

December 12, 2019

HEARING ON MOBILE HOME PARK SALES

Explanation of Terms:

Mobile Home: A “mobile home” is not mobile. It cannot be hooked up to a trailer hitch on a pickup and dragged hither and yon. It is, technically, moveable, but requires take down, a semi-tractor, and someone to move it to another place and set it up again. That is if there is another place to move it. Mobile home parks are becoming fewer and fewer. It cost many thousands of dollars and can be very destructive to the mobile home which was never meant to be moved about frequently.

A mobile home is considered a motor vehicle and taxed as such. It begins to depreciate the first day it is sold. Lot rent can not be taken off taxes as property taxes for a permanent home despite that people own their homes and may live in them for many years.

Mobile Home Park Residents:

Sadly, the term “trailer trash” has been accepted in the cultural vernacular without scrutiny nor acknowledgement for the offensive, destructive, pejorative that it is. It is often used in TV comedy sketches without apology. One would not call people “ghetto garbage” or “barrio bums or baggage.” These terms would be reprehensible and just as destructive as to classify a whole group of people and their children as “trailer trash” because of where they live.

I realize that no one is saying that here. Still the concern for people who live in mobile home parks might be greater if there were no social stigma, so the prejudice must be acknowledged.

So, who are the people who live in mobile home parks? By and large, we are like other neighborhoods of working and/or retired people. We are often families of children, disabled adults, the elderly, and low income. We are not by definition drug dealers, wife beaters, drunken louts, chronically unemployed, profligate wastrels any more than any other neighborhood of people. We tend to mind our own business, but if a neighbor needs help, the community will respond just like anywhere else.

I have been fortunate to live in an excellent mobile home park in Cedar Falls for over 35 year. The rules are strict and enforced, so it is quiet, relatively safe, and we have so many trees that a squirrel can run from one end to the other without ever touching ground. How many upper-class neighborhoods can boast of that?

Nature of Problem:

Mobile home parks are businesses and the owners have a right to buy and sell their businesses. However, a mobile home park is not a hardware store where it makes little difference to the customers if it changes hands. Nor is it a diner that closes for 2 months and opens again as haute cuisine with exorbitant prices. Customers can go elsewhere for nails or a nosh.

Peoples' lives are intrinsically tied to the decisions mobile home park owners make and they can not make changes quickly to accommodate obscene lot rent increases. These out-of-state developers – I call them carpet baggers – are more akin to people who buy apartment houses in the inner city, raise the rents to drive out the “riff raff,” then remodel, and rent at the highest rate the market will allow. I think this is called “gentrification.” No matter what it is called, the poor, elderly, disabled, and children bear the brunt of this “capitalist enterprise” without any of the benefits.

Possible Solutions:

It is important, then, for owners and renters to reason together to establish rules that are fair to both groups. Here are a few suggestions as starting points for discussion:

- 1) A 180-day notification period for lot rent increase
- 2) A maximum percentage of increase/year or every couple of years; i.e. cost of living, 5%, 10% or so forth
- 3) Grandfathering in of existing renters at current rates with the same limitations on raising the rent as in 2). The new owners may charge whatever they want to new renters, not to existing renters.
- 4) A 180-day notification of intent to sell wherein the renters may establish a co-operative to buy the park and have the right of first refusal

Summation:

I hope that a council representative of both groups, renters and owners, can meet with legislative representatives to fashion rules that are fair and accommodating to all concerned. Thank you.

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