

Trailer Estates residents rally for board



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Trailer Estates residents Ken Champion, left, and Tom Featheringill engage in a heated argument after a large group of Trailer Estates residents gathered Monday at a rally in front of their post office to show support for their board members who have recently been accused by other residents of not complying with the Sunshine Law. BRIAN BLANCO/bblanco@bradenton.com



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About 100 Trailer Estates residents rallied in front of the tiny community post office Monday to show their support for the neighborhood's board of trustees.

The very vocal group was upset over a smaller group of residents questioning the actions of the board.

"This is a wonderful park," said Gay Solomon, who has lived for four years in the community that straddles Florida Boulevard, just west of U.S. 41. "The negative people are a minority."

The smaller group, who want the way things are done in the park changed, huddled under the canopy of the post office as the larger crowd of board supporters gathered on the sidewalk and in the parking lot.

Many of those at the rally said the problems started about two years ago when two sisters, Sharon Denson and Mary Lou Smith, moved into the over-55 mobile home park.

"They started harassing the board," said Gail Opper, who moved to the park recently but has been visiting the park since it was established about 40 years ago when her aunt moved there. "From almost the beginning, they filed a lawsuit."

Denson and Smith have questioned the board's raising of fees without notice and billing for lawn maintenance, as detailed in a story in Monday's Bradenton Herald. Denson said the board acts more as a homeowner's association than an elected government body subject to open government and other state laws.

Those rallying in support of the board said they were upset with a small group trying to change the way things are run in the park.

"They have a right to complain," Solomon said, "but not come here and put everything upside down."

She wondered if things were so bad in the community why they would stay.

Trailer Estates became a special taxing district in 1969, essentially forming a governmental entity subject to the Florida open government statutes known as Sunshine laws.

Mike Burke has lived in the community for seven years, and his parents 18-20 years before that time.

"Like many people, I took over the place from my parents," Burke said. "This is a great place to live."

A lot of people are unhappy about the way things are run in the park, he said.

"I think we need changes," Burke said, "but I'm at fault for not getting involved."

He said he resents being called a troublemaker for questioning some of the board's decisions.

"They don't get enough input. They say they're following the experts' advice," Burke said, "but we're not told who these experts are."

At the same time, he thinks the board members are doing what they think is right.

"They have their hearts in the right place," Burke said