

Services for Manufactured Home Park Residents

What Park Residents Say

Report prepared for CASA of Oregon

By Andrée Tremoulet
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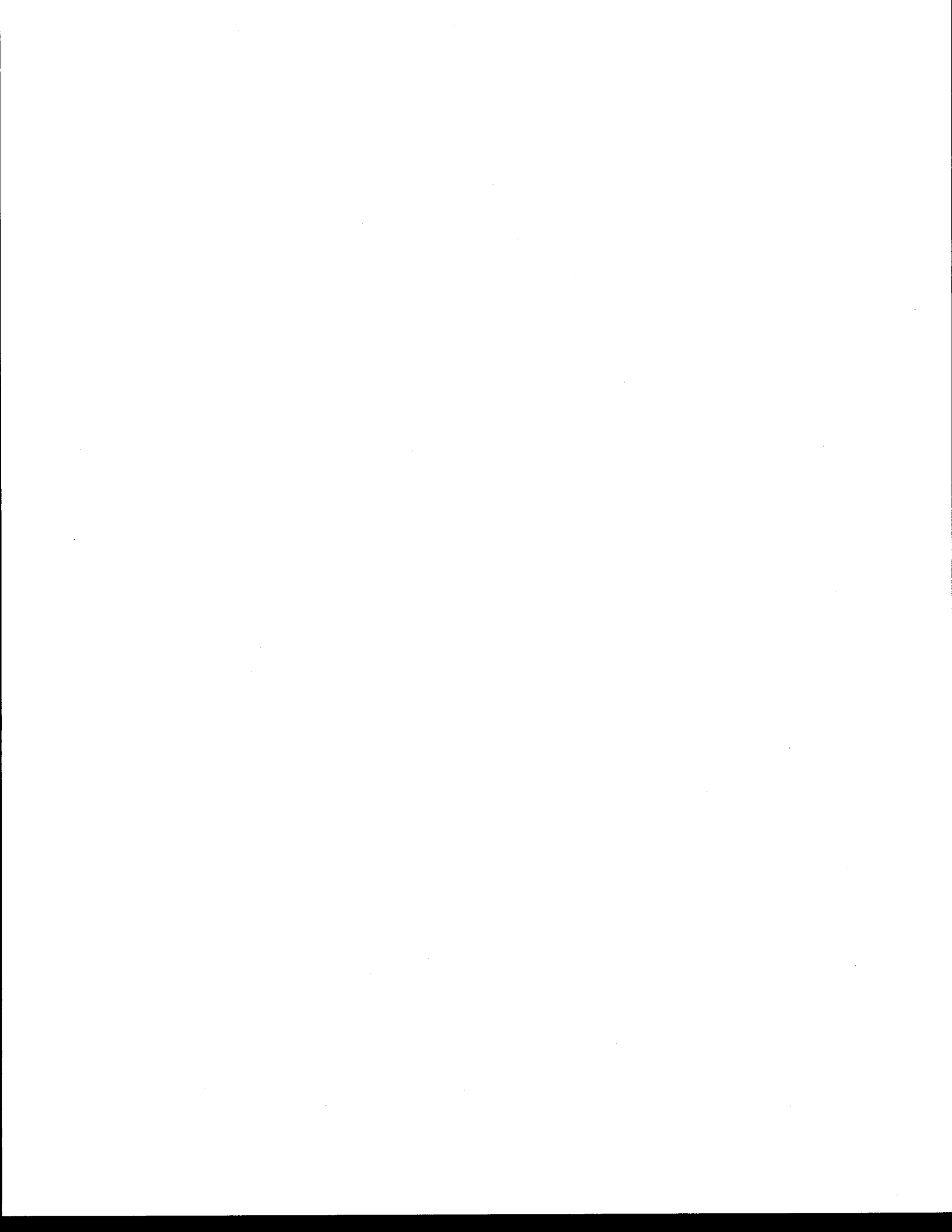
Special thanks to the volunteer leaders in each park who solicited participants and arranged for a location for the focus groups. And special thanks also to the residents who came out on weekends and evenings to share their ideas and concerns. This research would not have occurred without your involvement.

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A. Executive Summary

Background

Manufactured housing located in “manufactured home parks” comprises an important part of the affordable housing inventory in Oregon. It is the primary source of unsubsidized affordable detached single-family housing in the state².

According to US Census 2000, 10.3% of Oregon’s housing units are manufactured homes, a significantly higher percentage than the US average of 7.6%. Approximately 40% of the state’s manufactured housing, or some 65,500 – 79,250 units, are located in the state’s 1,300+ manufactured home parks.³ If approximately 40% of the state’s total housing units are affordable to low income households,⁴ then one in ten affordable housing units statewide is a manufactured home in a manufactured home park. Thus, manufactured home parks provide not only the largest source of unsubsidized single-family detached affordable housing, they also accommodate a sizable portion of the state’s overall affordable housing inventory.

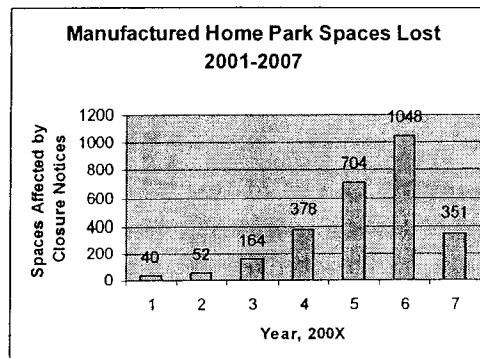
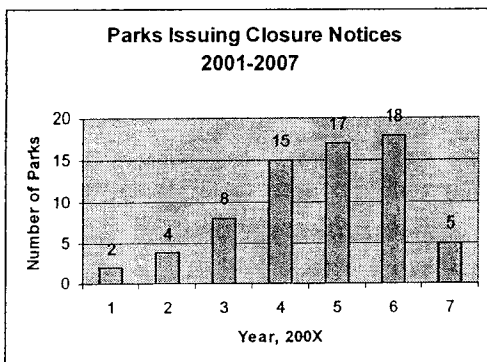
In the last five years, rising land values have shaken the stability of this form of housing. Park closures began to occur at an alarming rate as park owners closed parks and sold the land for conversion to higher-yielding uses. From 2001 – 2007, sixty-nine manufactured home parks issued closure notices, which represented a loss of 2,737 spaces, or approximately 4% of the total spaces in the state. As the charts below indicate, the losses peaked in 2006, the apex of the housing boom in Oregon. One county in the Portland metro region, Washington County, accounted for 40% of the spaces lost and 21% of the parks closed during that time period.

¹ The term “manufactured home park” as used in this report has the same meaning as a “manufactured dwelling park” as defined in ORS 446.003(30). It is a place where four or more residential trailers, mobile homes or manufactured homes are placed on one lot within 500 feet of each other, and where the primary purpose is to rent spaces for manufactured dwellings.

² Community Development Law Center and CASA of Oregon, *Manufactured Home Parks in Oregon*, Final Draft, July 2007.

³ Sources: 2006 Oregon Population Survey, Oregon Housing and Community Services Summary of Oregon Manufactured Dwelling Parks June 2007.

⁴ A low income household is one earning no more than 80% of median family income (MFI) for its geographic area, as established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. For a family of four in rural Douglas County Oregon earning 80% MFI (\$38,650), housing would be affordable if it cost no more than \$966 per month, which is 30% of their adjusted gross income. For a household of two earning 80% MFI (\$30,900), housing would be affordable if it cost no more than \$773 per month.



In response to these closures, the Oregon Legislative Assembly adopted several new pieces of legislation in 2007 in support of two strategies: preservation and assistance. The first involved supporting the purchase of manufactured home parks by residents and other “friendly” entities, such as housing authorities and community development corporations, so that they can remain parks. The second involved creating a “softer landing” for those displaced by the closures through providing financial assistance.

In April 2007, Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) contracted with CASA of Oregon (CASA) to lead a process to assess broad manufactured dwelling park residency issues and identify the kinds of services that residents need both to deal with ordinary residency issues and to assist them when their park is closing. Specifically, OHCS called for an “intensive inquiry of the needs of manufactured home park residents facing a threat and/or actual notification of park closure.” CASA retained Jan Glick & Associates (JGA), an independent consulting company specializing in strategic planning and change management for non-profit organizations, to facilitate the planning process and develop the model and plan.

