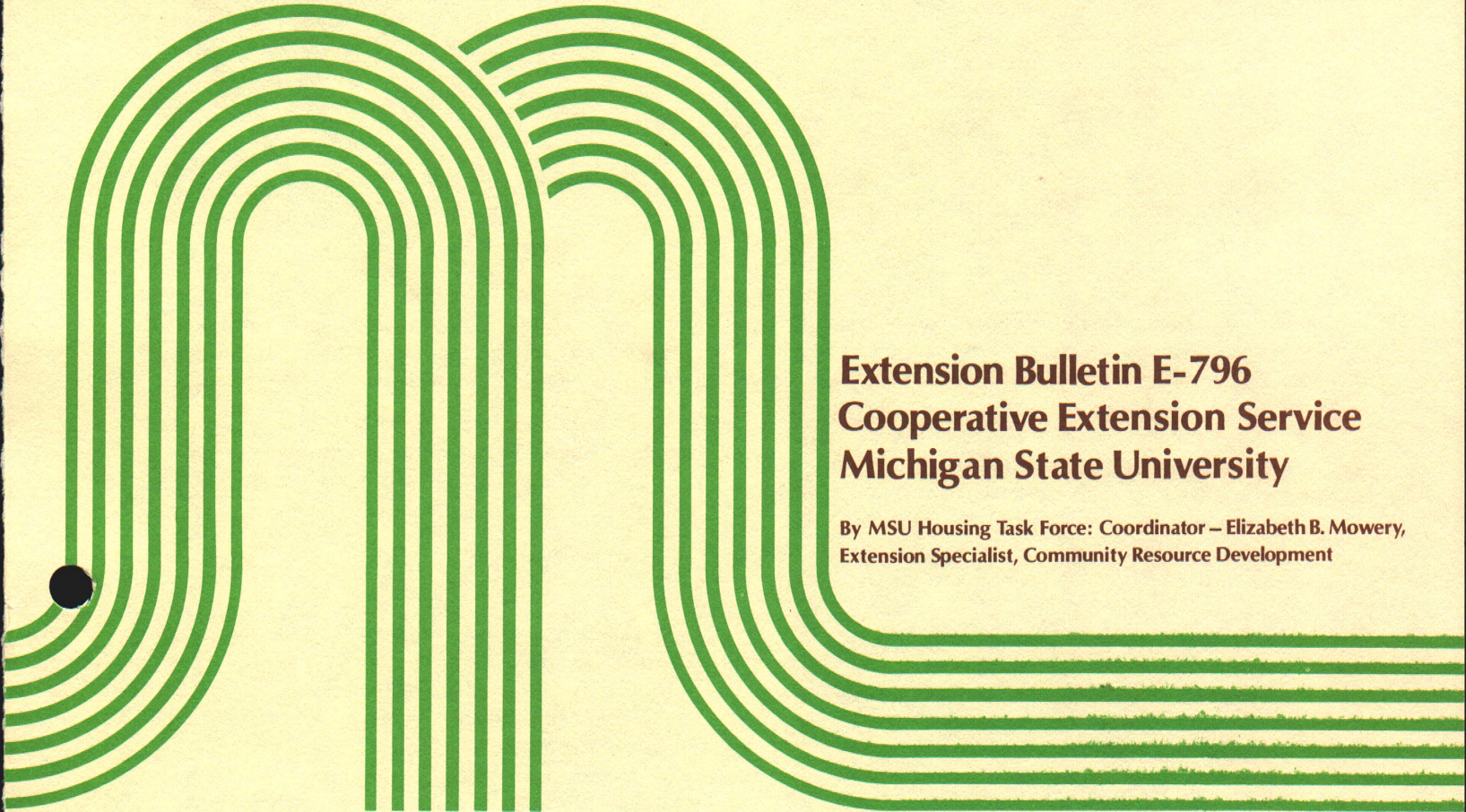


# SELECTING A MOBILE HOME SITE



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Michigan State University**

By MSU Housing Task Force: Coordinator – Elizabeth B. Mowery,  
Extension Specialist, Community Resource Development

You've decided to buy a mobile home and looked at several models. But one more point is of primary importance: **locate your site before you sign a purchase agreement.**

You may be able to choose between three kinds of locations:

- site rental in a mobile home park
- site purchase in a mobile home subdivision
- on individual private property

Or, there may be no immediate possibility. In some areas, zoning restrictions or building codes have prevented putting a mobile home on a lot you own.

