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BENTON HARBOR

2 groups aim to save park from golf holes

Friends of Jean Klock Park, Defense of Place file 60-page document with U.S.

Corps of Engineers detailing park's 124-year history

By ANN BURCH

H-P Correspondent

BENTON HARBOR — The Friends of Jean Klock Park and the Michigan affiliate of a national park protection organization have teamed up to keep 22 acres of the Benton Harbor park from becoming three holes of the proposed Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course.

The Friends and Defense of Place filed a 60-page document with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers detailing the park's 124-year history. The local organization is recommending the park be considered for eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places.

"We believe that as a consulting party we have provided ample and convincing evidence for this claim," wrote Carol Drake of the Friends of Jean Klock Park in a letter accompanying the document. "As a park that maintains its conservation value, Jean Klock Park tells a national story of perseverance of individuals, groups, leaders and philanthropists who came together to save and protect the dunes and lakefront resources throughout decades of threats and incursions."

The city of Benton Harbor, which owns the 73-acre park along Lake Michigan, has entered into a long-term lease with Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment Corp. so that the nonprofit company can use the 22 acres for its golf course.

Harbor Shores' developers have said the three holes in the park are key elements of the golf course and for its receiving "signature" status from Nicklaus. While the parkland offers a compelling aspect of the 18-hole course, it is not the only spectacular feature, said a key person behind the project.

"Besides the absolutely beautiful view of Lake Michigan, there are wonderful views from the bluff (along North Shore Drive and Higman Park Road) and the water view along the Paw Paw River that are all contributing to that signature or unique element," said Mark Mitchell, president and chief executive officer of the Alliance for World-Class Communities and a member of Harbor Shores' board of trustees. "The holes inside the park, themselves, are very important to the golf course design aspect and important for the project to move forward."

He did not directly answer the question of whether the whole golf course would be stopped if the three holes could not be inside the park.

Members of the Friends of Jean Klock Park are not against the golf course, but they do not want any of it inside the park. Drake said she understands the need for the city to attract tourism revenue to the community and believes the park should be incorporated into the Harbor Shores plan as a public park.

"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," Drake wrote in the report to the Corps.

"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," she said. Jensen was a noted landscape architect.

Federal review required

The two organizations filed the document in response to a letter from the Corps that sought comments about the historical value of the park. Because the city had received money from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund for park improvements, the National Park Service, which administers the fund as well as the National Register of Historic Places designation, must approve any work proposed within the park.

The Corps is involved because Harbor Shores wants to fill in a portion of a wetland inside the park as part of the golf course.

"The historical natural features will be studied to determine the historical significance of the park," said Thomas Allenson, who is with the Corps' Regulatory Office in Detroit. "This is part of the historical review process to see how the park has been used in the past."

In addition to determining unique or unusual natural features, such as the dunes, Allenson said, the review

process will look at aspects such as significant events and people involved with creating the park.

The review process

Recommendations for eligibility on the National Register, as well as the parkland conversion, will be made by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. There are many state and federal procedures developers have to follow to do the conversion. The SHPO is asking for a Section 106 Review under a state act governing historical land.

"One step in that procedure is (determining) if there are historic properties, either on the National Register or eligible for the register," said LuAnne Kozma, director of the Ann Arbor-based Michigan affiliate of Defense of Place. "If the SHPO agrees that the undertaking (the golf course) would harm those resources, and there's no way to mitigate the harm, then the SHPO would be able to stop the conversion process and the proposal using the park would not proceed."

Even if the SHPO found that the park is not suitable for the National Register or that the golf course would have no impact on the historic significance of the park, the SHPO might give clearance to the DNR to proceed with the park conversion proposal to the National Park Service, which must follow strict grant requirements of the Land and Water Conservation Act.

The Corps letter said the SHPO notified the Corps that Jensen (1860-1951), the landscape architect, prepared a design for the park, and the site may be eligible for listing on the National Register. Jensen's records were destroyed in a fire. The Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan holds the original Jensen design. But no one has been able to determine if Jensen was able to implement his plan for the park.

The SHPO instructed the Corps to seek more information on the park's landscape features to help determine the effects the golf course may have on the natural qualities or historical integrity of the park

No evidence
Harbor Shores' developers hired a landscape architect, Hitchcock Design Group of Naperville, Ill., to evaluate the 22 acres of parkland to see whether Jensen was able to complete his work. The Hitchcock report stated there was no evidence Jensen's design was ever implemented and the park is not eligible for listing on the National Register.

However, the SHPO said Hitchcock did not do a current vegetation survey overlay of the park and map the natural features against the Jensen design to reveal whether Jensen's design was ever used.

According to the Friends of Jean Klock Park and Defense of Place, the landscape architects are a "venture partner in the golf course development" because the company was one of the original Harbor Shores design groups and may have a conflict of interest.

"The shortcomings and inaccuracies of the Hitchcock report could not stand," Kozma said. She said the organization discovered the conflict when reviewing the Harbor Shores proposal.

