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[Mobile home renters get relief from county supervisors' action](#)

- Emily Wilson, Special to The Chronicle
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For Dot Norris, last month's decision by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to institute rent control for mobile home parks was some of the best news she's ever received.

When Norris moved into the El Granada Manufactured Home Community three years ago, her rent was \$680. Now she pays \$813 for the space where she parks her home.

Norris, along with Lisa Ketchum, both members of the homeowners' association, say they know families who have had to move out of the park, which is designated as low income.

"The rents here are totally out of hand," Ketchum said. "Rents in other parts of the county are going down and we just had this 8.7 percent increase."

But rent is not the only complaint of some of the residents at El Granada,

a park by the bluffs a little north of Half Moon Bay. They also say that the owners of the park, Kingsley Management, based in Utah, have slapped on extra fees for water and garbage, enforce the rules inconsistently, aren't keeping the park up, and are unresponsive to the residents' concerns.

"As far as management goes, they don't give us any say in how our community runs," Ketchum said. "They neglect us to the point where they endanger us."

Ketchum, a gardener, said that in the past several years the fight for some relief for the residents was a full-time job.

"I was angry that they were getting away with hurting people," she said. "It just wasn't

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right what they were doing, and I didn't want to just to sit by and let that happen. I could stop them from hurting me, but it was the injustice of it that drew me in."

Supervisor Mike Nevin said that the testimony of the residents, along with pictures, such as one of the mold on the wall of the exercise room, convinced him that something had to be done. Nevin said he is opposed to rent control -- but in this case he felt he had no choice.

"I have never considered it, nor did I ever want to consider it," he said.

"I've always been a proponent of the free enterprise system. Only in these unique circumstances would I do this ... We have out-of-state greedy owners that haven't cooperated. The condition and maintenance of the park have been appalling."

The ordinance affects the eight mobile home parks in the unincorporated county. It says that rents can be raised annually at 75 percent of the Consumer Price Index.

Edward McDonald, the attorney for Kingsley Management, argues that his clients have cooperated with the supervisors and the residents of the park and he points to such things as a maintenance log and a mediation program.

The attorney warns that rent control for apartments is what the supervisors will go for next, but Supervisor Mark Church said that is not a possibility.

"None of us are fans of rent control or rent stabilization," he said. "This is a unique situation. These people cannot pick up and leave like a typical residential tenant. They own their own homes and cannot pick up and move."

The supervisors also say that they are not worried about the threat of litigation over the rent control ordinance.

"I've never been threatened by anybody's lawsuit," Nevin said. "I'm in the business of making sound policy."

Rent control, even limited to mobile home parks, is not sound policy, argues Doug Johnston, the regional representative of the Western Manufactured Housing Communities Association.

"It's going to destroy the last vestiges of affordable housing and it's fiscally irresponsible," Johnson said. "The supervisors are focused only on one park."

Geri Nave, the owner of Sequoia Trailer Park near Redwood City, agrees that other

mobile home park owners in the county should have been brought into the discussion about rent control.

The ordinance permits owners who feel they are not getting an adequate rate of return to make an application for an increase, and Johnson predicts that the other mobile home owners will do that, causing the rents in other parks to go up.

Nave says that is exactly what she plans to do. Rent control means that her property is worth less, she said, so she'll need to charge more. Most of the residents of Sequoia pay under \$500 a month, but she says that under the ordinance, that will change.

"We're going to apply for a hearing and if we get \$100 a month (increase) that's what we're going to do," she said. "You can blame your supervisors. Property owners are guaranteed a fair rate of return on their investment."

Supervisor Rich Gordon said he doesn't understand Nave's argument that rent control means she needs to charge her long-term tenants more.

"If a park was raising its rents less than what rent control now says is the limit and they were happy with that, then that must have been a fair rate of return," he said. "If they have major maintenance or major repair they can come in and ask for a waiver to have their rents raised."

Gordon says he didn't feel particularly happy after the supervisors passed the ordinance. He was hopeful, he said, that long-term leases offered by the owners of El Granada could work, but none of the tenants were willing to sign the lease.

"It came in far too late," Gordon said about the latest offer that came after the Sept. 9 vote for rent control.

"There have been a host of management concerns raised over the last several years that put tenants in a position where they are not feeling very trusting," he said.

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