Development of parks has been slow in comparison with sales of mobile homes. Some of the older parks are now inadequate. Built during the 1940's and 1950's, they can no longer handle the larger mobile homes of today, and their facilities are often poor with limited laundry, parking and play areas. Many of these older parks are located on the

outskirts of town where the old "trailer camp" was forced to develop.

The situation is improving rapidly, but the importance is critical enough to merit repetition: be very certain where you will locate your mobile home before you buy.

## Parks

Newcomers to mobile home living rarely know the right questions to ask when looking at mobile home parks. Life in a park may be quite different from life in other neighborhoods.

Since parks differ widely, learn as much as you can about a park and decide according to the things most important to you. Even minor differences can have a big influence on whether you will like or dislike mobile home living.

## APPEARANCE and STANDARDS

You wouldn't decide to live anywhere on the basis of a first impression, but you can sometimes cross a park off your list at first sight.

It is easy to notice such details as: neatness, spaciousness, pleasant landscape development and wide, smooth streets. Look for well groomed roadways and an attractive arrangement of homes. Tidiness and evidence of personal pride around each home are credits to the tenants, the people who may be your new neighbors.

Swimming pools, shuffleboard courts, playgrounds, putting greens, etc. are all highly impressive, but remember that they are worth the extra cost only if you are likely to make use of them.

Inspect the size and condition of lots. Lots must be large enough to accommodate your unit. Look for evidence of drainage problems.

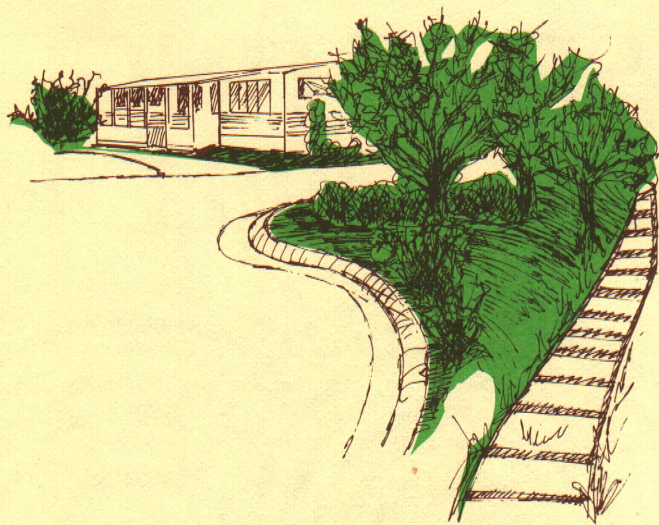
The site should have pilings, set below frost level, to support your unit. There should also be a concrete or asphalt pad. Pads in older parks may have no foundation other than soil or gravel. Soil settles more than gravel, and tends to rot tires if they are left on the mobile home unit.

Positioning your mobile home according to prevailing winds is an important factor. More stability is provided if the end, rather than side, faces prevailing winds. The 12-foot-wide end presents only one-fifth as much wall area to the wind as a 60-foot-long side. Shifts in wind direction, however, make secure tie-downs necessary to assure safety.

## LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Landscaping in a mobile home park deserves special attention. Consider the following elements of a well developed and landscaped park:

- Open space for strolling or walking.
- Healthy trees, evergreens and other vegetation to relieve the bleakness of concentrated mobile housing units. Avoid locations near trees over 30 feet tall which have weak tops or dead limbs.
- Well constructed, drained, hard-surface drives and pedestrian areas.
- Safe, neat service buildings with surrounding lawns and plantings.
- A clear-cut set of regulations stipulating responsibilities of park residents: lot and home care, mowing, opportunity for planting temporary or semi-permanent plants or trees, other yard-related activities.
- A clear-cut set of outdoor maintenance services provided by the park owner-manager: snow plowing, speed deterrents, street surface repairs, tree and mailbox maintenance, garbage collection and storage, park information for guests.



- Orientation of the park according to prevailing winds and storm patterns. Is the park on an exposed westerly hillside where winter winds will be harsh? Is the site protected by windbreaks and shade trees?

- A safe entrance to the park, with a clear view of oncoming traffic. The entrance drive should connect at a right angle and a main road which is not heavily travelled is preferable.