Mitchell said he does not believe the park qualifies for National Register recognition because it does not meet the criteria set forth by the National Park Service.

"I don't think it will qualify relative to the site evaluation criteria," he said. "It requires a lot of work for a site to be listed."

Drake disagrees. She says there is a long, documented history on the park, with many well-known individuals and organizations that were involved with preserving the dunes.

"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," Drake said.

The parkland, initially owned by John Higman, was sold in 1912 to Edward K. and Charles Warren. E.K. Warren was a land conservationist who donated property that would eventually become Warren Dunes State Park and Warren Woods.

But it is John Nellis Klock, along with his wife, Carrie, who offered the most significant historical element for listing on the National Register, Drake said. The Klocks donated the 90-acre park to the city of Benton Harbor after buying it from Warren. The park is named in honor of the Klock's daughter, Jean, who died in infancy.

Klock was a prominent businessman and civic leader in the early to mid-1900s. He owned The News-Palladium and one of its predecessors, The Morning News. He was mayor of Benton Harbor and a founding member of the First Congregational Church on Pipestone Street and Bellview Avenue in the city.



Contributed photo

SOME 4,000 PEOPLE from Benton Harbor and elsewhere attended the 1917 dedication ceremony of Jean Klock Park.

History of park

These significant dates in the history of Jean Klock Park were taken from the document submitted to the Army Corps of Engineers by Friends of Jean Klock Park: **1883** – John Higman Jr., along with his son, Arthur, own 146 acres of property northwest of Benton Harbor, including what would later be known as Jean Klock Park.

1912 – Arthur Higman sells portion of Higman Park estate along Lake Michigan to Edward K. and Charles Warren.

November 1916 – City of Benton Harbor places bond issue on ballot asking for taxpayer approval to buy the Warren land. The bond request failed.

December 1916 – City asks voters for money to buy the land, and voters again turn down the request.

April 1917 – The city for the third time asks voters for money to buy the Warren tract, but residents again vote down the idea.

May 1917 – John Nellis and Carrie Klock buy 90 acres of the Warren beachfront land and deed the property to the city of Benton Harbor.

July 1917 – The park is dedicated as Jean Klock Park, named after the Klocks' daughter who died at an early age.

1917-1919 – Jens Jensen, a Chicago landscape architect, known for his preservation of Lake Michigan dunes, prepares a landscape design, including a topographic survey map of the park's natural features.

1920 – The Federation of Women's Clubs and the city's Chamber of Commerce sponsor a Fourth of July pageant at the dunes, which included hundreds of performers.

April 1923 –

A \$25,000 ballot proposal was placed before city residents to fund park improvements. The proposal passed, due in part to support from the Federation of Women's Club and the Kiwanis Club. J.N. Klock was Benton Harbor mayor at the time.

1935 – Benton Harbor Mayor Mervyn Stouck suggested the city build separate beach facilities and cordoned off a separate section of the park for "colored people." The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, various black city organizations, as well as the Union AME Church presented resolutions to the city against the mayor's request. The mayor claimed it was a misunderstanding. He said he was only trying to create a service for blacks. The mayor backed down, and the matter died.

1950s – A turbulent decade for the park. City officials wanted to turn some of the dune area into a large parking lot and remove sand to fill in adjacent wetlands. The Indian Hills Garden Club fought to preserve much of the dune area and, subsequently, in March 1957, transplanted 60 evergreens in the park. It was the first stage of a five-year beautification plan by the club.

1967 – The golden anniversary of the park. A May 6, 1967, article in the News-Palladium, titled "Big Beautiful Playground Has Lively History," said "the conservation value of the 90 acre-park would be valued over \$1 million," describing the park as "the biggest jewel in the city's crown."

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1987 – Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley

issues an opinion finding the city had acted improperly when it included the park in its Downtown Development Authority proposal. The Attorney General stated, "A unit of government may not attach to a downtown development district an unimproved and unrelated parcel of land where the latter is not contiguous to the downtown business district ..." It was also during this time the group Friends of Jean Klock Park organized.

1989 – City submits grant application to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for \$750,000 to improvement the park.

1990s – During the first few years of the 1990s, the city applied for and received more than \$1.7 million in state and federal grants, including \$50,000 from federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

2003 – City proposes to sell nine acres of the park

for residential lakefront development.

The Friends of Jean Klock Park file a lawsuit to stop the sale, which was restricted by the original deed by J.N. Klock. The Friends and the city mediated the case, eventually agreeing to a settlement. The agreement allows the city to sell the land.

The city in return promised to preserve the remaining park land for public use and to protect the park from commercial development. A Michigan court ruled in favor of the agreement, handing down a consent judgment preserving the park.

October 2006 – The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board agrees to allow developers of the Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment, a private, nonprofit company, to use 22 acres of the park for three holes of a proposed Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course.

December 2006 – Developers of the Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment project enter into a 30-year lease with the city to use the 22 acres as part of the golf course.

March 2007 – Harbor Shores development is waiting for final approval from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service for the OK to use the part of the park for a private golf course.

— Ann Burch