

# MOBILE HOME COMMUNITY PRESERVATION CONVENING



Hosted by



**Housing  
Resources**

April 26, 2024

8:30 AM – 4:00 PM

Mesa County Workforce Center  
Grand Junction, CO

# SPECIAL THANKS TO

Thank you to our sponsors for making this event possible!

Thank you to our cohosts, Roaring Fork Community Development Corporation, and to our volunteer steering committee.

The information for this booklet was prepared by Hollis Walker on behalf of Housing Resources of Western Colorado; with design, formatting and additional copy editing by Ysabel Nehring. We thank them both for their hard work.



# INTRODUCTION

To our participants,

The goal of the April 26, 2024, convening is to create a space for groups that are actively working in mobile home community preservation to discuss the current environment for mobile home parks, understand different preservation models that are in place, learn which groups are taking on which roles, and share successful models as well as ongoing challenges. We are asking the question, What would it take for resident-empowered mobile home community preservation models to be consistently viable in Colorado?

When we say “resident-empowered mobile home community preservation,” we mean efforts to:

- (1) Protect the affordability of existing mobile home communities to benefit tenants.
- (2) Avoid displacement of tenants as mobile home communities are sold and/or upgraded.
- (3) Create a structure that empowers residents in some way by giving them a voice and real power in shaping the future of their communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emilee Powell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

*Emilee Powell, Executive Director*

*Housing Resources of Western Colorado*

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# BACKGROUND & HISTORY

Mobile home parks have their roots at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of automobiles. Early auto travelers began outfitting their cars with camping equipment, fostering the development of the “auto camp.” The first official auto camp opened in Douglas, Arizona, in 1913.

By the 1920s, auto camps (also called “auto courts” or “motor courts”) began to add amenities like communal bathrooms, showers, laundries, and kitchens. Initially, the camps were designed for motorists to pull in and erect tents next to their autos.

By the 1930s, rustic cabins began to be constructed by owners of auto camp sites, and some auto owners began to bring their own “house trailers.”

The concept of house trailers as a permanent form of housing coincided with the Great Depression and World War II. Trailers housed nomadic workers employed by the Works Progress Administration, founded in 1935.

When jobs ended, workers often stayed in their trailers in place, in part due to the inability to find work else-

where. Likewise, during World War II, trailers offered housing for defense industry workers.

By 1945, the federal government had ordered more than 150,000 trailers to house wartime workers. The postwar population boom and resulting lack of housing caused its own boom in the manufacture of trailers.

By the mid-1950s, trailers began to look and function like conventional permanent housing, and by 1955 “trailers” had come to be called “mobile homes.”

**TODAY, SOME 22 MILLION AMERICANS LIVE IN MANUFACTURED HOUSING, WHICH REPRESENTS MORE THAN SIX PERCENT OF THE NATION'S HOUSING.**

By the late 1960s, six million Americans lived in mobile homes, *representing one-third of U.S. single-family dwellings*. By 1978, the Housing and Urban Development agency had created a national building code for what was by then called “manufactured housing.”

All those mobile homes needed places to park, and individuals with land or who could purchase land began

setting up mobile home parks (MHPs) across the country. These largely “mom-and-pop” operations typically were not run by professional landlords and did not necessarily generate adequate funds to maintain infrastructure.

Fast-forward to the present time: Today, some 22 million Americans live in manufactured housing, which represents more than six percent of the nation's housing.

Approximately 100,000 Coloradans live in mobile homes; their median household income is \$39,000. The state has 760 registered mobile home parks with 57,475 lots.

Many owners of mobile home parks have recently reached retirement age. Major events, such as death or retirement of the park owner, can trigger park sales.

The potential value of mobile home parks has attracted corporate investors, venture capitalists, and hedge fund operators to purchase them. Institutional owners accounted for 23 percent of park purchases in June 2021, an increase of 13 percent from the previous two years.

Often those buyers learn (sometimes after purchase) that infrastructure is disinvested and must be repaired and/or replaced at great expense.

To finance improvements and increase profits, new owners often raise lot rents in parks by enormous amounts, causing “constructive eviction.” Those who cannot afford the new rents must leave, including those who own their mobile homes and must abandon them because of the high cost of moving them.

In the worst cases, new owners do not make repairs or improve the parks, leaving residents to tolerate sewage leaks, water service disruption, and other unhealthy and dangerous circumstances.

Many residents of mobile home parks are people of low income, the elderly and disabled, and immigrant workers. The loss of their homes may leave them unhoused, in the short or long term.

Large numbers of mobile home parks in the U.S. are owned by corporations who have no presence in the communities where their parks are located.

In recent years, due to inflation and housing shortages throughout the country, the value of mobile home parks as affordable housing, especially for workers, has become more apparent than ever.

Governments and nonprofit organizations trying to solve housing shortages are now working to preserve existing mobile home parks and, in some cases, help residents purchase their parks.

Doing so has proven difficult, in part because mobile homes are not technically classed as “affordable housing” in many jurisdictions, and are operated differently from traditional housing.

