

Senate Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs Session

Friday, February 21, 2025, 8:30 am

Major Presentation Points

- [Access to Funding](#) from government and private sources for safety, weatherization, and maintenance needs for individual homeowners
- [Remove Unequal funding access](#) for federal and state mandated and non-mandated projects for WWHOA to address common needs
- [Resources based on financial need](#) should be the criteria rather than community's organizational structure
- [Relevant notifications](#) of state and federal requirements, i.e. permit and operational fees
- [Record of affordable senior housing HOA communities](#)
- [HOA model](#) as an alternative to a cooperative for increasing affordable senior housing units, or affordable housing in general

Introduction to WWHOA

Williston Woods Homeowners Association is a 34 unit HUD approved affordable senior housing manufactured home community, incorporated on Dec. 1, 1983 as a home owners association (HOA), and is located in Williston, VT. Each resident owns their own home, and the lot the home sits on. The homeowners association owns more than 25 acres of shared common land, much of which is not suitable for house lots. The 34 units are located on two streets, Middlewood Road and Red Pine Road.

A significant number of our residents are in their late 80s and a few in their late 90s. They choose to live in WWHOA because they can afford to live independently in their own home. This allows them to 'age in place' and thus save themselves, and the state, money by not having to live in a more expensive 'residential' home, or impose on family members.' Many of our residents, perhaps most, live on relatively tight fixed incomes.

WWHOA has an elected board of directors, voted on at an annual meeting, which is responsible for maintaining a budget, overall maintenance, and other common needs. The board is empowered to expend money on WWHOA common expenses only. Residents vote and approve decisions on expenditures deemed necessary, and no other entity has the authority to expend monies without the board's oversight and the residents' approval. No resident is charged a rental fee for the space their home occupies - they own it.

Even though each resident own's their personal lot, they share ownership of the common land. WWHOA, as an entity, is required to maintain the common lands, file tax returns (We file as a non-profit using federal form 1120-H, and state corporate tax form CO-411.) and pay permit and operational fees to both the state and federal governments. These fees are not assessed to the individual lot owners, but to the home owners Association. WWHOA is treated by the State of Vermont as a governing entity, similar to other mobile home parks in this regard.

Although residents don't pay a monthly rental fee as they own their own lot, they do pay a monthly \$245 fee (Voted on by them at the annual meeting based on the board's recommendation.) which includes:

- Basic cable plus TV; bulk rate contract
- High speed internet access; bulk rate contract (300 MBPS)
- Snow plowing of streets; contracted
- Street maintenance and repair
- Mowing of common lands; contracted
- Maintaining and upgrading communal septic system
- Weekly trash removal; contracted
- LED Street lights
- Tree removal on common land when necessary
- Maintaining state required habitat for small mammals, birds, bees, and butterfly's; based on the 5-year forestry plan required by the State of Vermont
- Any unexpected common operational expense

A major concern we are currently dealing with is the fact that because we own our own lot, in addition to being owners of shared common land, we are not able to be listed on the State of Vermont's Mobile Home Park Registry. This means that we are being denied opportunities for funding from a number of sources, including state, federal, and private organizations, for safety, weatherization, and general repairs to our 40 year old homes. Funding assistance for the stormwater runoff project requirements are also negatively impacted by not being listed on the Registry.

We approached Representative Angela Arsenault (CHI-2) about this challenging situation. She submitted a bill to adjust the law determining the definition of a mobile home park to correct this situation. We were told that this adjustment couldn't be made because there might be unintended consequences. We would suggest that the situation we are currently experiencing is in fact an unintended consequence. We don't believe that our affordable senior housing community of 34 manufactured homes was intended to be excluded from the benefits of being on the registry. We wonder if the legislature was even aware of our existence when the definition of a mobile home park was established. In all practical aspects of living in a mobile home community, our HOA is no different than those mobile home parks organized as cooperatives.

[Access to Funding](#)

Many of our residents require financial assistance to make upgrades to their 40+ year old manufactured (mobile) homes. Not being included on the Registry means WWHOA does not receive notifications of various opportunities from funding sources to address individual homeowners need for safety, weatherization, and general maintenance upgrades. It is our understanding that many organizations providing such funding use the Registry as a means to contact potential homeowners needing the assistance, even if they don't require potential recipients to be on the registry..

Manufactured homes can offer safe and comfortable long-term housing at an affordable price, but will degrade more quickly than conventionally built homes if not adequately maintained on an ongoing basis. All except three of our units were built and installed in the 1980s, and a number are in need of maintenance to make them more comfortable, attractive, and safer.

Below are two examples of residents applying for financing assistance, out of many residents' needs, meeting all necessary qualifications, but ultimately denied the funding because WWHOA is not listed on the registry.

