

MOBILE HOME PARK
FROM PAGE 1

storm shelter requirements,” of state building code, Fortune wrote in the May 22 letter sent to the owner.

Among those building requirements are the ability to withstand 250 mph winds, be elevated above flood stage and be located within 150 feet of the homes within the park.

The letter also notified the owner that the city “requires a storm shelter, meeting the standards of ICC-500, be constructed in the Prairie View Mobile park.”

Fortune estimated the shelter would be expensive, about \$200,000, and if the owner refused to build one, “they would be in violation of state law and I would have to close the mobile home park,” Fortune told the council.

Jason Kloss, the environmental health manager with SWHHS who licenses the grounds of the park, said by phone that he agreed with the city’s action.

“It’s reasonable, and statute allows for it,” Kloss said. “I’m not surprised by it. They’re just exercising their option as written in statute.”

The Georgia owner declined a *Pipestone County Star* invitation for comment made through Ramona Rattler, who has been the manager of the Prairie View Mobile Home Park for the past four years and who used to live there for five years. She said she works the part-time job for “the corporation” through a man named Mark Spanier who has a Minneapolis-area phone number but a Peach Tree, Ga. address. While he didn’t want to comment, he said through Rattler that they were working on a new evacuation plan.

He did not comment on the shelter being required by the city.

What other mobile home parks have

Kloss licenses 12 manufactured home parks in SWHHS’s region. The others are located in Luverne, Slayton and the counties of Lyon and Redwood.

“Out of those, six have some type of shelter on site that was built with the park in some manner or another,” Kloss said.

The remainder of the trailer parks have buildings located within close enough proximity that the evacuation plan allows them to use a nearby building as shelter.

Pipestone’s park in SWH-

If the storm shelter isn’t constructed, the city ‘would have to close the mobile home park’

HS’s region is alone in not having that option.

“Where they put that park in Pipestone, it was kind of put in the middle of nowhere,” Kloss said.

Minnesota is the only state in the country with statewide standards for shelters for manufactured homes, said Dave Anderson, executive director for All Parks Alliance for Change (APAC), a statewide organization out of Minneapolis for Minnesota’s 180,000 manufactured home park residents, and also executive director with the National Manufactured Home Owners Association (NMHOA).

There are about 900 manufactured home parks within the state of Minnesota and Anderson said he did know of other cities that had required manufactured home parks to build shelters. Those orders generally began with inadequate evacuation plans like Prairie View’s, which he said “ranks right up there” with others he has seen that have since been corrected. One used a restaurant as the evacuation shelter, which had large glass windows. The residents were supposed to shelter inside the restaurant’s meat locker, he said. Another plan consisted of a map of the trailer park with a star marking the exit.

“I’m pretty sure they knew how to get out,” he said. “They needed to know where they could go where it was safe.”

Actionable items at mobile home parks

SWHHS licenses the grounds of manufactured home parks, not the units. Actionable issues, according to Minnesota statute, would be water and sewer services, debris, animals at large, or trailers situated closer together than statutorily allowed (10 feet, or 3 feet when parked end to end).

“The rules we have cover a broad generality of health and safety,” Kloss said, with a primary focus on water supplies, sewage disposal and animals at large.

“Anytime we have sewer surfacing we would do an intervention,” he said. “Sometimes, the obstruction is in the unit and we don’t have authority in the unit. If it’s on the ground, we can issue orders.”

There have been issues with water accumulation and infiltration of the sewage system at the Pipestone location,

he said, but when SWHHS has issued orders to the owners, Kloss said they’ve responded and the issue has been corrected.

SWHHS does not approve the evacuation plan.

“That’s the responsibility of the municipality,” Kloss said. “Our policy is that we assure the parks submit or renew their plan every two years with the municipality.”

The last time the park submitted an evacuation plan was Feb. 20, 2016.

“They said they submitted it to the city,” Kloss said, but according to Jeff Jones, city administrator, the council has not acted on the evacuation plan since Nov. 3, 2013.

Minnesota statute states that the “failure of a municipality to approve a plan submitted by a park shall not be grounds for action against the park by the Department of Health if the park has made a good faith effort to develop the plan and obtain municipal approval.”

State issuing order to fix the road

The road that circles through the trailer park contains deep pot holes and ruts and was all but impassable two weeks ago even with a four-wheel drive vehicle. Turning around to avoid the worst of the road was also difficult because so many of the yards had standing water.

The road conditions were what alerted Fortune to the evacuation plan in the first place.

“This started out because I received numerous phone calls from tenants that the roads were impassable,” Fortune told the council during their March 20 meeting. “So I went out, took measurements; you definitely couldn’t drive a car through there.”

He said park residents had to move all their trash containers to the mailbox area if they wanted trash pickup.

“The garbage truck couldn’t get in, they got stuck, and the bus driver said that she was afraid to drive in there as well,” he said.

