



Jean Klock Park fight not over

By Eartha Jane Melzer 10/23/07 5:33 PM

Governor Granholm's office and developers connected with the Harbor Shores project say they will appeal the National Parks Service rejection of a plan to convert a public beach in Benton Harbor into a golf course.

Last week NPS ruled against allowing Jean Klock park to be transferred to developers as part of a 530 acre project that would include 860 homes, an indoor water park, and a golf course. In a letter to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, which had already approved the deal, NPS stated that the park conversion would transfer the park into the hands of developers forever, that the land offered in exchange was not of equal value, and that locals had not had adequate opportunity to comment on the environmental impact of the project.

Liz Boyd, spokesperson for Gov. Granholm, said that none of the problems identified by NPS were "insurmountable" and that the Governor's office is "working aggressively" to address them.

Experts are divided on whether appeals are likely to be successful. Lana Pollack, president of the Michigan Environmental Council, said that while she is sure Granholm means well for Benton Harbor, her position on the Harbor Shores development is misguided.

Pollack sat on the Natural Resources Trust Fund Board when Harbor Shores first presented their plans, and she said it was clear from the start that Harbor Shores intended to fully privatize Jean Klock park.

Pollack said that the problems with the proposed park transfer are deep, and that if the federal government approves it, the people of Benton Harbor might have grounds for a federal lawsuit charging environmental injustice.

A Clinton-era Executive Order requires that federal actions not unduly burden people of color and people in poverty, Pollack said, in the case of the Jean Klock park transfer, "