

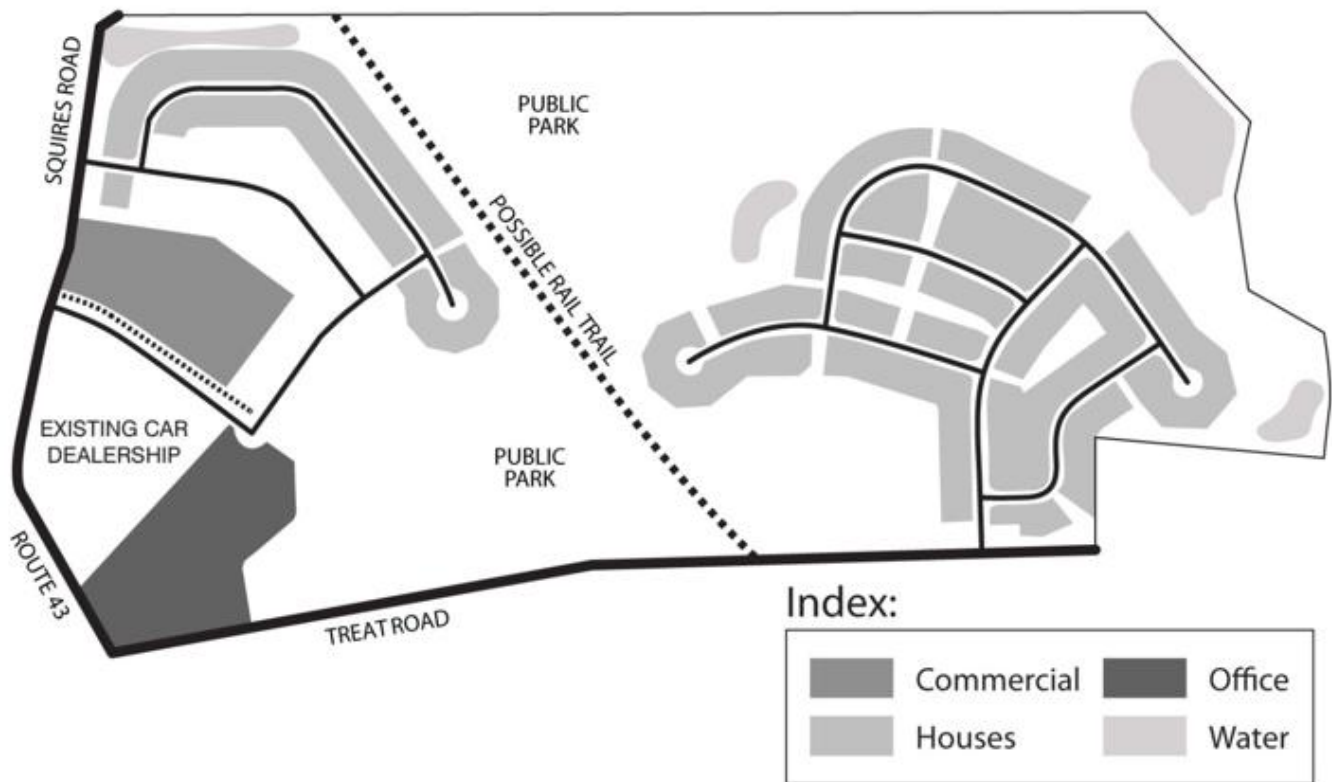
Residents question Pulte plan's density of houses, impact on schools

Joan Demirjian 20 hrs ago

Proposed Pulte Aurora development

Pulte Group is proposing a development for 247 acres of land in the city of Aurora that includes housing, offices, retail, walking paths and green space. The proposed site was once part of the sprawling 650 acre entertainment complex that included Geauga Lake Amusement

Park, Sea World of Ohio and Wildwater Kingdom. Pulte has an option to purchase the land from Cedar Fair of Sandusky, Ohio. Below is a conceptual plan showing proposed locations of development on land bound by Squires, North Aurora and Treat roads.



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AURORA — A conceptual development plan with houses, town homes, offices, retail stores and walking paths on about 247 acres that once were part of a summer entertainment complex was presented by representatives of the Pulte Group last week before the city Planning Commission.

The presentation on May 15 drew a capacity crowd to City Council chambers where residents expressed concerns about the environmental impact, concentration of houses and possible effect on the school district if more families move into Aurora.

Developers are aiming to begin construction next year pending approval from Aurora city officials.

The area, which includes the former Sea World parking lot as well as a former campground and quarry off Treat Road, already is zoned for mixed use which includes homes and commercial development. The proposed project borders the Rivers Edge Drive community to the north in Bainbridge Township.

Cedar Fair Entertainment Company of Sandusky, Ohio owns about 650 acres with roughly half in Bainbridge Township and half in the city of Aurora. The area once was home to Sea World, closed in 2004, Geauga Lake Amusement Park, closed in 2007, and Wildwater Kingdom water park, closed in 2016.

