be donated to the Trust for Public Land for use in Ohio.

Trustees received an email communication from Duffield Milkie, representing Cedar Fair with aerial photos of the site. He said the photos “clearly demonstrate that ample tree screening still exists on the site.

“Cedar Fair stands ready to continue its efforts to unlock the economic potential of the Bainbridge Township portion of the former Geauga Lake Park,” Mr. Milkie said. “A resolution of the JEDD (joint economic development district) agreement is a key to unlocking that potential and we are hopeful that the township will re-engage with Aurora and finally resolve the outstanding issues.”

Bainbridge Trustee Jeff Markley said with that latest correspondence, trustees will now “do our homework to resolve this, get our facts in place and internally decide on how to proceed.

“It is not the answer I wanted to hear,” he said, of the logging matter, “The damage was done and the buffering was removed. And the donation of the \$7,500 doesn’t help Bainbridge. It was expected to be a buffer and remain as legally defined and it is unfortunate that Cedar Fair chose not to do the right thing in this situation.”

“We have to question every bit of correspondence or non-action as a barometer of our relationship with the landowner, Cedar Fair,” Mr. Markley said.

Trustee Lorrie Benza said, “A very smart person shared his opinion of Cedar Fair with this observation: ‘The only thing more deficient than Cedar Fair’s bottom line is their corporate ethics.’

“Regardless of whether folks agree or disagree with the perspective, the bottom line for me is I don’t think anything of their remediation plan,” Mrs. Benza said of the logging matter.

Mr. Markley said the trustees must now do a lot of homework regarding Geauga Lake and be committed to restoring the Cedar Fair property that spans about 300 acres in Bainbridge.

For 10 years now, since Geauga Lake Park was closed, no positive direction or productive way for the sale and redevelopment of the property has been made, he said.

“It’s been one dead end after another,” he said.

“Now Sandusky (Cedar Fair) has decided there is going to be more destruction by cutting trees, closing the Wild Water Kingdom water park and leaving trash,” he said. “They say they want to meet with us, but they are destroying a natural resource, leaving it as a garbage dump and an invitation to trespassers and vandalism.

“That’s our perspective. They are going to take what they can and leave what has no value,” Mr. Markley said.

He also noted that Meijer, which has proposed building a super store on Aurora Road on the former Geauga Lake parking lot, must consolidate lots to be able to build. It has not taken that step yet, so the township zoning inspector cannot rule on the application.

That project is also waiting on a JEDD in which Bainbridge and the city of Aurora would share income taxes of employees. As to sewers and water for the store, that would be up to the property owner with providers likely coming from Aurora or Solon, Mr. Markley said.