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Development beginning at Geauga Lake property: Apartments, retail outlets among first to commit

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One of the first developments for the former Geauga Lake Park property in Bainbridge Township is underway by Vision Development Inc. It will bring the first complex devoted to apartments in the township. Clearing of the 19-acre site is in progress.

"It is the first multi-family rental development I am aware of in the township," Bainbridge Trustee Jeff Markley said. There are some rental condominiums in Bainbridge but they are not classified as apartments, he noted.

Brent Wrightsel, president and CEO of Vision Development Inc. of Upper Arlington, Ohio, said the plans call for 331 apartment units in 14 buildings. "We hope to break ground for the apartments in early summer," he said. "We are very excited about the project There haven't been any new apartments for quite some time in that area. For growing communities, it is vital to have a mix of property types to meet the needs of all residents," Mr. Wrightsel said.

Vision Development purchased the property from Industrial Commercial Properties of Solon. ICP owns the former amusement park property where Geauga Lake Park closed in 2007. There are about 350 acres at the site which also includes the site of the now closed Geauga Lake Wild Water Kingdom and the former Sea World park which closed back in 2000.

Gauga Lake Park had opened in the 1920s and still holds historical significance in the township and area.

Speaking of the apartments, Mr. Wrightsel said young people especially like apartments. They don't have a lot of belongings and often prefer apartments, Mr. Wrightsel said. "They like the lifestyle, and we build around a central focus on community, health and well-being. It offers something unique to young professionals as they enter the workforce."

Mr. Wrightsel said the apartments will include several different unit plans including studios, efficiency suites with one to two bedrooms and three-bedroom units are just under 2,000 square feet. "We have 14 types of units, so there will be many options for our residents," he said. The company will manage the property as it does its other developments.

To be called "VC Park at Geauga Lake," the development will include a separate building to provide a state-of-the-art workout facility with classes in personal fitness, Mr. Wrightsel said. There will also be a club house with decks off the back next to the lake.

Access to the apartments will be off the proposed "Big Dipper" roadway which will be the primary road to the entire future development, according to Mr. Markley. It is named after the historic Big Dipper Ferris Wheel ride that was a popular attraction at the former amusement park. There will be a second access from Aurora Road as well, he said.

The Big Dipper Road will connect with Depot Road as well and there will be entrances off Depot Road, between Geauga Lake and Brewster roads, to the former Geauga Lake Park property.

The lake, referred to as Geauga Lake, will play a key role in the development. It is about 50 acres, and a walkway will be built for use by the apartment residents the general public, Mr. Markley said. Access to the lake will be a priority. Most of the lake is in Bainbridge and there will be multiple entry points to the walking trails for the public, he said.

Connections to the lake front so everyone can enjoy it are of great importance, he said. Most of the lake is in Bainbridge and there will be multiple access points to the walking trails for the public.

A tiered sitting area at the apartments overlooking the lake will include fire pits, volleyball courts and pool, in addition to a dog park, according to Mr. Wrightsel.

"We like to include amenities in our properties," he said. "And we build community," he added, noting activities include events that include food drives and toy drives for those in need and cancer-awareness drives. "We're big on giving back," Mr. Wrightsel said.

He noted that they worked diligently getting the input of the township in regard to the style and amenities of the proposed apartment development, even on details as specific as the name of the new development.

Currently, the property is being cleared of old foundations from the former amusement park. Much of the materials will be repurposed and used for the sub-base of the roadways, Mr. Wrightsel said.

Entrance to the apartments will be from the main boulevard for the overall Geauga Lake development which is expected to also include offices and restaurants. The boulevard will be accessed off Aurora Road (Route 43).

Mr. Wrightsel said the apartments will include several different unit plans including efficiency suites with one to two bedrooms and three-bedroom units with two levels.

The buildings will be three-stories in height with four-story sites at the end of the buildings where the town homes are located. "There is a lot of variety in the building types," he said.

He noted Vision Development in Northeast Ohio built a community in Green, in the Akron-Canton area last year. Its developments are mainly in central Ohio and the Columbus area and surrounding suburbs. In the last seven years, it built 16 communities with 200 to 450 units in each project. Vision Development is preparing to build in a suburb of Cincinnati, although most of its development is in central Ohio.

He said the company's real estate network put it in touch with ICP of Solon, the owner of the overall Geauga Lake property. He said Vision Development saw the need in the area for the apartments.

"I love the site with the lake front," Mr. Wrightsel said. "We'll build the first section of the trail so everyone can walk around the lake. It's a special spot. I never thought I'd have this opportunity," he said.

The lake is special with its size, he noted, adding that the topography will be a challenge from the building standpoint. There is a height of about 25 feet from the lake to the apartment building site, however, it has a lot of character, Mr. Wrightsel said.

Gauga Lake Park nostalgia will be built into the project, he added. "We want to stick to the theme and remember where this place came from."

The club house is expected to be open this year and the first apartments will be ready for tenants in the first quarter of 2023, according to Mr. Wrightsel.

The former amusement park land is now zoned mixed use and uses include the apartments and residential use, retail and offices, Mr. Markley said. The mixed-use plan is consistent with the township planning efforts for that area. Its purpose is to create a “live, work and play” development.

He said Vision Development will be coming back to the township with its final plans for the apartments as part of the zoning review process.

In other development at the site, there is expected to be two big-box stores on the former amusement park land, including a Menards store and a Meijer store. The Menard’s store plan on 20 acres has been approved and construction is expected to start, Mr. Markley said. It will be built facing Aurora Road, across from the McDonald’s restaurant.

Representatives of the Meijer’s store have applied to the township for preliminary plan approval and it was granted with conditions, he said. They are expected to be coming back with modified plans for review.

ICP is offering provisions for green space on the land and has been conferring with the township on video about the plans, Mr. Markley said.

All developments will be obligated to provide some nostalgic reference to the former Geauga Lake Park, by using the name Geauga Lake and Bainbridge Township.

He noted that there have been no plans submitted for future development on the former Sea World Park property, adjacent to the former Geauga Lake amusement park property.

The future development on the sites will bring in property tax revenues to the township as well as an income tax component. Sales taxes generated there will go to Geauga County and there will be many job opportunities, Mr. Markley added.