Both the city of Aurora and Bainbridge Township changed the land use to similar mixed-use zoning to encourage consistent development.

Tony Visconsi of Hanna Commercial Realtors which is involved in selling the property said 247 acres are under contract with Pulte. A good portion of Cedar Fair's land cannot be developed because of wetlands or deed restrictions, he said.

There are approximately 80 acres in Bainbridge that can be developed, he said of the overall land. A barrier to attracting developers, he said, is that the land is not close to an interstate. Cedar Fair's land in Bainbridge has no utility services, he added.

Aurora has the capability to provide water and sewer services to the Cedar Fair land, including sections in Bainbridge Township, but officials from both communities have not yet worked out an agreement.

"That's the hold-up," he said.

Many people at the meeting, including Aurora Councilman John Kudley, expressed concerns about the density of the proposed 321 houses in the Pulte plan because they believe it could overburden the Aurora City School District.

"I'm concerned about density. I think there is a potential for an impact on the schools. It's going to be a greater impact than the developer is indicating," Mr. Kudley said.

But Superintendent Pat Ciccantelli told the Times that the district still has space in each of its schools and could accommodate as many as 250 additional students without having to add on to buildings.

The school district also would get property tax revenues from the developed land and funds from the state for additional students.

The school district is having a demographic study done to determine what the anticipated growth rates would be over the next 10 years, he said. "To me it is too early to know if there is a concern, but we will do our homework," he said.

Mr. Kudley also noted the developer is giving the city the parklands that will be created on the site surrounding the homes. They include wetlands that the city would have to maintain. "We have to see what the developer will do to manage the stormwater," he said.

As to the density, he noted that side yards are only 15 feet and the front yard setbacks are only 25 feet for some of the homes on the west side of the land in the plan. The ranch houses on the east side are relatively close as well, Mr. Kudley noted. The city's mixed-use zoning allows for 2.5 houses on an acre. The Pulte plan calls for 1.4 houses per acre.

Jim O'Conner, director of planning for the Pulte Group, said at the May 15 meeting that the plan is in its initial stages. Pulte would like to break ground next year.

Details of plan

The goal is to balance residential, commercial and retail, offices, commercial services and civic and government uses, he said of the project. The land in Aurora is surrounded by Squires Road, Aurora Road and Treat Road. An unused rail line goes through the site and could be a future connection to a statewide rails to trails path. The development would surround the Liberty Ford car dealership site.

Pulte is working with about 247 acres in Aurora with 224 acres in the residential area, according to Mr. O'Conner. He said the proposal promotes walking in a safe and well connected community and has taken into account environmentally sensitive areas. They want

to create a pedestrian friendly environment with access to shopping, dining and entertainment.

According to the plan, the west site off Squires Road is designated for residential use and includes about 77 acres with 109 town homes intended for young professionals and 67 houses. The east neighborhood includes approximately 146 acres with 145 lots.

About 20 acres is planned for commercial development off Squires Road and there would be another 20 acres off Aurora Road for commercial and medical office development.

The town homes would cost about \$275,000 and up and the traditional 67 homes, starting at about 2,800 square feet, would be priced from \$330,000 to \$410,000, he said. The west neighborhood would have access to Squires Road.

The eastern side of 146 acres off Treat Road would feature homes that would be geared to "empty nesters," Mr. O'Conner said. They would be smaller, in the 1,600 square feet and up range. The homes would not be attractive to those with children, he maintained. Only 20 percent of the homes would be aimed at families with children.

The commercial development would include medical offices and satellite educational facilities, he said. "This is not the same retail that exists close by, he said of nearby commercial development on Aurora Road. Pulte is targeting businesses that are pedestrian friendly. They are looking at child day care facilities, microbreweries, family friendly restaurants and dog services, he said of some examples.

There would be multiple walking paths in the parklands and community. The parkland on the west side encompasses about 34 acres and 78 acres on the east side. Over half the development will be in open space, Mr. O'Conner said. There is an opportunity for the city to incorporate a "heritage trail" using artifacts from the area's history. "It's a destination site," he said.

Brian Uhlenbrock of Neff and Associates architects and engineers said it would be a unified development with connective trails and a possible rails-to-trails walking path on the unused railroad line.

Deb Conti said she is concerned about the 176 units on the west end of the development being "squashed" together with only 15-foot side yards.

Councilman Jim Vaca, the ward representative, agreed that density could be an issue. He said after the meeting that he would like to see about 10 houses taken out of the development and the lots made larger on the west side.

Many residents were under the impression that the proposed development was going to be similar to Pinecrest in Orange Village or Legacy Village in Lyndhurst. "This is more residential instead of offices and specialty shops. The developer wants to stuff what it can on small lots," Mr. Vaca said.

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