

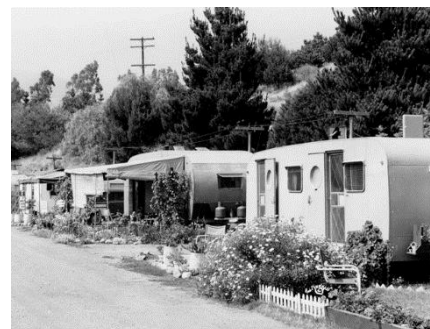
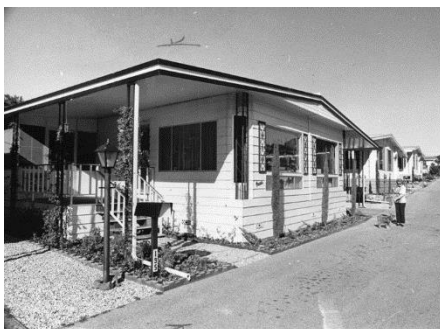
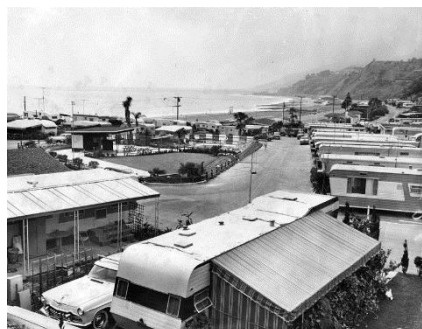
SurveyLA

Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey

LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

Context: Residential Development and Suburbanization, 1880-1980

Theme: Trailer Parks and Mobile Home Parks, 1920-1969



Prepared for:

City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
Office of Historic Resources



January 2016

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Residential Development and Suburbanization/Trailer Parks and Mobile Home Parks, 1920-1969

PREFACE

The theme of “Trailer Parks and Mobile Home Parks, 1920-1969” is a component of Los Angeles’ citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating potential historic resources relating to this residential property type. Refer to www.HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

CONTRIBUTORS

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of “Trailer Parks and Mobile Home Parks, 1920-1969” examines the evolution of this housing type from auto camps for travel trailers, to parks for house trailers, and later to mobile home parks. Similarly, this theme describes the evolution in use of this form of housing, from exclusively tourism uses to affordable permanent housing.

Evaluation Considerations

The theme Trailer Parks and Mobile Home Parks may have some overlap with other SurveyLA themes as follows:

- Properties significant for their architectural quality may also be eligible under themes within the Architecture & Engineering context.
- Signs may be identified as a character-defining feature of property types in this theme. They may also be identified individually as significant under the Commercial Signs theme.
- Examples of auto camps or motor courts with more permanent housing units may be eligible under the Bungalow Court sub-theme within the Residential Development and Suburbanization context, or under the Motels theme within the Commercial Development and the Automobile theme.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Trailer parks and mobile home parks are significant as a type of multi-family residential development in Los Angeles, representing the evolution of prefabricated mobile housing from exclusively tourism-related uses to affordable permanent housing. The period of significance extends from 1920-1969, when the construction of trailer and mobile home parks was most common.

Both the trailer park and the mobile home park evolved from a singular type of resource – the auto camp. Auto camps, also called “auto courts” or “motor courts,” were first developed around the turn of the 20th century in response to the growing popularity of the automobile. With the introduction of the Ford Model T in 1908, which was mass-produced on an assembly line and marketed to the middle class, automobile ownership became affordable for the average American. As a result, travel for pleasure and recreation also became more accessible. Many Americans began to take day trips by automobile, and the scenic “Sunday drive” became a common American pastime.