One resident requested funding from CVOEO to weatherize their home, and repair the kitchen ceiling from a roof leak that occurred from during a previous owner's occupancy. He was told that he met the qualifications for the assistance, but then was later notified he would not be receiving assistance because CVOEO realized that he resided in WWHOA and not in WWCHC, which is listed on the registry.

Another resident requested assistance for home repairs from the Manufactured Home Improvement and Repair Program (MHIR). The request was for a garage door damaged from a burglary attempt, rotted front steps (a safety hazard), and poorly insulated windows. She was notified that the request was denied because WWHOA is not listed on the registry, even though she qualified based on all other criteria.

[Unequal funding access](#)

We are in the process of finalizing funding and construction assistance from the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity and Greenprint Partners for our stormwater construction phase. It should be noted that we only found out about this possible funding through our lawyer's office, who had another client that was working with CVOEO. Our lawyer notified us of this opportunity, otherwise we'd likely never have heard about it.

We learned the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources was providing funding to assist mobile home parks to upgrade or repair septic systems. We needed to replace one of our 12 year old septic pumps and related equipment (An \$18,000 expense.), but couldn't receive funding because we were not listed on the Mobile Home Park Registry.

We assume that other communities were notified of this septic upgrading opportunity through vehicles like the mobile home park registry, and those on the registry were able to obtain such assistance. We feel all affordable senior housing communities, especially affordable senior mobile home parks, should have been notified, including HOAs, and we believe the funding should be based on financial need rather than the park's ownership structure.

[Resources based on financial need](#)

As mentioned previously, we believe consideration of financial need is a better criteria, and should be given more consideration, whether the mobile home park is an HOA, cooperative, or owned by an entrepreneurial third party.

Perhaps the mobile home park registry could include a field that identifies the type of ownership, so that decisions could be made as to what resources might be made available to whom. This way each park would still receive notifications of available opportunities because they would be on the registry, but the available resources could be adjusted based on legitimate needs. We do not understand why being an HOA should prevent our community from receiving such assistance.

[Relevant notifications](#)

We are not aware of any State of Vermont mobile home registry that includes all mobile home parks, much less affordable senior housing mobile home parks. Other than being registered with the Vermont Secretary of State's office, we are not aware of being listed on any other state listing which identifies mobile home parks, whether affordable senior housing, or otherwise. There have been multiple times when we did not receive notification for funding opportunities, or notification of requirements to pay state and/or federal fees.

For example, the Federal Corporate Transparency Act required all HOAs registered with their secretary of state to file a Beneficial Ownership Information Report by Jan. 1, 2025. Failure to do so meant being assessed a significant fine and penalty. We received no notification of this at all, and only learned of the requirement from our lawyer just days before the deadline. Fortunately we were just able to meet the requirements and deadline, but it was just luck that we learned of it at all. We are registered with the Vermont Secretary of State, submit yearly tax forms to the State of Vermont, and pay various permit and operational state and federal fees as an association each year. Yet none of those regular interactions with state agencies alerted us of this requirement.

[Other affordable senior housing HOA communities](#)

We wonder if there are other state listings of HOA communities in general, and specifically mobile home parks organized as an HOA, throughout the state that are experiencing similar difficulties. Making the same services currently being offered to those on the Mobile Home Park Registry to others would go a long way to enabling affordable housing options to more state residents.

[HOA model](#)

Considering the need for more affordable housing for residents, especially seniors, and the State of Vermont's commendable effort to provide for this shortage by creating mobile home park cooperatives from existing mobile home parks, we wonder if using a similar model based on the WWHOA arrangement might provide an additional affordable option.

We are managed by an elected board, just as a cooperative. Residents elect our board, approve annual budgets and expenditures, and vote on community improvements and governing rules. Our association owns the common land and we all share in the use and maintenance of this land. There is no third party owner or entity receiving a profit or income of any kind.

WWHOA has the additional advantage that each resident owns their own lot, so they have the opportunity to build more homeowner equity more quickly. When a home includes ownership of the lot, mortgage companies generally will provide better loan rates, and will also generally allow a higher percentage of the home cost to be eligible for the mortgage, thus requiring a lower down payment amount. So it would save money, both in the short and long term.

We also believe it is possible that such a model would require less investment by the State of Vermont to create the entity, which could mean more money available to put more people into their own homes, regardless of their age.

Therefore, we would urge this committee to consider conducting an economic feasibility study, comparing an HOA model similar to that of WWHOA to the current cooperative model, to determine whether the HOA option could be a more desirable option in some circumstances and thus help to address solving Vermont's affordable housing crisis.

Thank you for your time and consideration.