



A Hands-On Look at Mobile Home Comparability

This is the final in a series of three articles discussing the planning for and actual relocation of mobile home parks that are impacted by federally-funded projects. Different agencies, as well as state and local jurisdictions may have their own set of rules concerning the closure of mobile home parks. The reader is advised to carefully examine their agency's established procedures, along with state, local and federal regulations concerning the relocation of mobile home park residents. This examination should take place before beginning to plan or implement relocation activities.

BY DARRYL ROOT, R/W-RAC, JD

One of the most critical items in planning for the relocation of a mobile home park is to determine the availability of comparable housing for displaced residents. The article published in the March/April issue examined the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (URA) rules and definitions pertaining to comparability. This article will address more practical issues involved in finding comparable housing.

From the mobile home park displacee's perspective, there are two basic components of comparability—the replacement unit and the replacement park. The URA addresses both of these components to some degree. (See Title 49 Part 24—Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition for Federal and Federally-Assisted Program; § 24.2 Definitions and acronyms.)

The following discussion is a more hands-on look at comparability issues and assumes the common scenario where the displacement unit cannot be moved and the

relocation professional is looking at a “park to park” relocation. This discussion also assumes both the displacement and replacement units are decent, safe and sanitary.

The Replacement Unit

A mobile home resident is obviously concerned with the basics of comparability, such as obtaining the same number of bedrooms and bathrooms in the replacement unit. However, there are other features that are also relevant. For example, does the replacement unit in the new park have the same type of attached features that the present unit has? These features could include awnings, decks or carport coverings that have been added to the existing unit, but were not movable. What is the age of the replacement home? What is the type of construction of the replacement unit? Is it a mobile home (manufactured home) or is it modular housing? What type of heating does the replacement unit have (gas or electric)? Who is the manufacturer of the new unit?



The Replacement Park

This element of the comparability equation is harder to quantify. It is addressed to some degree by the URA. (See Title 49 Part 24—Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition for Federal and Federally-Assisted Program; § 24.2 Definitions and acronyms, which states, “6) Comparable replacement dwelling. The term comparable replacement dwelling means a dwelling which is... (v) In a location generally not less desirable than the location of the displaced person’s dwelling with respect to public utilities and commercial and public facilities, and reasonably accessible to the person’s place of employment...” Therefore, any comparable chosen must meet these and other minimums discussed in that section.

But the relocation professional should also be ready to answer such questions as: What amenities does the replacement park have? (Some mobile home park communities now have on-site swimming pools, clubhouses and gyms for resident use.) What are the credit requirements for entry into the new park? Are there limitations on the number and types of pets residents can have? What are the site maintenance requirements at the new park (i.e., lawn care, etc.)? Are there age restrictions for residents? What is the monthly site rental fee and security deposit? How large are the sites themselves and how close are neighboring units?

Conclusion

The relocation of residents of a mobile home park is a very complex, time consuming and expensive undertaking. A thorough understanding of all state and federal requirements is necessary before even beginning to start relocation planning. Availability of comparable housing must also be addressed along with the issue of proper funding. Understanding the qualifications for federal, state and local housing and social programs will also help displacees. It is also crucial that the relocation professional is brought into the project development process early enough to examine these issues and work with other right of way, appraisal and engineering professionals to formulate strategies that adequately address these challenges.



Darryl Root, R/W-RAC, JD

Darryl is Vice President of Marketing and Business Development for Paragon Partners Ltd. He has more than 20 years of professional real estate experience in both the public and private sectors involving real estate sales and acquisition of right of way, easements and fee property, as well as residential and commercial relocation assistance. Darryl has a law degree from Washington University School of Law and an MBA from Maryville University in St. Louis.