



## Battle of Benton Harbor takes a new turn

**Citizens say lease of public park for golf course violates law**

By Eartha Jane Melzer 7/21/08 1:49 PM



Opponents of a plan to lease Jean Klock park to golf developers insist that building the course on private land would bring more benefits to Benton Harbor.

In the latest round of a long battle, opponents of a proposal to build a private golf course in a public park are suing the city of Benton Harbor. They claim that by approving the project Benton Harbor has gone back on a 2004 legal promise to preserve Jean Klock Park for the people of the impoverished West

Michigan city.

Back in 2003 the city was sued by residents who wanted to stop it from selling off parts of the city's Jean Klock Park for development. The case ended in a settlement with the city promising to preserve the rest of the park for public use forever.

"They have gone back on their word," plaintiff's attorney Scott Howard, who filed a Complaint and Request for Injunctive Relief with the Berrien County Circuit Court on July 8, told Michigan Messenger. "They are leasing 22 acres to create three holes of golf on a privately owned golf course and the lease is for 105 years. Residents of the city are now going to have to pay 65 to 225 dollars to access park land. We think this is absolutely inconsistent with the city's promise to keep it as a park."

*Continued* -Developers, backed by the Whirlpool Corp., have insisted that the Harbor Shores golf-centered luxury development will benefit

the town of Benton Harbor, but that the success of the project depends on the city leasing 22 acres of its lakeside dunes. Harbor Shores has claimed that in order to be a viable enterprise, the golf course that anchors surrounding residential and commercial development must include the stunning views of Lake Michigan available from the top of the public dune area.

State agencies and the governor's office have enthusiastically endorsed the project.

The plan has also raised deep environmental and social concerns and spawned a committed opposition movement, involving some local residents who have fought for years to protect the park from privatization and development.

"Even though creating economic development may be a good thing, that doesn't make this into a public use of the land," Howard said. He added that he feels the lawsuit is not fundamental opposition to the Harbor Shores project, saying, "[They could] look to develop the golf course elsewhere and have two great amenities within the city of Benton Harbor."

The Benton Harbor mayor and city manager did not respond to requests for comment from Michigan Messenger.

Reports published in the Benton Spirit newspaper indicate that Harbor Shores representatives are disappointed with the lawsuit and are preparing a response.

WSJM talk radio reports that according to Benton Harbor Mayor Wilce Cooke, any action on the project is now premature and at a standstill.