

Park ruling favours landlord



The Seaview mobile home park location is part of a wider area coveted for revitalization. - Jim Sinclair

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An arbitrator has decided property owners are within their rights to evict mobile home owners from a Sooke town centre location.

With the decision comes a challenge to a manufactured home park redevelopment policy put in place last fall by the district of Sooke.

The issue, considered for some time, came to the forefront with eviction papers given last October 17 to residents of the Seaview Mobile Home Park at 6647 Sooke Road. The notices came with a year's notice and the acknowledgement that a year's pad rent would be payable to park tenants.

"We're shutting it down for financial reasons," landlord Jeff Zigay had said back in late October shortly after the notices were issued. "It's lost money for years with the huge tax implications. Now we have huge infrastructure costs."

Mayor Janet Evans had also weighed in at the time of the evictions.

"That whole area is part of our downtown revitalization plan and it's unfortunate those people are caught up in this."

The fledgling manufactured home policy states in cases of mobile home park redevelopment, displaced tenants must be compensated – either helped in moving or having fair market value paid for their homes by their landlord.

In this case the property owners claim that because no commercial activity is planned for the ground beneath the homes, no compensation is due beyond the 12 months' pad rent. This is the contention that appears to be backed up by the recent arbitrators' edict but hopes remain high an equitable solution may be arrived at.

Landlords' spokesperson Jeff Zigay said on February 18 the decision may be good news for his interests, but not so for the tenants. He expressed empathy for the residents and said he felt badly that they had lost time from the one year of leeway they had.

Zigay lamented the way financial circumstances had changed in the 13 years or so he had been involved with the ownership of the property.

"Property taxes went in '96 from about four grand to \$20,000. When you're making a real minor profit, even at the best of times, then you start taking an extra \$15,000 out... that puts you into the negative."

Zigay described as "out of the question" the idea of purchasing the 17 Seaview homes.

Ed and Faye Krap reside in one of the mobile homes as they have done for 31 years. Ed told the Sooke News Mirror he doesn't see many places to move to, or any economical lots. He's leery of going to another park where the same situation could come up.

Mayor Evans said on Feb. 18 the district was attempting to get a meeting scheduled with Zigay and his partners as soon as possible.

"The CAO (Evan Parliament) is away at a conference the rest of the week," she said, "so it's probably not going to be until sometime next week."

Mr. Zigay, that day, said although he's open to a meeting with the district he had received no invitation.

Although sympathetic, Evans says the matter is ultimately between the landlord and tenants, and that, contrary to some rumours, the current council had not discussed purchasing that specific piece of property.

As of Feb. 18 no meeting between the landlords and tenants had been planned.

The issue is expected to receive attention at the district council meeting scheduled for March 9.