Traditional mortgages are typically not available on the purchase of a mobile home placed on a rented lot, and tenants’ rights don’t necessarily apply to mobile

Government mortgagors Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae offer low-interest government-backed loans to investment companies, but not to resident groups who want to buy their parks.

Mobile home owners are both owners and renters, exposing them to the risks and responsibilities of both types of tenure.

Mobile home parks typically operate on private infrastructure, unlike other neighborhoods where streets, sewers, and water systems are owned and operated by a municipality.

This is the environment in which participants in this convening find themselves: promoting the preservation of mobile home parks as a practical means of maintaining and improving affordable housing; protecting vulnerable, contributing members of our communities who deserve and need our help to sustain themselves and their families; and providing residents with the ability to control their own housing and thus secure their futures.

home  
park  
residents.

**MOBILE HOME OWNERS ARE BOTH OWNERS AND RENTERS, EXPOSING THEM TO THE RISKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF BOTH TYPES OF TENURE.**

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*History adapted from a report by the City of Los Angeles. January 2016.*





## SURVEY SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Housing Resources of Western Colorado sent a survey to potential participants in this convening. Our thanks to all who took time to answer that survey. A majority of the 39 respondents (69%) to the survey were representatives of nonprofit organizations, local jurisdictions, and state agencies. Some 41% of respondents have been directly involved in MHP preservation. About 31% are currently involved in a preservation project. Overall, the variety of respondents reflects the broad scope of mobile home preservation efforts in our state.

Respondents are involved in almost every aspect of MHP preservation. Their most common roles are in Resident Education/Outreach, Advocacy, Resident Organizing, and Buying/Selling of MHPs.

Respondents reported the most significant challenges to successful MHP preservation were financial (obtaining loans and grants, competing with for-profit buyers); outdated, damaged, and inoperable infrastructure (including deferred maintenance and code violations); and residents' lack of understanding of their rights/responsibilities and lack of capacity to organize.

# SURVEY DATA

## Respondent Background

Survey respondents included 39 people from a variety of backgrounds who are involved in mobile home park (MHP) preservation. The group included:

**17** Nonprofit Organizations

**6** Representatives of Local Jurisdictions

**4** State Agency Officials

**4** Park Owners

**3** Funders/Financial Institutions

**1** State Legislator

**1** Park Manager

**1** Park Board Member

**1** University Official

**1** Consultant

## Roles of Survey Respondents related to Mobile Home Parks

Survey respondents reported they and their organizations play the following roles in mobile home parks (the numbers reflect the number of respondents claiming each particular role, with some playing multiple roles):

23 Resident Education/Outreach

5 Loans for Preservation

14 Advocacy

5 Grants for Preservation

11 Resident Organizing

5 Code Compliance/Oversight

10 Buying/Selling Mobile Home Parks

1 Redevelopment

9 Technical Assistance

1 Community-Directed Research

9 Policy-making

1 Knowledge of upcoming Affordable Housing bills

7 Property Management



# The Most Difficult Challenges According to Respondents

Respondents selected challenges from a list with an option to write in additional challenges. Numbers represent the number of respondents who selected each challenge.

## Financial

- 20 Lack of sufficient loan options for repairs/acquisition
- 19 Lack of grant funding
- 10 Inability to compete with for-profit buyers
- 1 Interest rates too high to keep rents reasonable

## Infrastructure

- 19 Conditions of park infrastructure (deferred maintenance, code violations, etc.)
- 9 Park doesn't fit an established model (too small, too large, too many rentals, etc.)
- 4 Zoning/land use regulations that inhibit continued use of parks

## Education/Capacity

- 14 Lack of capacity of residents to form a purchasing or governing entity
- 12 Lack of understanding of rights/laws among residents
- 10 Challenges of negotiating with park owners/sellers
- 9 Inadequate protections/time frame when parks are being sold
- 9 Lack of capacity among local government and nonprofits to support residents
- 6 Lack of support from local governments
- 2 Community desire to redevelop park instead of preserving
- 2 Lack of wider community buy-in
- 1 Poor awareness of lack of affordable housing

**16**

**Respondents who reported successful preservation efforts (i.e. purchasing, providing technical assistance, or funding)**

**12**

**Respondents who are currently involved in a preservation project**

# Data on Mobile Home Parks in Colorado 2023

**760** Registered Mobile Home Parks with the Colorado Division of Local Affairs (DOLA)  
*184 parks did not initially submit or complete registration*

**58,303** Lots in registered parks

**48,257** Occupied mobile homes owned by residents

**4,451** Occupied mobile homes owned and rented out by park owner

**1,818** Lots with vehicles or structures on them (i.e. RVs, camper trailers)

**2,492** Vacant lots

**1,285** Vacant Mobile Homes

In addition to existing regulatory work, by July 1, 2024, DOLA will begin to expand the dispute resolution program to take complaints from MHP residents who rent their homes (as well as those who own their mobile homes), nonprofit organizations, and local governments. In cooperation with the health department, DOLA will also start a water testing program of mobile home parks by July 1, 2024





# Colorado Laws Impacting Mobile Home Parks

*This summary contains information provided by the Colorado Poverty Law Project. The Colorado Poverty Law Project offers free legal assistance to mobile home park residents in some circumstances and offers free tenants' rights trainings to mobile home park residents in English and Spanish, in person or by Zoom: [contact@copovertylawproject.org](mailto:contact@copovertylawproject.org)*

## (1) 1985 Mobile Home Park Act (MHPA), amended in 2019 and 2020

This complex law includes the following elements:

**Tenant rights**, e.g., homeowners have 90 days to solve problems if in noncompliance with state, local or park laws; tenant can be evicted only for rules spelled out in the law; if evicted, tenants can get extra time to vacate.

