



Sunday, 04 March 2018 17:38

# Muskegon Lake's rebirth opens city to new water-focused uses

Written by [Marla R. Miller](#)

font size | [Print](#) | [Email](#)

Rate this item (0 votes)



(top left) Partners worked to remove hard barriers along the Muskegon Lake shoreline. (top right) Muskegon's former Sappi Paper site is being converted into a mixed-use waterfront community. (bottom) Forsite Development will soon tear down the B.C. Cobb power plant on Muskegon Lake.

*Courtesy Photos*

Similar to the city that borders its shores, Muskegon Lake's progress has experienced setbacks and successes, with many different groups working behind the scenes to position the lake as an attractive place to live, work and play.

After years of waiting, big changes for the lakefront are appearing on the horizon with the closure of the Sappi Paper Mill and the B.C. Cobb power plant, plus extensive cleanup efforts to restore the shoreline and fish habitats.

Beyond brick-and-mortar development, Muskegon is ready to take advantage of the region's water-based tourism and commerce. The comprehensive Imagine Muskegon Lake plan aims to revitalize six separate corridors around the south shore of Muskegon Lake,

including three in the downtown area. Public viewing and commenting closed in February, and a final version of the plan is expected to go before the Muskegon City Commission for a vote on March 27.

The plan incorporates port enterprise, tourism, development and public access, starting with street enhancements and infrastructure improvements. But it also aims high with ideas for a bridge across the channel, water taxis, waterfront parks, piers, boardwalks and shopping districts from Pere Marquette Beach to downtown and Veterans' Memorial Park.

In addition to a variety of residential and mixed-use development, other high-priority plans include improving mobility options with multi-use path and trail extensions, more bike lanes and paved shoulders, and a roundabout at Beach Street and Lakeshore Drive. Additionally, the initiative is considering public transient boat slips and shopper docks in downtown, public fish cleaning stations, a third public beach, a fifth boat launch and three fishing piers.

"That's what the plan focuses on, connecting people to the waterfront," said Mike Franzak, Muskegon city planning director. "We have a whole shoreline that's prime for redevelopment. ... So this plan looks how we can connect them to each other and especially downtown."

Here is a look at three key projects that have improved Muskegon Lake or will help redefine its use in the future.

## LAKE CLEANUP SETS THE STAGE FOR REDEVELOPMENT



## Breaking News

**Amazon officially announces Gaines Township distribution facility**

**EPS Security acquires local competitor VTT**

**Burke Porter makes capital investment in California automation systems provider**

**Restaurant Partners acquires Noble Restaurant**

**Goei retires from Michigan Office for New Americans**

For more news stories, [CLICK HERE](#)

June 2018						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Muskegon Lake is a budding success story for environmental cleanup efforts, which in this case date back more than three decades.

The lake should be off the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOC) by the end of 2019, said Kathy Evans, program manager for **West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC)**. The lake and the city will be poised to take advantage of the region's blue economy, from commercial shipping activity to residential development and recreational activities, she said.

"It couldn't have been more perfect timing, really, with all of the cleanup work that's been done," Evans said. "We have significant properties that are ready for redevelopment and a much cleaner and healthier environment to go along with it."

WMSRDC manages habitat restoration in the lake, helps bring together the community and other partners, and coordinates the community piece of sediment cleanup efforts by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the EPA. The first AOC remedial action plan originated in 1987, with updates published in 1994 and 2002.

The agencies determined Muskegon Lake had nine beneficial use impairments, four of which have since been removed.

"Things are in really good shape," Evans said. "I think Muskegon Lake is pretty well known as one of the success stories throughout the Great Lakes."

The **Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership** formed in 1992 to begin the hard work of determining the status of the water quality, sediment and habitats as well as setting goals, Evans said.

"That's been a really successful component of what we do," she said. "Without that group, we probably wouldn't have gotten as much done."

Efforts included the cleanup of contaminated sediment along various tributaries and industrial sites, plus habitat and shoreline restoration, removal of invasive species and planting native plants.

