



Friends of Jean Klock Park
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September 13, 2006

The Honorable Governor Jennifer Granholm
State Capitol
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Re: Jean Klock Park in Benton Harbor

Dear Governor Granholm,

We are writing to you today to ask that you withdraw your support for the current proposal to convert part of Jean Klock Park from public parkland to a private golf course.

Our beautiful city park, **Jean Klock Park**, will be utterly destroyed by the plan for a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course as part of the Harbor Shores development. We love our city and want it to prosper. We also dearly love our park. Jean Klock Park has been serving the people of Benton Harbor for 89 years. It is one of the oldest parks on Lake Michigan, older than Michigan's state parks. This heart-felt, valuable gift to our city was made by forward-thinking, generous donors, John and Carrie Klock, who clearly intended this park to be a free public park *forever*. If a gift of 90 acres of Lake Michigan frontage were made today, leaders would be hailing it as one of the greatest gifts ever made to the city of Benton Harbor. Eighty-nine years later, that gift is still here and the park is still one of the greatest gifts ever made. It was made with the promise that Jean Klock Park would be here for future generations forever. Jean Klock Park is *our* gem, *our* lake frontage on Lake Michigan, *our* valuable public parkland. We have no other park like this. It is irreplaceable.

As governor, you have played a key role in protecting similar resources, such as Arcadia Dunes, for other, wealthy communities. *We invite you, we urge you, to play a key role in protecting OUR park.* Please withdraw your support of the plan for the Jack Nicklaus golf course inside Jean Klock Park. We ask you to look deeper into what is happening.

Benton Harbor needs this park in its entirety for our city's future. Jean Klock Park is dedicated to the children of our city. It must remain for our children and future

generations. We need our natural resources, our dunes, our access to the lake, *our park that in its entirety is rightfully ours*. Jean Klock Park is also a valuable cultural resource, one that is and can continue to be a tourist destination as a place for cultural events and can drive cultural economic development. The park was designed by famous landscape architect Jens Jensen, whose plan is still evident today. The exquisite beauty of that plan can be restored and rejuvenated by native landscape design that is true to the original plan. Jean Klock Park has been identified by the State Historic Preservation Office's Preserve America's Treasures project as part of a heritage trail. If a golf course destroys our park, this vision could never be realized. Other cities, like Muskegon, have successfully fought off development plans for their public lakefront parks, keeping public what belongs to the public. Communities all along the Lake have found that protecting their natural lakeshore and dunes benefits the long-term viability of their community. The same things you personally advocated for Arcadia Dunes is true for Jean Klock park: that protecting the lakefront and dunes will **"keep one of the most scenic and picturesque places in Michigan open for the public to enjoy for generations to come... This is not only one of the last stretches of undeveloped Lake Michigan coastline, it encompasses what makes our state a special place to our families and visitors."** (www.michigan.gov)

Many Benton Harbor residents do not want to lose the park. But they are afraid of speaking out in fear of not obtaining the jobs that the Harbor Shores project can provide for their families. Many did not come to the community meetings to speak against the project, because they thought that their presence would indicate their support.

We know you must care about our community and its future. You made a commitment to our community. But you must also be aware that the destruction of Jean Klock Park and its conversion to a golf course will cause strife, ill will and heartache in our community for years, *for generations*, to come.

The park-turned-golf-course deal is not a true gift from Whirlpool or Harbor Shores. The gift of Jean Klock Park was a generous gift by donors who had no expectation of financial returns. The Harbor Shores plan is an "all or nothing" strong-arm deal, a taking of our park. It is a manipulative maneuver by a corporate entity, holding our small city of about 12,000 residents, many of whom are children, hostage to a deal they think we cannot refuse.

To make the deal happen, the Harbor Shores developers have not been truthful with our community, our city leaders, the DNR, the media, the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund board and perhaps have not been truthful with your office. All along, they have told us that a water view of the lake was a requirement for a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course. **This is not true**. They now acknowledge it is not true, and make no apologies—they simply continue to insist they must have our park.