CASA of Oregon also contracted with Andrée Tremoulet, a PSU researcher, to design, conduct and analyze results from seven focus groups comprised of manufactured home park residents from across the state, with support from CASA staff and trained volunteers. From July 18 through August 22, 2007, seven focus groups involving 66 manufactured home park residents were conducted in various parts of the state. The purpose of this research is to give voice to the residents’ understanding of their situation and their views on the kinds of services that they would like to have available.

This report presents a picture of the participants’ concerns, needs and ideas in four areas:

- Manufactured home park living
- Where to turn for assistance
- Park closures
- The components of an ideal future network of services.

Every attempt has been made to remain faithful to what the residents said. Where appropriate, this report uses direct quotes from the residents to convey key ideas. No effort has been made to moderate their comments or take into account other perspectives, such as that of manufactured home park owners, agencies, non-profits or associations.

In developing a plan, JGA will integrate the information from this report with information from a broad range of perspectives gained through stakeholder interviews. Thus, this report represents one vitally important stream of information that feeds into a more broadly-based process to generate a plan for service delivery.

Principal Findings

The principal findings of this report are summarized below.

Role of Residents

In creating a network of services for park residents, the residents themselves should be seen as an active, capable part of the network, and not as passive recipients of services provided by technically skilled others. A considerable pool of skill and knowledge exists among park residents, and this could be cultivated and incorporated as a key part of the network.

Services

Residents believe that the current state law and its enforcement mechanisms do not give them the leverage that they need in resolving day-to-day park problems. They said that the most important element in an ideal future network of services is ensuring that there is a voice for park residents in state law and rule-making. This is a clear and consistent message.

Residents also said that they want access to a clearinghouse of information on where to turn for assistance in dealing with the everyday issues that arise with park living. This should include both a place to obtain written information and also a phone line that provides one-on-one help and referrals. They want help with purchasing their park, mediation services for landlord-tenant issues, and updates on state laws and regulations.

Park Closures

There is no one recognized place to turn statewide for information on what to do if you receive a notice that your park is closing. This is true even though 69 parks have been issued closure notices since 2001.

Beyond the resource fair conducted by OHCS, there is no organized system for helping displaced residents find new places to live. After the fairs, residents are largely on their own. Some are better able to manage this challenge than others. At least 26 homeless households reported park closure as the cause of their homelessness in central Oregon in the winter of 2007.

When parks close, residents lose more than a place to live. For some residents (especially older residents), moving means being taken from a supportive and familiar network and entering an unfamiliar, often impersonal and sometimes more institutionalized environment that can constrain their ability to live independently.

Any entity designated as the resource statewide for assistance with closures will be faced with the need to develop accurate information about statewide laws and resources AND to create a system for developing information about housing resources and services available locally.

Park Living

In general, manufactured home park residents like where they live. For many, it is their housing of choice, not housing of last resort. Older residents in particular want to remain where they are; they chose this lifestyle and do not want to live elsewhere.

In particular, residents spoke of parks as being far more than a place to live; they talked about the sense of community that they felt with their neighbors. The ties among residents in parks appear to result in benefits such as day-to-day social opportunities, an enhanced feeling of personal safety, and an increased possibility of aging in place among friends. The physical and social structure of parks appears to support a blend of autonomy/individuality (through single family detached manufactured homes) and community (through shared social activities and shared social spaces).

This summary highlights the primary findings of the report. Section C of this report includes a complete list of findings and a more thorough and nuanced description of what residents said.

The Organization of This Report

Section B of this report discusses how focus groups of park residents were chosen, organized, conducted and analyzed to yield the information presented in this report. It also explains how and why focus groups were chosen as the means to explore topics related to manufactured home park living.

Section C of this report covers each of the four principal areas of inquiry: manufactured home park living, where to turn for assistance, park closures and the characteristics of

an ideal network of services. Each section begins with a summary of the principal findings and then discusses the participants' responses in detail. Section C is the "meat" of this report.

Section D presents a brief conclusion.

B. Methods

1. Focus Groups

Focus groups are facilitated discussions organized for the purpose of soliciting and probing the opinions of participants about a chosen topic. They were created by market researchers as a way to explore what consumers think about a potential new product. In policy analysis, they provide an excellent means of sampling opinion and preferences of a population about selected topics. While focus groups do not yield statistically valid results (results that permit accurate and precise generalizations about the general population), they can provide valuable insights about concerns and opinions. The seven focus groups conducted as part of this research sampled the opinions of park residents in Oregon about manufactured home park living, desired services and park closures.

In constructing these focus groups, care was taken to try to include park residents who live in a variety of different locations and under a variety of different conditions. The sections below describe the methods used to select parks and residents (and the constraints imposed by those choices), how the focus groups were conducted and how the data were analyzed.

While this report does not produce conclusive evidence about what park residents statewide think, it does identify issues that are important and relevant to a report recommending what should be included in a network of services to assist park residents. It gives voice to the opinions and concerns of park residents in a way that is easily integrated into a larger program planning process.

2. Sampling Methodology

Profile of Parks Selected for Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted in seven parks in Oregon from July 18 through August 22, 2007. The parks were intentionally selected to sample variations in the types of parks that exist in Oregon. The following dimensions of variation were considered:

- Size of park based on number of spaces
- Whether it is a park limited to households with a resident age 55 and older (55+ parks) or a family park comprised of households with no age restrictions
- The geographic area of the state in which the park is located
- Whether it is situated in a rural, suburban or urban location
- Primary race/ethnicity of park residents
- Estimated economic status of residents
- Whether the park has experienced a threat of closure.

Chart B-1 displays the characteristics of the seven focus groups along these dimensions. In six of seven focus groups, participants came from a single park. One focus group was comprised of residents from several parks in the area, most of whom were leaders or otherwise very active in their park.

OSTA and CASA recruited the parks through utilizing their existing network of contacts. At least one resident in each of the parks had had some prior contact with one or both of these organizations. The relationships between the parks and these two organizations are described in Chart B-1.

Profile of Participants in Focus Groups

OSTA and CASA of Oregon managed the selection of focus group participants from the parks. Staff identified and worked with a local leader at the park, who was the person who actually recruited the focus group participants. Staff asked the local leader (a volunteer) to recruit "a cross-section of residents" who represented the range of incomes, ages and household types present in the park. A degree of self-selection typically occurs when potential participants accept or decline an invitation to join a focus group. While there are no statistics to prove it, it is likely that the focus group participants in this study are more active and involved with their park and manufactured dwelling park issues than park residents in general.

As Chart B-1 indicates, sixty-six people participated in the seven focus groups. The profile below is a composite snapshot of the participants based on their answers to a questionnaire about their households and their homes (Appendix A). All but fourteen participants completed the questionnaires (participation rate of 79%). Ten of those who did not complete the questionnaires were from the same focus group, which was conducted in Spanish at a family park.

Chart B-1

Oregon Manufactured Dwelling Park Focus Groups Conducted July 18 – August 22, 2007											
Park	Dimensions of Variation Among Parks					Threat of Closure?	Geographic Area	Rural/ Suburban/ Urban	Number of Participants in Focus Group	Date of Focus Group	Parks' Relationship with OSTA & CASA
	# spaces	55+	Race/ Ethnicity	Econ Status							
1	151-200	N	Primarily white	Mixed	Park was for sale but purchase rescinded	Portland Metro	Suburban	14	7/18/07	OSTA: 1-5 members, no chapter CASA: Assisting	
2	51-100	N	Primarily white	Low-Mixed	Notice given and extended	Central Oregon	Suburban	9	8/3/07	OSTA: No relationship CASA: One phone contact prior	
3	51-100	Y	Primarily white	Low	No notice	Mid-Valley	Suburban	8	8/10/07	OSTA: 6-10 members, no chapter CASA: No relationships	
4.	NA – Multiple Parks	Y	Primarily white	Upper-Mixed	No notice, little concern	Southern Oregon	Rural	12	8/11/07	OSTA: Participants very active in OSTA. Several chapters CASA: No relationship	
5.	1 - 50	Y	Primarily white	Mixed	No notice, little concern	Eastern Oregon	Rural	2	8/13/07	OSTA: 1-5 members, no chapter CASA: No relationship	
6.	101-150	Y	Primarily white	Mixed	No notice, little concern	Portland Metro	Suburban	7	8/16/07	OSTA: 26-30 members, have chapter CASA: No relationship	
7.	1-50	N	Mixed white & Latino	Very Low	Notice given	NW Oregon	Suburban	14	8/22/07	OSTA: No relationship CASA: Assisting	