**Responsibility of park owners** to maintain working plumbing, utility and sewer connections; provide running water; maintain common areas, roads, trees, etc. safely.

**Protection from retaliation** when a tenant exercises legal rights, tries to organize, or takes other actions to enforce their legal rights.

The relatively new Dispute Resolution and Enforcement Program (DREP) allows tenants to register complaints about violations of MHPA without going to court. The state Department of Local Affairs handles this through its Mobile Home Park Oversight Program.

## **(2) 2020 Colorado Immigrant Tenant Protection Act**

Protects tenants from being forced to disclose immigration or citizenship status and prevents landlords from demanding or disclosing to others—including law enforcement—any information about tenants' immigration or citizenship status. The few exceptions include some situations in which a park resident is also an employee of the landlord/park owner and state/federal laws require gathering such information; and documentation necessary to determine potential residents' financial qualifications.

## **(3) 2020 Colorado Opportunity to Purchase Process**

**[this is a 2020 amendment to the 1985 Mobile Home Park Act]**

Requires that park owners notify residents within 14 days of: when the park is listed for sale; when the owner plans to accept an offer from a potential buyer; and when the owner received a notice of foreclosure.

Requires the owner to provide 12 months' notice if the owner plans to change use of the property from a mobile home park to something else.

Provides a 120-day window during which residents can attempt to purchase their park. A purchase agreement and commitment for any financing needed must be provided to the landlord.

Allows residents to transfer their right to purchase to a government agency or a housing authority or nonprofit.

Violations can be reported to the Colorado Poverty Law Project and/or the Mobile Home Park Oversight Program: [contact@copovertylawproject.org](mailto:contact@copovertylawproject.org); [MHP0P@state.co.us](mailto:MHP0P@state.co.us), 1-833-924-1147.

## **(4) Local jurisdictions and health/environment departments**

Local jurisdictions—cities, counties, and metro districts—and health/environment departments—may have laws that impact mobile home parks, such as zoning and permitting. Many old parks, established before permits were required, have been “grandfathered in” and don't require permits, even if they are sold to a new owner. However, in addition to state laws regulating MHPs, local authorities and health departments do have regulations about health and welfare—including safe drinking water, sewage, and road safety—that can help mobile home park residents force owners to take necessary action. These vary widely by jurisdiction but are worth exploring if needed.

More specifics about Mobile Home Park Sales and Homeowners' Opportunity to Purchase laws, along with links and numerous helpful forms, are available at the Colorado Department of Local Affairs website.

# Proposed MHP Legislation in 2024

## Colorado General Assembly

House Bill 24-1294, “Mobile Homes in Mobile Home Parks,” would specify legal rights and responsibilities relating to the sale, lease, and purchase of mobile homes in mobile home parks. Rep. Andrew (Andy) Boesenecker is the primary sponsor, along with Sen. Lisa Cutter and Rep. Elizabeth Velasco. The bill has been amended and passed on to committee.

In addition, the bill specifies the duties and rights of the purchaser and the seller of a mobile home in connection with an agreement in which the purchaser agrees to purchase a mobile home over a period of time that is mutually agreed upon by the seller of the mobile home (rent-to-own contract) and specifies the terms and conditions that must be included in a rent-to-own contract.

The bill authorizes the attorney general to independently initiate and bring civil and criminal action to enforce the provisions of the rent-to-own mobile home contract law.

*Note: This summary applies to this bill as introduced. For the most current version of the bill as amended, visit [leg.colorado.gov](http://leg.colorado.gov)*





# Models of Mobile Home Park Preservation

## Resident Cooperative

When a privately owned mobile home park comes up for sale, residents can organize into a co-op or similar governing body and purchase the park, usually by obtaining several grants and loans from public and private sources.

Mobile home park residents can apply for technical assistance to become a Resident-Owned Community through ROC USA. In Colorado, the regional ROC provider is Thistle Community Housing, a nonprofit organization based in Boulder and a member of the NeighborWorks Network. (See more about ROC USA, which has a lending arm, under “Sources of Funding.”) Only mobile home parks with 25 or more lots are eligible to become Resident-Owned Communities through ROC USA, based on the organization’s assessment that small communities may not have capacity to manage long term. Some communities with serious infrastructure problems also are not eligible for assistance from ROC USA because of feasibility. According to ROC USA, in order to develop a successful Resident-Owned Community, 75-80% of residents must be engaged in the process. Nine Resident-Owned Communities are currently operating in Colorado. Approximately 300 official Resident-Owned Communities are operating in the U.S. According to one estimate, the country has another 700 or so mobile home parks owned by a resident cooperative.

