

# Fairness for mobile home owners

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The B.C. government's refusal to provide better protection for people evicted from mobile home parks is creating unfair hardships for a vulnerable segment of the population.

Housing Minister Rich Coleman has rejected all requests for improvements in the current law, which requires a payment equal to 12 months' rent when a park is redeveloped and residents displaced. At a typical pad rent of some \$325, that means a payment of about \$3,900. It also means, in many cases, personal and financial disaster for park residents. The number of problem cases has been growing as more mobile home parks have been slated for redevelopment.

Coleman says the right of park owners to do what they like with their land outweighs the interests of residents. The problems are better tackled through municipal bylaws, he suggests.

Property owners' rights are important. But they are not absolute. The current level of compensation, though inadequate, recognizes the obligation to balance the rights and responsibilities of owners and residents.

The problems created for tenants by redevelopment can be devastating. Many have planned to spend the rest of their lives in the mobile home park and invested significantly in their homes, or continue to make payments on them. They had an expectation of security.

Eviction does not simply mean moving. For starters, there are few vacancies to be found. Even if another site can be located, park owners have strict rules on the age of units being moved onto an existing site.

In many cases, the structures themselves cannot survive relocation. Much manufactured housing is mobile in name only. If one can be moved, the total costs can reach \$30,000.

As a result, eviction can mean economic ruin.

That's especially true given the demographics of mobile home residents. Studies in other jurisdictions have found residents tend to be older, with many at retirement age. That in turn means that they are living on fixed, often limited incomes.

Some councils have responded. Langford, among others, has brought in measures to encourage preservation of mobile home park spaces and to ensure compensation for residents if they are displaced for redevelopment. Some park owners have also voluntarily undertaken to reduce the damage done.

But far too many of the people living in some 45,000 spaces in 800 mobile home parks in the province are not protected. In the past few years, some 30 parks have closed or are in the process of being redeveloped, including 10 on the Island.

Mobile home parks have traditionally provided a valuable form of affordable housing. More should be done to encourage their creation and preservation -- municipalities could, as Coleman has suggested, reduce or eliminate development cost charges for new park, for example.

And as long as they are threatened, the province should be acting to update the compensation for affected residents.

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