- Most of the participants were older adults with no children living with them.
 - Almost three-quarters of the participants (73%) were age 60 or older. Two others reported living with or representing someone who was age 60 or older.
 - Eighty-eight percent of participants reported that there were no children age 18 or younger living with them.
- The majority of households---57%---were composed of one or two people. Forty percent of participants lived alone. Seventeen percent lived with one other person. One participant indicated that he had a large family and that seven other people lived with him.
- The majority of participants lived in older homes
 - Only two percent of residents reported living in a home built during the last ten years.
 - Forty-four percent reported living in pre-HUD Code homes built before 1977.
- While most participants lived in modest homes, a few lived in higher-value homes.
 - More than half of the participants (56%) lived in a doublewide, and a third (33%) lived in a singlewide home.
 - Half of the participants (50%) estimated the value of their homes at \$20,000 or less. Eight percent valued their homes at more than \$100,000. Almost a quarter (23%) did not provide an estimated value for their home.
- Eighty-eight percent owned their home outright, with no loan to pay in addition to rent.
- Participants varied considerably in the duration of their experience with manufactured home living. A quarter of participants had lived in a manufactured home for three or fewer years. Seventeen percent had lived in a manufactured home for more than 18 years.
- Sixty percent had lived in their current park for six or fewer years.
- Slightly more than half (52%) reported having access to the Internet on a regular basis for e-mail and visiting websites.

While the participants in the focus groups were not selected with the intention of matching the demographic profile of all manufactured home park dwellers in the state, it is helpful to understand if and how the sample of participants differs dramatically from this general population. A comparison with the demographics of all Oregon manufactured home park dwellers derived from the 2006 Oregon Population Survey indicated that the focus group participants were older and less likely to have children living with them than the population of park residents in Oregon overall, as indicated by the following comparisons:

- The focus group participants were older overall than the heads of households living in parks statewide (73% of the focus group participants were age 60 and older, compared to 46% for the state overall)
- The focus group participants were less likely to live in households with children (88% of focus group participants did not live in a household with children under the age of 18, compared to 78% for the state overall).

This report summarizes the opinions of the focus groups participants. It presents a sample, but not necessarily a representative sample, of what residents of parks think about these topics. As indicated earlier, it is safe to assume that these participants are likely to be more active and involved in their park and community than average residents. It is also safe to assume that the views of older residents from small households are portrayed more fully than the views of younger families with children in parks.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Organizing the Focus Groups

Volunteer leaders in each park recruited the focus group participants. Typically, they also identified an appropriate location. Most focus groups were conducted in the park clubhouse. When a clubhouse was not available, the focus group was conducted in another nearby location, such as a resident's home or a church.

The focus groups ranged in size from two to fourteen participants, with most falling in the range of seven to twelve participants. Typically, a facilitator (the researcher or trained staff) and an assistant led the focus groups. Only a facilitator was present at the focus group attended by two park residents. The focus groups were audio-taped with the permission of the participants. They typically lasted from 60 to 90 minutes.

CASA provided light refreshments for participants. At the end of the focus group, participants were provided with a \$10 gift certificate to a nearby store from CASA as a way of saying thank you.

Introduction and Ground Rules

The facilitator introduced the focus group's purpose and explained that the findings would be used in a report that CASA was preparing for the State on the kinds of services residents in manufactured home parks would like to have. The facilitator also discussed the ground rules, including the request that participants not discuss what was said during the focus group with others. The facilitator assured residents that every effort would be made to preserve the confidentiality of their responses by not linking them with an identifiable park or a particular resident. The facilitator invited questions and asked participants to complete the demographic questionnaire. Participants signed consent forms that explained their rights as a focus group participant and kept one copy of the form for their records.

Focus Group Content

The facilitator guided the discussion by asking questions in the following topic areas:

- Manufactured home park living in general
- Problems in parks and what services residents accessed to address them
- Park closures
- An ideal network of services for park residents.

Participants responded to the questions as they wished and engaged in dialogue with each other as part of the process. To jump-start the discussion on an ideal network of services, residents individually completed a questionnaire that asked them to rate nine potential services and add any additional ones that are important to them. A summary of the focus group questions, the ensuing discussions and the responses to the questionnaire can be found in Section C Findings.

Information

From time to time, focus group participants asked factual questions or wanted information about topics such as state laws or available services. When this occurred, the facilitator would reinforce that the purpose of the focus group is to hear what residents have to say. The facilitator said that she would write down the questions and respond to them after the focus group had concluded. In most focus groups, the participants did have questions, and either the facilitator or the assistant responded either while they were all still gathered at the conclusion of the focus group or at a later time.

Analysis of Focus Group Results

CASA staff transcribed the focus group tapes. Each transcript was read, and important passages were highlighted. Themes were developed from the highlighted passages. An outline was prepared for each focus group consisting of these themes and the quotations and key ideas associated with them.

A thematic analysis was then conducted across focus groups. Information from multiple parks was compiled under unifying themes, which provided an opportunity to compare and contrast how different focus groups responded to the central topics.

Throughout these first two steps, the goal was to remain as close as possible to what the residents actually said. The third step involved trying to interpret the results in a way that would remain true to the words and meanings of the participants while drawing conclusions about them. The researcher developed a composite summary of the themes and added her comments and conclusions. The composite summary forms the basis of this report.

C. Findings

1. Manufactured Home Park Living

Principal Findings:

- Focus group participants said that they like their home and living situation. They find manufactured home parks to be an affordable housing option with many amenities that suit their lifestyle, budget and stage of life.
- The financial structure of manufactured home park living allows residents to maximize the day-to-day use value of their home in exchange for sacrificing the opportunity to maximize its exchange value [what the resident would get when he or she sells the home].
- The primary problem associated with manufactured home park living cited by residents is the possibility of park closure and displacement. Other potential problems arise from issues with park management.
- Manufactured home parks present opportunities for community that are not present in traditional single-family housing developments while still offering more autonomy and privacy than available in apartment living. The physical and social structure of parks appears to support a blend of autonomy/individuality (through single-family detached manufactured homes) and community (through shared social activities and shared social spaces).
- The sense of community was especially strong in focus groups comprised of residents of 55+ parks and in a focus group comprised of residents of a park with many Latino families. It is not known whether a similar sense of community is prevalent in low-income family parks in general.
- The sense of community fostered by park living has many potential benefits for older residents, including social opportunities, an enhanced feeling of personal safety, and an increased possibility of aging in place among friends.

The Topics and How They Were Explored

To understand why residents choose to live in a manufactured home park and how satisfied they are with that choice, focus group participants were asked what attracted them to manufactured home park living, whether they would choose to live in a park again, and if they would recommend park living to a friend.

Financial Considerations

Many participants cited financial considerations as a reason for them to live in a manufactured home park. This form of housing has a lower purchase price and lower maintenance costs than conventional site-built housing. Once the home itself is paid off, the monthly rent is considerably less than that of an apartment in the same geographic

area. For example, rent at one senior park in a major metropolitan area was \$345 per month, including garbage and water. A resident at a family park with a number of agricultural workers said, "Whatever we make in the month is enough to live well here."

One participant from a 55+ park explained his choice to live in a manufactured home park as being a way to live comfortably with the smallest possible investment---a way to maximize the day-to-day use value of his housing through sacrificing its exchange value (the money he would make when the home sells). He said:

If you add up the land price and the tax after you bought a \$30,000 piece of ground--OK, pay all that, and you [will] get your money when you die, or your relatives will.

The taxes on this place [the manufactured home park] are paid by the manager...the trash is picked up by him, the dumpster is empty and taken care of by him. We do have to pay an electric bill, phone bill and home things. You add those things up by the year, and you live in a place like that for 20 years, and you do save money [over owning both the land and home yourself]. You wouldn't get that much out of a \$30,000 piece of ground that you got yourself.

Participants from both family and 55+ parks said that they found manufactured home park living far superior to living in an apartment. Among seniors, the principal benefits of living in a park instead of an apartment were a sense of personal safety and security, community, greater privacy, and the ability to continue to do the kinds of things (gardening, home improvement projects, etc.) that one can do in a site-built home that one owns. One woman said, "We sold our [site-built] home and we looked into an apartment and decided that he wouldn't have anything to do besides watch TV, and he needed something to do."

Families said that manufactured home park living provided a better environment than apartments for their children. One father said, "The kids are happy, instead of being locked up in an apartment." Another added, "They are used to the freedom to be on the street and play and have fun with other kids."

