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Benton Harbor Emergency Manager Ignores City Resident's Concerns

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On June 7th, 2011, nearly seven weeks ago, Benton Harbor taxpaying resident Clellen Bury sent Joseph Harris, Benton Harbor's Emergency Manager, a letter outlining his concerns regarding public access issues at Jean Klock Park. Mr. Harris never responded to Mr. Bury's letter.

"At a 'Townhall Meeting' Mr. Harris publicly addressed the limited hours of operation for Jean Klock Park that he ordered in May. He did reset the hours to reflect the requirements of the City Charter but I never received a written reply from him regarding the hours of operation or the many other concerns I stressed in my letter," Bury said. "Mr. Harris claimed that the hours he felt it was necessary to write an order for and publish on the City's website, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., were the hours that had been set by the previous city manager, but that is a falsehood. Last year's sign at the entrance to the park indicates the hours of operation are 7 a.m. till 10 p.m. - hours that were set last year by the former city manager and later extended to 11 p.m."

Further legitimate concerns of Mr. Bury's are whether the park will remain open throughout the year, if there will be sufficient public access to the park during the fast approaching Whirlpool Ironman Steelhead Triathlon in August, will the park be privatized during the 2012 PGA, and what will be done to protect the fragile sand dunes from the massive audience that will be in attendance for that week-long event? Most importantly, Mr. Bury questioned the possibility that Mr. Harris would privatize or possibly sell the entire park; a concern that is not his alone.

"Mr. Harris attempted to sell the water treatment plant which is inside Jean Klock Park," added city resident Donna Roseman. "He changed his mind but I am still not satisfied he won't if given an opportunity. I also believe that there is a plan evolving to privatize the beach and remainder of Jean Klock Park solely for the benefit of Harbor Shores. In their original drawings, Harbor Shores planned for a '*Harbor Shores Golf and Beach Lodge*' to be located near the entrance to the park, essentially renaming the park. I'm doubtful they have abandoned the idea."

Since Mr. Bury sent the June 7th letter a new issue has developed. On Monday July 18th, a notice was published in the Herald Palladium advertising that the public picnic area in the interior of the park that's located in the center of holes 7, 8 & 9 is open for 2012 reservations. The very next day it was discovered that it has been reserved for the entire 2012 PGA event, well before the notice was published in the local newspaper. Never before has the public been required to reserve and pay to use the small picnic pavilion. "The public's rights to the picnic area are dominant to those of Harbor Shores. If I'm not mistaken, if this is allowed to happen, both the City of Benton Harbor (under the control of Joseph Harris) and Harbor Shores, are in default of the lease agreement for the golf course in Jean Klock Park," stated Bury.

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