

September 19, 2006

Honorable Jennifer M. Granholm
Governor, State of Michigan
State Capitol
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Granholm,

I am writing privately to express concern about your apparent position in favor of a plan that would destroy a city park on Lake Michigan for a golf course in Benton Harbor. I encourage you to immediately withdraw your support of the part of the Harbor Shores plan that uses Jean Klock Park. Continued support of this project would be inconsistent with your strong conservation record and your concern for Great Lakes coastal protection.

As you know, Jean Klock Park is proposed to be transformed into a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course under the plan for Harbor Shores. This historic 73-acre park on the shores of Lake Michigan has already been seriously compromised -- bulldozed at its northern end for a luxury housing development that was a misguided decision by city leaders and the result of a lawsuit. The consent judgment city leaders agreed to just two years ago, and an action also promised before the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, was to allow that development in exchange for protection for the rest of the park. Now that promise is at risk.

Benton Harbor needs assistance and the state's attention. The Harbor Shores project promises to bring much-needed jobs to the area. But the citizens of Benton Harbor should not be dealt an ultimatum that forces them to give up precious assets such as Lake Michigan parkland, dunes and recreational opportunities in order to get those jobs.

Jean Klock Park provides a great deal of recreational opportunities that are at risk from the destruction of the park. It is a peaceful park, used by Benton Harbor residents for activities such as picnics, concerts, weddings, baptisms, and cultural and family events of all kinds. The dunes are significant natural resources that deserve protection but also provide a buffer and peaceful setting for recreational activities on the beach and the entire park.

This is an irreversible decision. The transformation of Jean Klock Park into primarily a golf course, available largely to the privileged, is an injustice to the people of Benton Harbor. The use of the park for a golf course changes the park to one used primarily by residents for their activities, to an elite golfers' paradise. The two uses are incompatible.

Statewide values are also at risk. Coastal dunes provide great benefits to fish and wildlife, provide resting spots for migratory birds and reduce the impact from severe weather on the community. Municipal parks such as Jean Klock are rare in urban Great Lakes coastal communities.

It is important to note that this park was gifted to the community over 90 years ago in perpetuity for public use. If we are to trust that the many conservation easements entered into by the state itself in recent years for protection of sensitive lands will outlive this generation, we need to see that local and state governments respect and observe equivalent agreements from the past.

I encourage you to stand up for residents of the community and state who stand to lose a priceless park. The destruction of Jean Klock Park cannot happen on your watch.

Sincerely,

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