

Petaluma mobile home park residents facing 300% rent increase

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Residents of Little Woods Mobile Villa in Petaluma fear they may be homeless after receiving notices that their monthly rent would increase by 300% or more a month.

PETALUMA, Calif. - Residents of Little Woods Mobile Villa in [Petaluma](#) fear they may be homeless after receiving notices that their monthly rent would more than triple come next year.

The mobile home park on Lakeville Highway has nearly 80 occupied spaces where some residents have lived for decades.

Earlier this week, several neighbors received a packet of paperwork notifying them rent would increase by 300% or more.

"That's outrageous," said resident Darrell Pike. "This is greed, pure greed."

Pike said his notice shows his \$500 monthly rent would increase by 343% or more than \$1,700. That would bring the total to more than \$2,215 a month.

He has lived with his brother for more than 10 years and is worried the added rent will prevent them from making ends meet.

"I can't afford to move anywhere else," said Pike. "If we don't have this community what do we have? We have homelessness."

The owners of the park said late Thursday that rising costs is leading them down the road to bankruptcy.

"As property owners, we're seeking a fair market rent or considering closing the business before we are forced out," owner Nick Ubaldi said in a statement.

The City of Petaluma passed an [updated ordinance](#) earlier this year that capped the annual rent increases allowed by mobile home parks. The intention was to strengthen protections for renters, however, it has resulted in threats of closure in July at two parks, including Little Woods.

"I feel this isn't fair," said resident Christopher Brown. "They don't want us living here anymore. To me that is criminal."

As written, the city's [rent control protections](#) allow an increase up to 70% of the change in inflation annually. For this year, the change in the Bay Area consumer price index is 2.9%, resulting in a maximum rent increase of 2% allowed by the ordinance.

Brown has one of the oldest mobile homes in the park where he lives with his two dogs and girlfriend.

"My roof doesn't leak, my plumbing works, it's my home," he said. "A \$1,531 increase [a month] for a space rental is just ludicrous."

Brown said he has never been late paying rent and was shocked when the notice showed a 339% increase.

"I don't feel that I deserve this treatment," he said. "I feel like we deserve a fair shake."

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Petaluma City Councilmember Karen Nau represents the district where Little Woods sits. She has tried to calm residents' fears and said the attempt at extreme rent increases will force both sides into arbitration.

"The reason why the owners want to raise the rent is to have more revenue," she said. "They say their expenses exceed the income."

Park owners who give notice of a space rent increase above the maximum allowed are required to petition the city for an arbitration. That has happened in this case.

The courts will ultimately look at the park's books to see if a higher rent is necessary for owners to earn a reasonable profit, Nau said.

"We want businesses to thrive in Petaluma but not on the backs of our tenants, she said. "Especially our lower income."

Many of the residents at Little Woods are elderly, disabled, or have children. Most are low-income and roughly 80% are Hispanic and don't speak much English, neighbors said Thursday.

Ubaldi, whose family has owned the mobile home park for more than 30 years criticized the ordinance and said it allows no adjustment to rent for new tenants and ties the lower rent to the space forever.

"There is no safety valve for private business owners who are left holding the bag permanently subsidizing affordable housing for the city of Petaluma," Ubaldi said in a statement.

Several of the residents who pay \$400 or \$500 dollars a month told [KTVU](#) they're willing to pay more, but thousands of dollars more is not something they can afford.

"I wouldn't trade what we have here for a big house on the next block over," Brown said. "Leave us alone...let us live here."

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