## Nonprofit Ownership

In recent years, numerous Colorado mobile home parks have been purchased by local nonprofit agencies. In some cases, the nonprofit agencies have been nongovernmental housing alliances and coalitions or Community Land Trusts. Nonprofits can leverage their existing operating capacity to build capital stack to purchase and manage; and funders may be more likely to offer grants and loans to a known entity with a track record of fiscal responsibility. Community Land Trusts traditionally buy land that is then leased long-term to homeowners. While mobile home park preservation has not generally been part of the mission of most land trusts, Elevation Community Land Trust is active in preservation in Durango. (See “Successful Preservation Efforts.”)

## Nonprofit Ownership, Cont'd.

When nonprofits purchase a mobile home park, they may be intending to own the mobile home park long-term, or may be effecting the purchase with the intent of selling the park to the residents as soon as that is feasible and if residents are willing to make the shift to ownership.

## Housing Authority Ownership

Housing authorities are governmental or quasi-governmental entities usually attached to local jurisdictions (municipal, county) that acquire, construct, own, and manage affordable rental units for people who meet certain low-income qualifications. Housing authorities can acquire funding from state and federal sources, including Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 vouchers, which pay rent for privately owned housing for elderly, disabled, and low-income people who earn less than 50% of the Area Median Income. Along with local jurisdictions, housing authorities can purchase mobile home parks when park residents assign their “opportunity to purchase” to them.

## Local Government Ownership

Municipalities and counties can purchase mobile home parks. Local governments have access to some funding that is not available to nonprofits, which facilitates purchases.

## Private, For-Profit Ownership

The most traditional model of park ownership is private for-profit ownership. This form of ownership doesn't guarantee that affordability is preserved, or that park residents have a meaningful voice, but it also doesn't prohibit those objectives. Given the large number of mobile home parks in Colorado and the relatively small capacity of the nonprofit/local government sector, private for-profit ownership should be part of the discussions around community affordability and preservation.

## Combined Investor & Resident Purchase

Dan Hunt, a park resident and board member who participated in the ROC purchase of Animas Mobile Home Park in 2021, said that when a nonprofit buys a park and later sells it to residents, the cost of the sale in interest, etc., will be passed on to residents. To avoid such a “second sale,” there may be another potential model in which an investor buys the park, with residents earning equity over time (such as annually or after several years), so that the residents eventually own the park.

Such a scenario might include the investor putting in two-thirds of the money and residents putting in one-third, possibly in a forgivable loan. This could help residents of small parks or who face major infrastructure improvements to eventually become owners.



# COLORADO RESIDENT AND COMMUNITY-OWNED PARKS

The following list represents the parks discovered in the course of our research. Other Colorado resident and community-owned parks may exist.

	City	Units	Date Purchased	Owner
<b>ROC Mobile Home Parks</b>				
Rocky Mountain Homeowners Co-Op	Canon City	55	2018	Park Residents
LMP Co-Op	Longmont	36	2019	Park Residents
Rivermaze Co-Op	Canon City	35	2019	Park Residents
Animas View MHP Co-Op	Durango	122	2021	Park Residents
Sans Souci Cooperative	Boulder	62	2021	Park Residents
Cooperativa Nueva Union	Leadville	29	2021	Park Residents
Paradise Village Cooperative	Johnstown	40	2022	Park Residents
Golden Hills Community Cooperative	Golden	40	2023	Park Residents
La Luna Community Cooperative	Lafayette	34	2024	Park Residents
<b>Non-Profit Mobile Home Parks</b>				
Nueva Vida	Fort Collins	68	2022	United Neighbors/ Vecinos Unidos
Triangle Trailer Park	Durango	12	2022	HomesFund – CDFI Non-Profit Lender
Three Mile Trailer Park	Glenwood Springs	20	2023	Roaring Fork Community Development Corporation
<b>Community Land Trust</b>				
Westside Mobile Park	Durango	63	2022	Elevation Community Land Trust*
<b>Housing Authority</b>				
Century Mobile Home Park	Alamosa	148+	2022	San Luis Valley Housing Coalition
Whitehaven Mobile Home Park	Steamboat Springs	70+	2022	Yampa Valley Housing Authority
<b>Other</b>				
Ponderosa Mobile Home Park	Boulder	66		City of Boulder (et. al.)**
Smuggler Park	Aspen	100+		Converting to individually owned lots

\* Park is converting to modular homes on foundations

\*\* Converting to Habitat for Humanity Homes





# SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR MOBILE HOME PARK PRESERVATION

*This list is not exhaustive. Sources are based on reported funding from survey respondents.*

## STATE OF COLORADO

Both Department of Local Affairs and Colorado Housing and Finance Authority have grant and loan products that can be used in acquisition and preservation of mobile home communities. These are funded through various sources, including but not limited to Housing Development Grant, Proposition 123, and pass through Federal funds.

