

Michigan

How \$200 million plans for lakefront site could benefit all of Michigan



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MUSKEGON, MI – A Muskegon investment group's \$200 million plan to turn the former Sappi Paper mill site into a mixed-use destination called Windward Pointe is big news for the city.

There's no disputing that. But a development this size could also have major implications for the state as a whole, specifically West Michigan.

Pure Muskegon LLC, the Muskegon investor group behind the development, plans to redevelop 120 acres of property that includes more than a mile of prime Muskegon Lake frontage.

The project, along with the planned demolition of the Michigan Steel building on Western Avenue and the anticipated redevelopment of the B.C. Cobb plant site on the eastern side of Muskegon Lake, is designed to reshape the appearance of the lake for the better.

That means more business, more tourism and ultimately, more money for Michigan and its economy.

"This is an extremely positive development for Michigan," said Wes Eklund, a founding member of Pure Muskegon. "This particular project is going to absolutely transform the face of the south shore of Muskegon Lake."

"It's pretty interesting that all these projects are coming together in a few year period. Those are three major industrial properties that are now going to be repurposed and when that's all done, really the face of Muskegon Lake is going to be changed for the better forever."



What's next for Windward Pointe development plans at old Sappi site

Muskegon Lake is one of Muskegon's biggest assets. As the largest deep-water port on the west coast of Michigan, the economic benefits of developing the port could be huge for companies throughout West Michigan.

The Windward Pointe project won't directly affect shipping activity but the beautification of one of the largest properties on Muskegon Lake certainly wouldn't hurt.

The development of the Port of Muskegon is one that is already being discussed on the city, state and regional level and will continue to be the topic of ongoing discussions.

There's also the reputation of Muskegon to consider. For years respected as a thriving, industrial giant, the city is now seen by many inside and outside of the region as an old factory town with a once-glorious history.



Investors announce big plans for Sappi site on Muskegon Lake

Developments like Windward Pointe could help to change that stigma and that's good news for people throughout Michigan.

"It's going to be significant," Eklund said. "And when it comes to the image of Muskegon as a dirty industrial town, that's going to change. It's going to be really interesting and fun to watch."

The statewide effects of Windward Pointe aren't just theoretical, though. Statewide entities have been involved with the project for more than three years including the Michigan Attorney General's office, Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Environmental Quality.

"This is a shining example of redevelopment and reuse of a massive industrial site, which in its hey-day employed hundreds in the community," said Robert Wagner, MDEQ Program deputy director.

"Through the Administrative Agreement, Pure Muskegon was able to purchase the property and work toward creating their vision of a vibrant, place-based project. We are pleased to lend our expertise and support to cleaning up this major industrial site and helping to revitalize the Muskegon Lakeshore."

Those state entities plan to work with Sappi Paper and Melching Demolition to facilitate the cleanup and redevelopment of the entire property.

The legal administrative agreement and property transfer between the parties involved will also trigger approval of a \$1 million MDEQ Brownfield grant to assist in the removal of the remaining smokestacks on the property.

If all goes well, the property could be cleared and ready for future development by July 2017.

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