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EDITOR'S PICK

Legislation balances rights for manufactured homeowners

MARJORY LAU GILSRUD My View

Apr 28, 2021



It seems like there are very few things politicians can agree on these days. But Minnesota legislators on both sides of the aisle support giving homeowners a chance to buy the land their home sits on in manufactured home communities across the state.

House File 112 is now in the Housing omnibus bill and is headed for conference committee negotiations. I urge my senator, Julie Rosen, along with Sens. Nick Frenz and Gary Dahms and other policymakers from the area, to support the House language.

Owning your home but not the land under it comes with unique challenges. Homeowners have no say over:

- Ever-increasing site rent that outstrips the equity in our homes
- Poorly maintained water and sewer systems, streets and other critical infrastructure
- Losing our most valuable assets, our homes and communities



Marjory Lau Gilsrud

Homeowners simple ask: Give us a chance to buy

Imagine going to sleep only to find out the land under your home was sold overnight. House language allows homeowners the chance to buy the land, just like other buyers.

But it's not as easy as it sounds. These sales are usually private deals. Often homeowners find out the land was for sale only after the paperwork is signed.

The language is simple and asks landowners for two things:

- 1) Let homeowners know when you want to sell the land.
- 2) Give homeowners 60 days to put together a competitive offer.

That's basically it. Give homeowners an opportunity to purchase.

Owning both our home and the land under it has made our community a better place to live. I no longer have to worry about being displaced because in 2011 I moved to Madelia Mobile Home Village. The community here had purchased the land in 2008. With that ownership came financial security and stability.

We vote on the budget and set site rental fees. There is no profit margin built into our rent. We approve rules and improvements. And most importantly, we are secure. There isn't an investor owner who can decide to close the community.

This summer we are starting up a \$700,000 water and sewer infrastructure project, thanks to a grant from the Manufactured Housing Infrastructure Fund at Minnesota Housing. This work is just one of many projects we are tackling.

We built a bus shelter for kids at the bus stop, fixed up the streets, added new mailboxes and repaired old and built new garages.

Next on our list is a storm shelter.

Since moving here nearly 10 years ago, our rent has increased only \$40. I hate to think about what I'd be paying where I used to live.

Their lot rent increased \$20 every six months. When I left there, it was more than \$400 a month. Here, it's \$265. That's the impact of resident-owned communities.

Limited but powerful opposition

We expected landowners to oppose any proposal that tries to balance homeowners' interests with that of the landowners and private buyers. We expected the unfounded challenge that somehow this legislation would force landowners to sell for less money. (It doesn't. In fact, a competitive offer from homeowners enhances the landowner's ability to sell. In the past 15 years, the nine Minnesota communities that have sold to the homeowners sold for fair market value.)

The biggest opposition is coming from Realtors, yet I haven't figured out why. Realtors aren't part of most community sales today. In 2020, 70% of Minnesota's manufactured home sites that sold went to out-of-state buyers. When the big investor groups swoop in, they aren't Googling for local realtors. They already have the expertise needed to take control of property that holds some of the last affordable housing in the state.

Help available for other communities

Changes at Madelia Mobile Home Village didn't happen overnight. The support of Northcountry Cooperative Foundation and resident-owned communities across the country, brought Madelia Mobile Home Village to the place where we control our own destiny for decades to come. Ask anyone who lives here, and I'm sure they'll tell you it's comfortable, affordable place to live surrounded by terrific neighbors.

I'm working with homeowners in other communities across the state to ensure when their manufactured home community goes up for sale, homeowners have a fair shot at buying the land under their homes.

Marjory Lau Gilsrud lives in Madelia and is president of the Madelia Mobile Home Village Cooperative Board of Directors. She also serves as secretary of the state-wide resident union, All Parks Alliance For Change and serves on the Board of Directors of Resident Owned Communities U.S. A. (ROC), a national organization that assists manufactured home communities across the country become their own landlord.