

# Mobile Home Parks, RV Parks, and the Future of Affordable Housing in Apache Junction, Arizona

# PUP 593: MUEP Professional Project

## Project Description

Over 50% of the City of Apache Junction's housing stock is composed of mobile, manufactured and RV homes. Of the 125 mobile home park communities in Apache Junction, a significant number are in advanced stages of dilapidation. Many of the most challenging parks predate the city itself, failing to conform with current city zoning code and lacking modern infrastructure. Additionally, many of the communities in question pose health and safety risks in general, violating city code in terms of property maintenance, building codes and refuse and garbage removal.

The housing stock in many of the non-conforming parks, was built prior to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Act of 1974; meaning they may fail to meet federal standards for quality, durability and safety.

The City grants many of these properties "rights of lawful non-conformance." This status allows parks to continue operating in their current state, but prohibits them from adding units or rebuilding, following destruction of property. Should destruction occur, the park must rebuild to conform with current zoning. For many of these properties, redevelopment would result in the end of their business and the elimination of the affordable housing options they provide.

The City of Apache Junction recognizes that mobile home communities such as these provide valuable affordable housing stock for residents and thus outright removal of the communities is not an option. However, current housing and park conditions raise health and safety concerns and bring into question the long-term economic health of the city.

As the City of Apache Junction considers how to confront this issue, 3 goals drive their efforts:

1. Improve the conditions of high-priority parks and increase the quality of living for residents
2. Promote the redevelopment of parks into alternative affordable housing units when appropriate
3. Preserve affordable housing to meet the demonstrated need of the Apache Junction's population

## Methods

A **literature review** was conducted to gather research related to mobile home and RV parks, as well as affordable housing development

**Stakeholder interviews** were conducted with five Apache Junction mobile home and RV park property owners, and five professionals working in affordable housing development

A **needs assessment** was conducted to better understand the existing conditions and characteristics of the 28 high-priority, non-conforming mobile home and RV park communities in Apache Junction. For reporting purposes, each park was evaluated within the context of their specific Census Block Group. The needs assessment consisted of:

- A **windshield survey** of to assess physical conditions of housing stock within properties, as well as the properties themselves.

- The researcher developed a **survey tool** to record property observations and data, including number of units, unit type, property and unit conditions, amenities, etc.

- A **geographic analysis** using data available through the US Census Bureau and Google Maps to determine proximity to community assets and important daily needs.

- A **demographic analysis** using data available from the U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey to establish trends within each block group and provide comparative data across the subject areas

## Project Deliverables

- A full housing needs assessment report evaluating Apache Junction's 28 high-priority mobile home and RV park communities in detail

- A project analysis that brings together knowledge from the literature review, findings from the needs assessment and insights from stakeholder interviews.

- A typology for specific park needs: Each mobile home park and RV community was organized into one of three property needs categories, based on data gathered through the Needs Assessment:

- **Amenitize Properties** – properties that are in need of minor structural improvements, updates, and amenities. These parks don't provide valuable affordable housing stock to low-income individuals and households.

- **Update Properties** – properties that are in need of moderate structural improvements and updates. These properties provide decent affordable housing stock to low-income individuals and households, and should be preserved.

- **Sandbox Properties** – properties that are in need of significant upheaval. Property conditions are very poor and housing quality is sub-standard. These properties should be prioritized for redevelopment.

- A typology for prioritizing mobile home parks by block group: Block Groups were organized into one of four priority groups, based on data gathered through the needs assessment:

- **Priority 1** – Where there is a **high demand/need for affordable housing stock**, and where it is **geographically suitable** for lower-income households to live, based on their close proximity to community assets.

- **Priority 2** – Where **affordable housing may be under threat** due to demographic and housing stock changes, and where it is **geographically suitable** for lower-income households to live, based on their close proximity to community assets.

- **Priority 3** - Where there is a **high demand/need for affordable housing stock**, and where it is not **geographically suitable** for potentially vulnerable lower-income households to live, based on their distance to community assets.

- **Priority 4** - Where **affordable housing may be under threat** due to demographic and housing stock changes, based on Census Block Group data, and where it is not **geographically suitable** for potentially vulnerable lower-income households to live, based on their distance to community assets.

## Key Learnings

- Mobile home and RV park dwellers represent a vulnerable population of land renters. Park closures and lot rent increases can result in negative tenant impacts including displacement and financial hardship.

