

Public Engagement

City staff hosted several virtual meetings with mobile and manufactured home park (MHP) owners and residents in May 2022 to share updates on MHP preservation efforts and to solicit feedback regarding near-term preservation strategies. In each meeting, staff gave a 20-minute presentation describing key preservation techniques that have been successful in Washington and around the country. An overview of these techniques is provided below along with summaries from the discussion portion of each meeting. In total, nearly 50 residents and owners participated in the 1-hour virtual meetings.

Preservation Strategies

MHP Overlay District

The intent of a MHP overlay district is to preserve existing MHPs through additional zoning protections. An overlay district would create special zoned areas that sit on top of the base zoning and specifically regulate allowed uses. Typically, MHP overlay districts limit uses to MHPs, while allowing a variety of other uses. Overlay districts are considered additive, meaning they provide additional regulations or protections on top of the base zoning so there is less risk of redevelopment in the future. An overlay district could apply to some or all of the existing MHPs, and City Council will be the final decision maker later this year.

Expanded Notice of Sale and Tenant Opportunity to Purchase (TOPO) Requirements

While the state of Washington does require that MHP owners notify all residents if they intend to sell their property, owners are not required to share the price, terms and conditions which they have conditionally accepted or intend to accept. Including these additional noticing requirements, along with TOPO requirements, has been a highly successful technique in resident acquisition of MHPs around the country.

Effective expanded notice of sale and TOPO ordinances typically require MHP owners to notify residents of an impending sale and give residents an additional 90 days to submit a proposed purchase and sale agreement. After this period, MHP owners shall engage in good faith negotiations with residents and can either accept or deny the offer. If an owner accepts the offer, residents typically have an additional 90 days to obtain any necessary financing or guarantees and close on the purchase.

This technique has proven successful because, without these specific regulations, MHP properties are often sold “off the market” and residents are not made aware of a potential sale until after a park owner has negotiated with a prospective buyer.

Summary of May 10 Owner Meeting Q&A + Comments

Seven MHP owners or representatives, along with several residents, attended the Owner Meeting on May 10. Several owners expressed interest in long term preservation and suggested the City also explore ways to reduce barriers to build new MHPs. One owner mentioned barriers they faced related to wetland impacts when trying to develop a new MHP in another jurisdiction. Two owners expressed concerns around the potential of a MHP overlay district reducing property rights for owners. One owner commented that the potential 90-day opportunity to purchase timeline could be burdensome for owners. A question came up regarding which parks will be included in the overlay district, and staff explained that this decision will be determined by City Council based on Planning Commission recommendations. Underlying zoning and ownership structure are two factors that both the Planning

Commission and City Council will consider when evaluating which existing MHPs to include in an overlay district.

Summary of May 16 and May 17 Resident Meetings

13 residents from Bakerview Mobile Estates, James St. Estates, Maplewood Park, Mill Wheel Park, and Samish Mobile Home Park attended the May 16th meeting. 29 residents from Lakeway Mobile Estates, South End Mobile Estates, Cresthaven MH & RV Park, Parkway Village, and Robin Lane Mobile Home Park attended the May 17th meeting.

Meeting participants expressed general interest in the use of an overlay district. Some expressed interest in collectively purchasing their park if that option became available, but many expressed concerns around feasibility due to the high cost of land and housing in Bellingham. Staff referenced the organization, [Resident Owned Communities NW](#) as a resource for residents interested in MHP acquisition. Currently, the City does not have a program in place to help low-income MHP residents with down-payment assistance.

Several residents described how many manufactured homes in Bellingham are quite old and would be difficult and costly to move if a park closed. Staff referenced the [Department of Commerce Relocation Assistance webpage](#) as a resource to learn more about MHP closure noticing requirements and relocation assistance options. In addition, residents expressed concerns around rent increases at their MHPs, and staff highlighted that the proposed preservation strategies would not address rent increases due to a [state law prohibiting rent control](#). Several residents also asked questions around current notice of sale requirements and how these are enforced. One resident cited a lack of notice when Bakerview MHP was sold several years ago.

Residents shared other potential ideas related to MHP preservation, including the establishment of non-profits to run MHPs and help resident-owned communities; MHPs partnering with the USDA to qualify residents for funding for home loans and repairs (note: this would only be possible in areas outside of Bellingham City limits defined as rural by the USDA); and lastly, expanding areas where MHPs could be built.

Next Steps:

Planning Commission Public Hearing: 6/16/22

Residents and owners are welcome to send public comment to the Planning Commission by email at planningcommission@cob.org. More details about the 6/16/22 Planning Commission public hearing can be found on the [Planning Commission webpage](#).