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Lansing seeks ideas for boat club property

Marina may rise from park

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With the right to evict the Lansing Boat Club from Grand River Park, Lansing city officials are hoping the community will share its best notions of what to do next with the tranquil westside property and its river frontage.

"Lansing leaders for years have envisioned something greater," Mayor Virg Bernero said. "So we're really building on that foundation and that vision, that grand vision.

"It's a unique and very exciting opportunity for Lansing."

Despite some criticism from residents and business leaders, Bernero is forging ahead with plans to transform a part of the 44-acre park into an urban marina, welcoming the chance to change an area sometimes seen as a private bastion into "truly public space."

A six-person jury ruled Wednesday, after less than 30 minutes of deliberations, that the city had followed the proper steps to evict the club from the city park on Lansing Road. The club occupies about 3 acres in the park.

While an appeal is in the works, Bernero said the city would officially seek ideas for new uses from civic groups, nonprofit organizations and other entities within the next two months.

For now, Bernero said he pictures an urban marina with more boat slips, rowboat rentals and a concession stand. He said he has no plans to kick the boat club out of Grand River Park until any appeal is resolved.

The economy might impact the pursuit of a marina or other development.

Economy a factor

Bob Hubbell, chief executive officer of Delta Township-based Coldwell Banker Hubbell Briarwood Real Estate Co., was part of a group that considered developing about 16 acres of Grand River Park, including the boat club site, into upscale housing in the 1990s.

"Is it developable property? Yes," he said. However, "my interest has faded with this economy, I can tell you that."

Tough times, the mayor responded, is exactly when Lansing needs to be thinking creatively about the city's recreational opportunities.

Former Lansing Mayor David Hollister, who testified during Wednesday's trial, said the park is a much

more viable piece of property since the Stadium District and other downtown developments have been completed.

"It's just a matter of time," Hollister said of future development.

Some residents fear the city eventually will permit condos to be developed on park land. Bernero said that's not part of his vision.

Any sale of park land would have to be approved by voters.

Focusing on appeal

Boat club member Jeff Venn said the club promises to have a strong appeal that will focus on the judge's jury instructions.

If the city wants a public marina so much, Venn said it should consider riverfront property available between the club and where the Michigan Princess docks.

"They don't have to take our property from us," Venn said.

The boat club has been unwilling to sign a new lease since the last one expired on Dec. 31, 1996. That prompted the city to go to court to evict the club.
