

## Opinion: Preserving affordable housing in Montana's mobile home parks

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Western Montana's housing crisis is not just a result of rapid growth throughout Missoula County. It is a testimony to corporate greed. Now more than ever, members of our community face uncertainty amid our housing crisis. It is up to policymakers at all levels to meet this moment and tackle the major gaps in affordable housing throughout Missoula County with thoughtful tenacity. My name is Maggie Bornstein and I am running for House District 96, Missoula County's westernmost legislative district. From working as the YWCA's lead advocate for children and families experiencing homelessness to fighting for tenant rights at the Legislature, my professional and personal commitment to housing has positioned me to be the best voice to address our housing crisis in our state Legislature.

On the doors, I have listened to young families who feel the prospect of homeownership is permanently out of reach and everyday people who are reckoning with moving out of our community because an unexpected car expense may leave them short on rent.

Western Montana cannot become a place where our neighbors who sustain our grocery stores, public schools, nonprofits, and emergency response services cannot afford to live. But our reality comes closer and closer to this daily, such as in the recent sale of the Missoula KOA to an out-of-state buyer, which has prompted a nearly immediate reduction in available lots for mobile homes and an increase in rent amongst tenants.

Nonprofit organizations like NeighborWorks Montana have been on the forefront of tackling this issue by making common sense solutions, stronger. According to their website, "Manufactured housing makes up over 10% of the total housing stock in Montana and represents the largest source of unsubsidized housing that is affordable to low-income people." Manufactured homes, otherwise known as mobile homes, are one of the greatest points of entry to homeownership, but with one catch — without owning the land which they reside on, residents of these properties face serious vulnerability, particularly as these homes age.

NeighborWorks has got ahead of this issue by empowering communities to become Resident Owned Communities (ROCs). In House District 96, Buena Vista, a thriving mobile home community,

has been resident-owned since 2013 with the help of NeighborWorks Montana. Offering security and long-term affordability beyond each home's first owner, ROCs like Buena Vista address our housing crisis by keeping existing affordable housing in our neighborhoods.

Mobile home parks are the next frontier for out-of-state corporate developers looking to put profit over people. As evidenced by nationwide and regional trends, it is only a matter of time until more parks in our community are sold. Leaders in development and property management not only hold seats in our Legislature — they are passing lucrative legislation for their own gain and leaving the working class behind. For decades, mobile homes have allowed everyday Montanans to fulfill the dream of homeownership. I'm running to ensure mobile homeowners have a fighting chance.

In Helena, I will work to

- Hold new park owners accountable to provide relocation funding to tenants and to ensure that no one is displaced when parks are sold.
- Create legislation to ban legislators from writing laws that sanction personal, financial gain.
- Protect and expand the rights of tenants.
- Make Montana's wealthiest earners pay their fair share — not the same as everyday working people.

The Democratic primary for House District 96 will be held Tuesday, June 7. Please vote for me, Maggie Bornstein, your fighter for affordable housing and a livable future for Montana's working families.

Maggie Bornstein is running for state House District 96 in Missoula.

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