

Mobile Mayhem

Eugene should protect its park tenants.

If the history of mobile home park closures in Oregon were to be written, the courageous actions by tenants at two parks in Clackamas County and by the Wilsonville City Council would command center stage. On Oct. 17 by a unanimous vote, the council passed an ordinance requiring owners to pay for their tenants' relocation costs, or to purchase their homes if they can't be moved. This dramatic enhancement of the state law was drafted by city attorneys to "mitigate the public health and welfare demands" created by such closures. To my mind, the Eugene City Council now needs to follow Wilsonville's lead.



The reality is that the 1,412 mobile home parks in Oregon represent the single largest block of affordable housing in Oregon and therefore need protection. Unfortunately, current state law offers none when it comes to closures. The Oregon Housing and Community Services lists 44 parks that have closed since 1997, although they admit their information is not complete. Many cities concerned about this trend were reported to have asked Wilsonville for copies of the new ordinance.

This new development would have never happened, however, were it not for the tenants of the two Clackamas parks – Thunderbird in Wilsonville and Willamette Cove in West Linn – who took matters into their own hands. They deserve our thanks because, in a democratic, grassroots action, they brought this issue to the attention of Oregonians statewide. They wrote letters to the editor, picketed prospective developers, lobbied their state representatives to get new legislation passed, and tried to secure funding to buy their parks. These brave folks are the Rosa Parks of affordable housing.

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Now the park owners are being forced to take a good look at their actions, if for nothing else than to counter a growing public sentiment that throwing these vulnerable people out on the streets to make a "killing" doesn't represent good community values. Clearly, they are losing the public relations battle. Today the two Clackamas parks for sale have no prospective buyers except the tenants themselves.

Roger Ash, owner of the Thunderbird, has predictably brought a lawsuit against Wilsonville. William Dickas, his attorney, complained in a newspaper article that the council was acting like a "sovereign nation" and is "not permitted to choose which rights of citizens it will honor and which it will take away." But the city of Wilsonville *is* sovereign and has the power to "fill in" where it thinks state law is deficient, as long as it doesn't contradict that law. Governmental bodies have always made these kinds of decisions in an attempt to balance individual rights with good public policy. It is a matter of fairness and equity that drives such decisions, notwithstanding the pronouncements of hired lawyers for the rich and powerful.

Ironically, Eugene was the first city to have an enhanced ordinance regarding park closures. Passed by the City Council in the early 1980s, it protects a handful of parks located in areas zoned industrial and commercial and on floodplains. The ordinance was drafted at a time when there were few closures, and its intent was to protect tenants in parks the city might want to move to more appropriate residential-zoned areas. The problem is that the figure it requires owners to pay tenants – up to \$3,500 in relocation expenses – has never been updated and is now entirely inadequate. In addition, it only applies to special categories of tenants: low income persons, disabled people and seniors over 70. Why shouldn't every tenant in every park be protected?

What concerns me is that between now and January 2008, when new, more equitable legislation could become law, owners will try to make the most of their existing legal advantage. This is already happening in west Eugene with the subdivision conversion of Hidden Meadows, a park with 102 units. Most tenants there don't have the resources to buy their lots, assuming the owners allow a mix of stick-built and mobile homes, which is highly unlikely. And outside the city, the possibility of new developments in Glenwood, especially if Triad/McKenzie-Willamette decides to situate a hospital there, will endanger its parks, adding to depletion of affordable housing in the metro area.

For these reasons, the Eugene City Council needs to revisit this ordinance now. Like Wilsonville, Eugene can make good public policy by protecting the tenants' investment in their homes and the stock of affordable housing in the city. If the councilors have the courage to do so, perhaps the county and Springfield will follow. Not to do so means turning our backs on this most vulnerable population.

Peter Ferris was a mobile home tenant for two years in west Eugene and now lives in a park in Waldport. He can be reached at bumpy73@yahoo.com

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEMON METH

Regarding Chris Pender's letter concerning meth hype (11/10), I would suggest his concern is a matter of semantics. Meth is a drug that turns people into toothless zombies since it destroys dental work. It causes overproduction of the dopamines in the brain that are related to sexual pleasure. A recovering addict is bereft of these chemicals.

The addiction is so powerful that addicts destroy newspaper machines and parking meters to fuel the hunger. They break into my car and steal my stuff as well. They subject their children to houses of ridiculously toxic chemicals to cook the stuff. And in some extreme cases they wander down the street naked and masturbating in January after tweaking for days (yeah, that actually happened here in Eugene).

Meth abuse is a most hideous demon that eventually affects us all whether it's through direct effects such as addiction, theft of property or indirect effects on local governments through taxes from incarceration, rehabilitation and repair of public utilities. Call it what you will. It is still completely unacceptable.

Davy Ray
Eugene



COPS AND TAXES

Commissioner Anna Morrison's downplaying county polling results that show a 70 percent preference for a business gross receipts tax (over \$250,000 income) reveals her trying to cherry-pick her desired sales tax solution for law enforcement funding.

Granted, public safety poses deadly serious and complex issues. But politicians like Morrison who make a habit of disregarding citizens' feelings on local issues (such as the brazen effort to log and develop key sections of the 80-acre dunes parcel across from Old Town Florence) shouldn't be surprised to encounter public resistance when they come asking for more taxes.

Commissioners should also serve as goodwill ambassadors from county government. The efforts of far west Lane residents to carve Siuslaw County out of Lane County should have sent a signal that there is a huge disconnect between area voters and a commissioner who ranges from remote to downright hostile to local concerns.

Why else would residents of areas like Indian Creek outside of Mapleton have formed a citizen militia to combat burglary? Who ya gonna call? An absent commissioner or sheriff's based in Eugene? Particularly when that commissioner voted against monies for an additional deputy for the rural areas.

Before we're asked to pony up for a sales tax, Morrison should re-think her sales pitch.

Leo Ellingson
Florence

DEATH BY VOLVO

I saw you, but I guess you didn't see me, as you turned directly in front of me and nearly caused my death. Me — law-abiding cyclist in bright yellow rain gear. You — spaced out hippy in blue Volvo. Nice stickers! I almost died.

You want to save the planet? Maybe you should stop driving a damn car, you lazy bum!

Taylor Pierson
Eugene

SCUMBAG ECONOMY

In response to the Nov. 23 letter "Meth Nightmare": The solution to the drug problem always has been and always will be very simple. The state and federal legislatures have the power to substantially stop the drug trade anytime they want.

Anyone convicted of manufacturing, distributing or selling certain substances would receive a mandatory life sentence without parole (to be served in a federal prison in the desert of New Mexico without air condition-