

2 Petaluma mobile home parks threaten closure over rent ordinance

Residents of both Little Woods and Youngstown mobile home parks received notices after the city revised its rent stabilization rules. |  4



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Sheri Feinstein, Deborah Roberts, Kay Poland, Sue Sullivan, Laura Bennett, Jodi Johnson, Shawn Powell and Betty Hautzenrader are representatives of multiple Petaluma mobile home parks who campaigned for the city to take up the issue of rent control. Photo taken at the Youngstown Senior Mobile Home Park, Tuesday, June 6, 2023. (Christopher Chung / The Press Democrat file)

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Attempts by city leaders to bring Petaluma’s mobile home tenant protections in line with other Sonoma County cities has led to an extreme side effect, as two of the city’s largest mobile home parks are now threatening to shut down completely, potentially resulting in hundreds of local residents without homes.

Owners of both Little Woods Mobile Villa, a 78-unit all-ages mobile home park at 1821 Lakeville Hwy., and Youngstown, a 102-unit all-seniors mobile home park at 911 N. McDowell Blvd., have notified residents of their potential plans to close the parks and convert them to other uses.

“There often comes a time in the life of a park that a decision must be made as to whether it is feasible to continue operating a park when the physical improvements and infrastructure become older and costly to repair and replace, and/or the park owners conclude they can no longer economically operate the park based on measures taken by state and local government,” read a July 6 letter from Little Woods Mobile Villa managers to residents.

Due to such factors, the letter stated, the owners were “considering whether it is viable to continue operating the park as a mobile home park, and are exploring the option of converting the park.”

The letter continued, “While a decision has not yet been made as to whether to close the park, the owners of the park are evaluating the option and the park reserves its rights to cease business operations and close the park.”

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Little Woods Mobile Villa is managed by Harmony Communities and owned by Little Woods Mobile Villa LLC, which according to state business records lists Nick Ubaldi as the LLC's agent as of December 2022. The principal address for the owner is listed as Harmony Communities' Stockton address.

Ubaldi did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Meanwhile, residents of Youngstown received a similar letter dated July 7 from WGP Property Management that announced the owners were also considering closing the park, and had retained a firm to assist in the process.

"If the owner proceeds with the closure of the park, you will be given 12 months advance written notice of the date by which you will be required to move," the letter read. "You may be eligible for advisory services, such as referrals to replacement sites. Additionally, you may also be eligible to receive a payment for moving expenses and/or for financial assistance."

This announcement followed a letter dated June 22 that said the park would be changing to an all-age community, rather than being exclusively for seniors, and notifying residents of a community meeting to discuss those changes on July 21.

Requests for comment to Youngstown owner Daniel Weisfield and that park's WGP Property Management were not immediately returned. On Wednesday, Larissa Branes, an attorney representing Youngstown, provided a statement on behalf of the park:

"It is not clear if it is financially viable for Youngstown to keep operating as a mobile home park, based on a number of factors. A business that brings in less money than it spends obviously cannot be sustained. Therefore, the park owners are considering their options, which includes closing the park through the process outlined by state law."

Both notices of potential closure came after the city vowed to update its cap on annual rent increases for mobile home parks. Council members already have approved amendments to the city's [Mobile Home Park Space Rent Stabilization program](#), which was originally established in 1993 and capped annual rent increases at 6% or 100% of the Consumer Price Index, whichever was lower – but which now caps annual rent increases 4% or 70% of the CPI, whichever is lower.

The change resembles lower rent caps already in place in Santa Rosa and other Sonoma County cities.

On Monday, residents of both Little Woods and Youngstown filled City Hall to express their concerns over the potential closures, telling city

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Council members went on to approve the second-reading adoption of the amendments during the Monday meeting. An urgency ordinance had previously been approved June 19.

In response to the notices from park owners, City Attorney Eric Danly said during the Monday council meeting that he and other city leaders have been reviewing them, as well as the city's regulations governing mobile home parks and park conversions.

The city, he said, is authorized to regulate the process in transitioning mobile home park uses to other uses.

"It looks like some of the notices imply that the conversion process is not necessarily difficult and is in the control of the park owners, but it is subject to council approval," Danly said.

"Park owners that are looking to convert the use of their parks are required to apply for both a General Plan amendment and a zoning amendment," Danly noted. "They also have to provide a relocation impact report."

The City Council must then conduct a noticed hearing on the matter, Danly said, and if the council is unable to make findings to mitigate potential impacts of relocation on residents, "the City Council shall deny the application for the conversion, closure or cessation of use," according to current regulations.

In the case where a mobile home park's closure or conversion is approved, it would be required that residents receive financial assistance for relocation.

In late 2021, that process became crucial to residents of the Youngstown mobile home park east of Highway 101, where park owner Weisfield had [sought to raise rents by 40%](#).

In response, Youngstown residents mobilized to oppose the increase, and an arbitrator ultimately [denied the increase in a February 2022 ruling](#). It was only the second arbitration occurrence in Petaluma since the mobile home rent stabilization ordinance was enacted.

In 2017, residents of Little Woods faced a proposed rent increase of about 44%, but [operators backed down from the proposal](#) following public outcry.

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