## LOCATION

If you have children, what is the availability of good schools? How far is the park from your work? Check the surrounding area. Are there railroad tracks nearby? A city dump, confined livestock housing, an airport, or an industry that has an odor?

If the park is outside the city limits, ask how this will affect services such as mail delivery, garbage collection, police and fire protection.

Consider the safety of children. Is the park fenced or far enough away from highways, ponds, lagoons or other attractive nuisances that are hazardous to children? Is there a place for children to play?

Does the owner provide a storm shelter in case of tornado or high winds?

Check the site for good drainage. Heavy rains can cause flash flooding and unusually quick spring thaws can cause rivers to spread into flood plains.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Generalizations can be dangerously misleading, but the mobile home park is likely to be a highly "controlled" community. If there is a scarcity of spaces, the park owner can effectively hand-pick occupants. Social convictions may prompt you to question any screening practices.

The owner usually establishes the rules, which are, in

effect, the laws of park life. Never decide on a particular park without carefully studying the rules. Consider how they will affect you, and what they deny or permit others. Regulations may, for example, prohibit:

- keeping pets
- planting hedges
- sunbathing in brief attire
- family activities you may value

Unwritten rules have sometimes forced a tenant to buy trailer skirting, oil, gas or even milk from a particular supplier, although this is now prohibited by law in Michigan. The designated supplier may charge inflated prices, and slip back some of the excess profit to the landlord.

Since rental is on a month-to-month basis, the owner has the option of changing the rules at will. To find out about your prospective landlord and life in the park, visit with those who have lived there for some time, and with people in the nearby community.

The lifestyle a park fosters will differ according to tenants. Parks occupied primarily by retired people are often called "service oriented". The social programs in these parks have attracted many people to mobile home living. The park may be open only to people in this age bracket.

Others are more like bedroom communities and do not emphasize social or recreational programs. Many parks, of course, have a mix of people living in them, and a wide range of facilities and programs.

The critical question is whether a particular park is suited to the lifestyle of your family.

## RENTAL COSTS

Rent varies widely and depends on:

- type of park
- lot size
- number of conveniences and luxuries
- whether or not utilities are offered
- geographic location
- availability of other park spaces within the community

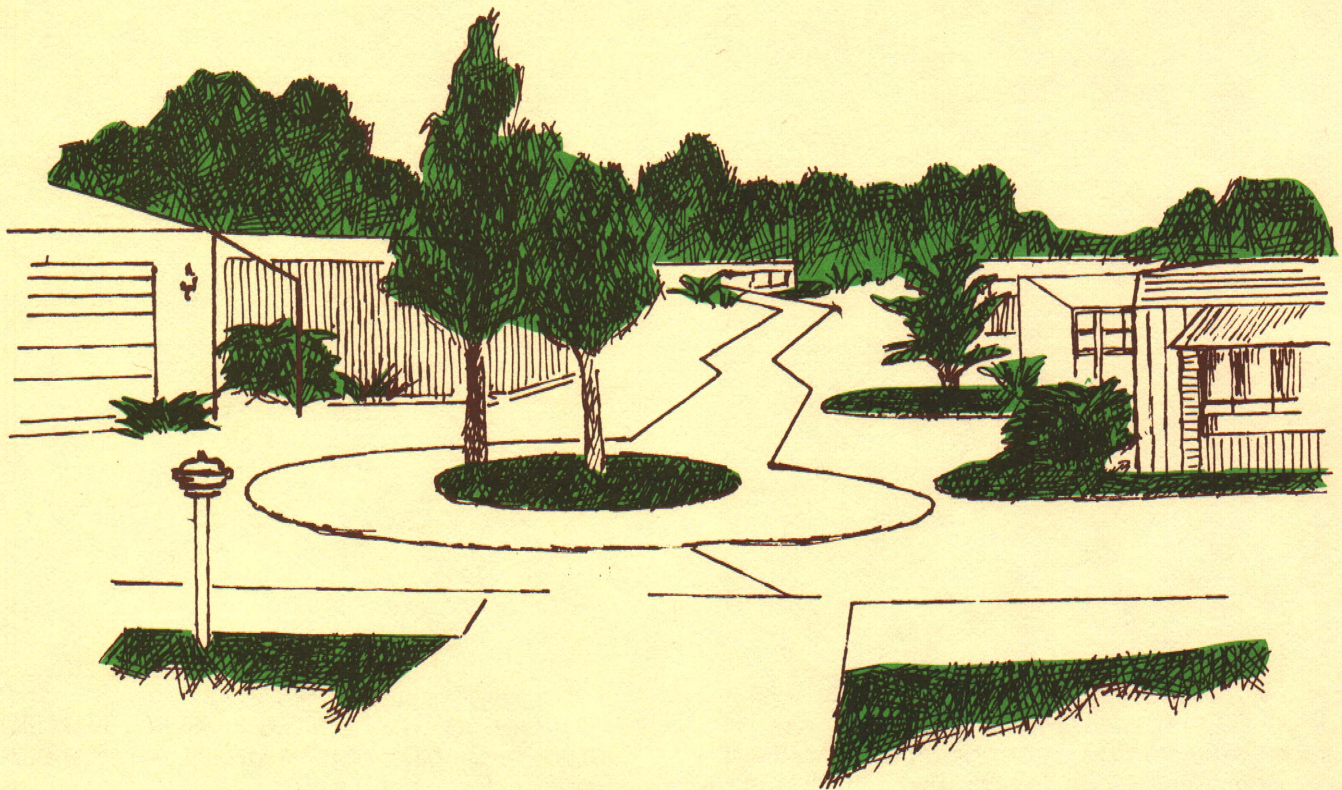
Some parks charge additional rent for each child in the family. Charging for guests is illegal if they stay less than 15 days. The Mobile Home Owners Association cited \$75 to \$80 per month as an average site rental charge for Michigan mobile home parks in late 1973.

