

# Mobile home park defended, cursed

By CHRISTINE LYALL  
Of The Gazette Staff

Billings Heights resident Rusty Pegar of 2840 Bunker Hill has a cousin who does manure art.

"He puts a little dye in it and covers it in lacquer, but the truth of the matter is, it's still manure," said Pegar, who lives in the Independent Subdivision.

And that's how he feels about a proposed mobile home park that local developer Gerry Unruh wants to put on a tract of land adjacent to the subdivision.

Pegar was one of about 80 people who attended a three-hour public hearing of the zoning commission and Yellowstone County Commission Wednesday on Unruh's plans for an upscale mobile home park. The strictly homeowners' park — no rental properties would be allowed, according to Unruh — would contain about 104 units on 25 acres north of the K-Mart shopping center at 2555 Roundup Road, also known as Highway 87.

The commissions conducted the hearing to determine whether to grant a request to

change the tract's zoning from Community Commercial to Residential Manufactured Home. The county planning staff supports the change, said Senior Planner Kerwin Jensen, because there would still be ample commercial property in the area, even if the park were developed.

Pegar was not alone in his contention that a mobile home park will decrease property values in a neighborhood where \$100,000 to \$200,000 houses sit on half-acre lots. Clayton Fiscus of Fiscus Realty testified that homes in the area could lose as much as 25 percent of their market value if a mobile home park were developed.

"(Unruh) paints a pretty picture," Pegar said of the developer's plans, which include paved streets, transplanted mature trees, a swimming pool and tennis courts. "But the truth of the matter is, it's still manure in our back yards."

Pegar was among about 15 people who testified in opposition to the zone change, after six people testified in favor of it.

Among the proponents were representatives of four mobile home manufacturers and Ruthie Upton, manager of Casa Village

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—Gerry Unruh  
developer of proposed park

Trailer Court — a potential competitor of Unruh's.

Upton said the Heights park is a "necessary addition to the city," given the skyrocketing demand for affordable housing. She said Unruh's park would be similar to Casa Village in that it would be a highly controlled community in terms of upkeep, pets and parking regulations.

Doug Stovall of Big Sky Homes said the demand for mobile homes in Montana in 1994 increased 32 percent over 1993.

"Our young people have no place to go," he said. "They need a place to start."

But that's precisely what scares the residents of Independent Subdivision.

More than one opponent expressed concern about overcrowding at Independent School, and some feared for the safety of children who would live in the mobile home park and have to walk along Highway 87 to the school.

Monty Cranston, a Pierce Homes salesman and former teacher, suggested the mobile home park would actually increase the school's tax base, thereby adding money to the pot for any needed improvements.

Other concerns had to do with soil erosion, the potential for damage to Five-Mile Creek and the possible polluting effects of septic tanks in the park.

Opponent Lori Dross, 2941 Saratoga Trail, presented a petition bearing 382 signatures of people opposed to the park. She said the zone should not be changed because it is ideal for commercial property.

Dross read a letter from Heights merchant Melissa Dye, manager of Corral West Ranch Wear, which stated that changing the zone would "stunt severely commercial prospects in the Heights."

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"Since when did the rights of one supersede the rights of many?" wrote Dye.

Unruh said the changes he has proposed for the land would actually improve property values and create a tasteful living area for retirees and young families.

Unruh, who plans to live in the park, said any changes he would make to the river or any sewer system he were to employ would be governed through state and feder-

al regulations.

"We're going to set our standards high," he said, noting the homes would be worth about \$60,000 each and be surrounded by trees, ponds and other landscaping. "This is going to be a very well-run operation.

"How can I guarantee that? When you invest \$1 million in a facility, you've got to get a pretty decent return. To get that return, you have to ask for a high price," Unruh said.

The zoning committee postponed its recommendation for 30 days, after which the county commission will make a final decision.