

NEWS: HUNTINGTON BEACH

Senior Mobile Home Rental Assistance Program Coming to Huntington Beach; Is it Enough?



BY HOSAM ELATTAR

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On Monday, June 6, residents of Skandia in Huntington Beach, Calif. stood on the sidewalk in front of their mobile homes as they rallied against recent rent increases.

Facing rent increases, senior mobile home owners in Huntington Beach living on tight incomes at Skandia Mobile Home Park have been asking their elected city council members for help, while many fear they will lose the homes they planned to spend the rest of their lives in.

They have routinely been showing up to city council meetings – often dressed in red t-shirts with “Save Our Seniors” printed on them – calling on council members to put a measure on the November ballot asking voters to decide on a new law that would stop rent hikes at mobile home parks like theirs across the city.

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But council members refused to even publicly discuss putting such a measure on the ballot, despite a recommendation from the city's Mobile Home Advisory Board to do so.

[[Read: Huntington Beach Seniors Hit Roadblocks in Fight For Rent Relief](#)]

Instead they're looking to help the residents in another way.

At their Tuesday meeting, Huntington Beach City Council members voted unanimously to approve a rental assistance program for eligible seniors at mobile home parks.

"I know this isn't a panacea to the rental increases that our own folks had been seeking. But it does potentially buy us some time for those that are in extreme need that are going to be out in the street with rental increases," said Councilman Dan Kalmick at Tuesday's city council meeting.

Kalmick and Councilwoman Natalie Moser first proposed the program in June.

Meanwhile, local mobile home park owners like Chris Houser have spoken against the proposed ballot measure from residents, saying they need to cover their increasing costs.

"Residents want to limit their increase in rent but who is going to put limits on the increase to our expenses? Our expenses climb every year with insurance, employment and ever-increasing maintenance costs," he said back at a city council meeting in February.

Houser owns Rancho Del Rey mobile home park and sits on the Mobile Home Advisory Board.

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Skandia Mobile Home Park on Monday, June 6.

While residents and members of the Mobile Home Advisory Board on Tuesday spoke in support of the program, they made it clear that the program was not enough.

Carol Rohr, a Skandia resident and leader in the push for a ballot measure, called the program a good first step at Tuesday's meeting and said more needed to be done.

"It is still a token attempt to offset the space rent spiking going on in our mobile home community," she said. "There should be further efforts to come up with safeguards for the mobile home community that is being victimized on a regular basis. There are many residents who may not qualify for this assistance program but who are still at risk."

Skandia, the park where she lives, is home to veterans and seniors who live on fixed incomes from their pensions and social security they use for groceries, medical expenses and upkeep of their houses as homeowners.

Incoming Rent Hikes Push Organizing Efforts

Even though they own their homes, they pay rent for the space their houses occupy in the park.

The seniors were informed that those rents would go up \$75 a month annually for the next three years after the park fell under new ownership, Investment Property Group, last August.

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So Rohr and other residents began organizing in an attempt to get city officials to put an ordinance against rent hikes for mobile homes like theirs on this year's ballot.

They have started the Huntington Beach Mobile Home Resident Coalition which Rohr publicly said Tuesday has 500 members and counting.

[Read: [Huntington Beach Mobile Home Residents Rally Against Skyrocketing Rents, Call on City and Voters to Intervene](#)]



On Monday, June 6, residents of Skandia in Huntington Beach, Calif. stood on the sidewalk in front of their mobile homes as they rallied against recent rent increases.

This isn't the first time senior mobile home residents in Orange County have called on elected city officials to help them address rent hikes.

Residents at Rancho La Paz park – which straddles both Anaheim and Fullerton – turned to Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva (D-Fullerton) to get a state rent control law as they faced rent increases after a new owner bought the park.

Last year, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill crafted by Quirk-Silva to stop steep rent increases at mobile parks – but the final version of the bill was watered down after the Assemblywoman told Voice of OC she had to make a series of amendments to her legislation after a wave of opposition from interest groups.

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of a 5% rent increase annually.

That means it doesn't apply to Skandia Mobile Home residents.

[\[Read: OC Mobile Home Park Seniors Win Rent Relief After Two Years of Activism\]](#)

Funding and Criteria for Mobile Home Rent Assistance Program

The new program would be funded through the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development's **[Home Investment Partnership Program federal grant](#)** given to state and local governments which can be used for direct rental assistance for low income residents for up to 2 years.

The city already offers a **[similar program](#)** through HOME Funds for people who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless and has \$391,000 leftover from the grant, which can be allocated to fund the mobile home rental assistance program.

The Housing and Urban Development department (HUD) requires a housing quality standards inspection be done before a resident can qualify for the assistance.

Federal Community Development Block Grant money can be used to administer the program as well as to help residents pass the HUD inspection.

In order to qualify for the program, the city requires mobile home owners to be 62 or older, not receive other government rent subsidies and qualify as a very low income resident.

“By definition, very low-income is a household that has an adjusted annual income that does not exceed 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI), adjusted for family size, as established by HUD (for Huntington Beach, the very-low income, two person household limit is \$54,200 for 2022),” according to a staff report.

According to a presentation by Ursula Luna-Reynosa the city's Director of Community Development, the average monthly space rent for mobile home owners in Huntington Beach is \$1,839 and the program is estimated to help 30 households per year.

“We will not know the actual subsidy amount until we start selecting participants and asking them their income levels and etc. because the program is based on their gross income and space rent,” she said at Tuesday's meeting.

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People who are veterans, paying half or more of their income on rent and are extremely low income will be prioritized for the program.

The program could begin early 2023, according to a [staff report](#).

The Fight for a Rent Stabilization Ordinance

Besides their own city council, advocates for a ballot measure against rent hikes at mobile homes have faced other hurdles – including a city law passed two decades ago banning rent control in Huntington Beach.

Proponents say they're not trying to change the law and that their proposed ballot measure would only apply to mobile homes.



Huntington Beach mobile-home realtor and resident Patti Evans, age 65, holds up a sign alongside her fellow senior neighbors, in protest of recent rent increases.

But Mobile Home Park Owners have spoken out against the ballot measure who say their expenses are increasing too.

Similar debates played out in Anaheim and Fullerton during the rent control battle over Rancho La Paz in 2019.

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Rohr and other Skandia residents have not given up on getting a rent stabilization ordinance for mobile home residents on the ballot but they're now setting their eyes on the 2024 election.

“We have a renewed resolve in the mobile home community to pursue a citizen driven initiative to place a carve out measure on the ballot in 2024,” said Skandia resident Arthur Estrada at Tuesday’s meeting.

“By collecting tens of thousands of signatures from like minded citizens it will both show the legitimacy of our claims and the popularity of our position.”

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