New parks often charge a low rental rate at first and raise rates when all spaces are filled.

## UTILITIES

The amount of power available is important. As mobile homes have become larger, so have power requirements. Added appliances require added power. If the park is not wired to supply all mobile homes the amount of power they need during hours of peak use, voltage will drop, lights dim, and other appliances will not operate properly. This happens even if your mobile home has been wired by the factory to handle the amount of power it needs.

Parks should have both 110- and 220-volt wiring. Many older parks do not have 220-voltage, but mobile homes built today require that amount. Buried lines are preferable.



A long distance between the home and the park connection will cause some power loss, especially if conductors are inadequate for the load. This results in higher bills, frequently blown fuses, and overheated lines.

Many parks do not have natural gas. Some parks pipe bottled gas from a large central tank; in others, each unit must have its own cylinder. If you pay for your own utilities, find out if the cost is metered, estimated or a fixed sum.

Check water and sewer lines. Is there a private well or does the park use city lines? Ask residents if water supply and pressure are adequate. In Michigan, all water supply lines should be buried beneath the frost line.

## SAFETY TIEDOWNS

Tiedowns should be installed by all mobile home owners. If your neighbors don't tie down, their units can be blown into yours.

Ties are wire ropes or straps which "tie" the mobile home and its frame to anchors buried in the ground. Clamps and turnbuckles or other tensioning devices are used to connect ties to anchors. (See Figure 1.)

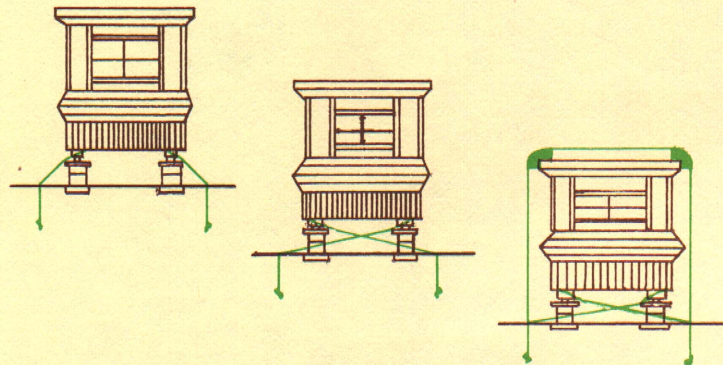
A combination of frame and over-the-top tiedowns offer the most security. Frame ties keep the unit from being shifted from supports, and over-the-top ties are not required if secure frame ties are used. Some 10-, 12- and 14-foot units do not have enough sidewall strength to transmit high wind loads to the steel frame. Therefore, while ties secure the frame, sections of the unit may blow away in a severe storm. Over-the-top ties are incorporated into the design of some new homes.

## RIGHTS and RESPONSIBILITIES

Talk with the park manager or owner about rules for setting up the mobile home, tiedown requirements, and cost for initial utility hook-ups. For example, you may have to pay the owner to set up the mobile home. Any requirement that the home be sold through him is now illegal.

