



Park-abuse lessons hold import here

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To the editor: I attended the recent Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund board meeting to support funding the acquisition of the former south Denison property, representing two organizations, the League of Women Voters and the Kalamazoo River Sturgeon for Tomorrow. While the meeting went very well, there was another item on the agenda that should be of interest to our community that will likely go unreported.

Our neighbors to the south, Benton Harbor, gave an update on Jean Klock Park. If you are unfamiliar with this situation, the short story is three years ago a piece of lakefront property, long ago donated to the city as a park, was permitted by the state to be used for a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course.

The MNRTF stipulated that they receive annual updates. Three years later, with the course in full operation, they are getting the first report at their request.

We saw a presentation demonstrating a few economic benefits this course was delivering to a disadvantaged community. The course is part of a non-profit corporation which includes the Whirlpool Foundation.

In exchange, the people of Benton Harbor received several contaminated parcels which were to be cleaned up by the developer. These parcels were to be connected by trails for the public to use.

As mentioned above, the golf course is operational, but the work on the contaminated parcels is not complete. The course was designed with no connecting paths between the public park parcels, as required by the agreement. There are only signs warning the public off.

There is no inter-connectivity between the public parcels. They exist in isolation. Parking has been put in along the beach front on public property. The developers believe this is for the public benefit. Some residents see it as an encroachment on a public beach, not to mention the water-quality issues of building a parking lot feet from the water's edge.

Now the Trust Fund is looking for answers. The board mentioned this is not what they envisioned and want an explanation at their next meeting in December. The developer defends this as an unfinished product.

This story is an example of the narrow oversight received from our government. I saw a resort with golf course, restaurant, hotel and condos cloaked with non-profit status.

I appreciate our local area for its rural character and natural features. Visitors to our community come for the same reason. We worked on a master plan as a community with a very high level of participation.

The warning is to be proactive in working with government to defend our zoning, restrict building on critical dunes or any other regulated use. We must all be vigilant that rules are adhered to. Don't be passive; it could happen here.

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