



## U.S. farmers warn of broken system

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# Private firms snap up mobile home parks



The buyout of mobile home parks by investment firms is on the rise, with devastating consequences for residents. Over the past decade, rents in these parks have risen 45%, according to census data. PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Purchases driving out often already-vulnerable residents

Cassie Powell University of Richmond | THE CONVERSATION

One of America's most affordable paths to homeownership is slipping away.

At manufactured home parks – sometimes called trailer parks or mobile home parks – rents are rapidly rising due to large-scale buyouts by private equity firms.

Although private equity's foray into the housing market is not new, the buyout of mobile home parks by investment firms is on the rise – with devastating consequences for residents. Over the past decade, rents in these parks have risen 45%, according to census data. Once a park is sold, the risk of eviction rises significantly in the following year.

I'm a poverty law attorney in Virginia, and many of my clients are residents of mobile home parks. Over the past four years, I've watched their communities get sold, one by one, to large investment firms. Many of them are desperately struggling to protect their homes – for some, their only source of wealth – in the face of exploding rents and threats of eviction.

### The immovable mobile home

Today, the term "mobile home" is a misnomer. Historically, mobile homes were trailers

designed for travelers and workers living near factories. With so many veterans returning home after World War II, trailers provided an easy and affordable way for them to obtain housing in the face of shortages. The trailers could be moved from place to place as people either attended school or sought work.

A shift occurred in the 1950s. Those with higher incomes bought houses, and those with less means continued to live in mobile homes. Eventually, mobile home communities cropped up throughout the country as places for

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In the midst of a housing affordability crisis, mobile homes are seen as a way for those with limited incomes to generate wealth and access homeownership.

# Ameren requests electric rate hike

Zach Roth  
Peoria Journal Star  
USA TODAY NETWORK

One of Illinois' top consumer watchdogs is warning customers that Ameren Illinois is asking to raise electric rates by nearly \$60 million next year after it went over its capital expenditures budget this year.

The Citizens Utility Board said that Ameren is returning to the Illinois Commerce Commission this month to request an additional \$59.6 million on top of an increase of \$308.6 million that had been approved last year for its electric service.

The initial increase was to be phased in over a period of four years, but a provision in state law allows for the ICC to recover yearly expenses through reconciliation if the utility goes over budget on capital expenditures over the past year.

CUB says that Ameren's proposal would have \$14 million in what they called "wasteful" spending, with \$10.8 million being used to reimburse shareholders for contributions to their employees' retirement fund that the watchdog says they cannot prove they made. CUB also says that Ameren is also attempting to use \$200,000 for an "unexplained" increase in expenses for meter-reading and \$62,928 to pay for outside contractors used for work on a \$775,000 project that was supposed to be handled internally.

Sarah Moskovitz, CUB's executive director, says that customers shouldn't have to foot the bill if a utility goes over their budget in a given year.

"We will always challenge wasteful spending by the utilities," Moskovitz said in a news release. "And, while consumer protections have improved, we support ending this reconciliation benefit for utilities. If Ameren blows through its budget in a given year, customers shouldn't have to pay the excess."

Regulatory judges have already approved a recommended decrease of \$9.8 million for Ameren, with the members of the ICC allowed to follow the recommendation or adjust it up or down as they see fit. A final ruling is expected to be handed down by Dec. 20, with CUB asking customers to sign a petition to the ICC asking them to reject Ameren's request.

Ellie Leonard, a spokesperson for Ameren, said that if the full \$59.6 million increase is approved, customers would see a monthly increase of 39 cents per month on their electric bills.

# 12 holiday happenings this weekend in Kewanee area

Kathi Edwards  
Special to the Kewanee Star Courier  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The weekend brings Bishop Hill's Lucia Nights, Toulon and Geneseo Christmas Walks, along with photos with Santa, fundraisers, live music and more to

the Kewanee area.

### Party Pom Kits

What: Celebrate the New Year with a Party Pom Popper and a New Year's Horn. Grab a kit on the second floor.  
When: Dec. 1 – Dec. 31 while supplies

last  
Where: Kewanee Public Library District, 102 S. Tremont St., Kewanee  
Cost: Free

### Jingle Bell Skate

What: Enjoy Christmas music and

skating in the gym. Wear an ugly Christmas sweater to compete for prizes. 5:30-6:45 is for children in third grade and younger, with the time slot of 6:45 – 9 for all ages.

When: 5:30-9 p.m. Dec. 12

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