

Geauga Lake will be coming back as a public space



Geauga Lake, the amusement park, was founded on the northeast side of the lake in 1887 and featured the Big Dipper roller coaster. The wooden ride, built in the 1920s, is seen here in 2010. *The Plain Dealer*

Megan Sims - msims@cleveland.com

Aurora City Council unanimously approved spending \$5.3 million for nearly 50 acres of land and the adjacent lake.

Megan Sims msims@cleveland.com

For more than a century people flocked to Geauga Lake, until the last of the theme parks around it closed nearly a decade ago. But if all goes as planned, people will again be able to enjoy the lake and surrounding property.

Aurora City Council voted unanimously Monday night to approve spending \$5.3 million for 48 acres of land and the adjacent lake.

“Gauga Lake and Sea World, then Wildwater Kingdom were fixtures in our community for decades,” Mayor Ann Womer Benjamin said in presenting the proposal to City Council before the final vote.

“We all felt the loss when the parks closed and we were cut off from enjoying the lake. Now with this acquisition and project, we’ll preserve the lake and adjacent land for the public’s enjoyment for the foreseeable future.”

The legislation allows the mayor to sign the purchase agreement with Industrial Commercial Properties after 30 days. The plan was first announced in spring 2023.

Aurora is using \$1.3 million in federal stimulus money from the American Rescue Plan Act to help pay for the purchase.

The city plans to develop the property as public space, redeveloping it into a park that could include a pool and beach, along with boating and other amenities.

As a part of the deal, Industrial Commercial Properties would be involved in the potential building of a “Lake Loop” trail, but Womer Benjamin said that it would depend on funding.

“This is a super exciting project and, frankly, I think both Aurora and Bainbridge Township are excited about it,” Womer Benjamin said during an interview on Tuesday.

“Northeast Ohio should be excited about it because we are creating a recreational venue out of what could have gone to residential development.”

Dean DePiero, the city’s law director, said that the city would solicit public input.

Womer Benjamin said the city would work with the Cleveland branch of MKSK Studios as a design consultant, and an engineering consultant to evaluate the utility infrastructure on the property.

Though demolition has already begun at Geauga Lake, Womer Benjamin said she hoped to preserve a few structures, including the aquarium building that was once a part of Sea World Ohio.

“The very iconic aquarium structure appears to be potentially reusable. I would love it to be a venue for a restaurant or something like that and we would lease it out,” she said.

Gauga Lake, the amusement park, was founded on the northeast side of the lake in 1887. A second park, Sea World of Ohio, opened in 1970. Gauga Lake became Six Flags Ohio in 1999. Later owner Cedar Fair closed Gauga Lake in 2007 but maintained Gauga Lake’s Wildwater Kingdom until 2016.

Womer Benjamin said the parks had been a wonderful member of the community, despite the “overwhelming traffic,” and the city has collected some artifacts from the parks that it hoped to share with the community to “bring back the nostalgia to the new park.”

“(The parks) were just places to enjoy the lake, the rides and all the exhibits at Sea World,” she said.

Though she said she could not predict the cost of the redevelopment, Womer Benjamin said she hopes the park could be open by the summer of 2027.