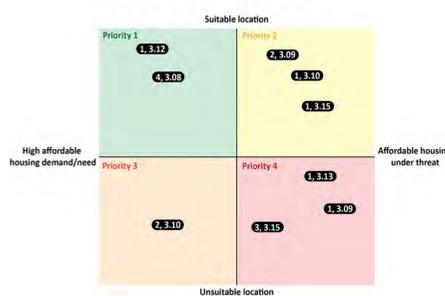
- Park improvements and upgrades are cost prohibitive for park owners whose land is legally non-conforming; owners rarely have the incentive or means to make the upgrades desired by the City.

- Some of the most successful and clean parks among those observed are owned and managed by individuals who approach their role with understanding and compassion for tenants.

- The low-income housing rental industry can be a profitable business venture without abusing and price-gouging tenants.

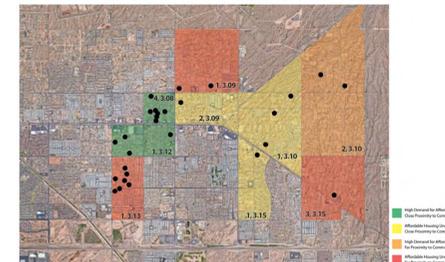
- Successful low-income housing development often requires creativity in financing and working across community partners.

Census Block Group Priority Matrix



**Figure 1.** Census block group priority matrix based on block group needs. Each block group represented contains at least one high-priority community identified by the City.

Census Block Group Needs, Apache Junction



**Figure 2.** Map of Census Block Groups, categorized by block group needs, in which high-priority mobile home and RV parks are located. *Google Maps.*

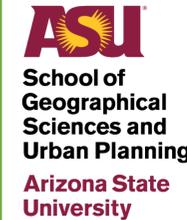
## Recommendation Highlights:

1. Develop a strategy for preservation, improvement or promotion of redevelopment of parks on a park-by-park basis using the two typologies for block group and park needs developed in this report.
2. Leverage the expertise and experience of successful mobile home and RV park owners in the city. This can be done by promoting communication and providing greater support and opportunities for collaboration between park owners themselves as well as the city.
3. Adopt proactive and aggressive strategy for attracting and incentivizing developers to pursue both affordable and market-rate housing:
  - a. Opportunities for development
  - b. Available funding; forward commitment of funding
  - c. Land for donation
  - d. Eased zoning regulations
  - e. Incentivized inclusionary zoning
4. Develop a protocol for when a mobile home or RV park is listed for sale. The protocol would provide current tenants, non-profits, other Apache Junction park owners and the city itself with the opportunity to coordinate a bid for the land to ensure park preservation.
5. Create an affordable housing development overlay district that could be applied to non-conforming park. The overlay would enact special zoning requirements that would incentivize park owners to make necessary updates and improvements to their land. The overlay not only incentivizes affordable development, but also preserves affordable housing stock in a place where it would otherwise be threatened.



**Larry Kirch**

Development Services Director, City of Apache Junction



**Maggie Dellow**

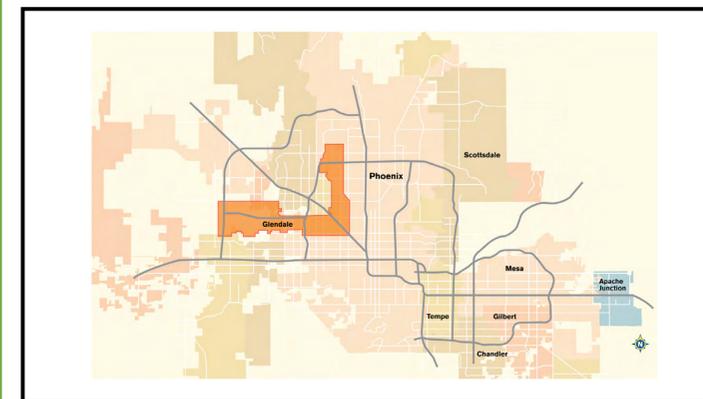
Masters of Urban and Environmental Planning Candidate, Spring 2019

**Dr. Meagan Ehlenz**

Assistant Professor  
Faculty Advisor - Chair

**Dr. Deborah Salon**

Assistant Professor  
Faculty Advisor



Email your project comments to: [ProjectCities@asu.edu](mailto:ProjectCities@asu.edu)



**Figure 3 (top left):** An aerial view of a non-conforming, high-priority mobile home park in Apache Junction, AZ. *Google Maps.*



**Figure 4 (bottom left):** The same mobile home park depicted in Figure 3, redeveloped to conform with current zoning. *Google Maps.*

**Figure 4 (bottom right):** A conceptual model that illustrates how the affordable housing overlay could decrease minimum lot sizes and setback requirements to incentivize redevelopment at a greater density while preserving affordable housing stock. *Google Maps.*