

Why Asking for Bailout Money Changes Your Perspective

A MHOAA board member reviews the state of living there...

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When the housing bubble burst this past year, one group of homeowners already knew what it felt like—"unmobile" home park residents. Now many middle class homeowners of stick-built homes know what it feels like when your home is not your castle.

We know we live behind the eight ball. Long ago, we became familiar with banks and mortgage lenders, who, in times when money was flowing, might even consider giving us a loan three or four points above market. We knew foreclosures too, especially when we didn't read the small print or lost a job. In those days, we considered ourselves lucky if we found a landlord who lived in our community and treated us like real people. These "mom and pop" landlords did right by us.

Then came the last 30 years when predatory capitalism and greed became the norm. In the 1990's, out-of-state corporations came to every state to buy up those mom and pop communities, raised rents to leverage another purchase elsewhere, and ignored maintenance and customer service. These new landlords were looking to make a "killing" when land values would reach critical mass.

The large corporations brought new refinements to political harassment, using bullying tactics and threats of eviction when we questioned operations or formed associations. Their managers came through a revolving door that often saw them exiting after a year or two, many torn by serving the demands of their bosses and the plight of the people they served. Want-a-be landlords followed the corporate suit.

Now many Baby Boomers, after recently reviewing their portfolios, are looking to downsize. You'd think the landlords would take advantage of such a prospect, but after many years of mismanagement and closures, they are not positioned to do so.

Those of us on the ground know the solution is purchasing our communities and are working toward that end. Your MHOAA Board knows the only way we can achieve real home ownership is by becoming a political force in your state and nationally. We are just beginning to have a presence in Washington D.C. and partner with a coalition of affordable housing non-profits, ROC USA™, and veteran and senior advocate groups. Our small steps toward that goal are becoming larger.

When the bailout bill was passed in the fall, I was busy educating homeowners to vote their pocketbook around Oregon. In October I was elected to our national homeowner's board at our national convention held in Minneapolis. There over 100 of us shared ideas and experiences and a focus about how we could renew our commitment to changing things nationally. And for the first time we scheduled our convention just after CFED's (see <http://www.cfed.org/home.m>) so we could talk ideas and strategies with our new non-profit partner to preserve affordable housing.

After the Democrats won in November, an idea kept returning to me—why not lobby for bailout money for a low-interest loan fund to assist us to purchase our communities? When I received tickets for Obama's inauguration, I planned for a few extra days to lobby my newly elected congressmen. A committee staff person for Ways and Means agreed to 10 minutes with me and said the language in the bailout bill permitted community purchases, but we were probably too late as the remaining \$350 billion was pretty much spoken for.

At first I came away thinking Wall Street had trumped Main Street once again. But then after deeper thought, I reviewed our progress here in Oregon and in many other states too. What we had achieved was remarkable. And climbing another mountain was going to be easier because we all had plenty of good company.

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