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Black Press Media

Documentary exposes youth sex trafficking in the region

Frontline workers aim to break the silence

Rick Stiebel
News Staff

A documentary about the sexual exploitation of youth aims to pull back the curtain on Victoria's dirty secret.

Principal photography has started for "Tug of War," an independent film that explores in disturbing detail the impact sexual exploitation of youth has on victims and their families in the region and beyond.

Empress Avenue Media, the production company behind the project, follows the film's director, Mia Golden, and other members of the Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) as they tackle the complex challenges facing vulnerable youth.

"Predators have quickly come to realize that being online allows for easy access to youth," said Golden, a child, youth and family counsellor with Pacific Centre Family Services Association and co-ordinator of Crime Reduction and Exploitation Diversion (CRED). "The explosion of social media, easy access to the internet and pornography and the normalization of highly sexualized and often violent content are all issues that contribute to the exploitation of young people."

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Tri-Way Mobile Home Park residents Roy Cooke and neighbour Bill Bowering are among residents in the Langford community who worry about the future disposition of their homes. (Jane Skrypnek/News Staff)

Langford mobile home park residents living 'in limbo'

Tri-Way Mobile Home Park tenants fear for their future

Jane Skrypnek
News Staff

In a community of more than 100 residents, many are distraught and enraged. They feel their

homes are "in limbo" and their futures are uncertain.

The group of aged 55-plus citizens are residents of Tri-Way Mobile Home Park, a 12-acre section of homes and greenspace between Spencer Middle School and the Trans-Canada Highway that's been around since 1958.

However, for residents of the mobile home park who say they were assured by their landlord that their future was secure, the

letter they received on March 25, 2019, was an unwelcome surprise.

"Probably, they don't understand what it's like to be old. And boy it's a shock when you get there," resident Dorris Honer, 85, said with a short laugh. "A little bit of kindness and understanding goes a long way."

The letter informed residents the land — part of a larger 50-acre parcel — was up for sale.

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Residents feel mayor went back on promise made at 2019 meeting

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It didn't indicate any changes would occur to the mobile home park, but because residents only own their homes and not the land beneath them, resident Peter Kedge said they were immediately worried.

In May 2019, Kedge and two fellow residents – Ken Nentwig and Rob Jolly – arranged a meeting with Langford Mayor Stew Young and director of planning Matthew Baldwin to express their concerns and seek assurances about their future.

The result of that meeting was a signed letter from the mayor that they said they took great comfort in at the time and understood it to give them a significant say in their future.

It states in part, "the City of Langford will not rezone any manufactured home park for any other use unless and until a comprehensive plan of compensation has been provided. This plan must be approved by council, but more importantly, approved by the overwhelming majority of the residents of Tri-Way Park. As I stated, for something like this a simple majority of 50 per cent-plus will not suffice."

Young did not respond to interview requests by press deadline.

On Feb. 10, KeyCorp Developments put its application for rezoning before the city, with the goal of purchasing the property once rezoning was approved.

At its Aug. 17 meeting, council passed Bylaw 1885, rezoning the property on which Tri-Way Mobile Home Park occupies 12 acres, allowing for residential, multi-family and commercial developments.

Tri-Way Park residents claim they had little say in the matter and the only place a "comprehensive plan of compensation" was mentioned was in a covenant signed by the landowner and the city on Aug. 13, just four days prior to the rezoning approval.

"I'm outraged that public officials can say one thing and do another. But, that seems to be the era we're in," Kedge said.

He said he, and some of his neighbours, feel the mayor went back on his promise to them.

But, for the city, it's not quite so clear.

Coun. Denise Blackwell, chair of the planning, zoning and affordable housing committee, noted because the mobile home park is going to remain as such for the time being – until KeyCorp Developments submits a plan for redevelopment – it has not in fact been rezoned for any other use yet.

In the year and a half since the letter was delivered, there has been a flurry of activity between the owner, developer, Langford and Tri-Way Park residents.

Back in January, nearly a year after the property was first put up for sale, KeyCorp Developments invited Tri-



Dorris Honer and Ray Micholski say the stress of an uncertain future for their home is too much on top of old age, health issues and COVID-19. (Jane Skrypnik/News Staff)

Way Park residents to a gathering where the development company presented its plan to rezone and purchase the property.

To manage this project, KeyCorp created TriWay Developments Ltd.

In the presentation slides, TriWay Developments specified the developer cannot honour an agreement with residents until the land is purchased and they will not purchase the land until it has been rezoned.

The presentation also laid out TriWay Development's plan to shrink the size of the mobile home park, but accommodate all residents according to provincial and municipal regulations.

Residents said they accepted the presentation for what it was – an initial

plan from a developer who couldn't make any hard promises yet. But, at the end of the presentation, residents recalled Jim Hartshorne, president of TriWay Developments, stating they would buy out any resident who wanted to leave.

Hartshorne declined to be interviewed for this article, but TriWay Developments said there was a misunderstanding on the part of residents.

However, a survey conducted by the Tri-Way Representatives Group – a group elected by residents to communicate with TriWay Developments – shows 68 of the 78 units who responded expected everyone would receive a buyout after attending the January presentation.

TriWay Developments clarified it will buy out residents whose mobile homes are not included in designs for a new smaller park and if anyone whose home remains in the park boundaries wishes to leave they will have to sell on the open market.

For residents who have been wanting to leave since the property was put up for sale, they say this is easier said than done.

Jolly and Laurina Norris had been planning on listing their mobile home and moving away in April 2019. Norris had given up her acupuncture practice space in Victoria in January 2019 and the couple had purchased a house near Kamloops.

