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Bainbridge joins county bid for Swagelok headquarters

JOAN DEMIRJIAN Jun 14, 2018

Bainbridge Township officials joined municipalities across Northeast Ohio trying to attract the proposed Swagelok global headquarters. The company is looking to invest \$30 million to \$50 million for the project and initially employ 300 to 500 people.

The former Geauga Lake amusement park property in Bainbridge would be a perfect site benefitting both Bainbridge and Swagelok which has manufacturing in neighboring Solon, trustees said.

Trustees met Monday with Geauga County representatives to discuss site possibilities.

Swagelok is seeking a location for its new global headquarters, innovation center and customer welcome center. Swagelok's manufacturing of valve and tube fittings as well as fluid system products would remain in Solon where about 3,000 people are currently employed, company officials said.

The former Geauga Lake property in Bainbridge was included in a proposal by Geauga County Community Improvement Corporation on behalf of the county for possible sites for the Swagelok headquarters.

Township trustees reviewed the proposal for the Cedar Fair owned property with Geauga County Administrator David Lair and Geauga County Department of Development Director David Favorite. The county also suggested a site in Troy Township as well as land in Auburn Township. Middlefield Village made its own proposal to Swagelok.

The Geauga Lake Park land has sat idle since 2007 when the amusement park was shut down by Cedar Fair, which owns the Cedar Point amusement park in Sandusky. There are about 260 acres in Bainbridge and a similar tract in the adjacent city of Aurora.

"It would be fabulous to get some viable use on that property," Trustee Lorrie Benza said after the session with Geauga officials. "Let's bring an element of life back to the area."

In a letter to Swagelok dated May 31, 2018, Geauga County Commissioners said the Bainbridge Township site offers nearly unlimited options to configure and size a high-profile corporate campus. The northwestern portion of the site is cleared, graded and ready for immediate development.

The headquarters and innovation center could be built overlooking Geauga Lake, a natural spring-fed lake in the center of the site, and there is plenty of space to expand and use existing green space and “create one-of-a-kind amenities,” according to the Geauga County proposal.

Bainbridge Trustee Jeff Markley said it is good to see the county is involved in bringing large companies to Geauga. “They are willing to help the township in attracting businesses.”

The Geauga Lake property is a phenomenal office setting with the lake and a lot of opportunity for growth, Mr. Markley said. “It could be the anchor for significant development and be a catalyst for future development. It is a significant location to trigger opportunities for others to come in.”

Kenston Local School District officials already have pledged support and would agree to a tax abatement for the Swagelok project, Geauga officials said. The school district serves Bainbridge and Auburn townships.

For the Bainbridge site, the county and township could actively pursue the establishment of either a Community Reinvestment Area or Enterprise Zone for the site to enable real estate tax exemption. Alternately, “We could pursue Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as an expedient alternative way to enable real estate tax savings,” the county proposal states.

Trustee Kristina O’Brien said after Monday’s meeting that it is important for groups that want to encourage economic development in Geauga County to have such dialogues. The county is focused on economic development, “And I want Bainbridge to develop benefits in this forward-thinking process and we should have sites ready for responsible economic growth.

“I am very willing to listen to all the different avenues to attract economic development that is good for the township and business. Whatever creates the atmosphere for economic development, I’m all on board. We need an anchor,” she added.

Mr. Favorite told trustees Monday that one of his roles is to foster economic development throughout the county. “We are working together with Geauga Growth Partners,” he said.

In terms of economic development, some development simply shows up in the county while in other cases, “we have to go after and pursue it. The playing field is very competitive,” he said.

Swagelok put out a request for possible sites for its development and gave a very short timeline of less than 30 days with proposals due June 1, Mr. Favorite said. A decision by Swagelok is expected by August and construction is expected to start in 2019 and conclude in 2020 with a grand opening.

“We had to act quickly,” Mr. Favorite said. The county worked with Tracy Jemison of the Geauga Growth Partnership and evaluated 15 potential sites in Geauga County.

The next step now is to take Swagelok representatives on a tour of the sites “and get them excited about Geauga County,” Mr. Favorite said. Swagelok is expected to make site visits and complete due diligence on all potential sites by the end of June and make a formal site selection in mid-August.

Mr. Favorite said he is looking at all the opportunities the county has for development, which is why the help of the township is needed. “We have to work together.”

The Community Reinvestment Area, a tool for tax abatement, was brought up Monday and Mrs. Benza said it was the first time the township has had a discussion with county representatives on that matter. “If it is something that would benefit the community, I look forward to pursuing options,” she said.

“I think attracting any kind of professional business to the property would be of benefit to the whole area. The goal is to put some viable and productive use to a property that has sat sadly vacant for more than a decade,” Mrs. Benza said of the Geauga Lake site.

Bainbridge Township will forward a copy of the master plan created by Environmental Design Group of the Geauga Lake property to county officials. Representatives of the Meijer super store chain have indicated an interest in 41 acres of the Cedar Fair land in the former parking lot along Aurora Road (Route 43).

“If the preferred site would be the parking lot area and if Meijer is still interested in that area, we would like the county to have access to the Environmental Design Group master plan to identify alternative areas, other than the parking lot,” Mrs. Benza said.

The township has been waiting to hear from the Meijer store representatives about its plan that had been proposed for a very long time, Mrs. Benza added.

Mr. Lair told trustees that there will be involvement with the nonprofit Community Improvement Corporation of Geauga County which promotes the industrial, commercial and civic development of the county in compliance with zoning. There are things that can be done with the CIC to assist businesses and industry with revenue bonds.

At the meeting's conclusion, Mr. Lair said they will take information back to the commissioners that Bainbridge wants to move forward on the proposal for economic development on the Geauga Lake property.

Mr. Favorite said he hopes to come back to discuss a vision for the township.

Joan Demirjian