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Newsday.com

Mobile home owners fight rent increases

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9:20 PM EDT, October 8, 2007

Nestled behind a lonely stretch of Jericho Turnpike sits the quiet, tree-heavy Syosset Mobile Home Park community, there since the 1920s and home to about 70 families.

But a new owner has purchased the land and residents said they fear luxury housing could occupy the spot, displacing the low-income families who call the park home.

"We're going to fight it," said Barbara Pedote, who has lived in the park just over a year and is the homeowner's association president. "They are just not going to take my home away. We want to stay here."



In April, residents of the five-acre property received a notice that the park had been sold. The residents, who own their homes but not the land, said since the property was sold they have been shocked by the changes.

In June, the new owner, STP Associates, a Syosset-based developer, gave residents a one-year lease effective Sept. 1 that raised rents by about \$250. In March, another increase will bring everyone's rent to \$1,000. At the end of the lease, in September 2008, they have to leave -- with no compensation.

The residents had been paying about \$500 a month.

Judy White, a spokeswoman for STP, could not be reached for comment.

"The position is they own their homes, but not the property in which it rests," said Elliot Schlissel, an attorney hired by the residents. "They can take their homes with them, but the problem is the homes are too old to be moved."

Surprised by the proposal because they had been assured the park had been grandfathered in as a mobile home park, the homeowners association regrouped and dug in. They began raising funds, hired an attorney and wrote to politicians seeking help.

"Every politician talks about the lack of affordable housing," said Marcy Rappaport, vice president of the homeowners association. "Yet I don't see them stepping up to save mobile home parks. People are

going to be homeless."

In August, the homeowners association sent a letter to STP about its concerns.

In protest, residents paid their September rent, but less the \$250 called for by the new lease. Residents have gotten eviction notices that will commence Oct. 31 if they do not pay the specified rent.

"We haven't agreed on what the increase is," Rappaport said.

Last month, residents met with STP about rent increases and the homeowners possibly buying the property.

Residents vow to do whatever it takes to save their homes. They have raised \$3,000 for legal expenses. They are checking to see if the park qualifies for historic landmark status. According to Rappaport, the park is the only one in Nassau County's history and was once touted as a great place to stay during the 1939 World's Fair.

"You can buy a farm in Suffolk County and you can't evict the animals. It must remain a farm," Rappaport said. "Yet they can evict us? The animals have more rights than us?"

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