

The Ukiah DAILY JOURNAL

Mobile home rent control ordinance nixed by Mendocino County

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Updated: 06/20/2012 11:59:26 PM PDT

for Ukiah Daily Journal

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors was united in voting down a rent ordinance for mobile home parks at its Tuesday meeting.

The ordinance was drafted by County Counsel Jeanine Nadel at the board's request. It would have imposed stabilization on rent that park residents pay for the land where their mobile homes sit. The public discussion drew 26 individuals -- almost all the owners or residents of local mobile home parks -- to comment before the board.

Proponents of the ordinance stated that it would help protect senior citizens living on fixed incomes from unreasonable rent hikes by park owners. Some called these parks "cash cows" and said that residents needed some kind of security in order to keep their human dignity. The board heard from several senior citizens who were concerned that they might lose their homes if their Social Security checks proved insufficient to cover new rent increases.

Park tenant and self-described senior citizen advocate J.R. Rose stated that the ordinance was a "good one" that would guarantee park owners a profit while still giving residents protection.

Opponents of the rule said it would hurt free enterprise and stifle a healthy, competitive environment in Mendocino County by discouraging landowners from offering affordable forms of housing. Because rent hikes in the event of emergency would be prevented, local park owners who have kept their fees stable for as long as three years said they would be forced to begin regularly raising rent charges if the ordinance were passed.

Several owners of local parks said they understood the concerns of their senior and low-income tenants and worked to keep rent fees low. Others cited CATO Institute studies showing lower quality and quantity of housing in counties with rent control.

After listening to public comment, the board went to discussion. Supervisor John McCowen noted that the ordinance's definition of a mobile home park as a property containing "two or more mobile homes" would involve many local residents who might be unaware of their status as a "park," but who would be affected by this rule. The board agreed that the county could not afford the estimated one or two extra staff required to enforce a rent ordinance. The board expressed interest in one park owner's suggestion of a county rental assistance program to help low-income individuals.

The board discussed possible legal ways to apply pressure to Lake Mendocino Mobile Home Estates, the target of most complaints about rent fees. However, the board noted that the proposed ordinance would penalize all of at least 60 mobile home parks in Mendocino County, most of which, supervisors said, do not charge exorbitant rent. While

reports of rent gouging had come from residents of one local park, many other park tenants expressed opposition to the ordinance in petitions received by the board.

Supervisor John Pinches made a motion to deny the ordinance, seconded by Supervisor Dan Hamburg. The motion passed unanimously.