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Contact:

LuAnne Kozma, Defense of Place: 248-473-5761

Carol Drake, Friends of Jean Klock Park: 269-925-4880

Friends of Jean Klock Park Write Park's History:

Comments to State Historic Preservation Office Chronicle Benton Harbor's 90-Year History of Protecting the Park's Dunes

Friends Group Says Jean Klock Park Eligible for National Register

The Friends of Jean Klock Park and Defense of Place completed official comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the historical significance of the City of Benton Harbor's Jean Klock Park as part of a Section 106 Review. The review is part of a conversion request for approval by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources because the park has been assisted with Land and Water Conservation Act federal funding. The Section 106 Review is in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Jean Klock Park, owned by the public since 1917, is a target of the proposed Harbor Shores development. Virtually all of the park and dunes would be taken for three holes of a privately owned golf course.

The National Park Service administers both the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the National Register of Historic Places. The State of Michigan makes recommendations regarding both park conversion and National Register eligibility through the Department of Natural Resources and the State Historic Preservation Office.

The Friends' sixty-page report chronicles the history of Jean Klock Park from its beginnings when a threat by a 19th century housing development led to the rescue of the dunes and lakeshore by prominent philanthropist and conservationist Edward K. Warren; the creation of Jean Klock Park as a preserved landscape dedicated to public use by Benton Harbor's most illustrious citizen and benefactor, John Nellis Klock; the park's association with the Dunes Movement and dunes advocate Jens Jensen, the Prairie School landscape architect who prepared a design for the park; and the continuing threats to the park, focusing on how the community understood, articulated, and fought for the benefactors' intent that the land be preserved as a public park and maintained in its natural state.

“The Friends make the case that Jean Klock Park does meet the criteria for eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places and that the proposed golf course in the dunes destroys the park's integrity and historic purpose,” said Carol Drake, a founding member of the group.

Hitchcock Design, a landscape architectural firm hired by Harbor Shores Inc. to assess the historic features of the park was discovered to be a venture partner in the golf course development. Its assessment concluded that the golf course would have no impact on Jean Klock Park and recommended against a National Register nomination by the State of Michigan.

The Friends of Jean Klock Park and Defense of Place challenged these assertions. “The shortcomings and inaccuracies of the Hitchcock report could not stand,” said LuAnne Kozma, of Defense of Place.

The non-profit park groups are considered consulting parties in the Section 106 process as a result of the discovery by Defense of Place of Hitchcock Design Group’s conflict of interest. Friends of Jean Klock Park is considered a consulting party due to its standing legal interest in protecting the park from development.

“The next chapter of Jean Klock Park’s history will be written by the Granholm administration,” said Kozma. “Decisions on the park’s eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places and a recommendation to approve –or not approve--this highly unusual park conversion will be made by the State Historic Preservation Office and the Department of Natural Resources, respectively. We are hopeful the agencies will go back to square one and re-evaluate the situation.”

“We are optimistic that the report will be a needed catalyst for the community, the developers and the State of Michigan to rethink the revitalization of Benton Harbor. Revitalizing and protecting the key features of Jean Klock Park— notably its dunes,” said Drake. “and using the park as part of a cultural economic development plan that focuses on heritage tourism and dunes ecology or installation of the Jens Jensen landscape plans for the park, would create a unique and authentic tourist attraction.”

The Friends of Jean Klock Parks’ Jean Klock Park report and an executive summary can be obtained by contacting Defense of Place at: luanne@defenseofplace.org.

For more information, visit the Friends of Jean Klock Park website:
www.savejeanklockpark.org

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