



Steven A. Fisher is the executive director of the Washington-based American Great Lakes Ports Association. He is writing this column in response to retired attorney Harry J. Knudsen's previous column questioning a Muskegon port development strategy.

You can have both port and recreational development of Muskegon Lake

by Steven A. Fisher

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Last July the American Great Lakes Ports Association held its annual summer meeting in Muskegon.

Port and maritime officials from across the Great Lakes region came to the city and ... were impressed. Muskegon's maritime infrastructure is enviable: a harbor at full Seaway depth of 27 feet, seawalls in good condition, land available for future development, and most important - an engaged and supportive community.

These attributes should not be taken for granted. Crumbling infrastructure, inadequate dredging, lack of available land, community infighting - these are the daily challenges at other Great Lakes port communities. Muskegon's excellent maritime assets should be leveraged to expand commerce and create jobs, but this needn't occur at the expense of other activities.

A recent guest editorial -- penned by Muskegon County's retired attorney -- questioned the wisdom of future port development in Muskegon and argued that community leaders should instead focus on recreational uses for the waterfront.

This is a false choice. Like many other Great Lakes cities, Muskegon can and should pursue both.

Since the 1970's, every Great Lakes city has gone through a realignment of its waterfront. Outstanding examples can be seen in Erie, Pa. and Hamilton, Ont., Canada. In these communities local leaders balanced port development; construction of recreational facilities such as marinas, parks and trails; and environmental restoration including clean up of contaminated sites and habitat restoration.

Through a community planning process, both cities were able to rally citizens in support of multi-faceted waterfront redevelopment plans. In these communities

diverse uses coexist rather than conflict with each other.

Muskegon is doing the same. Important work is been done to "delist" Muskegon Lake as an "Area of Concern" by the federal government. Habitat restoration efforts are ongoing, and the Muskegon Lake Vision 2020 planning process provides a forum for discussion of the appropriate future uses of the shoreline.

Throughout the Great Lakes region, port development is being recognized as an economic development opportunity. Both Monroe and Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. recently hired port managers to develop cargo opportunities and create jobs.

Led by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, the Council of Great Lakes Governors has established a regional maritime initiative with the goal of leveraging the region's maritime assets for economic growth.

Today, port activity supports more than 26,000 Michigan jobs and generates almost \$4 billion in business revenue. Shipping has been, and will continue to be, critical to Michigan's economy - and to Muskegon.