

by Lynn Rhodes
Herald Staff Reporter
Willow Park for mobile homes...a nice place to visit, and who wouldn't want to live there?

"There's no hassles here like in an apartment. Kids and pets are allowed, and there's no leases," said Willow Park resident Bill Lunn.

"Living here is like being at the cottage all year 'round," he added.

Tucked beside Highway Seven in Norval, Willow Park is situated in the valley where the Credit River meets the Silver Creek below a shelter of hills. A road, paved and winding, leads off the highway to the park.

"The best part of my whole day," said Mr. Boyd, a commuter to Toronto, "is looking down the hill away from the highway at my mobile home."

"Soon I'll be 65, and this will be our retirement home," he continued.

"If I need help with anything, I know I can knock on any door here, and no one would deny me. There's a special esprit de corps here that's hard to come by these days."

Being a ten-year veteran of Willow Park, Boyd knows what living in a mobile home community is all about, and enjoys it.

The Boyds have gradually modernized their mobile home during the decade they have lived in it.

"We have all the conveniences of a subdivision, and more," he said.

There's a large furnace, air conditioning, music piped into every room, a bar, an 18-foot deep pool beside the patio, an aquarium custom-built along the full width of one wall...

"But this is only the Chev of mobile homes," said Boyd modestly.

Visit Duncan Stacey if you want to see the Cadillac of mobile homes."

Stacey has a spacious two bedroom, with a den, a modern kitchen - dining area overlooking a broadloomed sunken livingroom, and a three-piece bathroom large enough to accommodate a washer and dryer.

"For me, this place is just a middle step, until I have enough money to put a down payment on a house," explained Stacey, a private businessman.

"This is a starter home for many," observed Willow Park owner Norm Guthrie.

"Living here gives a couple a chance to build up a nest egg."

For lots averaging 45 feet wide by 75 to 100 feet long, Guthrie charges \$165 to \$115 monthly rent. All services included, except heat and telephone. In lieu of taxes, the town charges \$240 yearly per lot, for licensing fees.

A maximum of two children are allowed per unit, since septic tanks are used.

Now -comparing the rent a family of four would have to pay for an apartment or a house-mobile home living is an economical alternative.

"We used to live in a highrise, and were trying to save for a house, but there was no way," said Bill Lunn, father of one. "Living here is a lot cheaper."

"If we're ever going to keep people going in this country," believes Guthrie, "we'll need more (mobile home parks)."

According to statistics published in the November 75 issue of "Municipal World", in December 1974 there were 26,700 mobile homes in parks in British Columbia, 21,828 in the prairies, 11,197 in the maritimes, 10,500 in Quebec and 9,400 in Ontario.

The trend has not changed. "By the end of

1973, one out of every five housing starts in Canada was a mobile home; the number of mobile homes in Ontario increased at a slower rate than those in other provinces...the percentage of mobile homes in parks in Ontario remained at 31 percent in 1974, still well below the national average of 44 percent..." continues the report, based on CMHA and CMHC figures.

The majority of parks in Ontario are "far from the Toronto hub area, where they are frowned upon," said Guthrie, who named London, Barrie and Woodstock as cities close to mobile home communities.

Near Toronto, where the housing shortage is most crucial and the jobs are most plentiful, mobile home parks are scarce.

"From March to November," said Guthrie's wife Pearl, "I get about five calls a week from people looking for some place to park their trailer."

But there's no room. Willow Park, consisting of only 5.8 acres of land, is only licensed to accommodate 16 mobile homes and a time limit is set for campers in the 24 campsites.

Since Guthrie was unable to name any competitors in the permanent mobile home park market in Southern Ontario, he sees "both a demand and need for more," and has an idea.

A few years ago, he presented his plans for a 400-unit park to some of the local politicians, unofficially. They didn't go for it - not even when he offered to build and donate a school in the vicinity of the park.

Why? Guthrie believes that people generally have a preconceived, negative image of mobile home parks.

"Local politicians are uneducated as to what they are," he said.

"Because the people own their own units, they have pride in them and take extra care. There's no shabby town deals here. Sure, across the country some of the newer parks are better planned and better kept than the older ones - just like suburbs, there's good and bad. Ontario Housing is the worst example of slums I've ever seen."

