

Sonoma County Community Development Commission Listening Session with Mobile Home Park (MHP) Residents

Topic: Sonoma County Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance (MHRSO)

Location: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Chambers

Date/Time: September 25, 2023, 9:00 AM – 11:00

On September 25, 2023 the Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC) held an informal listening session with Mobile Home (MH) residents in unincorporated Sonoma County. CDC does not maintain a database of MHP residents and therefore relied on MH resident advocates including Legal Aid, Golden State Manufactured Owners League, and Sonoma Valley Collaborative, to distribute invitations in both English and Spanish. Of the MH Residents that were invited to attend, fourteen were present. Notably, 6 residents came from 7 Flags Mobile Home Park located southwest of the City of Sonoma. After a brief introduction, residents were invited to step to the lectern to share their thoughts and concerns about amending Sonoma County's MHRSO.

The chief concern among all the residents was that raising space rent beyond a reasonable amount would be an undue burden on residents who survive on fixed incomes (Social Security, pensions, savings). One resident was specifically concerned with rising inflation, stating surviving in the current economy is hard because of the increased cost of goods and services. They stated that capping space rent would provide security to households on fixed incomes, and doing so was "logical and reasonable."

Another common concern for the residents present was the looming threat of homelessness they face with annual MHP space rent increases. Multiple residents expressed fear that raising the space rent will result in rates unaffordable given modest incomes, which would price them out of their homes and leave them without a place to live. "Where are we supposed to go?" was a repeated question by many residents.

Concerns about inflation, increases in MHP space rents and possible homelessness because of inflation have caused residents a great deal of stress, they say. Combined with reduced MHP services like regular tree trimming, fence repair and maintenance of park facilities, residents cite a significant impact on their quality of life and health. Further, while park residents work hard to keep their units and space in good order, such upkeep is expensive when residents can no longer physically do it themselves due to age or disability.

MHP residents also contend that MHP owners are generally making a very good income with healthy profits. The residents perceive owner's claims that rent caps will make MHPs financially infeasible are false. The residents also shared concerns that households speaking only Spanish are being bullied by MHP owners, and may be paying higher space rent than is allowed under the current ordinance.

As far as amending the current MHSRO, the residents felt that an annual cap of 4%, or 70-80% of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a reasonable request for an MHRSO update. Residents were concerned that the CPI used covers a large portion of Northern California to include the County of Marin and doesn't reflect the reality of Sonoma County itself. Overwhelmingly, the residents understood that ultimately a mobile home park is a business, and businesses are expected to make a profit to survive.

However, the residents are asking the park owners to take account for the “human element” of this issue, asking to “achieve financial equilibrium” with the park owners.