

## Wardtown Mobile Home Cooperative becomes sixth resident-owned community in Maine

by Kathleen McLaughlin  
Coastal Journal contributor

FREEPORT — The sign on Route 125 in Freeport still reads Wardtown Park; big broken pines from a severe storm last fall still loom dangerously over some of the mobile homes, and the park office still has no sign. But though it may not be obvious to anyone just yet, a big change has just taken place there.

Following in the footsteps of a handful of trailer parks around Maine, Wardtown became the Wardtown

Mobile Home Cooperative May 13, an action that essentially transferred oversight and ownership of the low-to-moderate income neighborhood from the Freeport Housing Trust to the very people who live there.

"I think this is going to be great for the community, because now we control what is to be done," said Dale Whitmore, the co-op's newly elected president and a Wardtown resident.

Under the deal, the co-op signed a 30-year mortgage with Maine State Housing Authority and the Genesis Community Loan Fund of Damariscotta. Since the mortgage is low interest, monthly lot fees for Wardtown residents will remain at about \$270.

Residents are also being asked to join the new co-op with a \$100 fee, which gives them voting power and will be returned should they ever decide to leave. Whitmore said most have joined, but he'd like to see even more attend

the monthly meetings and get active on newly established committees for finance, membership, rules and maintenance.

Wardtown has 60 lots that are spread out over approximately 40 wooded acres. Most residents are either young families or elderly people on fixed incomes. All Wardtown residents have incomes in the low to moderate range.

Whitmore, who also serves on the Freeport Housing Trust

Neighborhood Association, which provided technical assistance during the transition. NEROC is a regional branch of the 170-member ROC-USA, which now has 170 members nationally, including Wardtown.

Pooley said Wardtown used the same model of forming a cooperative that has been used for more than 30 years, a process that involves many meetings and a great deal of consensus building. Pooley said it works very similarly to any co-op for food, condos or business.

Wardtown is the sixth resident-owned cooperative in Maine. The others are:

Brunswick Bay Mobile Home Cooperative in Brunswick, Medomak Mobile Home Cooperative in Waldoboro, Deer Ridge Mobile Home Cooperative in Augusta, Pemaquid Villas Mobile Home Cooperative in Bristol, and Greystone in Veazie.

Pooley said more cooperatives are on the horizon in the Pine Tree State because many of the private and non-profit trailer parks are 20 to 30 years old and in need of infrastructure repairs and improvements, and face raising fees or selling the property. And that, she said, would mean an affordable housing option will become much less affordable.

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Pooley expects Wardtown, like other co-ops, will experience dramatic physical and psychological improvements as residents begin to see that they do have a say in things

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Photo by Kathleen McLaughlin  
Wardtown Mobile Home Cooperative President Dale Whitmore stands by the park's old sign on Route 125 in Freeport.



Photo by Kathleen McLaughlin  
Wardtown Mobile Home Cooperative has 60 mobile homes on some 40 acres of land in Freeport.

like what gets fixed and when, and who can move in and who cannot. "It's very empowering," she said.

Pooley referenced the Medomak Mobile Home Co-op, which built a community garden that provided ample produce for not just the park residents, but even had enough leftover to give to the local food pantry, shattering the "trailer park trash" stereotype that pervades.

"It shattered that stereotype in such an amazing way, that I want that success for all of these communities," Pooley said.

The Wardtown Cooperative has already held its first monthly meeting and voted to proceed with hiring a landscape company to mow the common areas of the park and remove the menacing trees and debris. Other plans include improving and maintaining the septic systems in the park and organizing some social events, such as a barbecue or yard sale.

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**Correction:** voting on rents and budgets is by ballot vote, not voice vote.