

Residents of Pan and Fork mostly didn't leave Basalt

Town of Basalt officials said Friday that more than two-thirds of the former residents who owned and occupied their residences at the Pan and Fork Mobile Home Park were relocated within the Basalt area.

There was a big concern when the mandatory relocation started last year that residents would be forced out of the Roaring Fork Valley, Town Manager Mike Scanlon said. But an analysis performed by the town showed that almost 68 percent of the residents of households who owned their residences were able to buy new housing or rent in Basalt, El Jebel or Lazy Glen. In addition, 87 percent resettled between Carbondale and Aspen, Scanlon said.

“We can document 341 people were moved,” Scanlon said in an email that accompanied the analysis. “(We) believe that there were another 35 or so we missed during the early move outs. Some people wanted to avoid us for various reasons.”

Out of the 341 documented relocations, about half were residents of owner-occupied trailers, Scanlon said. The town reached financial settlements with the residents using a common formula that accounted for time in the park and the number of people in their households. Payments ranged from \$15,000 to \$25,000.

The town tracked the resettlement locations for the 170 or so residents of 31 owner-occupied units. They didn't track where renters ended up because the focus of relocation was on the owners of the trailers. Renters received substantially lower financial settlement packages.

The Town Council authorized \$1 million for the settlements based on estimates by Scanlon and Assistant Town Manager Judi Tippetts. So far, \$758,801.90 has been spent on relocations and there are bills that probably will amount to \$40,000 for asbestos testing and landfill fees, Tippetts said.

“Our final number will be approximately \$800,000,” she said.

Another \$1 million was made available by a private party for low-interest loans for Pan and Fork residents who had difficulty qualifying for standard bank loans. Some people couldn't provide documentation that they were in the country legally. The loaner, who worked through a local bank, didn't want to be identified.

“They helped quite a bit of people,” Scanlon said.

The town’s analysis of where residents of owner-occupied units resettled includes a map that shows that eight households purchased residences in the El Jebel area, three in West Basalt, three in Basalt, two in Lazy Glen, one in Aspen Village, three in Carbondale and one each in Glenwood Springs, New Castle and Rifle. Many of the purchases were mobile homes.

In addition, eight households are renting between Aspen and Glenwood Springs, according to the town’s data.

Basalt teamed with the nonprofit Roaring Fork Community Development Corp. to purchase the Pan and Fork Mobile Home Park for \$3.25 million in August 2012. Basalt used open space funds to acquire 2.9 of the 5.3 acres. It will convert its portion of the property into open space and a park alongside the Roaring Fork River.

The nonprofit organization initially planned to sell its portion of the property to a developer and use the proceeds to relocate the Pan and Fork residents. The town government determined that Community Development Corp.’s plan wouldn’t work soon enough, so it took over the relocation effort.

It’s been a longtime goal of the town’s master plan to move the residents out of the floodplain and to undertake steps to ease the flood risk. A contractor removed accumulated rock and cobble from the streambed to increase the capacity of the main channel to handle water during runoff. Riverbanks were restored, and the Pan and Fork site has been raised with the material scrapped off the river bottom. It hasn’t been determined yet what will happen on Community Development Corp.’s portion of the property.

scondon@aspentimes.com

May 3, 2014