Tahoe Verde residents upset with new owners

By Kathryn Reed

Tahoe Verde mobile home park residents must feel like they are living in a bit of a time warp. The topic of rental control is back.

In 2007 and 2008 occupants of the more than 200 units were in a dispute with the owners at the time that escalated to the South Lake Tahoe City Council. The council said no to mandating rent control. Rent control would have to apply to all such dwellings in the city limits and would be overseen by city staff.

The mobile home park has new owners, rents are going up, new leases are being circulated and rent control is back on the table. The five-year leases were distributed in September, but not everyone is signing them. Residents are talking privately to council members and anticipate bringing the issue of rent control to a vote of the council.

“As far as what my rent pays for, I would expect it to pay for any maintenance of the park. But this lease would make it otherwise,” Kim Love told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Love and Mike Gwin have been talking to fellow Tahoe Verde residents to inform them of their rights and to create a united front. Attorney Ted Long, who helped with the rent control measure the first time, is again working on behalf of the tenants.

“We are not asking for special treatment. What we want is a level playing field,” Long told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He and the residents also want to talk to the owners about

their concerns, but that has yet to happen.

Owners of the mobile homes occupy most of the 268 spaces. But mobile is a bit of a misnomer. The structures are for the most part permanent and not able to be hitched to a vehicle and carted out of the park. The land is what these people are renting.

One of the issues is that they can't just leave like an apartment or house renter could because of owning the structure. And residents don't believe they could sell based on what many see as a one-sided lease agreement.

HCA Management Company out of Novato is managing the property.

"We try to be above board in our leases. They are sometimes maybe difficult for someone to read," Phil Taylor, regional manager with HCA, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I believe the concern of residents boils down to this – we have made almost $1 million worth of improvements since we purchased it last December. I think residents are apprehensive they are going to have to pay for that now and they are not. If they read the lease, we could not ask for them to pay for improvements unless they voted for it."

The lease actually says capital replacement and capital mandates can be done without consent of residents. Capital improvements of more than $10,000 must be agreed to by at least 51 percent (each space gets one vote) of residents. Then any improvement costs above $10,000 would be divvied up among the residents.

Rent increases are loosely tied to the consumer price index, though the management company can up the fee 3 percent each year no matter what the CPI is and won't hike it more 6 percent as long as the CPI is not above 10 percent.

And if all the spaces are not occupied, any fees beyond rent will be divvied up among the occupied spaces. This, residents

say, gives the owners zero incentive to keep the park full.

Water is included in the price of rent as is landscaping of the common area.

Previous leases with prior owners did not require residents to pay for capital improvements.

“What are they doing with their money?” Gwin wonders of the current owners.

His base rent is now $654 month. In 2000 it was $480. He has put $40,000 into improving his home.

Many who live at Tahoe Verde are on fixed incomes. Even those who aren’t, like Gwin, aren’t seeing their paychecks increase. He hasn’t had a raise in three years.

“People are scared,” Gwin said.