



Public land vs. private golf

By [Eartha Jane Melzer](#) 8/20/08 5:48 PM



Dune overlooking Lake Michigan
beachfront at Jean Klock Park

The final federal approvals have been granted for a controversial plan to turn Benton Harbor's lakefront park into part of a privately owned golf course, and a citizen's group that is trying to preserve the public park is anxiously awaiting a Friday court hearing that could either speed the project or stop it.

[Harbor Shores](#), developers backed by the Benton Harbor-based [Whirlpool Corporation \(NYSE: WHR\)](#), is poised to begin work on developing 22 acres of [Jean Klock Park](#), the city's Lake Michigan dune park, for use as three holes of a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course.

[Friends of Jean Klock Park](#), which has filed suit in Berrien County circuit court, argues that the golf course violates the deed of the property, which was donated to the city in 1917 and that it also violates a 2004 settlement in which the city promised to preserve the park for public use forever.

The plaintiffs have asked the court for a preliminary injunction to stop the golf course development while their legal challenge is in progress. Developers have asked that the lawsuit be dismissed.

Former Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer of the firm Dickinson Wright is representing Harbor Shores developers.

In a separate lawsuit filed this month, another grassroots park advocate group, Protect Jean Klock Park, is suing Benton Harbor, the state Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service in federal court for violating environmental regulations in their approval of the project.

More background on the controversy over Jean Klock Park can be found here.