



Import

Golf course to open a few holes short

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BENTON HARBOR — Completion of the golf course that will be the centerpiece of the \$430 million Harbor Shores development will be delayed until 2010, project officials announced Thursday. A week ago, developers said they could not afford to wait any longer to begin work in Jean Klock Park if they were to meet their goal of opening the Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course next summer. But when contractors met this week to discuss the project's construction schedule, they realized they would not be able to finish paving new roads for the park and course before winter weather arrives, said Wendy Dant Chesser, president and CEO of Cornerstone Alliance and a Harbor Shores trustee. Chesser said Harbor Shores will immediately begin to refurbish facilities and do landscaping in Jean Klock Park, as promised to the community. But developing the remaining golf course holes will have to wait until the start of the 2009 construction season, she said. However, Chesser said either 9 or 15 holes will be open for play next year. The three holes in Jean Klock Park will be seeded by July 1, 2009 and the 18-hole course will be ready to play in spring 2010, Chesser said. The delay will add more expense to Harbor Shores, because the developers have to remobilize the contractors next year when the original contract said they'd be done this year, Chesser said. "This continues to take dollars away from the community benefits." The developers will move ahead with other park-related improvements to show the community their commitment, Chesser said. That includes work on an observation tower, lakeside boulevard and refurbished bathhouse. "While delays are disappointing, Benton Harbor residents will look forward to enjoying the full benefits of the Harbor Shores project," Benton Harbor City Manager Richard Marsh said in a written statement. "We are working with all parties to ensure its speedy completion." Harbor Shores officials maintain delays were caused in part by two lawsuits filed against the project. One, a suit filed in Berrien County Trial Court by the Friends of Jean Klock Park, was dismissed by a judge. The other, a federal suit brought by seven Benton Harbor-area residents against the city, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and National Park Service, is still pending. The suit alleges that the defendants violated environmental regulations in approving Harbor Shores' plan to build three golf holes in Benton Harbor's only park on Lake Michigan. Harbor Shores is filing to intervene in that lawsuit. Harbor Shores has an agreement with Benton Harbor to lease 22 acres of the 73-acre park to build three holes that will provide golfers with views of Lake Michigan. Opponents insist that violates the conditions under which the park was given to the city by the late John and Carrie Klock in memory of their deceased infant daughter, Jean. Nicole Moon, one of the plaintiffs in the federal suit, pointed out that the Army Corps of Engineers did not issue permits for Harbor Shores to begin work in Jean Klock Park until Aug. 29, and work could not have started until then. "We will not be held responsible for the dismal economic prospects for real estate development in which Harbor Shores Finds itself," she said. "Nor will we be scapegoats for their inability to procure proper permits in a timely fashion." She added, "We're hoping that over the winter Harbor Shores will disclose its plans for the excavation of the dunes for the three holes of the park." Carol Drake, vice president of Friends of Jean Klock Park, said Harbor Shores made a smart decision by delaying construction in any part of the park. "Harbor Shores is aware of the consequences of their decision to begin work in JKP and understands that we have a strong chance of winning our appeal," Drake said. "If they were to start work and a decision was made in favor of the plaintiffs, Harbor Shores would have to make an attempt to restore what had been altered, which would be next to impossible." Harbor Shores had a choice to build the golf course outside of the park's boundaries but instead they chose to spend more time and money on trying to take public land. If they had used a

privately owned alternative land the course would have been up and operating today and no one would be discussing this."The decision about the fate of JKP is not over and we remain confident that the Friends of Jean Klock Park will prevail in the Michigan Court of Appeals."Chesser said Harbor Shores has had to divert funds intended for community benefits to pay court costs and legal fees for the two lawsuits.Contact Julie Swidwa at jswidwa@TheH-P.com. □

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