

Mobile home rent law ripped

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Proposed revisions to Capitola's mobile home park rent-control ordinance drew sharp criticism last night from both park residents and owners.

The City Council last night agreed to study the revisions one last time. The study session will be Jan. 15, followed by a public hearing on Jan. 22.

"We have to be prepared to make our decision at that time," Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan said.

Mayor Bob Bucher said the council may have to act under the old ordinance if a new one is not adopted soon after Jan. 1, when annual rent increases are calculated.

Councilman Jerry Clarke called testimony given by Meg Miranda, a representative of the park owners' Western Mobile Home Association, "a mega-step backwards."

Miranda had objected to a number of provisions in the ordinance, as well as much of the wording, including a reference to "a shortage of spaces for the location of mobile homes, resulting in a low vacancy rate and rising space rents."

If there is such a shortage of spaces, she said in reference to the city-owned Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park, "Why then are you turning 81 spaces into a parking lot?"

Clarke said her comments indicated park owners were returning to their original stand of refusing to recognize the ordinance, rather than cooperating to revise it.

Park owner Jeff Doney said, "Owners are presently being treated unfairly, and the new ordinance damages them even further."

A major change in the ordinance would authorize the City Council to hire a hearing officer to serve in place of the rent review board. That change was sparked by the fact that many disputes heard by the board were appealed to the council.

Miranda complained that wording was vague regarding when the officer would actually hear disputes.

She also said it was "imperative" owners be allowed to raise space rents above the amount allowed by the ordinance when residents move out of a park and new residents move in. As things stand now, park residents reap all the benefits of space value while "owners are not allowed a fair return on their land."

Judging from testimony, residents weren't any happier about the proposed ordinance revisions than the owners.

Resident B.J. Steiner said rent increases should be figured according to a formula based on no more than 50 percent of the Consumer Price Index. The new ordinance would increase that figure to 60 percent.

Repairs should be paid for by the park owner out of the rent increases based on that formula, rather than comprising an additional expense charged to residents, Steiner said. Also, tax increases resulting from sale of a park should be prohibited.

"We as tenants are not satisfied with this ordinance in its present form...We didn't really start understanding it until two or three days ago," Steiner said.

"And as far as we can see, rents are going to be more under this ordinance than under the old ordinance."

REFERENC

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