

# Residents of Missoula trailer home park to buy property to prevent displacement

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*Councilmembers Sandra Vasecka, left, and Amber Sherrill sit in the council chambers during the mayoral voting Monday. Vasecka voted Wednesday against using federal funds for a Resident-Owned Community at a mobile home park in Missoula.*

TOM BAUER/Missoulian

The mostly low-income residents of a 34-lot trailer home court just west of Missoula will now be able to feel a little bit more secure in their living situation.

That's because they're going to pool their money and buy the land underneath their homes in order to stave off future displacement, thanks to a big award of federal money.

On Wednesday, the Missoula city council's housing committee voted to approve [contracts totaling \\$850,000](#) to allow Old Hellgate Village mobile home park to become a Resident-Owned Community, or ROC. In December, The Montana Dept. of Commerce awarded the City of Missoula the \$850,000 in Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus funding for a proposed ROC, administered by a nonprofit called NeighborWorks Montana.

The funding comes from the federal CARES Act, passed by Congress and signed by former President Donald Trump in March of 2020.

Kaia Peterson, the executive director of NeighborWorks, said the funding is targeted at preserving housing for people with low to moderate incomes.

"As most of you are very well aware, residents of manufactured home communities are at significant risk of redevelopment," she said. "Particularly in our community where we have continuing rising housing costs and pressures of redevelopment. And folks in these communities are at risk of displacement not only due to redevelopment, but due to rising costs."

She said that the total cost for the residents is around \$3 million, but favorable terms from the seller and the federal money mean the lot rents will only go from \$500 to \$600 per month.

"A lot of folks in this type of housing have fixed incomes or limited incomes, and even a \$100 lot rent increase can be a stretch for many of them," Peterson said.

Old Hellgate Village, located on Mullan Road next to the Hellgate Trading Post, was built in 1968. Peterson said there was widespread agreement from the residents, as 29 of the 30 eligible households have signed on to become members of the ROC.

"So just a sense of who lives here, it's a mix of young families, empty-nesters and retirees," she said. "And 60% of the households are households making below 60% of Area Median Income, so it's primarily low and very low income households."

Residents get to vote on decisions about the community, and there are now 14 ROCs with 575 households across Montana.

"So, again, since this is COVID money, the approach here is that maintaining stable housing is an important aspect of community health," Peterson said. "And folks in these communities are often particularly vulnerable to things like COVID due to existing underlying health conditions, and lack of access to resources."

She hopes that more mobile home residents will approach the property owner before an out-of-state investor decides to snap it up.

"So for folks who are not familiar with the residential community program, it is an approach to allow residents to purchase their communities as a collective, as a cooperative, and then own and maintain those properties as stable affordable housing in perpetuity," she said.

City council member Sandra Vasecka was the only member of the committee to vote against approving the contract.

"I think this is an interesting project, but unfortunately I don't think this is a good use of COVID funding because there has been displacement before COVID," she said. "And I know that a lot of folks on council disagree with me on this one but unfortunately I'm not going to be supporting this today."

Council member Mike Nugent said he had told Vasecka during an earlier discussion about the project that he looked forward to respectfully disagreeing with her.

"I think this is a great project," he said. "We've seen too many times where communities like this are sold." He said that there has been redevelopment pressure put on Missoula that's directly related to COVID. "I see this as a very good use of that money," Nugent concluded.

Council member Stacie Anderson also voted to approve the use of the money.

"I think this is a great use of funding," she said. "I'm excited that the state actually is doing some very good and productive things with the money that they have received. And you know, we have seen over my time on council examples of some really heartbreaking stories of owners not wanting to run (the park), or sell their land out from underneath those mobile home parks and really the lack of options for the people who live there."

Anderson called it a "win-win solution that really helps the most vulnerable in our community."

Source: [https://missoulain.com/news/local/residents-of-missoula-trailer-home-park-to-buy-property-to-prevent-displacement/article\\_bcf3f3f1-0a52-5454-bfd5-b98f9866674a.html](https://missoulain.com/news/local/residents-of-missoula-trailer-home-park-to-buy-property-to-prevent-displacement/article_bcf3f3f1-0a52-5454-bfd5-b98f9866674a.html)