But before listing their mobile home, the letter informing residents that the property was for sale arrived and suddenly Jolly and Norris felt stuck.

Before the arrival of the letter, the couple's understanding was that their home would sell within a month. After its arrival, the realtors they spoke with said they couldn't list the home in good conscience.

"Who in the world is going to buy a trailer that's up for sale in a park that may be torn down within the year?" Jolly asked.

The couple has since moved to the Interior but has still been paying \$1,400 a month in pad rent, insurance and mortgage payments.

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News hasn't all been negative for mobile home park residents

Continued from A4

"We're very close to the edge right now as far as solvency. It's been bleak for us and it continues to be that way. We're literally bleeding out," Jolly added.

Other residents fear the value of their homes are so low, they won't be able to survive on the money they make if they are forced to sell on the open market. Maureen Lewis, 74, is one of those residents and said she is sick with worry over what's to come.

According to the BC Assessment Authority, 2020 assessed values of Tri-Way Park mobile homes range between \$21,700 and \$348,000.

There has, however, been some recent good news for residents.

TriWay Developments secured alternative affordable housing for residents who want to or have to leave by securing a deal with the Capital Regional Housing Corporation (CRHC) and B.C. Housing. In a Sept. 20 release, B.C. Housing announced the 58-unit building will be located in the immediate vicinity of the current park and construction is expected to begin in January 2021.

In an email, TriWay Developments said it doesn't plan on redeveloping the mobile home park until the CRHC building is ready for residents to move into.

Hartshorne argued in the Aug. 17 council meeting that the CRHC building will be a welcome change for many Tri-Way Park residents and some of them agreed. For those who have lost their partner or are struggling to maintain their home and yard, an apartment is an appealing choice.

But, for residents like Roy Cooke, the entire point of living in a mobile home park is getting to have a yard in an affordable



Rob Jolly and Laurina Norris have been making payments on their empty mobile home for a year and a half. (Rob Jolly)

format.

His wife has multiple sclerosis and being able to easily access the outdoors and go for short walks is invaluable to her, he said. "They've kind of got us by the short and curlies," he added.

Residents have expressed all of these concerns and more repeatedly to various members of the city and to TriWay Developments.

Prior to any rezoning being passed, council usually holds a public hearing. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, instead of a public hearing residents were able to submit letters.

Tri-Way Park residents submitted seven letters, alongside several others from citizens concerned about the environmental impact a redevelopment would have. During the Aug. 17 meeting, residents were also given an opportunity to speak during a Zoom call public participation. But Tri-Way Representatives Group members Kedge and Nentwig said this format prevented many older residents from participating.

Those who did participate expressed their grievances for nearly an hour, at the end of which Kedge and Nentwig said they were shocked that council

didn't further the discussion before passing the rezoning.

Now, with the initial rezoning passed, Kedge and Nentwig said they are relying on the protection of the covenant and the goodwill of the development company.

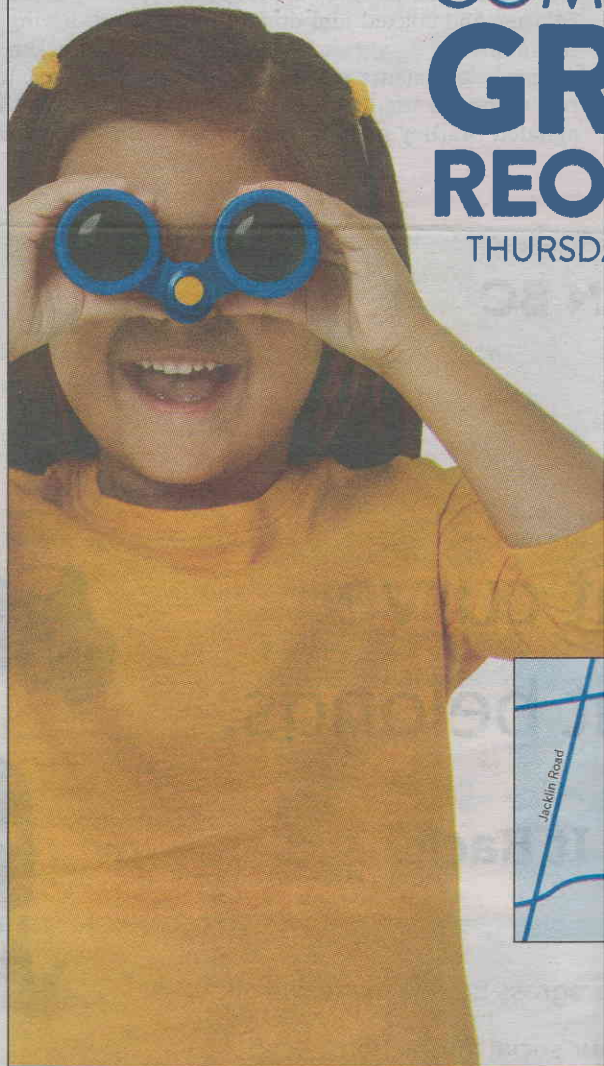
In the covenant, it states, "The parties agree that this Agreement represented a comprehensive plan for compensation satisfactory to city council." This comprehensive plan promises residents the better of city or provincial policy regarding mobile home park redevelopment.

On top of the required 12-months notice and payment of assessed value dictated in the B.C. Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act, the Langford Manufactured Home Park Redevelopment Policy requires the developer to submit a compensation plan for council's approval prior to redevelopment. It also mentions a reserve fund that council is to make available to homeowners by way of a municipal grant application.

The latest update residents received from TriWay Developments is that it will complete the sale by the end of October.

Until then, residents say their levels of frustration and anxiety are only going up.

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