During the four and a half years Guthrie has owned Willow Park, none of his tenants have ever been on welfare or unemployment insurance recipients.

The terms of the Landlord and Tenants Act are not applicable to mobile homes, which gives Guthrie the authority to evict tenants who disrespect the property. He has

only evicted one family, on different grounds. Guthrie's tenants follow simple rules: dogs are leashed, cars drive slowly, lawns are mowed and yards are unlit.

Guthrie plows the snow, repairs the road and generally maintains the property himself.

If a mobile home is sold, Guthrie's approval of the new tenants is necessary, to ensure that they are responsible people.

However unblemished the reputation of Willow Park, Guthrie was advised that his chances of getting the required authorization to put his plans for a park project into action would be slim.

"It's a ticklish issue," commented town planner Mario Venditti.

Finding a suitable location for such an expansive park seems to be the greatest difficulty.

There's no room in the metropolitan areas, where housing is most needed.

Many people feel that mobile home communities have low aesthetic value and would degrade the property value in a suburb or on the outskirts of a town, he said.

"You can't put a mobile home beside a \$100,000 home," agrees Guthrie.

There should be a buffer area."

What lies beyond the buffer areas outside cities and towns in Southern Ontario? High-priced farmland, conservation areas, or a wilderness of swamps and bush without hydro, water, roads or sewage facilities...

Guthrie's proposed park project would be expensive, but his offer still holds.

Deputy town treasurer Grant Usher said there was no policy on mobile home parks, but a 1975 bylaw, 75-20, states that no trailers are allowed to locate except in licensed trailer camps.

Guthrie sees little hope in attaining municipal consent to expand Willow Park either. He would like to have his property rezoned so he could convert the campsites into lots for permanent mobile homes.

With all this red tape, how did Willow Park ever get established?

It was unplanned. Before regulations existed, it gradually developed out of a demand for mobile home space. As far back as the late 1940's summer campers began asking the original owner, Guthrie's father-in-law Wes Louth, if they could stay there permanently.

Guthrie should have had his idea for a 400-unit park, 30 years ago.



LOOK DOWN from Highway 7 in Norval and there's Willow Park, one of the few places in southern Ontario where people can live year 'round in mobile homes. Owner Norm Guthrie sees a need for more such parks.

The mobile home controversy

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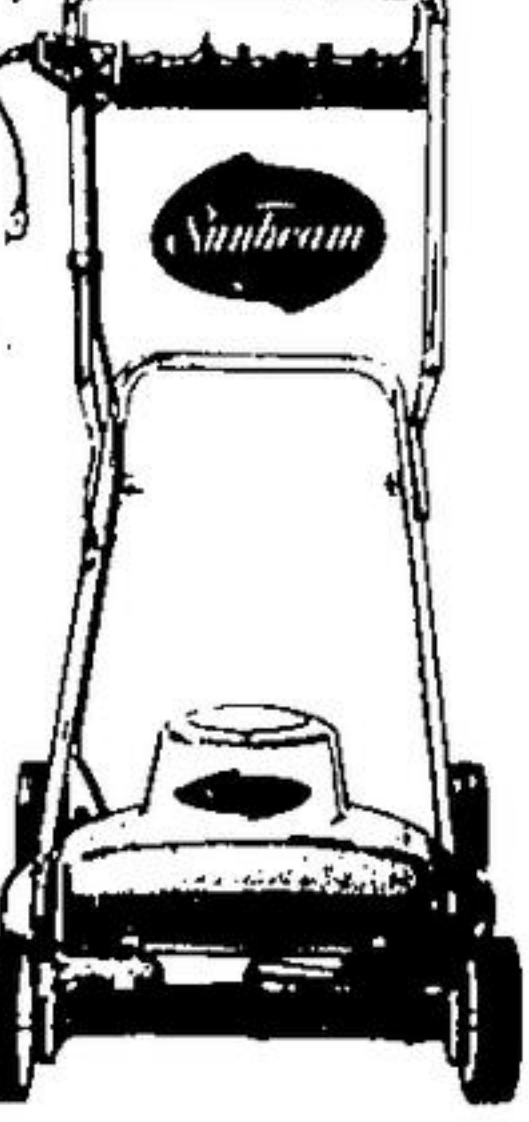
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