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

**United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)** - Funds infrastructure improvements for mobile home parks.

**Community Development Block Grant Program** - Funding is distributed by local jurisdictions. Funds must be used to benefit people whose income is at or below 80% of AMI (Area Median Income).

**Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** - Offered in 2024, Preservation & Reinvestment Initiative for Community Enhancement (PRICE) grants are available to local governments, nonprofits, CDFIs, and resident cooperatives to preserve and revitalize manufactured housing communities.



## OTHER FINANCING INSTITUTIONS

**Colorado Health Foundation** – A private nonprofit that works to support health equity and racial justice in Colorado by investing in nonprofits, communities, and the public and private sectors.)

**Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)** – Banks, credit unions, loan funds, etc., that have been certified by the federal government to provide funding to low-income communities, particularly through lower interest than market rate loans.)

**Local Jurisdictions** – Cities, counties, Native American reservations

**Nonprofit Organizations** – These sources are most likely housing alliances and coalitions, which may or may not be directly affiliated with local governments. Some nonprofit organizations have been formed solely to represent mobile home park preservation efforts. Other nonprofits, such as cooperative development centers, support MHP conversions through various forms of technical assistance, although are not involved in their direct funding.

**Community Land Trusts** – A community land trust [CLT] is a nonprofit organization that owns land and leases it to provide affordable housing, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial spaces, and other community assets. CLTs are usually managed by a nonprofit or quasi-governmental organization. CLTs are governed by a board of CLT residents, community residents, and public representatives who develop housing and other assets that are owned and controlled by the community. Community land trusts differ from other mobile home park preservation models. Most CLTs don't deal in mobile home parks, but in traditional housing. In a CLT housing project, the land is owned by the community and held in trust permanently. This restrict future sales prices to ensure affordability. Homes are owned by individual households with incomes at or below 80% of Area Median Income. A 99-year renewable ground lease gives homeowners rights and responsibilities. This model has a resale formula built into it that supports permanent affordability through a shared appreciation model; homeowners who sell their homes can receive up to 25% gain of the market appreciation and must sell to an income-qualified household.

**ROC USA** – ROC USA is a national nonprofit organization that works to help mobile home park residents purchase their parks and govern themselves. ROC USA works with regional nonprofit technical assistance affiliates and ROC's own lending subsidiary, ROC USA Capital. The regional representative for ROC USA in Colorado is Thistle Community Housing. ROC has its own criteria for what size and types of parks it is able to assist.



# Successful Preservation Efforts

## Animas View MHP Cooperative, Inc.

Animas View is a 120-lot mobile home park of primarily elderly residents in Durango that also owns a duplex on its property. About 80% of Animas residents have incomes at or below 80% of Area Median Income; 25% of residents live on less than 30% AMI.

Park residents were notified in December 2020 that the former owner planned to sell the property and that, as a result, lot rents could increase by \$350 per month. Some residents had previously discussed buying the park and reached out to Thistle Community Housing to explore becoming a Resident-Owned Community. Unfortunately, Thistle Community Housing could not assist unless the park was actively for sale. When the sale notification was received, Animas residents contacted Thistle immediately. Residents met in the first week of 2021. ROC required that 51% of residents support the process of becoming a ROC. At the time, the law provided 90 days to get the park under contract and another 90 days to close. Animas was one of 85 MHPs being sold as a package. One other park in that group, Sans Souci in Boulder, was also able to become a ROC.

Residents formed a board and went to work educating park residents, raising money, and doing research on the infrastructure work that needed to be done. The board met frequently with resident member Dan Hunt, a retiree, as operations manager. Fortuitously, Hunt had experience in real estate, construction, restoration, property management and other businesses involving an understanding of finance.

The final loans were approved on June 8, 2021, and the closing occurred on June 21. The loans have 10-year balloon payments, by which time the park will have built enough equity to get new loans for the balances.

**Animas' financing package ("capital stack") is a good example of the complexity of funding. It was comprised of:**

<b>\$9.6 million</b>	<b>ROC USA® Capital with National Cooperative Bank</b>
<b>\$2 million</b>	<b>Colorado Health Foundation loan</b>
<b>\$1.2 million</b>	<b>ROC USA® Capital bridge loan (to be repaid after closing through another funder)</b>
<b>\$1 million</b>	<b>Durango HomesFund Loan (a Community Development Financial Institute)</b>
<b>\$565,000</b>	<b>Capital Magnet Fund Loan (through ROC USA®)</b>
<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>Colorado Health Foundation (a loan that will be forgiven after 10 years if the park is still in operation)</b>

Individual homeowners' only equity is their \$100 membership fee. The co-op owns the land, and should it go out of business, it must be turned over to another nonprofit housing group.

Lot rent was initially raised \$80, with a subsequent increase of \$45, to meet loan payments and expected operating costs. Infrastructure improvements proved to be more expensive than engineering consultants had originally estimated: in planning, \$800,000 had been set aside for water and sewer improvements that are now projected to cost \$3.2 million. Until the work is completed, the park is paying approximately \$50,000 a year for water that is leaking from old pipes.