Triggering Event for Seniors

For seniors in particular, manufactured home park living may become a consideration after some triggering event causes them to re-evaluate their current housing situation. Specific triggering events mentioned by focus group participants include:

- Divorce
- Death of a spouse
- A change in one's physical conditions that results in a need for housing that is all on one level (mobility impairments)

- A change in one's physical condition that results in a desire for a smaller home with less upkeep
- Retirement and a desire to spend time traveling rather than maintaining a large family home

These participants said that they chose to live in a 55+ park because it offered the following kinds of amenities and possibilities:

- A smaller yard and less maintenance
- Destinations and services within walking distance, including stores and entertainment
- A clubhouse with activities
- Lower housing costs
- An opportunity to live with others at a similar stage in their lives
- A sense of community and enjoyment of being with others on a day-to-day basis
- One-story living
- The possibility of aging in place (not mentioned directly, but implied through the responses).
- Personal safety and a sense of security.

Community

Participants from both family parks and 55+ parks cited a sense of community and the feeling of personal safety that results as major benefits of living in a manufactured home park. Participants used phrases such as "It's very friendly," "Like a family situation," and "We live very comfortably here, like if we were a community," to describe how they felt about where they live and their connections with their neighbors. One father said that the kids play together in the protected private streets of the park as if they were part of one large family.

Physical Safety

In senior parks in particular, neighborly relationships helped to create a sense of physical security and safety. Residents said that they felt safe walking in their park after dark. One participant said, "I've lived in a [site-built] home for 45 years in a very nice neighborhood. Would I have sat in the living room with my front door and my back door open and unlocked? Not a bit, but I do it here [at my home in a manufactured housing park]." Participants at several parks said that residents at their park watch out for one another.

Aging in Place

The sense of community at 55+ parks also appears to play a role in helping residents remain independent and age in place in their own home instead of having to move to housing that provides formal services. If a resident has not been seen for a while, participants indicated that a neighbor would likely check on that person. Several said that if they needed assistance in an emergency, they felt that they could call their

neighbors. A woman said that her father died peacefully because he knew that his wife would be taken care of by the other residents in the park where they lived.

Balance Between Community and Privacy

Senior parks seem capable of supporting a living environment in which residents can strike a balance between community and personal privacy/autonomy. One participant described the relationships between residents in her park as follows:

[The downside of getting too close to your neighbors is] nosiness, everybody knows your business. You don't want everyone to know your business...If you don't want do this at 8:00, somebody is calling you [and asking], "How come you are not doing it at 8:00?" But the upside is that you know certain people in the community you live in, and, God forbid, you get sick or hurt, or something happens...[another participant finishes her sentence] they're there if you need somebody...[the original speaker continues] Then there's people there and you can turn on that 100%.

Social Activities

Social activities at 55+ parks, both formal and spontaneous, seem to play a major role in enhancing the quality of life. One park had no scheduled social activities, but it did have a pool that seemed to serve as social hub during warm weather months. Another park had a beautifully-maintained clubhouse and an impressive list of clubs and activities organized by residents. The social committee at the latter park published a monthly newsletter with a calendar of events, which ranged from cookouts to card clubs. One woman said that she would strongly recommend that recent widows choose a park with a lively schedule of activities. Social activities in the park are convenient (the able can walk to them) and provide an opportunity for interactions with familiar people.

Advice

Most residents said that they would choose to live in a park again and would recommend it to others. Those who were hesitant said that their primary concern was the instability that results from not owning the land on which the park is situated. The more contact that park residents had with park closure, the less likely they were to recommend park living to others or say that they would do it again themselves. Some said that they would not have moved in had they understood that the park "could be sold out from under you;" others said that they had understood that possibility when they moved in but had not thought that it was a likely occurrence.

Other concerns about park living arose from problems participants had experienced with park management. One person said that he would recommend that anyone considering moving in a park check out the management carefully. Another recommended checking out the park rules. A third participant said that she would only

live in a park where there were controls (such as criminal background checks) on potential new residents.

Thus, it appears that focus group participants are satisfied with manufactured home park life and want it to continue. It provides an affordable housing option with features different from that of either traditional owner-occupied single-family housing or apartments. In particular, it appears to present opportunities for community that are not present in traditional single family housing developments while still offering more autonomy and privacy than available in apartments.

2. Where to Turn for Assistance

Principal Findings:

- In creating a network of services for park residents, the residents themselves should be seen as an active, capable part of the network, and not as passive recipients of services provided by technically skilled others. A considerable pool of skill and knowledge exists among park residents (especially in senior parks), and this could be cultivated and incorporated as a key element of the network.
- Residents believe that the current state law and its enforcement mechanisms do not give them the leverage that they need in resolving day-to-day park problems.
- Residents want access to a clearinghouse of information on where to turn for assistance in dealing with the everyday issues that arise with park living. They also want help with purchasing their park and updates on state laws and regulations.
- Management plays a key role in the everyday quality of life for park residents. If there is a problem, in general park residents turn to the park manager for assistance before they turn anywhere else.
- OSTA is most commonly mentioned as the statewide resource to which residents turn when they cannot resolve a problem through the manager.
- While MDPCR is viewed as a valuable source of accurate information, their efficacy in resolving problems is seen as being limited by two factors: 1) the mediated resolutions are not enforceable, and 2) the state does not have the ability to enforce landlord tenant law directly.
- Park residents also turn to a variety of local resources for assistance, ranging from the City Manager to Legal Aid.

The Topics and How They Were Explored

To identify what resources park residents are now accessing when they need assistance or have a question, focus group participants were invited to recall a time in the past when they had a problem in their park. They were encouraged to remember what the problem was, where they turned for help, and whether the problem was resolved. Finally, they were invited to comment on the kinds of services they thought should be available to residents to assist with resolving the problems that arise as part of manufactured home park living.

Common Problems

The problems identified by park residents ranged from health and safety concerns to nuisance issues. Some problems were potentially life-threatening. Many appeared to arise from instances of contested responsibility—problems in which it was not

immediately apparent whether the owner/management or the park residents should take the lead and bear the costs of resolving them. In other cases, problems arose because owners appeared to be trying to reduce operating costs by limiting services such as common area lighting and water or delaying necessary maintenance and replacement work. Even if the problem was clearly the owner's responsibility, in many instances the participants did not seem to feel that they had much leverage in getting the owner/management to do what was needed if they were not inclined to do so.

Specific problems mentioned by residents include the following:

- Electrical wiring (external to individual homes) and related fire and electrocution hazards—mentioned in three parks
- Drainage, potholes and other private road maintenance problems—several parks
- Trees need trimming—two parks. In one park, falling tree limbs had destroyed one home and damaged another. In another park located in an area with a high risk of fire, the untrimmed trees too near houses created a life and safety hazard.
- Fire hazard created by lack of water in common areas. This was in an area with a very high risk of forest fires. One resident said "The Fourth of July, I couldn't sleep."
- Dangerous dogs (two parks)
- Criminal behavior by new residents (one park). Included a meth house, other drug activity and prostitution. After the owner gave notice that he was closing the park, the real estate market plummeted. Unable to redevelop the site, the owner began renting the abandoned manufactured homes to new households of all ages without doing background checks. This is occurring in what had previously been a 55+ park.
- Dilapidated storage sheds for individual homes
- Stray cats.

Where to Turn for Assistance

Nearly all the respondents reported turning to the manager first for help⁵. Management is the most important link in resolving day-to-day issues. Management has a huge impact on the quality of life for park residents. Residents of two parks were very pleased with their current management, and contrasted their lives now to when they had had bad management in the past. One person said that she would recommend that anyone thinking about living in park should thoroughly check out the management before deciding whether to move in.

⁵ This finding about the importance of management is reinforced by the responses of the participants on individual surveys. More than half of the residents (61%) who responded to this question indicated that they would turn to the manager if they needed help or advice on something pertaining to living in their park. Nearly a third (30%) said that they would turn to a friend, and 7% said that they would turn to a relative. The other 17% identified another person to whom they would turn. (Some respondents selected more than one resource person.)

Participants mentioned the following tactics used by management to dodge dealing with problems:

- Be unavailable by phone or in person.
- Avoid responding to residents or acknowledging that they received a request.
- Tell the residents to go ahead and deal with the problem themselves.
- Fail to tell the owner about the problem. (This appeared to be particularly effective if the residents had a distant or corporate owner whom they did not know how to contact or were not allowed to contact.)
- Go on the offensive to discourage reporting of problems. If a tenant reports a problem, find various lease violations and other issues with that tenant. Word will spread to other residents that you will be targeted if you report problems.

