

Group helps keep manufactured homes in place

by Jamie Yeager

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FARMINGTON — Though more than 75,000 Utahns still live in manufactured homes, many are losing the ground that their homes rest on.

Escalating land values have led to closures of 20 of Utah's manufactured home communities over the last eight years, including one in Bountiful. At a recent seminar held at the Memorial Courthouse in downtown Farmington, it was noted that the majority of Utah's manufactured homes are sited in "leased-land" communities.

In these communities, residents own their homes, but pay monthly lot-rents to park operators.

"There are many risks that come with living in manufactured home communities," said Mark H. Lundgren, director of Utah Resident Owned Communities (UROC).

Rent rates can rise over time. Some residents experience infrastructure failure and the park may close for redevelopment, making owners pay for the cost to move.

Unfortunately, park closures have been devastating for many park populations. Many one-time homeowners need to access subsidies in order to remain in their homes.

Resident Owned Communities can solve these risks by allowing park residents to purchase their own communities, residents were told.

Francisca Blanc, a manufactured housing policy specialist from the Utah Housing Coalition, and Steve Anderson, president of Utah Manufactured Homeowners Action Group (UMHAG), explained the benefits of Resident Owned Communities to those in attendance.

Members of those communities will be able to create park rules. Decisions are also made by the group and are able to control monthly rent.

A co-op is set up to be democratically owned and governed, making housing affordable.

Resident Owned Communities can also help manufactured homeowners approach their community owner and offer to buy the community.

"We will help you," said Lundgren, "I am willing to meet with anyone who wants to know more about forming a co-op."

Francisca Blanc is a paid advocate to help educate the public and lawmakers on issues involving manufactured homes. She has worked to bring change in laws, rules and regulations. Blanc has fought to give manufactured homeowners a longer eviction notice when their parks close or redevelop.

"As an advocate, I have to present the best new law model that will protect residents and will be voted by legislators," she said.

Law now states that residents have to receive nine months eviction notice before a park's closure becomes effective and their rent cannot increase during this time. This gives residents more time to relocate, find resources, access other housing, and build community support.

"We need to educate our elected officials that preservation of manufactured home parks are in the best interest of State and local government and the community at large... property rights are a big deal." said Blanc.

If homeowners are informed that their community is for sale, they can have the opportunity to organize into a homeowners' association and work with nonprofit agencies to make an offer to purchase their park, as a resident owned cooperative.

Anderson explained how important it is for park residents to form their own homeowners' association and work to be apart of the decision making process, and take back control of their lives.

"As an individual you are not going to be effective," he said. "But as an organization you can be 'very' effective."

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