Through ROC USA, the park is applying for federal funding from the newly passed PRICE program to pay for the repairs. The park also must replace a retaining wall estimated to cost about \$100,000.



The park board also decided to renovate the duplex on the property because perpetual rent of the duplex is estimated pay for itself in 4-7 years and then provide approximately \$50,000 in annual income. Local people have volunteered to help with some projects, such as painting the interior of the duplex.

**"It took a team of people to purchase our park. We invited over 100 people from outside our park to our purchase celebration party. They all did what they could with the time they had. It was critical.**

*- Dan Hunt, Animas Resident*

## Three Mile Mobile Home Park

Three Mile Mobile Home Park is a 20-lot mobile home community in Glenwood Springs. The same individual had owned and operated it for nearly 35 years. After he died, his children wanted to sell the park. The siblings said they had been approached by potential private investment groups but began looking into selling it to residents soon after their father had died. Ultimately, Bern Krueger, the eldest sibling, was introduced to Sydney Schalit, executive director of the social justice nonprofit Manaus. Manaus was the umbrella organization for a dormant affordable housing nonprofit called Roaring Fork Community Development Corporation.

Manaus previously had attempted to work with Thistle Community Housing and ROC USA on mobile home park preservation, but none of those successfully became Resident-Owned Communities; funding couldn't be secured, and the resident's offers were consistently outbid.

In August 2022, Schalit was at work seeking financing to purchase Three Mile Mobile Home Park and her bilingual team began educating residents about the process. She revived Roaring Fork Community Development Corporation as the entity to purchase the park in order to separate it from Manaus.

Roaring Fork CDC was able to raise \$300,000 from donations and secured a loan from the Impact Development Fund at 3.3% interest for 36 months. Long-term, the goal is to sell the park to the residents for the price paid and to offset some of the

purchase price through fund raising. Roaring Fork CDC closed on the park for \$2.4 million in April 2023.

Four days after the purchase, a high-water event in the creek shifted enormous boulders, taking out the sewer and water lines to the park and damaging a vehicular bridge on the property. An electrical brownout just a few days later damaged the well system.



The local fire department said it would not cross the damaged bridge in case of emergency. Roaring Fork CDC provided potable water and portable bathrooms for the residents and hired contractors to do the emergent repair work. Schalit estimates that long-term upgrades to the sewer and water systems as well as repair and bridge reconstruction together will cost as much as the purchase price of the park. Roaring Fork CDC intends to make needed improvement to the park before turning over to residents.



## Century Mobile Home Park

San Luis Valley Housing Coalition (SLVHC) is the housing nonprofit of Alamosa and the surrounding San Luis Valley. In the past, it created homeownership opportunities, offered home rehabilitation, and expanded into USDA rentals, assisted housing and loan programs. When the Mobile Home Park Act was amended in 2019, the state Division of Housing reached out and asked Executive Director Dawn Melgares if her agency could be the primary resource center for the area, since mobile home park tenants were already using SLVHC for assistance.

When the new law was being enacted, a major Alamosa mobile home park went on the market. The seller felt he was “grandfathered in,” since he listed the park for sale before the act went into effect and violated residents’ rights under the act. SLVHC used a grant to finance educating residents and file grievances. The park was sold in 40 days, but residents won their grievances and the seller had to pay residents a fee for those violations.

The Mobile Home Park Act had been amended by the time another MHP, Century Mobile Home Park in Alamosa, went on the market. Century consists of 185 lots, including 129 occupied homes. Its residents are largely farm workers and many speak Spanish or the Mayan language Q’anjob’al as their first languages. The owners were an elderly couple from Las Vegas who had lived at the park in the long-ago past. For about the last decade, they had put little maintenance into the park. A California corporation that owns many parks was poised to buy Century. That company had been the successful purchaser of the park previously mentioned and one in Monte Vista.

SLVHC found out the park was for sale within the first week, started meeting with residents, and got several nonprofits involved to help. But there simply wasn’t enough time to organize the residents, so the residents asked SLVHC to assume their “opportunity to purchase.” SLVHC started working with residents in August 2022 and purchased the park in December 2022.



SLVHC paid \$7 million for the park, financed with loans from First Southwest Bank, which is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), and the Impact Development Fund, also a CDFI lender. The City of Alamosa gave the agency a \$60,000 general loan to cover costs of getting started.

The state timeline for purchase was not long enough, but during the process of preparing for the purchase, SLVHC reached out to the state Mobile Home Park Oversight Program, which helped identify the sellers’ violations of statute. With each violation, the “clock” started over, gaining valuable additional time for SLVHC to move the process forward.

Melgares said residents of the park would not have been able to get the financing SLVHC was able to secure as an established nonprofit organization.