By the 1910s, automobile trips for pleasure grew in scope and duration as drivers began to venture further afield. However, motorists were often reluctant to check into a hotel in the city center, as spending a day in an open automobile meant that the occupants were either dusty or muddy. Also, there was often little place to park.¹ However, the alternatives were limited. Spurred in part by the fear of breaking down on poor roads, possibly miles from any town with a hotel, travelers began outfitting their vehicles with camping equipment.² Enterprising landowners – especially farmers or municipalities with large amounts of undeveloped land – sensed an opportunity and would often rope off a section of their land and charge a small fee to camp.³ Problems associated with this unrestricted camping necessitated the establishment and subsidization of free municipal auto camps. The first official municipal auto camp was opened in Douglas, Arizona in 1913.⁴

Eventually, tourists sought further amenities on-site, as they attempted to streamline their travel experience and minimize the necessary camping equipment that had to be transported. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, private auto camps with additional amenities were developed as commercial ventures. These private camps attracted their share of the auto camping public as municipal camps were often crowded during the summer months and had established limits on how long a tourist could stay. Private camps features campsites arranged in a row parallel or perpendicular to the highway,⁵ and were often situated near gas stations or small grocery stores. Amenities included communal bathhouses with toilets and showers, shared laundry and kitchen facilities.

Initially, camps were designed for motorists to park in a space and pitch a tent alongside their vehicle. Over time, however, the tents were replaced by rustic cabins constructed on-site by the camp operator, or by “house trailers” transported by the travelers themselves. House trailers allowed the motorist to literally carry a dwelling to a camp site; their appearance in the mid-1930s generally coincided with the development of bungalow courts and motor inns.⁶

¹ “National Road to Route 40.” Morrisson-Reeves Library website, <http://www.mrlinfo.org/history/nationalroad/natlroad2.htm>. Accessed February 2015.

² Mark, Stephen. “Save the Auto Camps!” Crater Lake Institute website, <http://www.craterlakeinstitute.com/online-library/save-the-auto-camps/save-auto-camps.htm>. Accessed February 2015.

³ “National Road to Route 40.”

⁴ “Save the Auto Camps!”

⁵ “Save the Auto Camps!”

⁶ “Save the Auto Camps!”

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A municipal auto camp in Elysian Park, 1922. (Los Angeles Public Library)

The popularity of house trailers was spurred in part by the introduction of the Airstream trailer. Wally Byam founded the Airstream Company in 1931, and together with aircraft designer William Hawley Bowlus, began developing streamlined riveted aluminum trailers. The first Airstream factory was located in Culver City; at the time, there were fewer than fifty trailer manufacturers registered for business.⁷ The Airstream models helped popularize trailer culture and contributed to a general shift away from the idea of leisure trailering toward the more permanent concept of trailers as permanent residences.

This evolving philosophy coincided with the economic decline of the Great Depression and materials rationing of World War II, periods when affordable permanent housing in Southern California was in short supply but high demand. A driving force in the development of house trailering during this period was the activities of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), founded in 1935. Trailer living allowed people to relocate freely to areas where work was offered constructing bridges, highways, and other municipal improvements.⁸ When their work with the WPA concluded, workers often remained in their trailers because they were unable to secure a stable job or afford a permanent home elsewhere.⁹

⁷ "History of Airstream." Airstream website, <http://www.airstream.com/history/>. Accessed February 2015.

⁸ "Suburbs on Wheels: A History of American Trailer Parks," online video by Andrew Hurley, 2007. Posted by "rabbitsunite," uploaded June 9, 2012. YouTube website, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nfYb_SZztg. Accessed February 2015.

⁹ *Suburb on Wheels* video.

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Auto Camp in Pomona, California, 1922. (Calisphere)

By 1937, the housing demand was so great that over four hundred different companies were manufacturing trailers.¹⁰ A group of trailer builders in Los Angeles established the Trailer Coach Association. It was noted at the time that Southern California beach communities were some of the most receptive to the development of trailer parks in the region, although several were under construction elsewhere in Los Angeles; “one or two on the east side, one in Hollywood, and one in the center of the city.”¹¹ A 1935 internal report by the California’s Division of Housing noted that “some cities were becoming havens for all manner of ‘habitations on wheels’,” and just two years later that “the trailer car camp craze has struck Los Angeles County.”¹² That same year, trailer coach manufacturers, who were interested in the development of a higher standard for trailer camps, drafted a proposed trailer camp law which they submitted to state legislatures. This draft, with amendments, was enacted by the California Legislature in 1937 and was known as the State Trailer Camp Act.¹³ The legislation is particularly notable in that its enforcement recognized the popularity of trailers as residences; the act was placed under the jurisdiction of the Division of Housing.

