



PRESS RELEASE

County Council

19 March 2008

Mobile Home Parks Residents Facing Eviction

County Council seeks solutions for Mobile Home Park Conversion Crisis

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Reacting to the pending closure of several large local mobile home parks, the county council today called for a fast-paced consideration of possible incentives and code changes to protect the mostly low-income senior citizen residents of these complexes.

Mobile home park residents typically own their residences but not the land on which they reside. Rising property values and more lucrative uses for these parks have sparked a crisis for residents as parks are converted to other commercial uses and mobile home owners are forced to relocate to an every shrinking number of remaining parks.

“While state law requires that mobile home owners be given a one-year notice of a pending conversion,” said Councilmember Brian Sullivan, “these eviction notices result in a tremendous upheaval for these mostly older folks with few resources and few affordable relocation options.

“There’s a lot of human suffering that goes on in these situations,” he said.

Residents of both Mariner Village (815 124th St SW) and the Carriage Club Estates (13320 Highway 99) mobile home parks attended the council meeting and urged quick action. Mariner Village residents, for example, face an Aug. 31 deadline to vacate the property.

“Mobile home owners have property rights too,” said Councilmember Mike Cooper in support of the resolution. “This is a good road map to move forward on,” added Councilmember Dave Gossett.

Sullivan says he will introduce mobile home park conversion moratorium next week.

Sullivan said he will introduce a three-month conversion moratorium next week to give the council and the Snohomish County Housing and Homelessness Policy Oversight Committee breathing space to consider, at a minimum, the list of possible incentives, law changes, financing options and tax breaks listed in the resolution.

The list ranges from imposing “mitigation fees to be paid by land owners or developers seeking to convert a mobile home park to another use, to be used for direct compensation to mobile home owners, financing to develop replacement mobile home parks,” to “using surplus Snohomish County government property to build replacement mobile home parks, to “examining reducing property taxes for mobile home park property,” to “working with financial institutions to explore options for expanding access to conventional mortgages and to other financial resources essential to helping mobile home park owners keep their property and helping mobile home park residents afford to live in their park community.”

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NOTE: The entire resolution, including the above referenced list is attached

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SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
Snohomish County, Washington

RESOLUTION NO. 08-011

EXPRESSING THE COUNCIL'S INTENT TO TAKE ACTION
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN MOBILE
HOME PARKS

WHEREAS, mobile home parks are the single largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in the country; and

WHEREAS, nationwide, about fifty-five thousand mobile home parks are home to roughly ten million residents or three million five hundred thousand families, of which seventy-five percent are considered low-income; and

WHEREAS, in many markets, homes in mobile home parks tend to remain affordable, compared to homes on fee-simple land; and

WHEREAS, new mobile homes generally sell for about a quarter of the price of new single-family units, with median sales prices for new mobile homes at fifty-one thousand dollars compared to two hundred twenty thousand dollars for new single-family units, according to the 2005 United States Census; and

WHEREAS, an ever-growing number of mobile home parks are coming under threat of closure as cities, suburbs and outlying areas expand and the underlying property becomes increasingly valuable for development; and

WHEREAS, mobile home park residents are vulnerable to displacement because, although they own their homes, they do not own the land upon which their homes rest; and

WHEREAS, this expanding pace and scale of closures has sent thousands of mostly low- and moderate-income mobile home owners scrambling to relocate; and

WHEREAS, although they are commonly referred to as "mobile" homes, this is misleading because most mobile homes are not easily moved; in fact, most mobile homes are not moved again once they leave the dealer's lot, due to the high expense of moving and the potential for significant structural damage during a move, especially for older mobile homes; and

WHEREAS, even though most residents of mobile home parks are long-term members of their local communities, when a park owner decides to sell, the residents usually find themselves faced with eviction and few alternative rental space which would allow them to maintain ties with their local communities; and

WHEREAS, the county must examine the urgent issue of preserving mobile home parks in the face of skyrocketing land values and development pressures, while at the same time recognizing the contractual and property rights of mobile home park owners; and

WHEREAS, on June 1, 2006, the County launched "Everyone at Home Now," a 10-year strategic plan to provide safe and affordable housing to all citizens of Snohomish County and end homelessness in Snohomish County by 2016; and

WHEREAS, the county should work with residents, land owners, local officials and banking institutions to preserve and expand affordable housing for low income individuals and families and develop and negotiate solutions that will allow mobile home park residents to gain the stability they and their families need;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that it is the intent of the Snohomish County Council to address the issue of the displacement of mobile home park residents and the conversion of mobile home parks to other uses, while helping preserve communities and building healthy neighborhoods with engaged citizen leaders. The Council and the *Mobile Home Park Preservation Subcommittee* (sub-group of the *Snohomish County Housing and Homelessness Policy Oversight Committee*) will consider options including:

1. Developing incentives to encourage park owners to utilize the "Mobile Home Park" zone designation for existing mobile home parks and for any future mobile home park development;
2. Imposing a temporary three month moratorium on conversions of mobile home parks until research on outcomes of those conversions can be completed;
3. Establishing adequate mitigation fees to be paid by land owners or developers seeking to convert a mobile home park to another use, to be used for direct compensation to mobile home owners, financing to develop replacement mobile home parks, or the equivalent;
4. Using surplus Snohomish County government property to build replacement mobile home parks, with the possibility of using developer mitigation fees for this purpose;
5. Partnering with nonprofit developers, housing authorities or community land trusts to use public/private funds to purchase at-risk mobile home parks before they can be sold for redevelopment;
6. Offering incentives to mobile home park owners to encourage selling to current homeowners at fair market value of property;
7. Enacting local or statewide "right of first refusal" laws requiring park owners to give residents notice before selling and the right to buy the park if they can match the terms of the proposed sale;
8. Examining expanding the number of zoning classifications where new mobile home parks would be allowed;

9. Adopting closure provisions to the Code which would include requiring a closure plan and additional notice prior to the conversion of a mobile home park;
10. Studying current mobile home park density and development standards to determine if changing regulatory standards would encourage mobile home park owners to continue use of their property as mobile home parks;
11. Adding mobile home parks as a type of residential use that would qualify for low income priority permit processing;
12. Examining the possibility for reduced permit application fees for conditional use permits for mobile home parks;
13. Examining reducing property taxes for mobile home park property;
14. Examining possible mechanisms for mobile home park residents to purchase their residential sites;
15. Examining the possibility of allowing parts of mobile home parks to be redeveloped while retaining other parts of the park for mobile homes.
16. Identifying successful examples of nonprofit practitioners around the country who are preserving and creating economically secure mobile housing for low- and moderate-income families;
17. Working with financial institutions to explore options for expanding access to conventional mortgages and to other financial resources essential to helping mobile home park owners keep their property and helping mobile home park residents afford to live in their park community.

PASSED this 19th day of March, 2008.

SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
Snohomish County, Washington