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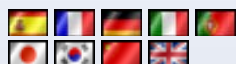
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Board approves disclosure notice for manufactured home buyers

Written by Elizabeth Larson
Wednesday, 26 September 2007

LAKEPORT –The Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to require local manufactured home sellers to give buyers a one-page disclosure form informing them of their rights early in the purchase process.

The ordinance requiring the mandatory disclosure notice must still go through a second reading next month.

Supervisor Denise Rushing brought the issue to the board earlier this month, at its Sept. 11 meeting.

Rushing had been approached by the Manufactured Housing Citizens Group, whose members shared nightmare stories of how their homes had been delivered defective and installed incorrectly, leaving them to battle the home dealers to have their homes repaired.

Spring Valley residents and Manufactured Housing Citizens Group members Janis Paris and Paul Frindt spoke on behalf of the measure two weeks ago, when it first went to the board for a lengthy discussion, and they returned to champion it again Tuesday.

With them came nearly one dozen area residents who shared their stories about struggling with defective homes and the companies who sold them.

Noticeably absent at Tuesday's board hearing were the local manufactured home sellers and contractors who had crowded into the chambers two weeks ago to argue against the disclosure sheet, which is meant to advise homebuyers of rights that already exist under state law.

Paris said manufactured homes usually are purchased in a two-part process; the down payment and a final disbursement of funds from escrow.

The one-page document would be presented to buyers at the time of down payment, said Paris.

Currently, sellers only make disclosures about buyers' rights during the final signing of the home purchase contract. It's four pages of six-point type, said Frindt, with buyers having only one hour to read and digest it.

She said the disclosure form the board considered Tuesday wasn't something the manufactured housing group created from "whole cloth." Rather, she said it was based in part on a longtime suggestion by the Consumers Union.

Frindt said their effort was simply to educate buyers in

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order to help them make better decisions.

"Manufactured housing done right is a wonderful thing," he said.

The disclosure document, he said, is just a reiteration of buyers' rights. "It's hard to see a very valid argument against it."

The homebuyers who sat in the audience and who would share their stories, said Frindt, exemplified the types of problems that can happen. This disclosure, he said, is too late to benefit them.

Homebuyers share their stories

Board Chair Jeff Smith said Tuesday that following the last board meeting he was contacted by many people – some of them friends – who had problems with manufactured home installations.

Frindt asked for a show of hands from the audience to determine how many people had had such issues. Ten people raised their hands, one of them being Rick Coel, the county's Community Development director.

Frindt then asked how many of them had resolved their problems. Only Coel raised his hand. Asked how many fixed the problems with their own money, a majority again raised their hands.

Manufactured home owner Janice Hatfield told the board she supported the ordinance. She said she begged the dealer she bought her home from for help, yet, "I'm still sitting in a mess and these people don't care."

Spring Valley resident Monte Winters, who was president of the Spring Valley Homeowners Association, said he is a "rare entity," because he lives in a manufactured home but didn't have any issues with installation or home construction.

However, Winters said he saw many problems with manufactured homes being installed in Spring Valley.

"You're taking a bold move," said Winters, adding that it behooved the manufactured home sellers to keep things "as cloud and dark as possible."

The proposed ordinance, said Winters, "takes some of the used car out of the manufactured home business, and that's a positive thing."

Another manufactured home owner, Diane Williamson, said, "Anything that alerts the public to what their rights are is fine," although she questioned if the ordinance goes far enough.

She said she has spent \$25,000 on an attorney to get through mediation with the company that sold her the home she lives in.

Williamson said she thought the matter was headed toward resolution, but she recently found out the company won't settle. That means she'll have to spend as much as \$50,000 more to address the myriad issues with the home she bought for \$103,000.

She suggested that there needs to be legislation that puts

the responsibility back on the manufactured home sellers to be forthright in their sales practices.

"We need something to start with, but this can't be the end," she said.

Rushing: Not a magic wand

Supervisor Ed Robey said the problems with manufactured housing appear to be statewide. Williamson responded that she's run across out-of-state manufacturers who also don't comply with California law.

Smith asked County Counsel Anita Grant if the county could make laws, rules and regulations in the county tougher than state law.

Grant said state law in this case does "occupy the field," but said she'll research what measures they can take.

Said Smith, "To me, this is beyond ridiculous, that folks have to go through this."

He said a message must be sent to Sacramento that the state needs to uphold its laws and prevent these kinds of abuses.

Lake County has many manufactured homes, said Smith, and it's "nuts" to allow them to be sold and installed when they're substandard.

Linda Tellardin said she bought a defective 2,600-square-foot manufactured home. The county's Community Development inspectors didn't inspect the plumbing, and she questioned who in the county was signing off on these homes.

"Am I going to have a piece of crap on my hands?" asked Tellardin, who wondered if the home she purchased to live in during her retirement would last 10 years.

She added that someone in the county needed to be responsible for carrying out inspections after she paid \$10,000 in permits.

Mary Glass of Kelseyville said she still can't live in her home after two years. When she asked county inspectors about her collapsing ceiling, they said it had nothing to do with them.

The contractor she paid to install the home walked off the job, Glass said. Some of the workers who helped install the home came back to her later and said there may be problems, since most of them were on drugs at the time.

"I agree with what you're doing," she told the board.

Rushing said the ordinance is "one step" meant to educate buyers, but more education is needed.

She said the board needs to ensure that county staff do their jobs and properly inspect manufactured homes.

"We don't have a way to wave a magic law and make everyone obey the law," she said.

Dennis Lackey, a retired general contractor, said he bought a manufactured home and also had a bad experience. That's because the process is set up to protect the seller,

not the consumer.

"The dealers have learned how to just touch your place and run," he said.

Lackey also cited problems with county inspectors, who didn't question the contractor's work, even though Lackey's plumbing was improperly installed.

Rushing moved to accept the ordinance on its first reading, which the board accepted 4-0. Supervisor Anthony Farrington was absent as he is recovering from a Sunday motorcycle accident.

Smith said he hopes the issues with manufactured homes will be addressed and resolved at the state level.

After the meeting, Paris said she was encouraged by a statement made by Grant, who said the local ordinance could be used as a template for a state law.

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