Beginning in 1940, the Division of Housing noted that “a great influx of trailers and trailer camps” were being constructed in areas adjacent to national defense projects.¹⁴ During World War II, trailers offered a convenient solution to the problem of housing for wartime factory workers. Trailers could be constructed quickly and situated where housing was needed most, near factories and other manufacturing and assembly sites, and could be easily relocated. During the war, the Federal government invested heavily in the trailer industry, viewing it as a ready source of quick mass-produced housing for defense workers. In 1940, the government placed its first order for 1,500 mobile homes. By

¹⁰ “History of Airstream.”

¹¹ “Rolling Homes Go Into High,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1937.

¹² “California Housing: Report and Recommendations of the State Commission of Housing,” State of California, Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Housing, 1954. (25)

¹³ “California Housing.” (26) The law was amended several times throughout the 1940s in order to raise standards.

¹⁴ “California Housing.” (27)

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1941, California was home to the second-highest number of trailer parks in the country, with 185 camps statewide, bested only by Florida with 247.¹⁵ In presenting the statistics, Professor Donald Owen Cowgill noted that “this is as any one would expect, especially in view of the attraction of these areas for vacation purposes.”¹⁶ However, Cowgill neglected to consider the fact that by 1945 the government had ordered more than 150,000 units, among them the Committee Trailer, which was sponsored by the War Board and manufactured by the United States government.¹⁷ By the end of the war, the government had essentially developed the modern travel trailer industry through its subsidies.¹⁸



Olympic Trailer Court in Santa Monica, Ansel Adams, 1940. (Los Angeles Public Library)

The greatest demand for house trailers, however, occurred in the years immediately following World War II. The postwar population boom and concurrent housing shortage experienced by returning GIs and their families necessitated affordable homes which could be constructed quickly. House trailers became especially popular because they met the needs of families in transitional housing situations:

¹⁵ Donald Olen Cowgill, *Mobile Homes: A Study of Trailer Life*. Washington, DC: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941. (60)

¹⁶ Cowgill. (60)

¹⁷ “Trailers: Yoked to the Car.” Taylor & Burns Architects website, http://www.taylorburns.com/a_double_wide_analysis/trailer.html. Accessed February 2015.

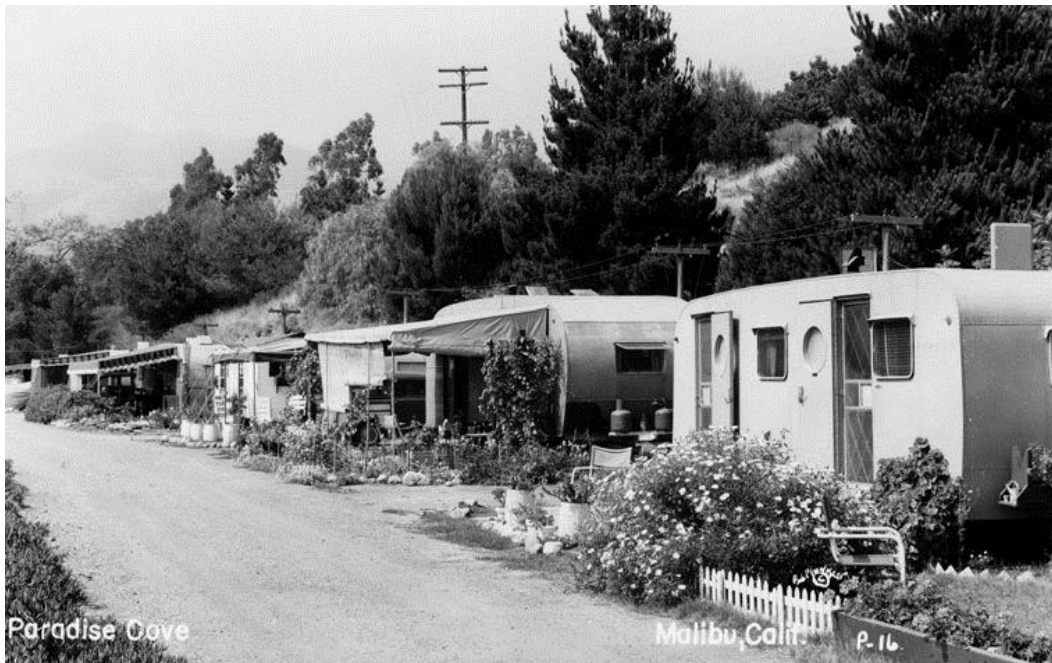
¹⁸ “Trailers: Committee Trailer.” Taylor & Burns Architects website, http://www.taylorburns.com/a_double_wide_analysis/t_comm.html. Accessed February 2015.

