

Presentation to District of Sooke Mayor and Council,
15 September 2008
Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment/Closure and
Tenant Assistance Policy

Introduction:

Good Evening Mayor and Council.

My name is Linda Brown and I appreciate the opportunity to outline my grave concerns about the anticipated loss of affordable housing here in the District of Sooke.

Why do people live in mobile homes?

It is said that owning your own manufactured home and renting a pad in a Manufactured Home Park is the last remaining affordable housing here in Sooke. These Parks are especially valuable for young families with limited income to provide yards, space and protection for their children at an affordable cost. Living in a Park is an attractive alternative for middle-aged singles or couples who don't want or desire the expense of a large house.

Manufactured homes are perfect for our seniors on fixed incomes who are not ready for the retirement home. They have their independence, a yard with a garden to tend and neighbors for company and assistance. Many of our seniors have put their life savings into their manufactured homes as a hedge against accommodation inflation.

So where is the problem and what is happening?

Park Owners/Developers & Home Owners/Renters:

It's important to understand the definition of Park Owners and Park Developers. Generally a Park Owner just owns the land and receives rent from their homeowner tenants. However, a Park Developer is someone that actually develops or creates the park. Of course, someone can be a Park owner and Park Developer at the same time, such as with the Manufactured Home Park where I live in Sooke. Forty-one spaces are already being rented to homeowners and there is space for 41 additional units to be developed.

Homeowners who live in Manufactured Home Parks are also tenants – Owner/tenants so to speak. While they pay rent to the Park Owner, they also pay property taxes to the District of Sooke for their home

How Developers Make Money:

In the old days a Manufactured Home Park Owner/Developer simply built a park and homeowners brought in their own homes and set them up. But today, Park Developers

and Owners are more sophisticated so they use a couple of methods to make big profits when they develop a new park; they develop the land and place new manufactured homes on the site for sale to new owners who are forced to buy the Park Owner's manufactured home; or the homeowner is forced to purchase a manufactured home from a vendor of the Park Owner's choice. Either way, the new homeowner thinks they're buying a package: purchase the mobile home and obtain the rental space to keep their home on. The Park owner has made a profit from the sale of the manufactured home to offset the costs of the land development. There are many people that say this is immoral. I'm not so sure. Developers generally develop land because they want to make money.

And then of course most Park Owners encourage homeowners to improve their rental space. Build additions, outbuildings, decks and patios. Plant trees, shrubs and flowers – all at the homeowner's expense. This increases the desirability of the park as a place to live, so when a new homeowner moves in, the Park Owner can set the new rent to whatever he or she thinks they can get away with. Provincial rent restrictions aren't relevant for new homeowners moving in.

But what happens when that land increases in value and now the Park Owner or Developer wants to redevelop the land for a different use to make even more money? Well, they can just evict the homeowners with one year's notice and one year's pad fee as compensation – and this compensation isn't paid until the end of the notice period. Tenants are expected to move their manufactured homes out of the Park, and these homeowners face terrifying problems.

Moving your Manufactured Home:

There is literally nowhere to move your manufactured home. I know – I've looked. The price is prohibitive, and they sure don't want your doublewide manufactured home in a new subdivision.

Moving into another Manufactured Home Park isn't another option. If another Park Owner has a vacant space, they are going to bring in a new manufactured home to sell to make money. Why take your second-hand manufactured home? One Park owner told me that they can receive over \$40,000.00 from manufacturers of these homes for each home that is placed on a site for sale. Who can compete with this?

But lets consider that you have found a piece of land – are you able to move it? Many mobile homes cannot legally be moved and are demolished. One expert I spoke with advised that with all the new fees - demolition costs were horrendous. It's better to give the home away.

It's important for people to realize that manufactured homes are not the mobile trailers of the 1960's. I couldn't even find anyone in Sooke who was willing to move a 3 bedroom, 2 bath with den doublewide; not to mention my sunroom, greenhouse, garden shed, workshop and sun deck. Manufactured homes are large and complex structures and cannot be cheaply or easily moved.

Landowners have the legal right to do what ever the law allows them to do. But it's not morally right to encourage others to invest large sums of money for homes or improvements to these homes, and then evict them with a few thousand dollars to move their homes where there is virtually nowhere to move them.

Moving the people:

Where are the people going to go? Where are we going to go?

