

Don't develop BH's most precious resource

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Editor,

I walk daily along the pristine shoreline of Jean Klock Park and often throughout the entire park. At the north end is a two-track that leads east over the fore dune to Grand Boulevard and beyond to the not-so-worthless "scrub shrub." This is the proposed site for a new upscale home development. There in the rich brush, sumac and wildflowers live deer, muskrats, rabbits, turtles and harmless snakes, along with unique varieties of migrating birds too many to inventory. But the thrill of all is the sunlit glimpse of a gorgeous red fox flashing by. Some critters are curious but most are alarmed by the intrusion of their sanctuary. I've experienced these wonders on this natural eco-balanced 90-acre beauty in the course of any given day. But let's not forget the dunes themselves as they are all the Twin Cities have to call their own. What if they were lost? Can you visualize this priceless gem of nature so generously donated by the Klock family? What if this irreplaceable gift was gone forever, inhabited by \$600,000 homes? Can you visualize that?

There are ways to attract use to the "park" and make it financially self-sufficient and profitable. I'd like to urge all to take a look at Weko Beach in Bridgman. Weko is well-planned, managed and maintained, offering a variety of family recreational options. There are tent and RV campsites, cabins, a concession stand and small boat launch, all lucrative revenue resources. Its dunes can be accessed by impressive boardwalks and lookouts which are designed to preserve them by controlling foot traffic. It is an excellent model with ideas that could possibly be used to enhance yet preserve Jean Klock Park for its intended purpose. The "park" also has the potential to accommodate future tourism needs, such as anticipated passenger ferries. What a coup that would be! Connect the Twin Cities and its beaches with bike paths and trolleys for both residents and visitors and hurray, everyone wins.

A strong Benton Harbor would benefit all but it doesn't mean the city needs to sacrifice its richest natural resource to repair its deficit. There are plenty of valuable options that could be looked at. Solutions already in place are Her Construction's 50 new homes, future residential development of the market and flats area, and the recent acquisition of the M-63 M-DOT property. The harbor waterfront alone is a gold mine just waiting to join the booming condo and marina industry.

Some municipalities would envy the opportunity to be the steward of this magnificent public park. I hope alternative suggestions will be considered by Benton Harbor's officials. Please think twice before it's too late. Honor the Klock family covenant as well the City Council's own acceptance and dedication of the property in 1917. Do it for the children of Benton Harbor and neighboring

youth for their future enjoyment. Rewarding results of such an unselfish decision may very well be ones of respect and positive support from surrounding communities.

Tom Divis

Benton Harbor