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those who could not afford a home right away, those who were waiting for a house to be built or become available to buy, or those who had been displaced by the war and were attempting to establish a more permanent living situation.¹⁹ By 1949, there were some forty trailer parks in Los Angeles County, with about half of those falling with Los Angeles city limits.²⁰ However, as house trailers were still viewed as transitional, rather than permanent housing, their design remained largely unchanged throughout the 1940s, with the focus remaining on mobility and affordability.

In 1952, the State of California's Division of Housing published a revised and illustrated edition of the State Trailer Park Act, which served as a guide for park layout, construction, and operation. The manual was part of a model ordinance, which was introduced by the Division in the hopes that cities throughout the state would adopt it in order to lighten the inspection workload for the Division.²¹ Indeed, in the years since World War II the number of trailer parks in the state had skyrocketed, from 820 in 1945 to over 3,300 by 1953.²² In 1956, the Division of Housing also adopted a section of the California Administrative code specifically dedicated to regulating plumbing, heating, and electrical equipment in trailer coaches. When a mobile home was approved as meeting the requirements, an "Official Insignia of approval" was issued by the state, along with a warranty.²³ At the time, the "California Code" was the only legally-enforced minimum code of its kind in the nation.²⁴



Paradise Cove trailer court in Malibu, n.d. (Los Angeles Public Library)

¹⁹ *Suburb on Wheels* video.

²⁰ "Woodall's Trailer Park Directory, Travel Trailer Magazine, 1949 edition."

²¹ "California Housing." (52)

²² "California Housing." (58)

²³ Ernest R. Bartley and Frederick H. Bair, Jr., "Mobile Home Parks and Comprehensive Community Planning," *Studies in Public Administration* No. 19. Public Administration Clearing Service of the University of Florida, 1960. (32)

²⁴ Bartley and Bair, Jr. (32)

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As more and more people took up full-time residency in trailers, they began to be associated more with housing than as vacation vehicles towed by cars.²⁵ As a result, the design of trailers began to shift, taking on a more stable appearance to reflect their use as a permanent residence. By the mid-1950s, trailers had begun to resemble conventional homes and included features and spatial planning not previously found in earlier travel trailers. These included such features as bi-level designs, which allowed for a greater distinction between public and private spaces; integrated bathroom facilities; and amenities such as fold-out porches, full-height doors, and jalousie and bay windows. One of the most important innovations occurred in 1955 with the introduction of the “Tenwide” trailer, designed by Marshfield Homes. As the name suggested, the Tenwide trailer measured ten feet in width, instead of the customary eight feet. This additional width allowed for greater privacy and a more conventional floor plan, as individual rooms could be closed off of a corridor. Prior to the Tenwide, house trailers could not accommodate a corridors, making distinctions between public and private functionally negligible.²⁶



Coastal trailer park, 1958. (Los Angeles Public Library)

The larger dimensions of the Tenwide came at the expense of mobility. Initially, the trailer was too wide to be legally transported on the highways of many states. However, its popularity reflected the changing market for house trailers, which were quickly becoming known as “mobile homes.” The Tenwide’s focus on space over mobility marked a shift in the concerns of the manufactured home industry, and helped

²⁵ “Trailers: Yoked to the Car.”

