



Ask the Planner: Improving the Appearance of Older Homes

by **Donald C. Westphal, ASLA**

What can we do to improve the appearance of the older homes in our community?

I have suggested in past articles that when approaching an upgrade on an older community, the scope of the work necessary should be concentrated into two areas: 1) elements of improvement controlled by the owner/manager and 2) those elements controlled by the homeowner.

It is important to make the necessary improvements to the community controlled elements first and then, having led by example, require an improvement in the appearance of the homes. The first step in the process should be a review of the community rules or guidelines. Do all the homes in the community comply with the existing guidelines? Many older communities have become lax in the enforcement of the existing rules. Items such as storage of miscellaneous materials on the home site, foundation wrap that is damaged or in poor condition, storage sheds that are rusty or in need of repair, steps or porches that are worn or unpainted, and siding that is rusted, in need of repair or painted an unacceptable color, are some of the more frequent examples.



Continue this first step by bringing the homeowners into compliance with the existing rules. This can be initiated by examining each home site and recording the rules infractions for each. A photo documentation of each home site is a great way to record the inspection results with a graphic demonstration of the problem areas. A letter should go out to all the residents informing them of the owner's and manager's commitment to improve the appearance of the community for everyone's benefit followed by a notice of individual infractions and a time limit to bring homes and home sites into compliance. It may be necessary for the community to help some residents in the improvement process by offering incentives of materials such as paint, grass seed, mulch, flowers etc. Providing a list of individuals in the community or area who would be available to perform needed repairs would be helpful for residents not capable or able to do the upgrades on their own.



Second, the review of existing rules or guidelines may have identified areas where changes or additions would give management additional tools for home upgrade and enforcement. The following is a list of items one might include in a revised guideline document: Minimum home size; roof pitch and materials; siding materials and color; foundation wrap (skirting); fencing; awnings; appearance of the street face of the home (required windows); patios, porches, and decks (compliance with local codes); carports, garages and sheds (size, location, and materials); air conditioners; transportation systems, wheels axels and hitches; windows and doors; utility connections; fire safety; antennas and satellite dishes; ramps and steps; landscaping and lawns; motorcycles and other recreational vehicles; parking; pets; play equipment on home sites; resale procedures; vehicles, washing and repairing.



Check to be certain that the revisions are done in compliance with local and state laws. While you are at it, revise the lease document if necessary to bring it in compliance with current laws. Begin a regular rotation of inspections and written notices of guideline violations. Be persistent, persuasive and patient, the community didn't become unattractive overnight and will usually take a fair amount of time to remedy the problem.



Those who have successfully completed the process have seen an improvement in both the value of the community and homes, but also in the spirit of the residents. I encourage you to start the process as soon as possible. The MHI publication *Renewing Your Manufactured Home Community* will also help get you started.

*Don Westphal has over 35 years of experience planning manufactured housing communities. He is also co-author of **Navigating the Manufactured Housing Zoning Process** and co-author **Renewing Your Manufactured Home Community: A Community Owner's Guide to Upgrading** both available through MHI. Don Westphal can be contacted at (248) 651-5518 or don@dcwestphal.com*