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## Meeting to discuss Geauga's largest mixed-use plan

Joan Demirjian  
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Planning for the largest mixed-use development in Geauga County is taking place right now in Bainbridge Township. It is to take place at the former Geauga Lake Park property involving approximately 325 acres on property now owned by Industrial Commercial Properties of Solon. The goal of the plan is to create a development with live, work, shop and play concept, Bainbridge trustees said.

Township residents are being invited by Bainbridge Township Trustees to learn about the planning phase at a special meeting by Zoom and in person at 7 p.m. Feb. 16 at Bainbridge Town Hall. The in-person meeting will be limited to about 35 people in the front meeting room of town hall.

Currently, the mixed-use development is expected to include apartments or possibly condominiums as well as retail spaces and offices.

Trustees have been meeting with representatives of ICP including the firm's lawyers from Thrasher, Dinsmore and Dolan, as well as RDL Architects and landscape consultants Behnke and Associates.

"It's something we've wanted to do for some time," Trustee Jeff Markley said of updating residents on Geauga Lake development. "It will be a good opportunity for residents to get up to speed on the matter."

The goal is to have an area where people can live and walk to shopping, dining and even work. "Walkability is a major design component," Mr. Markley said.

Trustee Lorrie Benza noted the magnitude of the proposal. "This is the biggest development project in Geauga County history, and we need our residents to know what's being proposed, so we scheduled the public information session."

Under consideration are high-end apartments and retail establishments along with proposals for access by the public to Geauga Lake. There will also be nostalgic components in honor of the long history of Geauga Lake Park, Mrs. Benza said.

There has already been a year of preliminary discussion about the abandoned Geauga Lake Park property between ICP representatives and Bainbridge Trustees, she said.

A Menard's Home Improvement store has been approved for that area with construction starting this spring.

The mixed-use zoning does not include big-box stores, however, the Menard's store appealed that restriction, and the township has been working on a consent judgment agreement with the developer. The Menard's store was a key component to making the entire mixed-use plan work with ICP, Mr. Markley said.

Mr. Markley said developers for the mixed-use project are working on design guidelines, density, setbacks and landscaping with RDL Architects and Behnke and Associates.

The idea is to include walking trails around Geauga Lake, possibly with a boardwalk and potentially a beach for public access, he said.

As a landscape architect and planner himself, Mr. Markley has been working on guidelines with Zoning Inspector Karen Endres and Assistant Zoning Inspector Steve Averill and Dave Dietrich, the township's part-time planning and zoning coordinator.

Mr. Markley said land clearing at the former Geauga Lake Park property will include demolition of a lot of concrete. Before they bring in the excavating equipment, he wants to try to save some features such as a retaining wall with a bear sculpted into the concrete that was part of Geauga Lake Park's Grizzly Run water ride.

There is also a concrete walkway with stones down to the lake that could be used in the future. "We are trying to design 'pocket parks' on the site," Mr. Markley said. As an example of a possible park, the township has some of the cars and tracks from the Big Dipper Roller Coaster that could be set up on a site where people could take photographs.

Funding for the parks could be done with income from the Joint Economic Development District with the City of Aurora and a Tax Increment Financing program.

Mr. Markley also noted that residents might have questions about what is happening at the parking lot of the former Wild Water Kingdom. There, FirstEnergy is bringing in equipment in preparation to work on new transmission lines that will be installed in Aurora along the old railroad line. It has nothing to do with the Geauga Lake development, Mr. Markley said.

## **Residents' concerns**

Bainbridge resident Dan Henry said he and neighbors will attend the upcoming meeting to express concerns about traffic the development could generate in his neighborhood on Geauga Lake Road. "We know it's going to happen," he said of that increase. The roads are currently not pedestrian friendly and the influx of more traffic will not help, he said.

The history of the area is important, particularly for his family. His great-great-grandfather Capt. Charles Henry, who served in the Civil War, lived on Geauga Lake Road. "There is a lot of history surrounding that area," Mr. Henry noted. "I'd like to see them maintain access to the lake for the public."

His mother, Jeanne Henry, said she would like to see the lake open to pedestrian traffic and the preservation of the historical aspects around the lake.

"It's always been public," she said of the lake. "And preserving any history is always good."

Mr. Dietrich, who was formerly the Geauga County Planning Director, said the goal of the meeting is to explain to residents where the development is headed.

Plans call for a roadway with a "boulevard" concept through the development from Aurora Road (Route 43) to Depot Road. Landscaping will be done along Route 43 and at the boulevard's entrance off Route 43. There would be a traffic light as well at the boulevard entrance. "It is so big and exciting, but there is a long way to go yet," Mr. Dietrich he said of the planning process.

"It's very exciting and the largest mixed-use development in the county. A project of this scope has never been undertaken in Geauga County," Mr. Dietrich said.

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