When Dr. Alan Steinman came to town in 2001 as director of **Grand Valley State University's** Annis Water Resources Institute, it was to start a long-term monitoring and research campaign. With the community's backing, the university established an endowment fund to help support the ongoing monitoring of Muskegon Lake.

"We've been able to leverage those dollars to over \$20 million to improve the lake," Steinman said.

Some of the highlights include reducing chemical concentrations and algae to improve water clarity and removing the toxic sediments and stretches of hardened shoreline. AWRI continues to study the lake and monitor water quality and fish through an observatory buoy that provides real-time data.

"I feel blessed to be part of this whole success story," Steinman said. "They wanted restored habitat and they knew that they needed the scientific information to figure out what was going on."

A GVSU study on Muskegon Lake's shoreline habitat restoration efforts showed a 6 to 1 return on investment. Muskegon Lake's Lakeshore Trail, which runs along the water for several miles from downtown to the Lakeside neighborhood and on to Pere Marquette Beach, was one of the early initiatives to provide public access and encourage tourism.

"I hear it all the time, people really appreciate the way things look," WMSRDC's Evans said. "They think the shoreline restoration is beautiful."

The other success story has been the community awareness and pride around the lake, recognizing it's a resource and not a sewer, and the understanding that ecotourism, recreation and residential living are tied to the health of the lake, Steinman said.

## Follow MiBiz



*Sponsored*

**Sponsored Content: Hiring A Professional for Your Commercial Real Estate Needs**



**Amazon officially announces Gaines Township distribution facility**

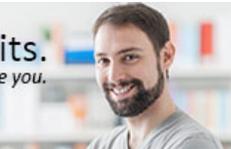


**Goei retires from Michigan Office for New Americans**



**Talent awaits.**  
*We'll introduce you.*

**Michigan Works!**



**Technology repair firm to invest \$2.7 million in GR expansion**



**MiBiz Growth Report: June 11, 2018**



"People want to connect to the lake — the bike trail is heavily used," he said. "They want public access. I think that's a wonderful, marvelous transition that has occurred over the last 17 years."

As a scientist, Steinman believes there is a way to balance conservation efforts and new development.

"We need to have development in Muskegon and we need to grow the economy to do that," he said.

"As these areas get developed, we need to do it in a way that's sustainable. Nature and business are complementary, they are not mutually exclusive."

### WINDWARD POINTE TO CONVERT BROWNFIELD TO NEW MIXED-USE COMMUNITY

Faced with the prospect of the Sappi Fine Paper Mill site becoming a scrap yard, a group of private investors rallied together to form **Pure Muskegon LLC** to buy the 120-acre property and transform it into an attractive waterfront community.

The landmark century-old smokestacks came down over the summer, marking the end of an industrial era on Muskegon Lake and signaling major progress for redevelopment plans near the Lakeside neighborhood.

The site, being marketed as Windward Pointe, includes over a mile of lake frontage. Plans call to redevelop it into a residential, recreational and mixed-use neighborhood. It could end up becoming one of the largest brownfield redevelopments in West Michigan.

The investors believe Windward Pointe will garner attention throughout the Great Lakes region, not only generating construction jobs, but enticing more people to live, work and vacation in Muskegon.

"It will be a community within itself in a larger community," said Wes Eklund, a member of Pure Muskegon and president and CEO of **Fleet Engineers Inc.** "This project, once it gets going, will draw a lot of interest."

Right now, the cleanup work continues and one of the larger remaining buildings was razed in mid February, he said. It's likely to be early next year before any construction begins.

In November, Muskegon city officials voted to help pay **DPZ CoDesign**, a Miami, Fla.-based waterfront design firm, to guide the vision for the site and develop a master plan.

Various stakeholders came together in December for a charrette to discuss ideas, and DPZ has formulated three plans that will be condensed into one, Eklund said. They plan to meet again in May to go over the options and hopefully move forward with one plan.