If they couldn't resolve the problem through working with the manager, most participants (those in four of seven focus groups) seemed stymied at first in terms of taking further action. Some did not know what resources might be available to assist. A few seemed reluctant to approach outside resources for fear of antagonizing the management.

OSTA

When outside assistance was sought, OSTA was the resource most commonly mentioned. Participants from three parks stated or implied that OSTA advised them to work on creating a unified stand in dealing with the management. The principal way that they said that OSTA recommended doing this was through forming a grievance committee. A grievance committee comprised of park residents functions by accepting and investigating problems reported by individual residents and then approaching the management as representatives of park residents as a whole. One park just formed such a committee. Two others rejected this approach.

Those that did contact OSTA for assistance generally found the advice to be helpful. One participant said that they felt confident that the advice was reliable, as there was no reason for it to be otherwise. The focus group comprised of OSTA members from various parks was the most vocal in their support of OSTA's services.

MDPCR

One park reported that they had contacted MDPCR and found them to be very helpful in terms of providing accurate and on-point information. Even though what they heard was not necessarily what they had hoped to hear, residents at this park found MDPCR staff to be responsive and thorough. Most parks did not report contacting MDPCR. Several did not know that the state had services for park residents. Others said that that they had found that the state lacked the ability to force compliance with landlord tenant laws (ORS Chapter 90), and that the mediation services did not result in binding resolutions to problems. While they did not say so directly, they implied that they would be unlikely to turn to the state for help in resolving problems for these reasons.

These are important concerns raised by the residents at several parks, and are an issue which will be addressed in more detail later in this section.

Local Resources

In addition to these statewide resources, other local resources were mentioned as being helpful in resolving specific kinds of problems. These included Legal Aid, the police, a utility company, CASA, and the Community Development Law Center. Two groups mentioned City Council or the City Manager. One participant said that the strong allegiances that the Legal Aid attorney in his area had with the local network of attorneys and judges resulted in a very poor outcome for at least one resident, and that he would not turn to that agency for assistance. Community Action Agencies were not mentioned by any of the focus groups as a source of assistance in solving problems.

Name Recognition of Sources of Assistance

To check to see whether participants were aware of various statewide entities that work with park residents, the initial questionnaire asked focus group participants to identify which, if any, of several group acronyms were familiar to them. The results are as follows:

- 48% of respondents indicated that they were familiar with OSTA
- 2% of respondents indicated that they were familiar with OMHU (Oregon Manufactured Homeowners United)
- 2% of respondents indicated that they were familiar with OHCS (Oregon Housing and Community Services)
- 2% of respondents indicated that they were familiar with MDPCR (Office of Manufactured Dwelling Park Community Relations)
- 77% of respondents indicated that they were familiar with AARP (well-publicized national organization included for comparison purposes)
- 2% of respondents indicated that they were familiar with OMCA (an acronym not associated with any known organization that was included for comparison purposes)
- 19% of respondents did not answer this question.

OSTA has relatively broad name recognition among the participants, some of whom are OSTA members. While residents may be familiar with services provided by "the state," they are unfamiliar with the name of the agency or office that provides them.

Resources that Should be Available

When asked what kinds of assistance should be available to residents to deal with issues related to manufactured home park living, residents at four parks specifically mentioned the need for some kind of clearinghouse of information. One participant said, "Some kind of clearinghouse where you can contact someone. I know that there is a lot of programs, there is a lot of help, there is a lot of people interested in helping, but if you

don't know where to contact..." Another person suggested a pamphlet with information available about services.

Other people said that they would like information about what is going on at the state with respect to new laws, regulations and services. Several mentioned that they would like access to information on how to purchase a park.

Two Important Themes

Two themes arose from this discussion about services and where to turn for help that were not a direct response to the questions asked. Because residents in multiple parks brought up these topics themselves without prompting from a focus group facilitator, it is likely that they are particularly important to focus group participants. They are: 1) the capacity of residents to solve their own problems and 2) the sentiment that much work needs to be done with state laws to better protect park residents.

The Human Capital within Parks

The stories told during the focus groups highlighted an ability to develop solutions to park problems and take other actions to enhance community life. Here are a few examples of what is occurring in the parks included in the focus groups:

- One family park that had been threatened with closure (a threat that has subsided for the moment) and fraught with inaccurate information being transmitted through informal networks in the park has taken major steps to address both challenges. With outside assistance, they have incorporated, formed a board, created a website, posted all board minutes on the website, held a park-wide membership meeting, created a park relations committee (which functions as a grievance committee might in other parks), and conducted a survey of the 150+ homes in the park to find out what is on residents' minds.
- A 55+ park has created a vibrant social schedule for its residents through its social committee. They manage the clubhouse, run monthly potlucks and barbeques, publish a monthly newsletter, and have at least four different card and board game groups that meet on different nights each week. Residents gather around coffee and donuts on Saturday mornings.
- Another park has brought suit against the owner. They have hired a private attorney and split the cost among themselves. It has been two years, and they are now starting to see some progress.
- Another park had a lot of potholes in the private roads. The manager's solution was to purchase a truckload of gravel and dump it onsite. The residents joined together to transport the gravel and fill the holes.

Park residents appear to have skill and talent that should not be overlooked, especially in senior parks. Focus group participants included an active but retired 86-year old attorney, a former journalist for a major paper, an engineer and the former assistant to the county sheriff. Many retirees had responsible and difficult jobs when they were working, and they appear to have retained that knowledge, problem-solving ability and self-confidence in retirement. As retirees, some now have the time to get involved.

In considering how to form a network of services, stories such as these reinforce the need to see park residents as an active, capable part of the network themselves instead of as passive recipients of services provided by technically skilled others. Key impediments limiting the efficacy of self-help efforts appear to be a lack of information about resources that can aid these efforts and a lack of organization at the park level.

An environment could be created in which park leadership is cultivated, trained, supported and rewarded, and where residents see how their involvement is valuable and can make a difference in the quality of life. In this environment, person-to-person contacts and relationship-building are very important.

Laws and Representation

A clear theme that arose from the focus groups was that participants felt that a lot of work needs to be done with state laws to better protect the interests of park residents. "State law has no teeth" was the phrase most commonly used to express this sentiment. Enforcement of state law occurs only through a civil suit, which is not likely to occur if the infractions by the owner are not major. While public legal services can represent low income park residents, moderate income residents are not eligible for this kind of assistance and are on their own in pursuing enforcement through civil action.

Two quotes from two different residents capture the frustration with the current situation:

There's nothing that covers us or protects us, you know. With the state rules, the owner knows that he can do whatever he wants. We are the ones that have to go out every now and then, and follow the rules. We're gonna have to spend the money. All he does is get a fine...because there is no backup.

Nobody in the state is enforcing the rules. That's the biggest problem. We have no representation from the state...There are a lot of people in manufactured homes in this state...the state should be having all of our interests [at heart]. If we have a complaint, they should have someone to come out and look at our complaint. They have their own attorneys that look after the state instead of covering us.

While no participants expressed dissatisfaction with OSTA's legislative efforts, several participants did voice frustration with the legislature itself and indicated that they thought that their interests were not addressed by their elected representatives. One participant said, "What we are speaking about here is our legislators and our legislature...We'd like representation." However, participants (with one exception) did not have an accurate understanding of the legislation adopted this session, nor did they seem aware of the advocacy efforts of several key legislators of both parties in their behalf during the 2007 session.

The importance of this theme is further underscored by the fact that participants chose "a voice for park residents in state law and rule-making" as the most important of nine potential services for park residents in the future. Having effective laws backed by appropriate enforcement mechanisms appears to be central to providing residents with the leverage that they need in bargaining for a good quality of life in their park. They do not feel that they have that leverage currently.

3. Park Closures

Principal Findings:

- There is no one recognized place to turn statewide for information on what to do if you receive a notice that your park is closing. This is true even though 71 parks have issued closure notices since 2000.
- There is no organized system for helping residents find new places to live. Beyond the information provided at MDPCR's Resource Fairs, residents are largely on their own. Some are better able to manage this challenge than others. At least 26 homeless households reported park closure as the cause of their homelessness in central Oregon 2007.
- Any entity designated as the resource statewide for assistance with closures will be faced with the need to develop accurate information about statewide laws and resources AND to create a system for developing information about housing resources and services available locally.
- Despite the absence of a statewide system of resources to assist residents with closures, some residents have found ways to obtain answers to their questions, access assistance, organize support and advocacy groups and find places to live.
- Residents lose more than a place to live when their park closes. For some residents (especially older residents), moving means being taken from a supportive and familiar network and entering an unfamiliar, often impersonal and sometimes more institutionalized environment that can constrain their ability to live independently.