²⁶ “Trailers: Pacemaker Bilevel.” Taylor & Burns Architect website, http://www.taylorburns.com/a_double_wide_analysis/t_pace.html. Accessed February 2015.

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predicate the split of the industry into the travel trailer industry and the mobile home industry.²⁷ Travel trailers were characterized by permanently attached wheels and hitches, which allowed the trailer to be connected to a motor vehicle for transport. Mobile homes were distinguished by a permanent chassis which was intended for transport to the site only. Wheels were sometimes removed once the mobile home was delivered to its destination, or otherwise concealed behind cladding or landscaping.

As mobile homes began to expand in size and acquire the more typical characteristics of single-family residences, the stigma which had accompanied trailer living began to dissipate. Prior to the introduction of the Tenwide model, trailer parks were essentially viewed as transient camping grounds occupied by lower-income residents. As a result, municipal zoning departments often designated land for trailer parks in less than desirable locations, near junk yards, freeways, or warehouses.²⁸ In many communities of the postwar era, planners made an effort to relegate “trailer parks” to the outer limits of a city, if not ban them altogether. However, by the 1950s, the popularity of mobile homes made them difficult to marginalize.²⁹ This demand gave rise to the development of “resort parks,” which were often located near vacation destinations and were frequently utilized by retirees as vacation homes. Santa Monica, for example, listed eleven trailer parks in its city directory in 1960.³⁰



Malibu Village Trailer Park, 1979. (Los Angeles Public Library)

As mobile homes became more widely accepted in the second half of the 20th century, mobile home parks began to evolve as well. A 1960 report prepared for the Trailer Coach Association, “An Appraisal of Mobile Home Living,” detailed the two primary categories of mobile home parks which had developed

²⁷ “Trailers: Tenwide.” Taylor & Burns Architect website, http://www.taylorburns.com/a_double_wide_analysis/t_tenw.html. Accessed February 2015.

²⁸ *Suburb on Wheels* video.

²⁹ “Village Trailer Park, 2930 Colorado Avenue, Santa Monica, California, City Landmark Assessment Report.” Prepared for the City of Santa Monica Planning Division by ICF International, November 2011. (7)

³⁰ *Village Trailer Park* report. (8)

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by the end of the 1950s: the *service-oriented park* and the *housing-oriented park*.³¹ According to this report, housing-oriented parks emphasize and sell housing space; residents spend a good deal of time away from the park; and locations are usually close to sources of employment. In housing-oriented parks, amenities are less important.³² In service-oriented parks, the majority of the residents stay at home and daily activities are centered around the immediate environment of the park.³³ Service-oriented parks cater more toward older and/or retired residents, and are likely to offer a more elaborate schedule of planned social activities and other amenities. There is little correlation between economic need and residence in service-oriented parks; the main attraction for many residents is the opportunity to participate in community activities.³⁴

With the development of larger and more permanent mobile home models, new parks were designed with larger lots, often with concrete patios for each individual site. In addition to providing a place to situate a residential unit, each home site typically provided basic utilities such as water, sewer, electricity or natural gas, and garbage removal. Like residential subdivisions of the same period, interior street patterns moved away from the strict grid to more curvilinear configurations. Other common park features included central recreation or community buildings, playgrounds, and swimming pools. Landscaping played an important role in creating privacy between individual homesites, insulating the entire site from surrounding areas, and beautifying the park as a whole – which helped to improve not only the appearance but the character of such parks.³⁵ A 1960 report on mobile home parks and community planning argued that employing “greenbelts” acted as a successful buffering tool for these multi-family residential sites, saying, “Greenbelting does, of course, offer excellent esthetic [sic] possibilities...it appreciates, rather than depreciates, the value of the surrounding properties. Greenbelting, far more than open spaces or fences, dampens noise.”³⁶ Some local ordinances even provided specifications for the inclusion of greenbelts in the planning of mobile home parks.³⁷

