

# Pushing Poor People Away

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Friday, 20 March 2009

Poor people are a problem for those who worry about real estate values and the appearance of their community. Is this why they make laws that push them out of town?

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Why do many poor people live just outside of our towns and cities? Because we won't let them live any closer. You see, low income residents are more likely to live in ugly homes and apartments. Other residents seek to ban such ugliness, and so attack the poor whether we - or they - realize that is what is happening. Some people may realize it on some level, and know that their laws and regulations are meant to push the poor out of town.

## First Step: Get Rid Of Mobile Homes

{bot\_wrgoogle}This is a legal process which happens in almost every community at some point. As a town grows, residents become more worried about property values, and so less tolerant of "ugly" housing. Eventually, almost every town wants to ban mobile homes in particular.

The reason mobile homes exist is because they provide cheap housing, whether they are bought or rented. However, to many who do not live in them, they are considered ugly, so they must be kept out of town. First step: ban mobiles (and sometimes modulars) within the city limits.

The result? Mobile home parks and neighborhoods in the townships outside of the city limits. But in time, these townships too want to get rid of the mobiles, so they stop allowing new parks to be built. Next they pass laws and regulations stipulating that only new mobiles or those under five years old can be moved into the township. They eventually may just outlaw any additional mobile homes. At least they generally leave the existing ones alone, but if yours burns down, it has to be replaced with a frame house.

These rules and laws are presented as being good for residents. They help get rid of "substandard housing." This IS good for those with nicer homes, but those with lower incomes are pushed further and further away from the city and jobs there. Longer commutes mean more expense, and a lowered standard of living, of course. Actually, when one watches the process, it almost seems that the unspoken goal is to get rid of poor people. In any case getting rid of their "ugly" homes accomplishes this.

When hurricane Andrew devastated Homestead Township in 1992, I said people would soon try to ban mobiles there, in the name of public safety, with hurricanes as an excuse. Sure enough, lawmakers were soon suggesting this. I didn't follow what happened, but I doubt they were as concerned about people's safety as they were about the value of that land if they could get rid of the poor people and their ugly homes.

Consider that the safest homes might have three-foot-thick cement walls, but nobody was calling for that standard as a matter of law. Residents of all home types get a lot of warning in any case, and so can avoid being there when hurricanes come. People lived in mobile homes there because they are cheaper, so once again, if they're banned, the lower income folk have to move away, further from jobs.

## Second Step: Rental Regulations

Having rental housing standards is another idea which claims to be about helping poor people. Nobody wants unsafe living conditions, after all. But when you look closely at how the process works, you see something else. The Northern Michigan town where I lived years ago instituted a rental code. I went and picked up a copy of it.

One of the many new regulations specified the required square inches of window space to allow light into a bedroom. This wasn't about creating a usable emergency exit, something already covered by other regulations. One rule required that there be no peeling paint - never mind whether the paint was dangerous or not. Many other statutes required all the niceties most people might like in their home. Only a few were about safety.

Consider why people rent places with peeling paint, small windows and drafty doors: they can afford these places! Now, when a landlord is forced to spend thousands on new windows, doors and paint, that cost is passed on to tenants. This is another way to make it too expensive for poor people to live in town. They move away, out to where the free market still provides affordable rentals.

Keep in mind that if they wanted and could afford the new paint and large windows, they would have rented a place with these features. Rentals like these are always available with or without regulation. All that such laws do is reduce the options people have.

Watch the reality of these legal processes, and it truly seems they are intended to push away the poor. Banning mobiles and forcing upgrades on ugly houses does make a town prettier. It increases home values too. Unfortunately, it also may be that this attack on "ugliness" is in part an attack on those seen as "ugly people." Certainly it shows that residents are comfortable banishing poor people and making them even poorer for the sake of property values and "prettiness."

Those who might actually care about this injustice have to see that the free market works. It provides what people need. Renters get lower rent if allowed, and then rent nicer places when they can afford them. Meanwhile, if you pass laws to prevent "ugly" homes, you simply make the tenants (and low-income home buyers) move away or pay more - either way you make poor people poorer.

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