Background

In analyzing the responses of focus group participants to questions about park closures, it is important to first review what exposure each of the groups has had to the risk of park closure. As the following summary indicates, participants have had varying levels of exposure, from residents of a park that has an active closure notice to residents of parks who do not expect their park to close soon:

- Park A: Closure notice given. Owner may sell to residents.
- Park B: Closure notice given and extended.
- Park C: Park was for sale but purchase offer was withdrawn.
- Park D: Little concern about closure. However, park is likely to sell at some point because of owner's age.
- Park E: Some concern about park closure. Want land use and zoning information that would help them understand how "developable" their park is.
- Park F: Do not think owner is likely to sell because of emotional attachment to park.

- Group G: Focus group comprised of residents from multiple parks in a rural area. Not concerned about closure due to remote location.

The Topics and How They Were Explored

To explore the kinds of resources and information park residents would like to have if they were faced with a park closure, focus group participants were asked if they were concerned about this issue and, if so, where they turned for information when they first started to pay attention to it. They were then invited to imagine that they had just found out that their park was closing. They were asked to consider where they would turn for information, what kind of information and assistance would they want, what housing options they might pursue, and what kinds of assistance should be available to park residents in general when they receive a closure notice.

Information Sources

There does not appear to be one clear resource for information on what to do if your park is closing. For participants from several parks, their primary source of reliable information about closures was the local newspaper and, in some cases, other media, instead of any information source associated with the industry. Participants of the three parks that had faced closure said that they did not know where to turn at first. Although initially stymied, residents from all the parks eventually did pursue strategies unique to their area to obtain information. These strategies are described below.

- Participants from two parks in the Metro area said that they attended resource fairs for parks that were closing to obtain general information and a better understanding of what was going on, even though no closing notice had been issued for their park. Participants from one of these parks contacted residents of another park that had received a closure notice to find out how and what they were doing.
- One participant from a park where a closure notice had been issued submitted a letter to the editor asking for assistance and inviting residents from all parks to get together to discuss the problem. This was instrumental in setting in motion a strong local organizing campaign that resulted in a local ordinance and other resources to assist park residents.
- Participants from two parks contacted the mayor, city manager, city councilors and other officials in their cities for help. Both cities approved ordinances to provide protections for residents.
- Participants from two parks said that they would contact OSTA if they received a closure notice.
- Participants from one park credited MDPCR with providing significant help. One resident said, "David Kauffman came down. He came several times to our meetings, from the beginning. He was probably one of the first people I talked to on the state level...He was very honest with us. Some of it was hard to hear, but

he was very honest and gave us direction as to what steps we needed to take to get this thing going.”

The multiplicity of strategies in the absence of a clear place to turn for information and advice indicates the resourcefulness of park residents. However, several indicated that there should be a single starting place for reliable information. One participant said, “It would be nice if we could all have a phone number where we can contact somebody to make sure that we are getting what is actually going on.”

The Kinds of Information Needed

Participants said that they would want answers to the following questions if they received a closure notice:

- Where can I go?
- Who’s going to help me?
- What are my rights?
- Can I move my home?
- Are they going to help me move my home and my belongings?
 - I can’t lift heavy things.
- Are they going to give me any money for my home? (3 groups)
 - In a park where the park owner or manager had helped people finance their homes, participants felt strongly that they should get back what they put into their homes.
- Are you going to charge me to dispose of my home?
 - I would vandalize my home so no one else could use it if I had to leave.
- How can we purchase our park? (3 groups)

One resident said that the state should provide replacement assistance and help with relocation. Residents need someone to come in and move their home at a low cost and set it back up. If someone cannot move their home, then they will need help with moving into an apartment or purchasing another home.

Another resident said that the city or county should help organize and support a task force comprised of the presidents of all of the park resident groups in the area. This group would fulfill three key functions. It would act as a problem-solving and support group among parks. It would seek out and mobilize other local resources that can be of assistance to park residents. Finally, it would also act as an information link to the residents at individual parks.

Some of the information that residents are requesting is the same statewide; other information (specifically that about housing options) can be best answered by researching and organizing local information. Any entity designed as the key resource statewide for assistance with closures will be faced with the need to develop accurate

information about statewide laws and resources AND to create a system for developing information about resources available locally.

Housing Options

Participants from parks that had received closure notices talked about the uncertainty and pain experienced by older residents who suddenly discovered that they had no place to go. One participant said, "It's tearing our people apart." When asked where people who had moved away went, they responded as follows:

- "Wherever they could"
- "We have lost a lot of them."
- "Some of them took their houses." [Only two took their homes]
- "Some went to families."
- "Some of them trashed their houses and left."
- "They either moved into family homes or they rent. One lady recently went into a senior assistance kind of facility."
- "Somebody committed suicide."

Many participants from parks who were not facing closure had a hard time imagining what they would do. Particularly poignant are the following comments exchanged among residents of a tight-knit, small, lively and very low income park:

Participant A: "There's no place that would take us."

Participant B: "We're gonna be dislocated people. Where would these people go?...For the elderly, most of them, they can't move. It's infeasible for them."

Participant C: "They are on fixed incomes..."

Participant D: "But still, there has to be places like this for people like us that cannot afford a \$500,000 house. There have to be places like this. This is what they're trying to find out. There just has to be."

Some participants did mention concrete housing options, such as moving into an apartment, buying a house, moving the home to land that they would purchase, moving into assisted living, moving in with relatives, and attempting to move their home to another park.

In some cases, older residents who are forced to move are losing more than their home; they are losing their community and the ability to live independently. As indicated in the prior section, in some cases residents are losing friends and neighbors whose nearby presence have allowed them to age in place as a group, supporting one another in small ways that provide personal safety and a sense of security. For some residents, moving means being taken from a supportive and familiar network and entering an unfamiliar,

often impersonal and sometimes more institutionalized environment that constrains their personal freedom and ability to live independently.

In the central Oregon tri-county area that includes Bend, the census of homeless households (One Night Shelter Count) conducted on January 25, 2007 identified twenty-six households who cited "mobile home park closure" as the cause of their homelessness.

At this point, there is no organized system for helping residents find new places to live beyond the assistance that they receive at the Resource Fairs organized by MDPCR. They are largely left to their own devices. Some are better able to manage this challenge than others.

4. Imagining a Future Network of Services

Principal Findings:

- According to focus group participants, the most important element in a network of services is ensuring that there is a voice for park residents in state law and rule-making. This is a clear and consistent message.
- The following cluster of additional services is also important: 1) a central resource for information, including a place to obtain written information and a phone line that provides one-on-one help and referrals; 2) help with resident purchases of parks, and 3) mediation services for landlord tenant issues.
- There appears to be some willingness to pay for services. This is a tentative conclusion. Additional research would be required to determine how much park residents would voluntarily pay for a specific set of services.
- Residents mentioned OSTA, non-profits in general, the state and local agencies as potential service providers. Determining which entity might best provide a particular service in a multi-part network of services is best approached by asking a series of questions pertaining to the fit of the agency to that particular service. Substantive knowledge, legitimacy and geography are all relevant to this discussion.