The same statute that governs health and safety issues for Minnesota’s manufactured home parks includes a passage about road maintenance that says the park’s owner “shall maintain streets and roadways in the park so as to permit passage of emergency vehicles and normal resident travel.”

“They have to maintain the roads so they are passable,” Kloss affirmed. “That means they have to manage the situation and address issues that are developing. First, the roads are passable and second, water drains away from the roads.”

Kloss said that he, too, recently went out to take a look at the road conditions and would be taking action based upon what he found.

“That’s an order I will be issuing that they have to address in some manner,” he said.

The road is beyond grading at this point, Rattler said, even if it were dry enough to grade the road, which is hasn’t been. It doesn’t help that people go “mud bogging” on the roads, she said, people who don’t even live there. Recently, she said that six mud-bogging pickup trucks had to be pulled out of the road.

Instead of relying upon the weather to help them help road conditions, Rattler said the owners were looking at improving the road with a specially designed wicking fabric that’s been used on roads in Alaska to alleviate frost heave.

If the park were to close, ‘it will be horrible’

Both before and after the May 20 vote when the council unanimously rejected the park’s evacuation plan, Mayor Myron Koets alluded to “a real bad situation” at the trailer park and how the council was going to have to “put our heads together and think of an innovative way that we can provide adequate, affordable housing within this city somehow.

“This may be one of these cases where we keep ignoring the problem of the trailer park and by not taking legislative action, or at least trying to rectify a bad situation, we are in effect shortening the lifespans of people who live there, just because of sanitary conditions and what have you, and God forbid if we ever had a natural disaster,” he said.

Fortune said that at his last count about a year ago there were 41 mobile homes at the trailer court and 26 of those had level 2 or 3 blight, in a four-level blight system with 4 being condemned and 1 being a few minor deficiencies. Fortune said he has inspected some of the homes and while some are original, most are from the mid-1980s with a few constructed within the last few years.

Rattler said the trailer park owners have spent thousands of dollars to fix the trailers when necessary.

“Corporate just finished fixing one last month and then decided he wanted to sell some ‘as is’ and he’s selling them for \$100 and they [the new buyers] have to fix them,” Rattler said.

Maintaining the trailers can be a challenge, she said. Some are in bad condition, she said, but “don’t always start out that way.”

“People move in and they literally tear them apart,” Rattler said. “They punch holes in the walls, tear up the carpet and then just walk away from them.”

If the city must carry its action to actual closure of the trailer park, Rattler said, “it will be horrible.” That’s because the inexpensive rents — \$370 a month for a three bedroom, which includes water and garbage — draw low-income tenants who can’t afford to live anywhere else. An increasing number of the park’s tenants are older people, Rattler said, who are not

April Terrific Kids

Each month, the second grade teachers at Hill Elementary School choose students from each class to be honored as Terrific Kids. Different students are selected each month until all second grade students have been named.

The program is organized by the Kiwanis and sponsored by local businesses that donate gifts for the students selected each month. April is the last month for the program.

All photos are contributed.



Mr. Wielenberg’s class: (l-to-r) Braxton Melcher, Leah Olson, Elsa Stogdill, Olivia Sullivan and Carson Van Hoecke.



Mrs. Evans’ class: (l-to-r) Julian Halsne, Austin Houselog, Elijah May, Christopher Quiroga Cedillo and Blake Sietsema.



Mrs. Reinhard’s class: (l-to-r) Rain Avis, Xzavier Fenton, Eben George and Kisa Stevens.



Ms. Farrell’s class: (l-to-r) Anthony Freeman, Grayson Lindquist, Lorenzo (Bryan) Moctezuma Campos, Kolten Nielsen and L.J. Saenlouangraj.

yet eligible for Social Security benefits, but “handicapped enough that they can’t work,” Rattler said.

Those tenants, Rattler said, live only on federal Supplemental Security Income, or SSI. According to the Social Security Administration, the monthly maximum SSI payment for an eligible individual for 2019 is \$771 and for a couple, \$1,157.

Some of the park’s residents have tried to find other housing, but have been unsuccessful, she said. One was a woman who lost her job and was evicted with her five children for nonpayment of rent. A handicapped, elderly couple from South Dakota needs a more appropriate place to live, she said, but can’t find any-

thing with all their animals: They have five dogs and use one of their bathtubs as a kitty litter box.

The park does not just draw local residents.

“They’re from all over,” Rattler said. “A couple moved out from Texas. A couple from Missouri inquired last week.”

Rattler owns two of the trailers at the park and lived there herself for five years. She said there are 42 trailers, rather than the 41 on file with the city. She couldn’t say how many residents lived there because some trailers have a shifting number of residents with family members moving in and out and at least one contractor rents the trailers for seasonal employees, she said.

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