Melgares had been told at purchase that a sewer line had collapsed but quickly discovered that many of the sewer lines were collapsed. Sewer line repairs are project to cost \$3 million. The homes electrical boxes are outdated and Xcel Energy notified SLVHC that the boxes will need to be replaced for another \$2 million. Water lines on the property no longer meet code and must be replaced for another \$1.5 million. Ideally, utility lines should be repaired at the same time.

Melgares estimates the necessary renovations will cost as much as the park itself about \$7 million. Meanwhile, SLVHC has put \$160,000 into repairing unsafe homes, removing mold, repairing roof leaks, replacing windows, and other important repairs, and doing small repairs on the sewer system to help residents until the lines can be replaced. Though there is room for additional tenants, new tenants cannot move in until the sewer and water lines are repaired. The agency must also finance outdoor upkeep and removal of trash and large abandoned objects that tenants did not have means to remove. The hardest part to find funding so far has been the removal of uninhabitable homes, which required \$5,000 each to take to the dump while following guidelines for assumed asbestos contamination.

SLVHC has not raised rents since taking over Century but has had to raise utility fees as those have increased. Melgares is seeking a USDA loan to cover some of the infrastructure repairs but may still have to raise rent slightly to qualify for the loan. Once the repairs are complete and new tenants move in, this will increase revenues. She anticipates it will take two to five years to complete the repairs. By the time infrastructure repairs are made, the park could be sold to residents, if residents decide they want to pursue that option.

**We know how important these homes are to these communities and the people who live in them. We have to try to save them.**

**– Dawn Melgares, Executive Director, SLVHC**

SLVHC has been asked to consider buying other mobile home parks but can't consider doing so until it solves Century's expensive problems. Some private park owners with infrastructure problems have said they will have to shut down their parks if they cannot get assistance, but they do not qualify for governmental or nonprofit grants and loans. Their tenants would lose not only their lot spaces, but likely their mobile homes as well, since moving mobile homes is costly (\$5,000–\$10,000 for a single-wide mobile home) and because of age requirements for moving, (single-wide mobile homes cannot be more than 15 years old if being moved to private land).

Melgares and another SLVHC staff member grew up in two of the Alamosa mobile home parks with questionable futures. "We have a soft spot for them; they were our homes," she said. "We know how important they are to these communities and the people who live in them. We have to try to save them."





## Nueva Vida Mobile Home Park

Nueva Vida Mobile Home Park, renamed from Parklane by residents after purchasing, is a 68-unit community in Fort Collins with 250–300 residents, many of whom are immigrants from Mexico with low levels of education. When the park went on the market in November 2021, tenants asked Nicole Armstrong, executive director of the nonprofit The Matthews House, and Sarah Bolduc of Genesis Project Church to help them. Armstrong's nonprofit couldn't take on such a project, so Armstrong and Bolduc began a new nonprofit—United Neighbors/Vecinos Unidos (UN/VU)—to attempt to purchase the park on tenants' behalf.

In November 2021, they began working with residents, surveyed the park, and hired a real estate team that would handle the sale at a low 1.5% commission. Colorado University Law School Professor Deb Cattrell and law students from the law school's clinic handled the legal work necessary and helped educate the residents. Armstrong and Bolduc raised \$6.8 million from three different organizations—Impact Development Fund, Larimer County, and Bohemian Foundation—to buy the park; funding was contingent on residents' income falling at or below 80% of Area Median Income and on the park remaining as affordable housing. They made an offer in March 2022, but the owner had a higher bid from an investor. He wanted an “as-is” offer, which they then agreed to, and he accepted their offer.

Armstrong and Bolduc knew that “as-is” meant the park would have infrastructure problems that needed to be repaired. “The question wasn't, ‘Were we buying a lemon?’ ” she said. “It was, ‘How sour is that lemon?’ ” The answer was pretty sour; like most old mobile home parks, Nueva Vida needed a lot of infrastructure updates.

The previous owner had required residents to install, own and maintain their own water meters. UN/VU decided as an organization to purchase an all-new water meter system; the organization retains ownership, making repairs as necessary unless residents fail to maintain them or somehow damage them. During the first year, water system problems caused the park to sustain frequent water leaks.

The trees, which hadn't been maintained for 25 years, had to be trimmed for safety. An old building that was so dilapidated it was uninsurable was torn down. Now, water and sewer systems are being repaired and streets repaved.

UN/VU hired Common Good Management to handle property management. With the help of UN/VU, they hired a local community member who is Spanish-speaking and a former teacher. Leases and community rules were rewritten in English and Spanish and bilingual community meetings, with provided childcare, are held monthly. Five volunteers serve on the board, including Armstrong, her cofounder Bolduc, the principal of a nearby elementary school attended by residents' small children, a retired engineer, and another nonprofit employee. Other people have volunteered to help, including a financial officer and a grant writer and “others, who have come alongside us to say, ‘How can we be part of this journey?’ ” Armstrong said.