The Topics and How They Were Explored

To determine what kinds of services park residents would most like to see in the future, focus group participants were invited to imagine what might be included in a strong, coordinated network of services to help residents with the kinds of challenges and questions that come up for people who live in manufactured home parks. They were provided with a written questionnaire (Appendix B) that included the following activities:

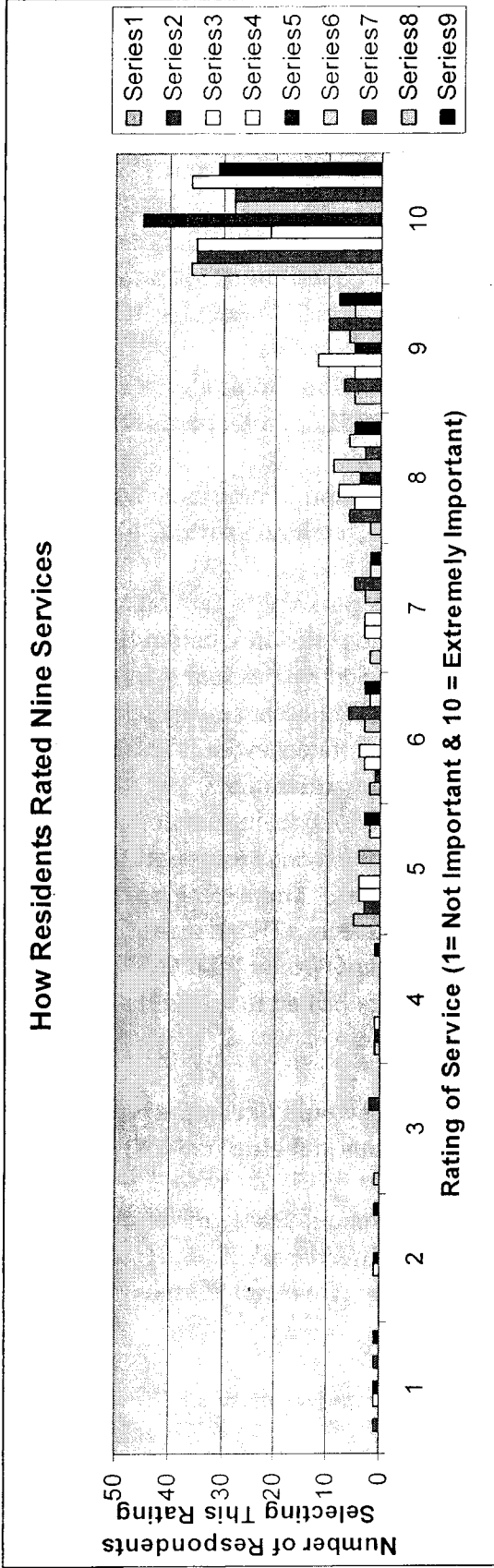
- Rating each of nine services
- Listing any additional services that they thought should be included which were not on the list of nine
- Indicating which of the two or three services had the highest priority for them
- Indicating how much they would be willing to pay for services.

How Participants Rated and Ranked Potential Future Services

Chart C-4a shows how the nine services were rated by the participants on a scale of one to ten, with one being not important and ten being extremely important.

- The most highly rated service is "Ensuring that there's a voice for park residents when the state makes laws or rules pertaining to manufactured home parks." Eighty percent of the participants who rated this service gave it a ten on a scale of one to ten.
- A cluster of four services vie for second place. They are:

Chart C-4a



The Nine Services	
Services (appears as "Series" on chart above)	Percent Rating as 10
1. General information about rights and responsibilities of residents	67%
2. Single place to call for guidance or referral for help with specific issue	65%
3. Mediation services for landlord-tenant issues	63%
4. Mediation services for problems among tenants	39%
5. Voice for park residents in state law-making.	80%
6. Updates about other cities and counties	53%
7. Help with forming resident associations	51%
8. Help with exploring whether residents can purchase park as a group	68%
9. Help with learning how to negotiate with landlord on park improvements	55%

- Help with exploring whether residents can buy their park as a group, should the owner want to sell (68% of participants rated it as ten)
- General information (pamphlets, fact sheets, web site with information, etc.) about the rights and responsibilities of tenants in manufactured home parks (67% rated it as ten)
- A single place to call for free to either get one-on-one guidance or a referral for help with specific problems and questions (65% rated it as ten)
- Mediation services for landlord-tenant issues (63% rated it as ten).
- Another cluster of services came in third. They are:
 - Help with learning how to negotiate with a landlord as a group for improvements and upgrades to the park (55% of participants rated it as ten)
 - Regular updates about what cities, counties and local jurisdictions are doing to improve conditions for manufactured home park residents across the state (53% rated it as ten)
 - Help with forming resident associations at parks (51% rated it as ten). It is important to note that the majority of the parks included in the focus groups had resident associations already. Some participants from these parks may have given this service a low rating because they felt that they did not need that kind of assistance, even if they viewed it as being an important service for other parks without associations.
- The lowest ranked service was mediation services for problems among tenants. Only 39% of the participants rated it ten. One of the focus group participants said by way of explanation, "We kill our own snakes," and explained that residents in her park dealt with their issues themselves. This low rating is consistent with the low demand for this service reported by MDPCR. The vast majority of this agency's mediation services are dedicated to resolving landlord tenant disputes instead of disputes among tenants.

Fifteen participants wrote in additional services that they would like to see provided. Most of these services related to specific needs or problems at their park. The services included:

- Affordable assistance with lawn and tree maintenance. Six people in three parks wrote this in. It appears to be especially needed in 55+ parks.
- Pro-bono legal assistance. This was mentioned by two people in two different parks.
- Home repair referrals
- Services for seniors: transportation, maintenance and security
- Help with animal control
- Help with lack of water in common areas
- Ways to enforce Chapter 90

- Loan guarantee mechanisms through the state and HUD to provide lower mortgage rates for people who live in parks
- Rent control
- Nicer managers.

The importance of the top two clusters of services to residents was reinforced by their responses to the request to identify which two or three services were most important to them. Chart C-4b shows how many participants selected a particular service as one of their top priorities.

- Once again, the highest ranked service is “Ensuring that there is a voice for park residents when the state makes laws or rules pertaining to manufactured home parks.” Seventy-eight percent of residents chose this as one of their top priorities. Five of the seven parks ranked this as their most important service, and the other two parks ranked it second.
- The two services sharing the second place ranking are:
 - A single place to call for one-on-one guidance and referrals (51%)
 - Help with park purchases by residents (51%)
- The third-ranked service is mediation services for landlord-tenant issues (39%)
- The fourth-ranked service is general information about rights and responsibilities (33%)
- The lowest-ranked service is once again mediation services for problems among tenants (6%).

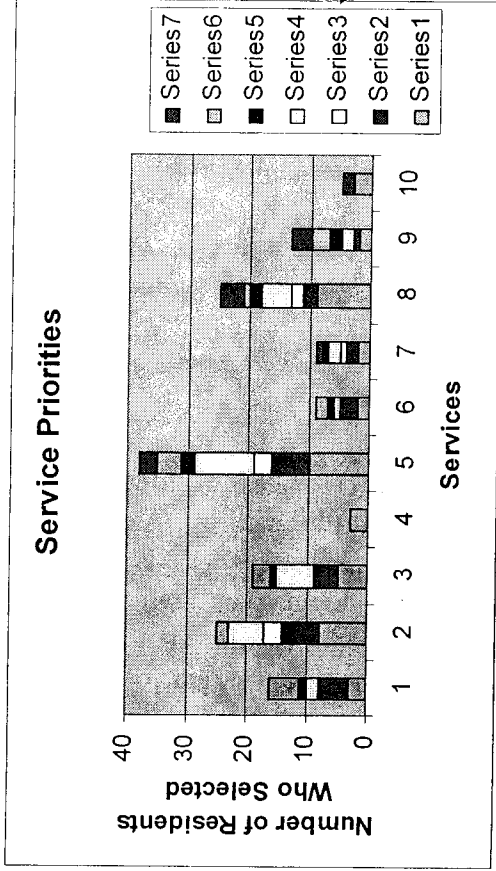
Thus, the focus group analysis indicates that the most important service to residents is ensuring that there is a voice for park residents in state law and rule-making.⁶ A cluster of services comes in second: 1) a central place to go for information, whether it is pamphlets and fact sheets or a phone line that provides one-on-one help and referrals; 2) help with resident purchases of parks, and 3) mediation services for landlord tenant issues. These should be essential elements of a network of services to residents of manufactured home parks in Oregon.

Paying for Services

Participants were asked how much they would be willing to pay for the services that they selected as priorities. They were provided a range from \$6 to \$24 per year, with a space to write in other amounts. Forty-five percent of those who answered this question chose the highest option given (\$24), and an additional 9% indicated that they were willing to pay more than \$24, with answers like “whatever it takes” and \$100. Thus, over

⁶ It does not appear that the prominence of this issue results from the fact that the majority of parks selected for focus groups have OSTA members or an OSTA chapter. One of the two parks that did not select this service as its highest priority had no OSTA chapter or members, and one did have OSTA members.

Chart C-4b



- Series 1 = Focus Group 1
- Series 2 = Focus Group 2 etc.