Michigan has no law prohibiting entrance and exit fees and no provision for a lease, although legislation dealing with this issue has been introduced in the state legislature. There are requirements that park owners maintain habitable surroundings and a tenant may withhold rent if his landlord fails to do so. The federal landlord-tenant law, which has been amended to apply to mobile home parks, provides protection against arbitrary or retaliatory eviction.

The Michigan Mobile Home Owners Association works for reform in mobile home living through organized action. They propose and lobby for new mobile home legislation, keep members informed of their rights under law, investigate complaints of individual members, and represent the interests of mobile-home owners in the courts. There were approximately 1,800 Association members in September 1973.



## Mobile Home Subdivisions

Land in a mobile home subdivision is sold by lots as in a conventional housing development. The mobile-home owner has a deed to his own lot and the right to sell that lot. A subdivision is usually in a choice location, with many recreational features, landscape development and large individual lots.

Costs over and above the price of the land include:

- utilities and connections
- water and sewage facilities
- landscape development and improvements
- installation of concrete piers and pilings
- escrow charge
- monthly maintenance charges (which may be subject to change)
- possible special assessments as improvements are added

Deed restrictions deserve careful study. In addition to those which may be similar to limitations placed on lots for conventional housing, other deed restrictions deal with problems relating particularly to mobile homes. Their purpose is to assure that the activities of lot owners conform to the policies of a well-operated park. For example, the age and quality of the mobile home may be specified, or the type of landscaping may be subject to approval by the management or a lot owners association responsible for the management and government of the development.

Subdivisions are often segregated by age. Retirees often locate together in mobile home subdivisions such as the one in Sun City, Arizona.

## Location on Own Property

An individual site for a mobile home should be selected in the same way as for any other type of housing. Zoning is one special consideration. Check with the local planner or building inspector in your community to make sure you will be allowed to put a mobile home on your land.

# CHECKLIST FOR COMPARING MOBILE HOME PARKS

## Appearance and Standards

YES      NO

- |   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1. Is the general impression pleasing?                  | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Are individual lots neatly kept?                     | _____ | _____ |
| 3. Is lot size you need available?                      | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Are pilings available on each site?                  | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Are roads paved and well kept?                       | _____ | _____ |
| 6. Is there adequate and convenient off-street parking? | _____ | _____ |
| 7. Are lawns well established?                          | _____ | _____ |
| 8. Is garbage handled satisfactorily?                   | _____ | _____ |
| 9. Is street lighting satisfactory?                     | _____ | _____ |

## Location

1. How far is it to:
  - a. school for your children \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. work for husband \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. work for wife \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. grocery store \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. medical care \_\_\_\_\_  
(For f and g write in other services of special importance to you.)
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. \_\_\_\_\_  
(Remember that miles represent dollars, time and energy costs.)
2. Does public transportation come into or near the park? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What kind of fire protection serves the park? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What kind of police protection serves the park? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What kind of ambulance protection comes to the park? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Does the park entrance provide safe and easy exit and entrance? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Is there a safe place for children to play? \_\_\_\_\_

## Community Life

1. Ask for a copy of the park rules. Note which ones you do and do not agree with.
2. Do people living in the park speak well of the management? Make a note of significant comments.
3. Are there any "unwritten" rules that do not appear on the printed list?
4. Do people outside the park speak well of the owner and of the park itself? Make a note of significant comments.
5. Do most of the people living in the park have similar characteristics, e.g., of a given age group or mostly couples with both the husband and wife working? Make notes.

6. What is the attitude of the management toward children? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What regulations cover selling your mobile home if you leave it on the site? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What recreation facilities are provided? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What additional charges are routine, or possible. (For example, a charge for overnight guests or use of the swimming pool.) Ask for or make an itemized list.

8. Are there planned social or recreation activities? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do the residents have an organization or association of any kind? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the likelihood rental rate will change? \_\_\_\_\_

### Rental Costs

1. What is the monthly rate? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Exactly what charges will be involved in moving in, setting up, and connecting your mobile home? Ask for itemized list. \_\_\_\_\_

### Utilities

1. Can the park deliver the amount of electric power your mobile home requires? (Ask the manager how many amperes the park is wired with to supply to your home. Information on your fuse box or in your instruction book will tell you how much you need.)