

Bainbridge hires law firm to assist with development

Joan Demirjian | Posted: Thursday, February 15, 2018 12:00 am

BAINBRIDGE — Trustees took action on Monday to help the township move forward with development of the former Geauga Lake Park property.

Trustees agreed to hire the law firm of Brosius, Johnson and Griggs LLC of Columbus to assist in establishing joint economic development districts and handling other issues involving the land owned by Cedar Fair that has been zoned a mixed-use district.

The goal is to spur economic development, said Trustee Kristina O'Brien, and Bainbridge has to be responsible with an area that is prime for growth.

The land is sitting there, vacant and blighted, she said. "Engaging this law firm is a step forward for Bainbridge. By bringing in a fresh view, hopefully we will create development opportunities," Mrs. O'Brien said.

The trustees became familiar with the firm while attending the Ohio Township Association's annual conference in Columbus recently.

"We have been to numerous OTA conferences and had listened to presentations from several law firms during these sessions," Trustee Jeff Markley said.

"We are going to engage the law firm, along with our assistant county prosecutor, to assist us on the next steps to make our mixed-use district a success, including the Geauga Lake property," he said of future development.

By beginning the process to utilize the legal services, they are creating a road map to facilitate solutions "to the obvious and not-so-obvious challenges," Mr. Markley said.

There have been roadblocks including bargaining talks for a JEDD with the city of Aurora. These joint economic districts often are a partnership in which a city provides utility services to township land and the two entities collect income taxes on township land development. State law prohibits townships from collecting income taxes.

Mr. Markley added that there are unsolved issues with the Cedar Fair property. The trustees are trying to get something positive to happen at the site. "We can't let it sit there abandoned forever," Mr. Markley said.

The proposed Meijer superstore that is considering building on Aurora Road has met a stalemate because of questions surrounding a necessary JEDD and the availability of existing city water and sewers from Aurora. The site is the former parking lot for the amusement park.

The trustees met in an executive session Saturday with attorney Sheldon Berns regarding the Meijer store's desire to build on a 41-acre site of the Cedar Fair property. "Meijer wants an answer on whether it can go forward," Mr. Markley said.

“We are finding it to be a challenge to ensure access to the existing utilities,” Mr. Markley said. “We need all the help we can get to do that.”

The estimated 600 acres of Cedar Fair property, with about half in Bainbridge and half in Aurora, is zoned for mixed use in the township which would allow offices and small commercial endeavors along with the possibility of town houses or apartments.

“There are a lot of hurdles, and we are going to work hard to get over them,” Mr. Markley said. “This process is a journey and there have always been so many roadblocks.”

The law firm was one of several recommended by the Ohio Township Association, “And we felt comfortable with them,” he said.

The Meijer store would be an exception to the smaller uses desired for the property that fronts on Aurora Road (Route 43).

“There’s a lot of moving parts to the situation,” he said. “Contrary to some who think it is Bainbridge who is holding up the Meijer store that is not accurate. There are a number of reasons Meijer is not yet there,” he said.

“It’s not fair to say Bainbridge is holding it up. We have always said we would work with Meijer but there are others outside of our control who need to act in a fair and reasonable manner to get this done,” Mr. Markley added.

Mrs. O’Brien said the overall goal is to understand the township’s options and opportunities regarding economic development in that area.

Consulting with the law firm will help the trustees identify the tools available and the opportunities that can be utilized by the township and the different vehicles that drive development in the area.

Bainbridge is open for business, yet development has been stalled in that area. The township has to learn what economic tools there are for that area, she said.

Anyone purchasing or creating a business has expectations based on legally available tools for economic growth, she said. “Bainbridge has to put it out there.

“Over the last two years, there have been so many twists and turns regarding that property,” Mrs. O’Brien said. “We have engaged the law firm so they can give us definitive legal advice on different economic opportunities in that area.”