With larger lots and better amenities, operators of mobile home parks could command higher rents, and often mandated that each individual was responsible for maintaining their own plot of land. Despite the rising costs, mobile home ownership still offered greater flexibility and affordability, as residents owned their home – often at a greatly reduced cost compared to permanent residences - and were not responsible for property taxes or ongoing rent. With updated homes and parks offering more amenities, the transient nature of park residency diminished and many mobile home parks began to develop their own identities. The insular nature of the developments helped foster a strong sense of community among residents which proved increasingly appealing. By the late 1960s, six million Americans resided in mobile homes, comprising one-third of the single-family dwellings in the United States.³⁸ A 1969 *Los Angeles Times* article indicated that 20 out of 100 Californians lived in mobile homes.³⁹

³¹ “An Appraisal of Mobile Home Living – The Parks and Residents,” prepared for the Trailer Coach Association by Construction Industry Research, Inc., February 1960.

³² “An Appraisal of Mobile Home Living.” (no page number)

³³ “An Appraisal of Mobile Home Living.” (no page number)

³⁴ “An Appraisal of Mobile Home Living.” (no page number)

³⁵ “An Appraisal of Mobile Home Living.” (no page number)

³⁶ Bartley and Bair, Jr. (88)

³⁷ Bartley and Bair, Jr. (87)

³⁸ “Mobile Home Life is a Far Cry From Trailers of ‘30s.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1968.

³⁹ Dan MacMasters, “Mobile Living: The restless giant stirs, and a revolution begins in home building industry,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1969.



Seminole Springs Mobile Home Park in Agoura, 1975. (Los Angeles Public Library)

In the 1970s, as mobile homes became more permanent in both their appearance and identity, their construction evolved from their transient origins as trailers to include “modular” homes, which bridged the gap between mobile homes and conventional site-built homes. Modular homes were designed for those homeowners who desired the affordability of a mobile home, but wanted the appearance of a permanent site-built home on land which they already owned. Modular homes lacked the axels and chassis found on mobile homes; instead they were transported from the manufacturing facility on flatbed trucks and assembled on-site. In 1976, mobile homes became known as “manufactured homes,” following the implementation of HUD safety standards, which clarified the definition of manufactured homes and established construction and safety standards. Due to their flexibility and affordability, mobile homes and modular homes would remain popular dwelling options throughout the 1970s.

Mobile Homes and Trailer Parks in Los Angeles

Mobile homes and trailer parks in Los Angeles are not publicly accessible and are not fully visible from the public right-of-way. In addition, there is a lack of scholarship on this housing type in Los Angeles and very few primary sources of information. Therefore, the eligibility standards and character defining feature below are based primarily on aerial photographs and general studies of the type; they may be more fully developed in the future with access to the properties.

Mobile home and trailer parks recorded for SurveyLA are those that appear to be good examples of the type as evidenced in the overall site design and planning and inclusion of permanent features such as community buildings, swimming pools, and signage. They may also be early examples of the type and may have evolved from earlier auto courts. While recorded properties meet these basic standards, they have not been fully evaluated. Additional field assessment is needed to establish significance and address features associated with individual units, landscaping characteristics, and to assess integrity.

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Today, over 50 extant examples of trailer and mobile home parks have been identified throughout Los Angeles dating from the 1930s into the 1980s, with the majority having been established in the 1950s and 1960.⁴⁰ Parks have been recorded for SurveyLA in various parts of the San Fernando Valley – including Canoga Park, Chatsworth, Mission Hills, Pacoima, Sunland, Sun Valley, Sylmar, Van Nuys – as well as other areas of the city, such as Northeast Los Angeles and Harbor City. There are three mobile home parks which occupy the bluffs of Pacific Palisades overlooking the Pacific Ocean – Pacific Palisades Bowl, Tahitian Terrace, and Malibu Village. These parks are particularly coveted and also threatened by redevelopment. The Monterey Trailer Park in Highland Park was developed as an auto camp between 1923 and 1926, making it one of the oldest remaining trailer parks in Los Angeles; it is a designated City Historic-Cultural Monument.⁴¹