Homeowners have been forced to lose their equity so they can't afford to purchase another property. Not to mention, that they still have a mortgage to pay - but no manufactured home to live in. Renting accommodation like you enjoyed in the park is financially out of the question. Where are they going to go?

Seniors, with no ability to work or bring in more income, are especially vulnerable here. Where are our seniors to live if they're tossed out of their homes? Who is going to protect them if we don't?

So, when families are evicted from a Manufactured Home Park they generally lose their home, certainly their equity, and often they have to relocate into substandard accommodation because they can't afford today's high rents. And, then to top it off, they lose their community. The majority of Manufactured Home Park residents are close neighbors. Certainly in our Park we have a voluntary neighborhood support system that is better than any government program. We are like family.

City of Langford's Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment Policy:

In Oct of 2007 The City of Langford officially adopted the Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment Policy recognizing manufactured and modular home parks as an important source and supply of affordable housing in the City of Langford.

Let me just read a couple portions of the policy:

- That the applicant of any manufactured home park site undergoing redevelopment applications will arrange and pay for the disposal of manufactured homes that cannot legally be relocated. Can you imagine what this might mean to your 85-year-old grandmother?

- In addition to the mandatory payment under the Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act, wherein a payment of a value equivalent to the B.C. Assessment Value of the mobile home is provided to tenants whose manufactured homes cannot be relocated, or where a site for relocation cannot be found.

Wow! What a concept. Perhaps the City of Langford found that the loss of equity and financial ruin faced by the homeowner, while the landowner makes windfall profits was unconscionable.

Now some people say that the City of Langford is wealthy and can afford to take the high road to adopt this policy. I personally think that these people had vision, values and courage. They saw what was happening to their residents and the loss of affordable housing, and did something about it. I can just imagine the cries of indignation from the wealthy, powerful and positioned.

The implementation of the Langford's Policy took guts, and now, other municipalities and governments are following Langford's lead and adopting their own Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment Policy and protecting the interest of their citizens who live in Manufactured Home Parks.

Sooke's Affordable Housing Policy:

I've come to discover that Sooke has an Affordable Housing Policy and I have to say it's an impressive document!

The vision of this Policy as outlined on page 8 is "To achieve safe, adequate, and affordable housing in the region."

Article 4.4 specifically addresses seniors housing and I quote "Sooke's seniors have very few options to downsize from their traditional single family dwelling to a condo, or townhouse, or who wish to rent. Many seniors will have to leave the community they have always lived in, to find affordable housing elsewhere."

Mayor and Council, you have an opportunity to preserve what little affordable housing that seniors have here in Sooke.

I invite Council's attention to Section 5.2.9 that specially addresses mobile homes, and the Policy's conclusion that indicates it takes multiple, sometimes controversial, approaches to make progress on affordability Issues.

The District of Sooke has vision too! The Council obviously recognizes the importance of affordable housing and keeping our seniors – well, all citizens of Sooke - safe and independent. I'm sure that all of you can understand the importance in providing

personal and financial security to families who are faced with the possible eviction from their Manufactured Home Park.

The District of Sooke's Policy should Include:

The common objective of all Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment Policies I have reviewed is to protect against the loss of affordable housing and the interests of homeowners should the Park owner redevelop the site. They include fair compensation to homeowners for their costs and loss of equity.

Park Closure:

However, there are always those Park Owners or developers that find ways to circumvent laws, regulations and policies. So instead, they just close the park. The affordable housing is lost and the homeowner still suffers the loss of equity and community. When the homeowners go away, the developer just goes about his or her business rezoning and redeveloping the site. That's why I'm suggesting that the District of Sooke better the Policy adopted by the City of Langford, to ensure the spirit of the policy is followed. I'm requesting that Sooke adopt a "The District of Sooke Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment and Closure Policy."

I betcha this will be controversial!

Close:

I have taken the liberty of creating a draft of such a policy that addresses the needs of the District of Sooke. Please take this document back to District staff, planners and legal council for their review and comments, and be ready to present your recommendations in just four weeks time. It's not that difficult: Just take the bull by the horns. Make sure this policy is included in the Official Community Plan. Don't wait for an election and pass this problem off to someone else. Do it now. Should there be anything that I can do to assist – just let me know.

Your Worship and Council, I urge you to take this opportunity to lead the Province of British Columbia by providing a Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment and Closure Policy that is fair and equitable to all residents of the District of Sooke.

Thank you. Are there any questions?