

Cleveland wants to use dry river muck to create industrial park in the Cuyahoga River valley

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Plain Dealer fileRiver dredging.

CLEVELAND -- Mounds of dried river muck would be dumped and leveled to help create a large industrial park in the Cuyahoga River valley, under a unique plan crafted by Cleveland officials.

The city is working with the Army Corps of Engineers on an effort to scoop 500,000 cubic yards of dredged muck from dikes north of Burke Lakefront Airport.

The dirt -- enough to fill 154 Olympic-sized pools -- could be taken to a valley west and south of Pershing Avenue and Interstate 77, officials say.

That would be only half of what's needed. Cleveland seeks 1 million cubic yards of fill to create a 54-acre industrial site, with a project cost of \$18 million, said Tracey Nichols, the city's economic development director.

The site could handle 500,000 square feet of manufacturing and create up to 300 jobs, Nichols said.

"We're looking forward to attracting a large-end user with a lot of skilled jobs," Nichols said Wednesday.

The project faces a degree of uncertainty. While the Corps would bid out the digging and transport of dirt under a \$7.25 million contract, the winning contractor must furnish the disposal site.



SOURCES: ESRI; TeleAtlas
THE PLAIN DEALER

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At this point, there's no guarantee the winning contractor would take the mass of dirt to the Pershing Avenue site.

Bidders will know the city wants the fill, said Josh Feldman, project manager for the Corps. And the city itself might bid on the job, Nichols said.

State and federal officials see merit in the project.

The Corps won \$7.25 million in federal stimulus money to remove dirt from the airport dikes.

The removal creates about two more years' worth of needed capacity for muck dredged from the Cuyahoga River and harbor, Feldman said.

The Corps oversees dredging that keeps the river channel open for commercial shipping.

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Dikes are expected to run out of space for the dredged muck by 2014. New space would not be available until 2015 at the earliest, when a new dike could open north of East 55th Street.

A series of dikes there could serve as the foundation for a relocated Cleveland port.

"It's a cost-effective way to extend useful life of the facilities," Feldman said. "It will allow us to continue to dredge. The longer we can use our existing [disposal site], the better."

Estimated cost to prepare the site for development is about \$18 million, Nichols said.

That includes buying the land from ArcelorMittal and Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway; extending utilities to the site; grading the fill; and improving Pershing Avenue and a road to the south, near Heidtman Steel.

The city landed \$5 million in state grants for the work and would invest \$4.1 million from its Core City bond fund, Nichols said.

The city estimates up to \$9 million in revenue from receiving up to 1 million cubic yards of fill at the site. Contractors pay to dump dirt they excavate from construction projects.

Terms of a state grant call for the project's completion by late 2011. Nichols believes the project can be done by then.

"There's no site of that size that's vacant and available from the city of Cleveland," Nichols said.

The reuse of dredged fill to create business opportunity "is a really good idea," said Paul Alsenas, director of the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission.

Alsenas and the commission have pushed for environmentally friendly redevelopment of the industrial valley, under their Cuyahoga Valley Initiative.

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