The Harbor Shores developers have told the Trust Fund Board that no one uses the park—and Mr. Geoff Fields showed the board an enlarged photograph of an empty park as if to prove it. This blatant lie is a disgrace. We use Jean Klock Park for recreational

activities of all kinds, for church suppers, family reunions, picnics, senior citizen outings, weddings, baptisms, school field trips, festivals, concerts, and of course general public use of the beach. The dunes are an important part of the park, providing a peaceful setting for these activities and an environment for our children to explore nature. Our city accepted and the State and Federal governments have invested over \$1.7 million in grant funds into Jean Klock Park to develop park amenities for those recreational activities.

The Harbor Shores developers are telling our community that their plan is an expansion and improvement of Jean Klock Park. This too is a terrible lie. They are proposing a scheme using the beautiful dunes of the park for three golf course fairways, claiming this will improve an unsightly parking lot, when in fact they occupy the dunes. Their plan to put a parking lot on the beach destroys valuable lake frontage. They claim they are expanding the park by offering small parcels of wetlands *inside the golf course*. This is unheard of. What child or adult resident of Benton Harbor would use such a space? This would not be community parkland. This land is their proposed golf course.

The use of Jean Klock Park for the Harbor Shores golf course would also create a tangible, physical barrier that blocks Benton Harbor residents access to the Lake and to the use of most of our park. This wall between the residents and our park will be real. It will be felt strongly. It will build resentment. It puts primarily golfers in our park. It keeps residents out. It shifts the use of our park for the reasons we use it now to elite, high-end golf. This does not serve us as residents.

The Harbor Shores plan to use Jean Klock Park for a golf course is an aggressive plan to take our park and use it for private benefit. The developers are holding a gun to our community's head, forcing us to agree to their taking of the park, in exchange for the promise of jobs. People of color should not be forced to choose between the environment and jobs. We deserve both. This is a grave injustice to our community.

This project is going forward without the public being fully informed or aware of what is going on. Those who did attend public meetings in August spoke loudly and clearly that they did not want the golf course in the park.

Two of us signing this letter are co-plaintiffs (among six original plaintiffs, one is ill) in a lawsuit against the City of Benton Harbor in 2003. In that suit, the plaintiffs sought to prevent the sale of park acreage within Jean Klock Park for a 28-luxury home residential development. In a consent judgment in Berrien County Circuit Court in 2004, *Clellen Bury et. al. v. City of Benton Harbor*, (Case Number 03-3430-CE-F) the Court allowed the sale of 9 acres of parkland for the construction of nearly all the homes (27 of the 28 requested), and ordered the City of Benton Harbor to permanently protect and keep the remaining acreage of the now approximately 73-acre park for public park purposes. The exact language of that order is as follows: **"The Court permanently enjoins the City from using any portion of the property depicted as Jean Klock Park in Exhibit C to this Consent Judgment for any purpose other than bathing beach, park purposes, or other public purposes related to bathing beach or park use, except for recreational vehicle park campsites. . . . The restrictions in this paragraph 3 shall run with the**

land and shall be binding upon the City and its successors.” The entire Consent Judgment is attached to this letter.

The Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment Inc.'s and the City of Benton Harbor's plans to use Jean Klock Park for the purposes of building three holes of a private golf course is illegal, clearly in violation of the spirit, intent, and plain language of the consent judgment. It is a betrayal of the community. The attorney who handled both the consent judgment for the city agreeing to this protection for the park, is the same attorney who now is negotiating for the City for the Harbor Shores deal.

We envision a brighter future for our city, one that dignifies every citizen of Benton Harbor, a vision that includes economic opportunity that does not come at the cost of surrendering our natural resources and recreational opportunities. You said at the Democratic State Convention in Detroit, when you accepted the nomination for Governor: *“This election is about two starkly different visions of our state's future. Will we have a Michigan that invests in its people to create opportunity and security for all or a Michigan devoted only to the profits and privileges of the few?”*

We believe the golf course using the park would benefit the profits and privileges of the few.

We invite you to come to Benton Harbor and visit Jean Klock Park with us, and see for yourself the *magnitude of our loss* should the golf course be allowed to destroy our park.

Please join with us to protect Benton Harbor's most precious natural asset and the key to the future of our prosperity, Jean Klock Park.

Sincerely yours,