

Trailer park residents forced out

Some abandon or give away homes they're still paying for

BY KATIE DEROSA, TIMES COLONIST MARCH 1, 2009

Residents of a Metchosin trailer park will say goodbye to their homes today, forced out by a court-ordered eviction. It's a mass evacuation increasingly common as property owners shut down such parks across Vancouver Island to develop the land.

Yesterday, only a few mobile homes remained at the 24-unit park near Pedder Bay, some separated from front porches or additions and left freestanding in the middle of their lots.

Pieces of drywall, old furniture, bicycles and a wheelbarrow lay scattered across the property. Discarded objects were piled up and burned, partly to show the residents' frustration and partly because it was the cheapest way to get rid of them.

Jeff Parchem, 39, will leave behind the mobile home he has lived in for eight years, despite a written warning from the owner that anything left on the property will be moved at the tenants' expense.

He was going to move the home to a Sooke trailer park but couldn't afford the \$10,000 cost. "I don't have the money to move this or even to get a crew to come in and demolish it."

Parchem still owes \$33,000 on the mortgage and will have to pay rent for a house in Sooke, where he will live with his wife, Dawn, and three-year-old daughter, Samantha. "It's sad to leave. This was a beautiful community."

Tenants of the park were told Jan. 31, 2007, by owner Oak Bay Marine Group that they had 12 months to vacate their homes. That sparked a legal battle where, for the first time, mobile-home owners challenged the Manufactured Park Tenancy Act, as residents of several trailer parks across the province faced threats of eviction.

B.C. Supreme Court ruled in October that Oak Bay Marine Group was within its rights to evict the tenants and a March 1 deadline was set. Tenants were offered 12 months' rent -- about \$4,300 each. But most of that will go to pay for Oak Bay Marine Group's legal fees, totaling approximately \$57,000, while the rest will pay for the residents' legal bill. Oak Bay Marine Group will turn the Metchosin property into a seasonal campground for recreational vehicles.

Some residents gave their homes away or sold them for \$1. Maureen Bradley, who bought a trailer as a vacation spot in 2006, sold it for a fraction of its value. Many of the residents -- elderly or on fixed incomes -- have been forced into debt or bankruptcy, she said. "A lot of people are walking away with mortgages for now-defunct homes," Bradley said, who has been videotaping the ordeal in hopes of producing a documentary on trailer-park closures.

Last month, residents of the Seaview Mobile Home Park in Sooke were told they would have to leave after an arbitrator ruled their eviction is legal. And residents of the Ladysmith-area Ivy Green Marina trailer park -- also owned by Oak Bay Marine Group -- were served eviction notices in January so the land can be turned into an oceanfront residential development. Bradley said trailer parks are the only form of affordable housing in rural communities. "While the judge says what [Oak Bay Marine Group] did was legal, it was far from moral," Bradley said.