

Coachella Valley Agricultural Housing

Background

The Riverside County Consolidated Plan reports that in 1990, approximately 19 percent, or 74,561 units, of the county's existing housing stock was composed of mobile home parks and is increasing. Many mobile home park owners whose parks are not in compliance with regulations do not have the financial capacity to provide necessary improvements that would allow parks to become compliant with federal and state law and local ordinances.

There are approximately 200 trailer/mobile home parks in the Coachella Valley, most of which have never been permitted, although most of them have applied for permits during the moratorium.

It has been estimated that more than 12,000 seasonal farm workers reside in the county. Many live in substandard conditions, such as makeshift camps, dangerous, unsanitary trailers or out-of-doors.

One of the County of Riverside's primary objectives is to provide financing for rehabilitating the many existing mobile home parks that serve the low and very low income farm workers in the Coachella Valley.

In 1992, under the Farm Labor Housing Protection Act, AB 3526 (known as the Polanco Bill) was passed by the state legislature. The bill is designed to "permit and encourage the development and use of sufficient numbers and types of employee housing facilities as are commensurate with local need." The bill exempts new farm workers housing parks from business taxes, local registration fees and Conditional Use Permits. Only parks with twelve or fewer mobile homes qualify.

Working within the limitations of AB 3526, the County Board of Supervisors and the Economic Development Agency have formulated a plan to encourage park owners, and individual owners of trailer/mobile homes, to apply for permits during a moratorium period of three months that ended on September 30, 1999. Since October 1, 1999, unpermitted parks are being inspected for violations and any park or individual owner who has not applied for help under the moratorium period will be closed down.

Findings

1. The proliferation of unknown and unpermitted parks has been exacerbated by the discontinuance of full time Environmental Health Housing Inspectors.

2. Initial and annual inspections will now be conducted by the State Housing and Community Development Agency (HCD) for local building and land use requirements. County Code Enforcement and Building and Safety will inspect for building code compliance. They do not have adequate staff to keep up with the required inspections.

The Environmental Health Department will be responsible for approving sewage and water system design.

3. Previous inspections found some parks with dangerous and unsanitary conditions, but none of them has been closed down. To date, no official plan has been formulated between state and county agencies to proceed with inspections and permitting in an organized manner. The goals of the program are vague. The State HCD and county departments have no clear plan on how to proceed with the closure of dangerous/unsanitary parks.

4. A low interest loan up to \$75,000 (based on \$6,250 for each mobile home space) is being offered to unpermitted park owners to install septic tanks, plumbing and other site utilities. Based on final costs of a permitted park owner/contractor, this amount falls short of what the actual costs would be.

5. Under the Mobile Home Tenant Assistance Grant Program, individual mobile homeowners who are tenants of unpermitted parks, have been offered up to a \$3,000 grant to improve their existing trailer that must have an economic life of ten years. They must have been registered by September 30, 1999, and show substantial improvement within three months.

6. The Mobile Home Tenant Assistance Loan Program offers mobile home owners, who are tenants of unpermitted parks, a loan of up to \$20,000 for replacement of mobile homes in such poor condition they cannot be repaired.

Recommendations

Economic Development Agency and Board of Supervisors:

1. Board of Supervisors to immediately authorize funding for a second full time code enforcement inspection team with additional responsibilities to locate and monitor unknown and unpermitted parks.

2. Reevaluate the loan limit for each mobile home space to ensure adequate funding to cover site utilities.

3. Provide adequate office personnel to monitor complete compliance with all grant and loan terms.

4. Economic Development Agency, Environmental Health, Planning Departments and State HCD work closely together to expedite the park permitting and inspections process.