Mobile home and trailer parks in Los Angeles fall into two major categories. Service oriented parks, also called resort parks, located near vacation destinations such as the beach communities. They were originally built as vacation or retirements housing and had shared amenities and planned activities. Examples include the parks in Pacific Palisades. Housing-oriented parks were typically located near employment centers and in areas zoned for less desirable uses (near freeways, industrial areas, etc.) Housing space was sold in these areas and amenities were less important. In Los Angeles, this type is primarily located in the San Fernando Valley and the harbor area. A few of the parks in Los Angeles are Tiki/Polynesia themed in style and include Tahitian Terrace in the Pacific Palisades and Kona Kai Village in Chatsworth.

THEME

Theme:

Trailer Parks and Mobile Home Parks, 1920-1969

Summary Statement of Significance:

A resource evaluated under this theme is significant as an excellent example of a trailer park or mobile home park type, representing the evolution of prefabricated mobile housing from exclusively tourism-related uses to affordable permanent housing. Identified example are used as semi-permanent or permanent housing, and retain the essential character-defining features from the period, including original boundaries, interior configuration, and permanent planning features.

Period of Significance:

1920-1969

Period of Significance Justification:

The period of significance extends from 1920 to 1969, when the construction of trailer and mobile home parks was most common. In the 1920s and 1930s, auto camps for travel trailers began to transition into parks for house trailers, and later to mobile home parks. By the 1970s, mobile homes started to evolve into modular homes. Development of new trailer and mobile home parks was not common after the 1960s.

⁴⁰ This information is based upon dates of construction from outside research and should be confirmed.

⁴¹ Monterey Trailer Park was locally designated in 2002 as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #736.

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Geographic Location:	San Fernando Valley, Northeast Los Angeles, San Pedro, Wilmington, Pacific Palisades
Area(s) of Significance:	Architecture; Community Planning and Development
Criteria:	NR C CR 3 Local 3
Associated Property Type:	Residential
Associated Property Sub-Types:	Trailer Park or Mobile Home Park
Property Sub-Type Description:	A trailer park or mobile home park is a residential community where occupants rent a space on which to site a trailer or mobile home, oriented onto a system of interior roadways. Common features include a community or recreation building, playground, swimming pool, sales office/manager's residence, mature landscaping, perimeter wall or fencing, and community signage.
Property Sub-Type Significance:	Trailer parks and mobile home parks are significant as a type of multi-family residential development in Los Angeles, representing the evolution of prefabricated mobile housing from exclusively tourism uses to low-cost permanent housing.
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Was constructed during the period of significance- Was originally developed as a trailer park or mobile home park- Used as semi-permanent or permanent housing- Represents an excellent example of the type, exhibiting quality of design through distinctive features- As a whole, retains the essential character-defining features from the period, including original boundaries, interior configuration, and permanent planning features
Character-Defining Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Occupies a large single property- Contains dozens or hundreds of home sites- Predominantly occupied by a single housing type, either trailers or mobile homes- Earlier examples may have a rectilinear interior street pattern, with units arranged in parallel rows- Postwar examples may have a curvilinear interior street pattern- Surrounded by a privacy wall or fence with a primary entrance- Includes a community/recreation building- May be designed in a themed architectural style and may also be evaluated under that theme- May have evolved from an earlier auto camp

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- May represent an early example of the type, dating from the 1920s or 1930s
- May include a sales office and/or manager's residence
- May include outdoor recreation facilities, such as a playground or swimming pool
- May include mature landscaping, such as trees, shrubs and lawns
- May include community signage
- For the National Register, a property must possess exceptional importance of less than 50 years of age

Integrity Considerations:

- Must retain integrity of location, design, feeling & association
- Individual trailers or mobile homes may date from various periods
- Security features such as automatic entry gates may have been added

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