

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Contact: Dave Anderson

All Parks Alliance for Change

Office: 651-644-5525 or toll free 855-361-2722

Cell: 612-623-4651

Email: dave@allparksallianceforchange.org

APAC releases new edition of “*Before You Sign: A Consumer’s Guide to Mobile Home Parks in the Twin Cities*” with detailed analysis of rents and vacancies

Saint Paul, MN — All Parks Alliance for Change, a statewide manufactured (mobile) home owner association has released the second edition of its “Before You Sign: A Consumer’s Guide to Mobile Home Parks in the Twin Cities” with a detailed analysis of rent levels in the metro area. The annual guide provides information consumers need before signing a purchase or rental agreement, including the rules of mobile home living and important details about each park’s city and county. The heart of the guide though is detailed park-by-park information, such as size of communities, vacancy rate, utilities, rents, and amenities.

“There comes a point, for some people, when renting seems pointless and wasteful,” said Dave Anderson, APAC Executive Director. “You are sinking money into a place that will never be yours. If you’ve decided to look for something a little more permanent, you may have considered the option of buying a manufactured home, which is more commonly known as a mobile home.”

This second publication of “Before You Sign” contains updated park-specific information, accounting for changes in vacancy rates, park policies, and contact information. It also includes an expanded range of useful information, including lot rents, utilities and fees, parking, and other amenities. Furthermore, APAC has taken the opportunity to analyze the data collected about metro area parks to describe patterns in the market related to lot rent, vacancy rates, and ownership

Trends in Manufactured Home Park Rents

Through independent research, APAC has identified average lot rental prices in 74 of the 83 metro area parks. A 75th park, Maplewood Mobile Home Park, was excluded from our analysis below being that its lot rental costs includes the cost of a home rental.

The lot rental costs ranged from a low of \$260.00 per month at North Star Estates to \$666.00 at Cimarron Park. The average lot rental across the metro area parks was \$440.59. A notable fact is that all ten of the top ten highest average rents are parks owned by out-of-state corporations (two of the top three are Equity Lifestyle Properties).

Trends in Vacancy Rates

Using the annual Metropolitan Council survey and the Minnesota Department of Health licensing information from 2014, APAC has identified 83 manufactured home parks in the metro area counties (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties). The parks range in size from 15 to 572 lots. There were 15,662 total lots, of which 13,657 lots were occupied, 2,005 were unoccupied, and 480 of the unoccupied lots had sited homes.

Unoccupied Lots: There are 2,005 unoccupied lots. This is an overall vacancy rate of 12.8%. The median vacancy rate is 8.33%. This is a very slight uptick in compared to 2011’s vacancy rates, which had an overall rate vacancy rate of 12.55%. It continues to be a significant increase in vacancy compared to the peak occupancy in 2000 during

which there was only a 2% overall vacancy rate. There are five parks with over 100 vacancies, which account for 796 or 40% of the unoccupied lots: Three Rivers (106 lots), Skyline Village (111), Brandondale (150), Ardmore Village (191), and Park of Four Seasons (238). There are three parks with a vacancy rate of approximately 50% or higher, which clearly marks them as at risk for closure: Woodlawn Terrace (50%), Ardmore Village (56.3%), and Wagener's Trailer Court (66.7%).

Unoccupied Lots with Sited Homes: There are 480 sited but empty homes out of a total of 14,107 sited manufactured homes. This is an overall vacancy rate of 3.40%. The problem is largely distributed on a broader, but also smaller, scale than in the case of unoccupied lots; 70 parks (or 84%) have at least one unoccupied home, while only 16 (or 19%) have 10 or more empty homes. Only two parks have 20 or more empty homes: Brandondale is a clear outlier with the highest number of vacant homes (75 homes, 18%), followed distantly by Oak Terrace (20 vacant homes, 24%).

"Before You Sign" is a free, ad-supported publication. Copies can be downloaded from APAC's web site (<http://www.allparksallianceforchange.org/?q=beforeyousign>). Printed copies will also be sent for the cost of shipping & handling, or to new members when they join. The information in the guide supports three important points about mobile home living:

- **Mobile Homes Are Affordable**
In many cases, manufactured homes can be the most affordable housing option. Used homes usually sell for \$30,000 for newer ones down to only a few hundred dollars for older ones. Consumers can buy mobile homes for what they would spend on monthly rent. Chances are, if consumers buy manufactured homes in the Twin Cities metro area, than they will be in a manufactured home park. This means they will be paying "lot rent" to the park owner every month. But, even then, the combined cost of buying the home and renting the lot can be less than renting an apartment. Living in a home park can be a very good financial option. But, not all parks are the same and not everyone will be right for every consumer.
- **Find the Right Park for You**
It is important for each consumer to fully evaluate which park is the right fit for them, because buying a manufactured home, despite the common name "mobile home," can become a fairly permanent decision. Manufactured homes can be costly to move and, as a result, only 19% are ever moved from their initial placement. When home owners decide to move, they have the legal right to sell their home in place in the park, but the process can sometimes take a while. That is the reason behind "Before You Sign." Before a consumer buys a home and signs a lease in park, they need to make sure it is the right one for them. Is it in the right community? Does it offer the access they need to jobs, schools, transportation, and shopping? Does it provide services and amenities they require? Are the "park rules" acceptable to them?
- **Do Your Homework**
"Before You Sign" likely doesn't provide all the information a consumer may want, but it will hopefully offer a good place to start. It is a first of its kind guide to all the parks in the Twin Cities metro area with standardized information for consumers to compare, suggestions on questions to ask, and contact information for each of the parks.

Park neighborhoods can provide affordable housing, sustainable home ownership, and a tight knit sense of community. Hopefully, this guide will help consumers decide if moving into a park is the right choice for them. This guide will be updated annually and PAC welcomes suggestion on how it can be improved.

All Parks Alliance for Change (APAC) is the statewide organization representing Minnesota's 180,000 manufactured (mobile) home park residents. Since 1980, APAC has worked with residents across the state of Minnesota to improve the quality of life in manufactured home parks.