

Benton Harbor backs off Klock Park sale

By LYNN STEVENS / H-P Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, November 4, 2003 12:00 am

BENTON HARBOR -- Before a house packed full of opponents, city commissioners withdrew a resolution Monday approving a residential development along Grand Boulevard in Jean Klock Park.

Commissioners had been scheduled to vote on the resolution proposing to "abolish the use of the Grand Boulevard Property for public purposes" and scheduling a public hearing for 7 p.m. on Dec. 8. The hearing will still be held.

The commission's Planning and Economic Development Committee met last week to recommend amending the city's master plan to allow selling 3.8 acres - 100 feet deep and 1,450 feet long - adjacent to Grand Boulevard.

The narrow street at the north end of the park used to be an access road to the Klock Park beach. It now ends at a pair of brick pillars a few hundred feet from Lake Michigan.

Grand Boulevard Renaissance L.L.C. wants to build 28 luxury houses on the strip of land over a seven-year period.

The proposed amendment would remove the acreage from public use as park land. No other changes to the park would be made under the amendment.

City Manager Dwight Mitchell told the audience at the City Commission meeting Monday night, "The park is not for sale. It never has been. It never will be."

He asked people to hold their comments for the public hearing Dec. 8, but many did not.

Rose Hunt-Redd, hired by former City Manager Joel Patterson to organize special events and promote the park, urged the Friends of Jean Klock Park, who filed a lawsuit in June to stop the sale, to help promote the park instead.

Carol Drake of Sodus said she has been working for the park, including spending four hours last summer picking up debris on a volunteer cleanup day.

She said Mayor Charles Yarbrough and Patterson both had ducked her questions about one element of Grand Boulevard Renaissance's plan, the so-called Southern Anchor parcels. She wanted an answer Monday.

Yarbrough told her he couldn't discuss it because the matter is in court.