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Park, RV owners decry county's proposed regulations – Galveston Daily News



Janice Terra stands on the porch in front of her RV in Bacliff on Monday, Jan. 28, 2019. Terra moved to the RV after she nearly died from an extreme medical condition. Terra is unable to work, so she has created a home and learned to live in a small space. KELSEY WALLING/The Daily News **Front Page, Galveston Daily News, Jan-29-2019**



Janice Terra sits at the table in her RV in Bacliff on Monday, Jan. 28, 2019. Terra said she's worried that proposed new county regulations might force her from the only home she can afford. KELSEY WALLING/The Daily News

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Janice Terra stood before county commissioners Monday and told them she would have nowhere to live if it weren't for her RV.

Five years ago, Terra suffered a heart attack that left her unable to continue working as a horse riding instructor, she said. Now living on a reduced income, she moved into a recreational vehicle in a park in Bacliff.

It's a life she chooses, she told commissioners, and one she now feels is threatened by proposed new county rules governing recreational vehicles.

"I love living in a travel trailer, because it's mine and nobody can take it from me just because I get sick," Terra said. "These rules will hurt me."

Commissioners were scheduled Monday to vote on changes to the county's flood plain regulations, which would have imposed restrictions on recreational vehicles and RV parks.

The rules would have required RV owners to obtain a county permit every 180 days, and to prove their RVs were movable and not permanent structures. The owners of RV parks would also be required to obtain operating permits and track how long people were staying in their parks.

Two things were driving the push for new regulations, commissioners and county administrators said Monday.

The first was a need to bring county regulations in line with Federal Emergency Management Agency rules. The county must meet FEMA's standards or county residents might not qualify to be insured through the National Flood Insurance Program, officials said.

The county already requires people who live in FEMA-designated flood zones to get RV permits and for those vehicles to be road worthy so they leave during hurricane evacuations. The new proposal is to expand the rules to places outside FEMA flood zones where the federal regulations do not necessarily need to apply. Despite their proximity to Galveston Bay, large parts of Bacliff and San Leon are not in FEMA flood zones, officials said.

The RV regulations would apply county wide because the entire county is "a rising water prone area," Galveston County Engineer Michael Shannon said. During floods, an unsecured RV could become a missile, Shannon said.

At the same time, officials acknowledged the floodplain regulations also are meant to give the county another tool to battle nuisance and crime complaints in some communities.

County Commissioner Darrell Apffel has mentioned complaints the county received about a specific RV park in San Leon.

"I have said publicly this is about cleaning up crime and drugs in the Bayshore area, and I still maintain that is one of the reasons for stiffer regulations," Apffel said. "We have got to do something about these RV parks that are breeding crime and drugs."

RV owners could come into compliance with the rules in three ways, officials said. They could get permits every six months and keep their RVs road ready; they could remove the RVs from county property; or they could convert the RV to meet the county's mobile-home rules.

Unlike RVs, mobile homes are required to be raised above base flood elevation. They do need to be permitted by the county, but those permits don't need to be renewed every 180 days.

About a dozen people spoke about the regulations Monday, asking commissioners to spend more time reviewing the purpose and scope of the rules, and to analyze the possible ramifications of expanding the rules to more of the county.

The requirement for parks to track how long their customers had stayed was cumbersome and unneeded, RV park owner Scott Monroe said.

"This affects commerce for not just us, but for other tax-paying people and citizens," Monroe said. "It also affects the good citizens that live and visit us in RV parks. I just feel that this is a one-sided idea."

Terra also questioned the proposed new rules.

"How is a grandma, 70 years old, supposed to every six months, unhook everything and just take everything apart and pull my trailer down the road so someone can say 'You're OK?'" she said.

Commissioners voted 4-0 Monday to postpone considering the regulations. County Judge Mark Henry was absent from Monday's meeting.

Apffel said he would hold a community meeting in Bacliff on Feb. 13 so more people could sound off about the proposal.

“It’s clear that we may have some problems with our regulations,” Apffel said. “Let’s come up with a fix to what you all perceive as a problem.”

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