MOBILE HOME PARKS
A NEW FEATURE ON THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

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Mobile home parks have recently become a conspicuous part of the landscape. The number of parks has been increasing rapidly. Large blocks of suburban and rural land are being converted to mobile home parks.

Living in movable quarters is not new. Trailer courts made their appearance in the early 1930's. The early travel trailers were small, sometimes homemade, and designed to be towed behind the low-powered cars of the day. Travel trailers are still popular and they have increased in size, luxury, and cost. They are still designed to be towed and are mainly equipped for temporary living.

The modern mobile home is a product of the post-World War II period. Although "mobile" in that it has wheels, lights, etc., most are not moved after they are once set up in a park. Mobile homes vary in size. The early ones were mostly eight or ten feet wide and fifty to sixty feet long. These narrow homes, termed "single-wide," are still popular, although now they are mostly twelve feet wide. About 1960, double width (or "double-wides," as they are known) began to appear. Their width is from twenty to twenty-four feet and lengths extend to sixty-four feet. They are, of course, moved in halves and assembled in the park. A few "triple-wides" to thirty-six feet are making their appearance.

Costs vary greatly, but single-wides often go for $8,000 to $9,000 furnished, and double-wides from $14,000 to $24,000, delivered and set up. Site rental ranges from $40 in small cities like Oroville to about $95 in deluxe parks near San Diego. Utilities are extra. Taxes are collected by the State Department of Motor Vehicles annually with registration.

Mobile homes are usually found grouped in parks because of legal restrictions against their use as dwellings on residential lots. Parks vary in size. The largest one in San Diego County has 600 spaces. The statewide average is forty-five spaces. Many new parks have spaces for 100 or more homes. An acre will accommodate eight to ten double-wides or about twenty single-wides.

The new mobile home has all of the appliances and furnishings of a conventional home. Beam ceilings, step-down living rooms, garbage disposals, and wet bars are standard equipment. The mobile home is mass-produced and mobile and would seem to lend itself to helping solve the shortage of low and medium-cost housing. Minimum maintenance, relatively low costs, available recreational facilities, congenial neighbors, independence of one's own house, and other amenities of mobile home living appeal to many.

San Diego County

San Diego County was chosen as the locale of this study because of its increasing significance as a retirement center and because of the obviously rapid increase in the number of mobile home parks in the area.
As of April 15, 1970, the county had 414 mobile parks of five or more spaces. Parks with fewer than five spaces are generally not commercially operated and include a number of one-home parks. The 414 parks contained a total of 33,247 spaces, with an occupancy factor of about ninety-five percent. The average mobile home park contains eighty-five spaces. A little more than half of the spaces are in parks within the corporate limits of the thirteen cities of the county. Since it is not possible to readily distinguish parks which contain lived-in travel trailers and those which contain only the larger mobile homes, the two groups will be considered together.

A number of variables influence the distribution of mobile home parks. Older travel trailer courts were usually situated on commercial land in or near town and along the highway. Presently, mobile home parks may be built only on land zoned for manufacturing. Prior to March 1, 1970, parks could be built upon other land (except single-family residence) by special permit. A flurry of new parks was begun prior to this date. Construction on some was only sufficient to make it look like a start was made when, in reality, the property owners were waiting. Hence, many new parks are in some state of construction.

Two main foci for mobile home parks occur in San Diego County (Figure 1). About two thirds of the parks and spaces are within twenty-five miles of downtown San Diego City. This reflects the attraction of the large, diversified population center. Another one-third are in the so-called north county near Oceanside, Escondido, and nearby towns. Only a relatively few parks occur in the remainder of the county.

Three patterns are readily distinguishable. Clustering occurs where land has been available in large blocks. In some places several parks may occur within one block. El Cajon, La Mesa, National City, and Chula Vista lie on the outskirts of the metropolitan area of San Diego and have (or had) vacant land for park construction. Demolition of structures to permit a park to be built is rare. Clustering in the north county occurs partly because of the proximity of the Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton north of Oceanside. Smaller clusters occur at Fallbrook, north of Vista, and in the Borrego Valley in the northeastern part of the county.

Linear arrangements of parks occur along highways and roads in a number of places. Readily seen is the influence of the ocean front in the beach communities south of Oceanside.

Various densities of scattering occur over the rest of the county. Most parks east of Escondido and the El Cajon cluster are small and with few of the amenities of those closer in. Homes found in the back country may be smaller, also. Some areas have very few or no parks. Large areas of mountain land are devoid of them. Interestingly, the close-in beach communities north of downtown San Diego, such as Ocean Beach, Mission Beach, Pacific Beach, and La Jolla, lack parks. They are part of the City of San Diego and were built up at an early date. They contain little empty land and are not on a major highway.

The El Cajon Area

In order to reach a better understanding, mobile home parks were examined in greater detail in two areas, both suburban and extending from within the built-up area to just beyond its margins.
The first area is centered around the City of El Cajon, about twenty miles east of downtown San Diego and connected to it by freeway. The almost-circular El Cajon Valley and surrounding hills provide an attractive setting. Its typical Mediterranean climate, with warm to hot dry summers and cool moist winters, appeals to many.