Residents participate in community meetings and the board is trying to determine if they have the will and desire to own the park. Armstrong shared that the ROC model doesn't seem a good choice for Nueva Vida it's a community with a lot of barriers to overcome. She also shared that being a nonprofit has in some cases been more helpful than if the park were an LLC or had another business structure. However, the organization is struggling in some respects; because mobile home parks are not flagged as “affordable” by the state for tax purposes, although its lenders deemed it affordable at financing. Nueva Vida's taxes increased an untenable 250% after the county said the property's value increased \$4 million in two years.

Despite challenges, the park has not had to evict a single tenant and the community is stable; residents are not moving out. And residents know that rent increases will likely be in the range of \$50 each year, unlike other nearby parks owned by private investors, where lot rents have been raised by as much as \$400 a month.

Armstrong attributes their success to relationship building within the community. UN/VU will continue to improve the park and may transfer to resident hands eventually.

## Westside Mobile Home Park/Triangle Trailer Park

Elevation Community Land Trust, based in Denver, had at one time been interested in acquiring a mobile home park outside of Colorado Springs to be redeveloped into homes on permanent foundations, according to executive director Stefka Fanchi. In the park of interest, all the units were owned by the park and rented to residents. Elevation tried to purchase the park but was outbid by a California corporation.

When residents of Westside Mobile Home Park in Durango received notice the park was being sold, the community organized and created a co-op and hoped to purchase their park with the help of ROC USA. However, the park didn't meet ROC's requirements; it was a mix of units that were rentals, resident-owned, and lease-to-own. Only two of the units were newer than 1970. Many units constituted substandard housing, with holes in the walls, no working heat, and other safety concerns. Some were divided into multiple housing spaces, or "studios."

Upon hearing Elevation's vision for redevelopment, residents decided to "build the dream" alongside the organization. Residents were 45 days into their (then) 90-day purchase period, and assigned their "opportunity to purchase" to Elevation. Fanchi called on partners, put together financing and made an offer to the owner that was rejected. At the same time, an article appeared in The New York Times about the company that was competing for the property. The park owner suggested if Elevation could meet the same terms as that potential buyer, make a cash offer, and close in 30 days, he would accept it.

By arranging for bridge financing, Elevation met his criteria, and its second offer was accepted.

Funders included the Impact Development Fund, First Southwest Bank, Local First Foundation, and La Plata County—as well as donations from individual community members.

Soon thereafter, another nonprofit purchased the adjacent Triangle Trailer Park, and now Elevation is buying Triangle from that nonprofit with the vision of redeveloping both parks into one community. Elevation intends to ask the city to annex both parks, which are located in the city but technically outside of its boundaries.

Elevation won't try to renovate or replace the aged mobile homes; instead, the agency intends to put factory-built modular homes on permanent foundations, replacing groups of the old mobile homes in phases. Elevation committed to no rent increases and no displacement of residents, so the process of refashioning the mobile home parks into neighborhoods of modular homes will likely take five to eight years. The first foundations should be set in spring 2025.

Fanchi expects to end up with a mix of permanently affordable rental and resident-owned units at the two parks. Currently the parks have 72 units; when the project is done, she believes they will house 107 modular houses.





## San Juan, Green Acres, & Cottonwood Mobile Home Parks

The City of Montrose's involvement in mobile home park preservation is unusual in that it doesn't involve the purchase of parks, but instead, negotiating with a mobile home park buyer to make improvements before being issued an operating permits.

Deputy City Manager Ann Morgenthaler explained that a development team came into Montrose and bought three dilapidated mobile home parks in which water quality was bad, sewer was inadequate, there were no fire hydrants, etc. The parks were so old they pre-dated permitting. Essentially the owner was told that if he made certain improvements, he would be eligible for operating permits and could move in additional units, which would increase his revenue. Without those permits, he couldn't move in new units.

With the goal of preserving affordable housing, the city contributed a total of \$500,000 for asbestos remediation associated with removal of uninhabitable homes and helped pay for new water and sewer lines. The city used American Rescue Plan and general fund monies for this partnership.

Now the mobile home parks have clean water, new sewer and gas lines, paved roads, and a new green space at each of the three sites.

"Terrible motel-like rooms" on the properties were also removed. The owner was required to keep rents the same until the improvements had been completed, on about a two-year timeline. The city paid a contractor directly for the work the city funded. This process was comparable to what the city does for businesses, Morgenthaler said; for example, the city will help fund things like asbestos removal from downtown buildings to foster redevelopment.

"It happened, when we spoke to the right developer, that he would commit to making improvements if he could in turn bring in new units," Morgenthaler said. "We're working now on how to use that hook (or other hooks) on parks that are not in the conditions we would like them to be. How can we issue a permit conditioned on the developer doing improvements and maintaining the parks?"

Morgenthaler took her ideas to the city planning commission, then to city council for approval, and drafted a written agreement spelling out what the developer had to do in order to get approval to add a certain number of units. For its part, the city would contribute financially to the improvements.

The developer has since moved to a rent-only model and is not accepting new resident-owned mobile homes in any of the three parks.

# ONLINE RESOURCES FOR MOBILE HOME PARKS IN COLORADO

Visit [HRWCO.org](http://HRWCO.org) to find a list of organizations, articles and other resources about Mobile Home Preservation.





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