List of Services	
1.	General information about rights and responsibilities of residents
2.	Single place to call for guidance or referral for help with specific issue
3.	Mediation services for landlord-tenant issues
4.	Mediation services for problems among tenants
5.	Voice for park residents in state law-making.
6.	Updates about other cities and counties
7.	Help with forming resident associations
8.	Help with exploring whether residents can purchase park as a group
9.	Help with learning how to negotiate with landlord on park improvements
10.	Other

half of the participants responding to this question chose the highest amount provided or wrote in a higher amount. On the other end of the spectrum, 14% wrote in \$0 or \$5. It is important to note that seven people (14% of the participants completing the survey) did not answer this question, perhaps indicating some ambivalence about paying.

Many participants did not seem to be aware of the \$6 annual fee that they pay as part of their personal property taxes. While this topic did not come up consistently in all of the focus groups, when it did arise, most participants did not know about the fee or how it was used.

While it is safe to say that the people who participated in the focus groups indicated a willingness to pay for services, it is important not to read too much into this conclusion. The focus group participants may be among the most involved and politically active people in their park, and thus may be more likely to be willing to pay than the average park resident.

Who Should Provide Services

It appears that the preference for what entity provides the service may be related to what kind of service is under consideration. Participants specifically mentioned OSTA, other non-profits in general and the state as the most likely candidates for providing services. One resident felt strongly that the state should have an agency dedicated solely to manufactured home parks. Another resident felt that services should be provided locally, as there would be too much distance between a park needing assistance and the provider. Several others felt that they would trust OSTA more than any other entity to provide services.

Another way to approach this problem is to develop questions to be considered in deciding who might be the best service provider for individual elements of a multi-party network of services for park residents. Based on the content of the focus groups, it appears that the following questions might be relevant:

- Substantive knowledge: Who has the knowledge and credentials to provide a specific service (such as legal services)?
- Legitimacy: Who seems to be a trustworthy source of information or assistance on this particular topic? To paraphrase one focus group participant---who has no reason not to be truthful and accurate about this issue?
- Geography: Who has the local knowledge, context and contacts to deliver the service effectively?

In thinking about a service delivery system and deciding who should provide which services, all three of these issues should be considered.

D. Conclusion

Undertaking this research offered a glimpse of the day-to-day concerns of manufactured home park residents. In general, participants in the focus groups were eager to share their views. Discussions were animated and sometimes punctuated with good-natured teasing and laughter. In one case, the mood was more somber, as residents in a park that faced an uncertain future picked their way through a minefield of confusing circumstances to try to find a safe place to land. All genuinely liked where they lived and wanted to stay there. Among the participants from 55+ parks, only one person said that he would move into a single family home if he could afford to live there. Judging from the abundance of flower gardens and well-tended lawns, residents viewed the parks as their permanent homes.

Some studies of Oregon manufactured home parks have tended to portray manufactured home park residents as victims of an exploitative system of housing of last resort. While it is true that the focus group participants would like more leverage in dealing with management and park owners, they do not appear to see themselves as victims, nor do they talk as one might expect a victim to talk. Residents at four focus groups spoke about how they had organized their park and, in two instances, how they had convinced their city to take action to protect their interests. They have skills, knowledge, life experience and self-confidence. What they want is better access to information and a strong voice in legislation and rules pertaining to manufactured home parks. Most would like to be part of a group of residents who purchase and manage their own park.

As long as parks are investor-owned, manufactured home parks will occupy a precarious position in places of rapidly rising land values. The current dip in the housing market provides an opportunity for policy-makers to reassess their long-term commitment to this form of affordable housing. As one-tenth of the inventory of affordable housing, its complete loss statewide would result in major new stresses on local social service and affordable housing systems.

Yet, one has to wonder about the compatibility of manufactured home parks with a state land use policy that prizes compact urban development surrounded by protected agricultural and resource areas. At five to six units per acre, parks are considerably more land-intensive than most traditional forms of affordable housing. Furthermore, some policy makers view older manufactured homes (or, more accurately, pre-HUD Code mobile homes) as sub-standard housing because they do not meet current building, fire, or energy standards. Thus, there are arguments both from a land use planning and a housing health and safety perspective to encourage the conversion of parks to other uses.

While the debate about the long-term role of manufactured home parks in Oregon is significantly beyond the scope of this report, this report does offer some relevant information to consider. Manufactured home parks are more than housing of last resort for low income households. Older residents in particular choose to live in parks because it suits their life circumstances well. Park residents want to have an active role in policies regarding parks and should be invited to participate. They have the knowledge, skills and ability to add significantly to a discussion about the long-term future of their preferred housing form.

Some Questions for Manufactured Home Park Residents

Thank you for participating in this group discussion today about your ideas and concerns regarding being a homeowner in a manufactured home park.

Please take a few minutes before we begin to answer the following questions. If you are not comfortable with answering a question, skip it and go to the next one. All answers are confidential.

Please tell us about yourself.

1. How long have you lived in a manufactured home? _____
2. How long have you lived in this park? _____
3. How many people live with you in your home? _____
4. Are you 60+ years old? _____
5. How many people age 18 or younger live in your home? _____

Please tell us about your home.

6. Do you live in a single, double, triple-wide or larger home? _____
7. Approximately when was your home built? _____
8. Do you own your home outright, or are you paying down a loan? _____
9. What do you think is the current value of your home? _____

Other questions

10. Do you have access to the Internet on a regular basis for e-mail and websites?

Yes No Other _____

11. Please circle all the organizations with which you are familiar.

AARP OSTA OMHU OMCA OHCS MDPCR

12. If you needed help or advice on something pertaining to living in your park, to whom would you turn first? (Please circle one answer.)

Park Manager Friend who lives in park Relative Other: _____

13. Are you familiar with Title 10, Chapter 90 of state law (Oregon Revised Statutes)? _____

Imagining a New Network of Services

Imagine that that, in the future, it is possible to create a strong, coordinated network of services to help residents with the kinds of questions and challenges that come up for people who live in manufactured home parks.

Please rate each of the potential services below on a scale of 1 to 10 for how important you think it is that it be included in this new network. And then put a check beside the two or three services that are most important to you.

1. General information (pamphlets, fact sheets, website with information, etc.) about the rights and responsibilities of tenants in manufactured home parks.										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion
Not important					Extremely important					
2. A single place to call for free to either get one-on-one guidance or a referral for help with specific problems and questions.										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion
Not important					Extremely important					
3. Mediation services for landlord-tenant issues										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion
Not important					Extremely important					
4. Mediation services for problems among tenants										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion
Not important					Extremely important					
5. Ensuring that there's a voice for park residents when the state makes laws or rules pertaining to manufactured home parks.										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion
Not important					Extremely important					
6. Regular updates about what cities, counties and local jurisdictions are doing to improve conditions for manufactured home park residents across the state.										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion
Not important					Extremely important					

7. Help with forming resident associations at parks.											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion	
Not important						Extremely important					
8. Help with exploring whether residents can buy their park as a group, should the owner want to sell.											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion	
Not important						Extremely important					
9. Help with learning how to negotiate with a landlord as a group for improvements and upgrades to the park											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No opinion	
Not important						Extremely important					
10. What other services should be included not mentioned above?											
11. How much would you be willing to pay annually for the services you've indicated that you prefer?											
\$6	\$12	\$18	\$24	Other _____				No opinion			

Report by CASA of Oregon on Services Desired by Manufactured Home Park Residents

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Andrée Tremoulet from Portland State University, School of Urban Studies and Planning. The researcher is working with CASA of Oregon (a non-profit housing assistance organization) and the Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services to determine what kinds of services residents of manufactured dwelling parks would like to have to support their tenancy in a park. This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree and is under the supervision of Dr. Sy Adler, School of Urban Studies and Planning, PSU. You were selected because you live in a mobile home park in Oregon.

If you decide to participate, you join in a group discussion, called a focus group, with others who live in your park. The focus group will last about 90 minutes. The focus group will be audio taped to aid with accuracy and information retention. The researcher will do her best to minimize the inconvenience to you by scheduling the group at a time and location convenient to you. Your involvement with this project may help to increase knowledge that assists others in the future.

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality. The researcher will ask all participants in the focus group to not discuss who participated or what they said outside the group. However, the researcher cannot assure that this will occur. None of the written information that results from this study will include names or other information that will allow readers to identify the identity of the participants.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, and you may withdraw at any time.

If you have concerns about your participation in this study or your rights, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503)725-4288/1-877-480-4400. If you have questions about the study itself, contact Andree Tremoulet at 503-249-1126.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the above information and agree to take part in this study. By signing, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your records.

Signature

Date