Here eighty-three parks contain an aggregate of 7,053 spaces, one-fifth of those of the county (Figure 2). It is coincidental that the average size of each is eighty-three spaces.

A cluster of thirty-one parks appears in El Cajon City. The original focus was old US 80. Several trailer courts are here. More recently, larger, modern mobile home parks have made their appearance. Two small clusters are developing north of El Cajon. Most of the remaining mobile home parks appear in linear arrangements along the road, which passes through Santee and Lakeside and along old Highway 80 through Johnstown. Their number diminishes rapidly as the mountains are encountered.

Mobile home parks may be grouped by size. Five divisions were made: small, five to forty-nine spaces; medium, fifty to ninety-nine spaces; large, 100 to 149 spaces; very large, 150 to 199 spaces; and giant, 200 spaces and over. The twenty-nine small parks in this area, while accounting for approximately one-third of the parks, include only one-ninth of the spaces. The four giants, on the other hand, account for one-twentieth of the parks and one-seventh of the spaces. Within the area, those parks west and south of Santee average 134 spaces each; all are new. The older parks along Main Street in El Cajon have an average of only thirty-seven spaces.

The stores of El Cajon Valley and Lakeside serve the residents of the parks. It is interesting to note that the only public transportation in the area of the map is the bus line which directly connects El Cajon with San Diego. A car is a necessity for all who live in the outlying parks. Conspicuous are trailer and mobile home sales lots along Main Street amid the parks there. Non-owners are encouraged to buy and owners are tempted to trade up.

Chula Vista

The second detailed study was made in the area from San Diego Bay south to the border. This area, with little relief, is a few feet above sea level and includes land on the lowest marine terraces in the region. The proximity of the ocean results in a cooler climate than El Cajon, especially during the summer months. Less than ten inches of annual rainfall result in a steppe climate.

Here there are no significant landform controls and the pattern of parks is mostly one of several clusters (Figure 3). These are most prominent just south of Chula Vista, in Palm City, and in San Ysidro. Old U.S. 101 attracted trailer courts at an early date. Many parks on this route date from the pre-World War II period. More recently, larger parks have been built south of Chula Vista, many of them in a rather small section along Anita Street.

This area contains fifty-nine mobile home parks which include 5,200 spaces. Ratios are about as in El Cajon. The nineteen small parks account for one-third of the parks but only one-tenth or 536, of the spaces. The four giant parks average 259 spaces each and together account for one-fifth of the total spaces.

All of this area is south of Chula Vista, which is the major shopping center. Proximity to the border and Tijuana does not seem to be an attractive force. All five
parks in San Ysidro are old. A bus line connects this area with Chula Vista and San Diego, but most residents rely on their own cars.

**Conclusion**

A number of points may be raised regarding mobile homes and mobile home parks. Their future as low or medium-cost housing is open to question. After the initial cost, which is half that of a conventional home of equal footage, space rental and utilities must be paid.

There has been considerable local agitation over mobile home parks. Many people think there are enough in the area already. It has been said that mobile home dwellers pay no taxes to support schools and services. However, a one-year-old 24x60 foot home which originally cost $14,000 pays $462 “in lieu” of property taxes to the Division of Motor Vehicles. Of this, for a home in a city, one-third goes to schools, one-third to the city, and one-third to the county general fund. If in the county, taxes are divided equally between schools and the county general fund. In contrast to escalating taxes on conventional homes, those on a mobile home decline to a low minimum in sixteen years. The mobile home dweller’s share of the real estate taxes and personal property taxes must still be paid.

The future of the mobile home in modular construction may be bright if the home manufacturers and governmental agencies, such as FHA, can get together on construction standards. If this happens, then “instant housing” at $10 a foot may be possible. The Nixon administration sees up to 50 percent of the nation’s new home buyers purchasing mobile homes.

In San Diego County, the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors is urging modification of the zoning laws to remove the five-acre minimum size for the placement of an individual mobile home — which means that one unit would be possible on a small plot under a limited use permit. The supervisor also wants a ten-acre minimum (about ninety spaces) on mobile home parks so that their chances of economic success will be enhanced.

Mobile homes seem to be an answer for housing for the active older person or couple. A poll taken by the City of San Diego showed that independent housing was preferred by those in the 60 to 70-year-old category. Many of these people have no children living at home and no longer need or want a large home and yard. There is a small amount of space on a typical 30x80 foot mobile home lot for puttering about. Park pools and recreation areas permit exercise and diversion. Often, the money derived from the sale of a larger, older conventional home is sufficient to purchase a new mobile home. Some parks are restricted to adults, but others permit families. Families are almost always permitted in the older trailer courts and mobile home parks. Some newer ones, if they admit children, restrict families to a specific segment of the park.

Since most parks are away from public transportation and few parks provide jitney service, a car is necessary and one must be healthy enough to drive it (or have a spouse who is). In reality, many retirees today are in their late 50's and early 60's and quite agile.

It is possible that mobile homes will continue to be a desirable means of housing for not only older people, but younger ones as well. As the costs associated with conventional homes continue to rise and their availability declines, mobile homes will increase in significance. The pleasant conditions prevailing in not only the southwestern corner of the United States but other parts of California, will aid in attracting mobile home residents to California.