

3/10/2021

SENATE BILL NO. 2159

Dear Chairman and Committee Members,

Hello, my name is Shasta Riederer and I have been a resident of Tatley Meadows for almost 14 years now. I have also been a resident of Stardust Terrace, in my more youthful days, and Colonial Estates for a brief time. I currently have family that still resides there and has for nearly 30 years.

I write to you today to provide you with a different perspective concerning the acquirement of these mobile home parks by an out of state corporation.

In the Summer of 2019, while the purchase of Colonial Estates was still in closing, I interviewed for the park manager position. I had previous experience in managing a 260-unit multi-family complex and was eager for a new challenge. During the interview I inquired as to who was purchasing the company. I asked about what changes were going to be made to further a deeper understanding of the position. We spoke about things like rent raises and installing water meters. I suggested to the young gentlemen interviewing me that I was concerned there was going to be issues with the city and the residents concerning certain changes. I also blatantly stated my opinion that the people of North Dakota are a stubborn bunch and that we were not exactly fans of change because we like to hold onto our local values. Upon arriving at home, I did my research on the company and noticed that they did not always have the best tenant communication skills, and that they had been acquiring other properties across the Midwest and not without challenges. I was not disappointed when I did not receive a call for a second interview.

A few months later, someone brought me the new 30-page lease that they had issued for Colonial Estates. They asked me to review it and wanted my take on if anything was illegal or unjust. I was educated on tenant/landlord law and city ordinance, so I took a look and made notes. It was lengthy and seemed more of a blanket lease than it was one made specifically for our area. I am relieved to see it was cut down to its current state.

Roughly a year after that, I noticed a Facebook group that was formed by fellow tenants of the communities that were being bought up by Havenpark. I joined this group in hopes that my experience and understanding of the industry would be helpful in lobbying with them. It became clear quickly that my conservative point of view was not that of the masses. The tone of the group did not collectively reflect the mission statement it put forth and I was quickly chastised and ridiculed for my stance on most of the complaints of that particular group. It seemed that only one agenda was acceptable and if you did not just jump on the “hate wagon” you were not an asset to them. I was accused of being “paid off” by management or being in cahoots with the investors. I was also privately messaged by people who obviously were fueled more by hate and ignorance, than common sense and rational. I was accused of not having compassion or a heart, among other choice words. And with that, I bowed out of joining their fight. As Mindy Teske said in her statement, I gave pause about stating my opinion openly because of persecution and consequences.

Upon this bill being brought to my attention, I felt it important that the committee knows that not everyone in these mobile home communities feels under attack. When you look at the bigger picture, just because we live in trailer park does not mean we are immune to inflation and corporate takeovers. I am a lifelong resident of Bismarck and like to think I am well educated on the ins and outs of real estate trends and market fluctuations. I am all for affordable housing. People need to have places to live that cannot afford to buy homes or even rent apartments in Bismarck’s strong sellers’ market. I will not get into my opinion on fair rent values. That is subjective and I think it’s too late in the game for those such considerations. What I do want to address is where we go from here and highlight some of the things that have been improved upon by our management and the new ownership.

Upon Havenpark acquiring Tatley Meadows, the following improvements have been made.

- A user-friendly tenant portal has been implemented that allows rent to be deducted electronically. This solves the problem of missing rent checks, but a lot of people will not commit to the process.

- A substantial amount of tree removal and trimming was done. This was neglected by the previous owners, causing safety hazards to many homes, including my own.
- Street repairs were performed to asphalt and curbs
- Snow removal is always done in a timely manner when the set threshold of snowfall is reached.
- Recreational improvements were completed. New basketball hoop and pad installed, new pool furniture was purchased, and landscaping was done
- New street signage was erected making directing traffic clearer for visitors
- Yard edging was completed on each yard, enhancing curb appeal
- New stone signage was installed to identify park entrance more clearly
- Fresh paint applied to mailbox areas and barriers installed
- Additional maintenance personnel hired to take the pressure off the management team
- Abandoned and dilapidated homes were removed, and some were replaced with new affordable homes.

These were the improvements that I have noticed in my park alone. I have also noticed additional improvements upon driving around town to the other parks I cruise by on a regular basis. Stardust Terrace has new lights installed making a once unsafe feeling, dark park more illuminated. They also have new entry way signage. Colonial estates has new signage and a new play structure for recreation.

With that being said, I ask you, would an out of state company coming in with the sole intention of being as “predatory” as they are portrayed to be, invest this much capital in their properties? I for one, would happily pay a little bit more rent to know that my home value and standard of living is being maintained or improved upon. I think some people feel they are being treated unfairly because past landlords and owners let certain things slide and because regulations have not kept up with the times. If Havepark had not have bought these parks, somebody else would have and we would most likely be stuck in the same predicament. I do have compassion for the people who have been financially affected by the increases in rents, but in reality, these increases are based on the market and inflation and they are happening everywhere, not just our parks. This

is where I think there is a disconnect between tenants and so-called greedy investors.

Among the parks around town, and on average, our rents tend to go up between 10 and 25 dollars every year regardless of who owns them. I am not sure how much anyone has broken down the rent comparisons around town, but based on my calculations, we are still getting a heck of a deal leasing land from these owners. I witnessed homeowners paying \$400 this summer for water bills alone that is equal to my lot rent, and I can water all day if I want to.

In closing, and as far as this bill goes, I think its important to be careful what we ask for. I think we would be naive to think that the cost of on-site offices and personnel for every park in the state, regardless of how many units it has will not be passed down to the tenants. Landlords are simply not going to just absorb that cost. I do agree something needs to be implemented that makes contacting management more streamlined. I have never had an issue in this regard, but I have heard about people who have.

I follow the rules of my park and have very little tolerance for those who abuse them because they think they can. But as far as giving someone 6 months to fix a lease violation before being able to file for eviction seems excessive to me and in my opinion, ties the hands of management as far as holding people accountable. I for one do not want to stare at dog poo, or broke down cars, or someone's old couch on their porch for 6 months and I ask you to further consider amending this bill in these areas.

I thank you for your time and am open to any questions you may have.