

# End of an era: Missoula KOA, trailer park sold

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MISSOULA — MTN News is continuing to track Missoula's housing crisis including how property sales are impacting residents.

The Missoula KOA — believed to be the oldest family-run KOA in the country — is giving up that title and is now splitting ownership between an out-of-state organization and Missoula Property Management (MPM).

"I grew up here, so I've seen a lot of changes over the years," former owner Laurie Wisby told MTN News.

We interviewed a Missoula resident living at the trailer court on the KOA, who said the sale prompted her decision to move.

"I am a bit sad to leave Missoula," said Miranda Maxson who has been living at the location for a couple of years. "I've been thinking about potentially leaving Missoula for the last few years, just due to like the rising housing costs, and the lack of places to actually live."

Wisby sold the KOA to Missoula Valley Partners LLC for an undisclosed amount with the sale taking effect on Jan. 1. State records show Missoula Valley Partners operates out of Bend, Oregon. MTN News has reached out to the organization for comment but we have not heard back.

Wisby explained she's ready to spend more time with her grandkids, "we're at that age for retirement." She also called the sale bittersweet and noted most of the feedback she's received from residents has been positive and congratulatory.

The KOA property is unique as it is home to both a trailer park and an RV park, "at least from what I understand, this is one of the only ones in the United States that does have a trailer court attached," Maxson said.

Wisby's parents opened the park decades ago before she took over operations.

"Yeah my folks started the trailer court in 1956, and at some point, they saw a need for overnight camping, and that's about when they bought that KOA franchise. We're the oldest family-run KOA — or we were."

The KOA [website](#) says Wisby served as the general manager for the Missoula KOA since 1995.

"He's (the new owner) leaving it a campground and KOA, and a trailer court. He's not going to kick everybody out and bulldoze it for apartments. Hopefully, they're appreciative of that — the tenants," Wisby told MTN News.

MPM is now responsible for managing the trailer park with Business Development Director Heather Schwenk noting that, "we don't have any formal plans in place yet."

A letter mailed to residents on Dec. 20 outlines some preliminary plans — including rent increases and putting up a fence, or wall, to separate the trailer park and RV park.

"They did state because they want to move that fence, they are removing an entire row of trailers, and I think that was alarming to some of us," Maxson said.

"The immediate goal is to separate the trailer park from the RV park," the letter stated.

"MPM will manage the mobile home park and the RV park will be managed by generally the same management team in place last year."

Rents will go up on March 1, according to the letter. Currently, residents are paying \$340 a month, but the MPM letter reports rent will increase to \$450-to-\$500 for trailers and \$600-to-\$650 for RV's. Schwenk said one reason for increased rent is to bring rates up to market value.

"The last previous owner was able to keep those rents at that rate, but now with the new ownership they've obviously paid a much higher price for the park," Schwenk explained.

Maxson says she hopes the changes the new owners make will be positive, but there is some concern among residents.

"We really didn't get much notice of this sale. I feel like most of us just don't really know what's going on. We've got the one letter so far, but other than that, we don't really know what's going to happen. There's a lot of uncertainty — I think there's a little bit of fear — because we just don't know what's going to happen here."

Maxson — a single mother hoping to build a better future for her six-year-old — said the changes at the trailer park signify something bigger.

"It's not affordable to live in Missoula at this time, and I don't really see it getting any better any time soon." Maxson also said, "There's not many places left you can live in this town."

She's decided to sell too and is working with a real estate agent to sell her trailer and move with her daughter to Sidney.

*"I've talked to her. Her dad does live here in Missoula. I've talked to her about us moving up towards the hi-line, she's really excited about it, her dad's been really supportive with it. I think it'll be something exciting and new. There's not much going on up there, but I think it'll be nice for her to have just a new environment, smaller town, things are still affordable up there, so I think she's really excited." - resident Miranda Maxson*

One thing Maxson said she'll miss, is being so close to her daughter's elementary school.

"We were pretty lucky in this location, we're next to what I believe to be the best elementary school here in Missoula," Maxson said. "She goes to Hellgate Elementary, and I will be sad to see her have to leave that school. With moving to a more rural town in Montana, I think we've got one option for schools."

Wisby said the decision to sell was not for financial reasons, "COVID hit and that affected us in the spring, but then people got out and wanted to travel and camp and 2021 was a good year, too."

When we talked with Wisby recently she said she was still working some, but added, "it's going to be hard when I don't come in anymore."

A line of "For Sale" signs means Maxson is likely not the only resident who is contemplating a move.

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