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Letters

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Why is Jean Klock Park all locked up?

Editor,

Last May Benton Harbor Emergency Manager Joseph Harris signed an order reducing the hours of operation at Jean Klock Park and restricting park use to summer months only. Mr. Harris' order was challenged, and as a result he amended his order, restoring normal hours of operation and year-round access.

So why is JKP locked up? The Klock deed says, "At all times (the park) shall be open for the use or benefit of the public." The lease agreement with Harbor Shores says, "Shall include the public use of trails and golf cart paths located within the Leased Premises for non-motorized winter activities." And the attorney general's charitable trust recommendations included the following guidelines: "Encourage public use of the park land on which the course is located during the off-season (and) Insure that the park remains open and inviting to all persons." And why would the so-called "centerpiece" of the Harbor Shores development be open for only one season? I thought the whole point was to attract people to live, work and play here.

It's been suggested that the parking lots are buried in sand and you can't drive in. Not true - sand management has been ongoing and the parking lots and drives are clear. Even if there was drifted sand, you could enter at your own risk and if crazy enough to get stuck, you could call a tow truck. There's other speculation that JKP is closed because of potential vandalism. Not a valid reason, as vandalism could be performed by anyone who walks in - bringing me to my next point.

The only way to access JKP is to walk in. There's hardly a park along the shoreline that is not vehicle accessible other than JKP. Roadside Park in Hagar, Hagar Park, Rocky Gap, Tiscornia, Silver Beach, Lions Park and Weko Beach are all fully accessible and are all being utilized. Someone recently said they believe JKP is closed because Benton Harbor residents don't use it during the winter months. I can say with certainty that this is false, and under current circumstances a city resident couldn't use the park because the city is too far removed from the lakefront for its residents to realistically walk to JKP. The only ones fortunate to walk to and use JKP are those from the adjacent communities of St. Joe city and Benton Township.

Because I have been personally involved and have long fought for access to JKP (www.savejean.klockpark.org), I find this unacceptable. Whether some agreed to it or not, the citizens of Benton Harbor lost 21 acres of public parkland for three holes of a privately owned golf course. What remains is still their land and they should have full access year-round. It is not fair to the people of Benton Harbor, not fair to the rest of us, and without a doubt it is not fair to the children that John and Carrie Klock dedicated this park to as a memorial for their daughter.

Carol Drake

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