



September 10, 2008

Eviction trial of Boat Club starts today in Lansing

Jury will hear arguments over lease at city park

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For the Lansing Boat Club, the beautiful autumn days at Grand River Park may be numbered.

The club's future at the park hinges on the outcome of a jury trial commencing this morning in Lansing's 54A District Court.

The boat club has called the city's Grand River Park, on Lansing's west side, home since the 1940s. Members haven't signed a new lease since the old one expired in 1996, but they now are fighting eviction proceedings by the city.

"I'm sorry that it had to come to this," Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero said. But, "the land belongs to the taxpayers. This is the fundamental thing we're fighting for. They're operating without a lease. They're operating illegally."

Attorneys from his administration have spent approximately two years trying to bargain for a new agreement.

The city began eviction proceedings earlier this year.

The city wants a one-year lease in place, rather than the five-year agreements to which the boat club is accustomed.

Also, city officials would like boat club members to pay slip fees that would be higher for non-Lansing residents.

"We'll just have to let the jury decide," boat club member Jeff Venn said. "We have an existing lease and it has carried over."

Tuesday, Chuck Theroux, former commodore of the Lansing Boat Club, sat with friends, soaking up sunshine on the banks of a calm river.

Boats barely bobbed in the water.

"We're just enjoying this view down here with the hope that we'll be here several more years," Theroux said.

When the city filed an eviction complaint against the boat club in the spring, the club averaged 90 members who paid annual membership fees of \$100 a year.

Since then, the club has gained a few more members, according to Venn.

He said he could not provide a new count.