

Saying goodbye to Falls Street

Residents of trailer park clean up for the last time at river site

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Eviction day is fast approaching for residents of Falls Street Trailer Park.

Remaining residents have until Sept. 1 to be off the property, and for some of them saying goodbye is difficult.

Among them are Cindy and Don Reynolds, who are struggling over changes that began with an eviction notice from the previous owners in August 2007.

For nearly 35 years the couple called the park home, their trailer looking out over the bend in the Somass River that leads to the old Orange Bridge.

"It's difficult because we liked the outdoors and our garden," Cindy said, who moved with Ron into their high-rise apartment on June 1. "Last night I just wanted to go outside with a hose and water the plants."

But compared with some of their neighbours, the Reynolds are lucky. The couple are among only three of the dozen or so trailer owners who managed to sell their home. The new owners came and whisked it off the lot last Thursday.

Only the concrete pad foundation remains, along with the view over the river. But for at least seven other owners who haven't sold their trailers, the future doesn't look good. There are no more places to put trailers in Port Alberni, Cindy said.

"We're still quite bitter," she added. "It was very, very stressful. It's a wonder nobody had more health problems."

The Reynolds' neighbour, 82-year-old Madeleine Williams, was also lucky enough to sell her home. The used trailers aren't worth much, but with the money from the sale and the year's worth of rent paid to former tenants of the park to relocate, Williams has options.

For now she's going to move in with Sandra Spence, her daughter-in-law, and will consider what to do next. First she has to ensure the site where her trailer once stood is clean. Together with her friends and family, Williams was out sweeping and raking on Friday.

"If there's anything on the site that needs cleaning up they pay for it from the money they still owe us," Spence said. "It's hard when you're 82 years old. You're used to your surroundings and you're used to your routine."

The way the eviction was dealt with still rankles many of the residents of Falls Street Trailer Park. In August 2007 they came home to find eviction notices stuck to their doors or thrust in their car windows, Cindy said, adding that she learned of the evictions when she saw a picture of her home and a story about the evictions on the front page of the Times.

While the Reynolds are now in their new home, there's still some confusion about the entire process.

In particular a statement on the eviction notice that says if the proposed project (the property was rezoned for 47 homes in a mix of single, duplex, triplex and fourplex units) hasn't begun in a "reasonable amount of time" the "landlord must pay the tenant an additional amount equal to six times the monthly rent that would have been payable under the tenancy agreement."

"What does a reasonable amount of time mean?" Cindy said.

The eviction notice was presented to tenants by landlord River Bank Estates Ltd. But a company spokesperson couldn't be reached for comment before the Times went to press.

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