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Centralia mobile-home residents purchase their community

SEATTLE, Wash.—This summer, about 200 low-income residents northeast of Centralia are making long-awaited improvements to their neighborhood.

That's because they own it now. The 45-site Hillside "mobile-home park" on Windsor Avenue now belongs to its residents, who recently purchased the land and infrastructure with the help of a loan from the Washington State Housing Finance Commission and other partners.

"We are excited to be a part of transforming this community," says Karen Miller, chair of the Housing Finance Commission.



Over 90% of the homeowners in the new Hillside Homeowners Cooperative are Spanish speakers employed at local timber, agricultural and manufacturing sectors—and their relief is unanimous as they begin to tackle new challenges and future plans for their cooperative.

"As part owner, I find comfort in knowing that my place here is secured," says Gaby Niño, treasurer of the Hillside Homeowners Cooperative. "We are currently talking about fixing the roads and securing our mailboxes. We are also talking about our options with the forested parcels."

In most manufactured home communities (also known as "mobile-home parks"), residents own their homes, but not the land beneath them—making them vulnerable to rate increases, deferred maintenance, and losing their homes to redevelopment if the land should be sold.

In order for Hillside to purchase the land, the community members first formed a resident-owned cooperative (ROC) in which each homeowner buys one low-cost share in exchange for a vote. They elect a board of directors and vote on larger matters like the annual budget, bylaws and community rules.

The Hillside Cooperative then bought their land for \$1.44 million with the help of a loan from ROC USA Capital, Mercy Loan Fund and the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. ROC Northwest helped facilitate the sale and provided technical assistance, and will continue to support the community for the next several years.

ROC Northwest also connected the Hillside community to a wealth of resources to empower residents with technology literacy, ESL support, and Spanish reading and writing skills, thanks to a partnership between the Olympia-based nonprofit CIELO, student interns from Evergreen State College, donated computers and a \$10,000 grant from Compass Compact.

"While working with them to form a cooperative, purchase and organize, we have learned a lot about the talent that exists in the community to operate a homeowners co-op," says Daniel Arranaga of ROC Northwest, who supported the cooperative and led the language literacy initiative.

The community's biggest hurdle will be finding a solution for unusually high utility bills that cost homeowners several hundred dollars a month. Hillside is exploring the possibility of annexation to the city of Centralia, which would allow lower utility rates and contribute to long-term affordability for residents.

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The [Washington State Housing Finance Commission](#) is a publicly accountable, self-supporting team that brings private investment dollars to benefit families and achieve public goals throughout Washington. Over 32 years, the Commission has created and preserved affordable homes for more than 334,000 people across the state, while contributing more than \$42.5 billion and 240,000 jobs to the economy.

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ROC USA (www.rocusa.org) is a nonprofit organization with a national network of eight organizations (such as ROC Northwest) and a national financing source for resident corporations. ROC USA® is sponsored by the Ford Foundation, NeighborWorks® America, Capital Impact Partners, the Corporation for Enterprise Development, and the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund. The Community Loan Fund, a non-profit community development financial institution in New Hampshire, leveraged its experience with 90 resident-owned communities at the time to launch ROC USA with national partners in May 2008. Since then, ROC USA Network has helped 76 communities preserve 4,882 homes in 14 states.

ROC Northwest (www.rocnorthwest.com), located in Olympia, Washington, is a subsidiary of Northwest Cooperative Development Center — a nonprofit organization devoted to assisting new and existing cooperative businesses. It supports cooperatives in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Hawaii. Founded by cooperatives in 1979, the Center has grown into the Northwest's leading provider of services for co-op business development. It has a long history of collaborating with communities, governments, economic development agencies and other cooperatives, sharing expertise and building cross-sector support for new and existing cooperatives.

Mercy Loan Fund (www.mercyloanfund.org), a subsidiary of the national affordable housing organization Mercy Housing, provides financing to hundreds of local nonprofit organizations, enabling them to build or preserve affordable housing in their communities. Since 1985, the organization has made 473 loans in 39 states totaling \$269 million, resulting in 20,700 affordable homes for over 55,300 residents. These loans have leveraged more than \$1.84 billion in total development funding. Mercy Loan Fund is certified by the U.S. Treasury Department as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). Mercy Loan Fund was formed with the goal of supporting the mission of Mercy Housing by making loans for affordable housing developments when conventional financing is not possible or affordable.