The three plans have various amenities and layouts, including canals, a waterfront hotel, marina, beach, cruise ship dock and glamping park. They also include buildings for commercial and retail development and more than 700 residential units. The housing stock includes single-family homes, senior housing, cottages and apartments — all designed with different looks but within a neighborhood concept and catering to different incomes and buying groups.

Redeveloping the entire site could take up to 15 years, Eklund said. Pure Muskegon plans to sell individual parcels to different developers, but there will be consistent building and design standards so one developer doesn't come in and monopolize the waterfront.

"It's going to be pretty important for the city of Muskegon and the south shore of Muskegon Lake," he said. "We've already seen property values go up in the neighborhood."

### DECOMMISSIONED B.C. COBB OPENS PORT TO NEW SHIPPING OPTIONS

On the east end of Muskegon Lake, another demolition project is tearing down the B.C. Cobb coal-fired power plant to leverage the site as the lake's main deep-water port and establish cross-lake shipping between Muskegon and Milwaukee.

**Parfet says  
municipal  
foundation model  
taking hold in  
Kalamazoo**



**Q&A: Mike Wall,  
IHS Markit**



**CLICK FOR MORE INFO!**

**Ludington city  
manager Shay  
appointed to  
Ottawa County  
deputy admin job**



**Mid-Michigan  
brewery to close  
Sunday**



**CLICK FOR MORE INFO!**

Last April, **Consumers Energy** paid North Carolina-based **Forsite Development** \$1 million to take over the property, decommission and demolish the plant, and handle environmental cleanup and remediation actions.

Asbestos abatement is underway and it could be summer or fall before the plant or smokestack start to come down, said Forsite President Tom McKittrick. In the meantime, the company has inked a lease with **Verplank Dock Co.**, a local terminal operator, to consolidate some of its existing Muskegon Lake aggregate operations to the Cobb site. Verplank leased a portion of the Cobb site for the last 27 years from Consumers, and it extends to the plant's coal pile area.

"They're working on the coal pile restoration there, on turning that into a working surface," he said. "I envision them to start shipping materials as soon as late spring."

Not only will the consolidation free up additional lakefront property for future development, but it will reduce the aggregate piles around the lake and truck traffic in the downtown area.

"It's going to help Muskegon in the future diversify its economy," he said. "Those commercial docks can potentially redevelop as mixed use or some other higher and better use."

McKittrick sees two main uses for the 115-acre Cobb site property going forward: maintaining it as a major port for aggregate delivery and developing a shipping market between Muskegon and Milwaukee. It's also important to maintain a million tons of freight volume per year through the port to ensure it's eligible for federal harbor dredging funding.

For companies producing products in West Michigan, the ability to ship directly between Muskegon and Milwaukee can save two or three days of logistics time in bypassing Chicago, he said.

"I do believe it will lead to some manufacturing or agribusiness projects in and around Muskegon," he said.

Verplank is in discussions to use the dock to transport several agricultural products, including grains and animal feed, and there may be a need for dry bulk storage facilities in the future, according to McKittrick.

"Aggregates are the primary product shipped out of Muskegon Lake, so that will continue for the foreseeable future, but they're positioning that dock so it can facilitate a wider array of higher-value products," McKittrick said.

Forsite continues to work with city officials — including formalizing an easement for the Lakeshore Trail that borders the property — and WMSRDC on environmental enhancement projects. Some of the ideas include shoreline softening and wetland restoration.

Right now, Forsite has no plan to sell the property and it will remain an industrial site, McKittrick said. The site is rather small and not suitable for building, but the dock has great potential and can open up a lot of opportunities for Muskegon, he added.

Forsite started reviewing the Cobb site two years ago and has noticed an uptick in activity around Muskegon Lake.

"Just in that short time, it feels like Muskegon has gained significant momentum with new developments," he said. "We're looking forward to doing our part to maintain and enhance that momentum."



Read **5955** times

**Steelcase to acquire Texas education furniture maker for \$145 million**



**Herman Miller acquires minority stake in Danish furniture company**



**CERTIFIED**  
SHEET METAL

**CLICK FOR MORE INFO!**