

City of Aurora

130 S. Chillicothe Road
Aurora, Ohio 44202-6802

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aurora Approves Acquisition of Geauga Lake and Land in Former Sea World Beach Access and Public Park Planned for ‘Opportunity of A Lifetime’

Aurora, Ohio, September 17, 2024: Aurora Mayor Ann Womer Benjamin announces Council’s approval Monday evening of the acquisition of Geauga Lake together with 48 acres of lakefront land in the former Sea World from Industrial Commercial Properties (ICP). The city will pay about \$5.3 million for the purchase.

Following the announcement of the proposed purchase last year, the matter was postponed on the city’s agenda while the city negotiated several key issues with the seller, ICP. Among those issues were the city’s authority to control access points and rules for the lake, a prospective walking trail around the lake, and Bainbridge Township’s rights with respect to the lake and property.

“We have all worked very hard in the last 15 months to iron out remaining concerns, and we have finally reached agreement,” Womer Benjamin said. “It was extremely important to me that the city have the necessary tools and flexibility to build a beautiful park for public enjoyment and protect the lake and its users in the future. I am comfortable with the resolution of these issues.”

Womer Benjamin said that while plans for the property are not finalized, the city has identified a design team to prepare a conceptual design for the property, which she expects to be redeveloped into a public park with a pool, beach and related amenities, non-motorized boating, and other recreational attractions. In addition, the city will hire an engineering firm to identify and evaluate the existing utilities to determine what further needs to be planned. The city has been working with ICP to proceed with demolition on the Geauga property while negotiations continued, financed through a grant obtained by the owner.

In November 2020, ICP announced it had acquired the remaining 377 acres that had been the home of Geauga Lake Amusement Park and Sea World Ohio. The property straddles two communities and two counties, Bainbridge Township in Geauga County and the City of Aurora in Portage County. Aurora negotiated a Joint Economic Development District (“JEDD”) Agreement with the township in 2020 which provided certain economic benefits to the city for its provision of utilities to the Bainbridge side of the property. That has enabled ICP to pursue redevelopment on the Bainbridge side, including plans for residential and retail areas. An apartment complex has already broken ground.

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Redevelopment on the Aurora side has included a new Liberty Ford facility, and in the last several years Pulte Homes has been constructing residential developments on some of the property along Squires and Treat roads.

Womer Benjamin said the city's purchase of the 48 acres of lakefront land and the 53-acre spring-fed lake has a different focus. "The lake has been a recreational attraction of the community for decades, and to lose access when the parks closed was certainly disappointing," the Mayor said. "To reinstitute lake access coupled with a park and recreational amenities will enhance the overall community and enable the public to enjoy a beautiful area of Northeast Ohio. Although the property will be owned by the City of Aurora, we will work collaboratively to create a true regional asset."

To pay for the acquisition, the city will use about \$1.3 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, with the remainder coming from general fund money budgeted for that purpose.

"This is a legacy purchase for the people of Aurora," the Mayor said. "It is the opportunity of a lifetime to guarantee our residents lake access and a destination that is going to be one of the gems of Northeast Ohio."

For further information contact

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