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Lasting Impressions

Creating an Impressive Visual Image for Your Community

Q How can we create an impressive visual image for our community at a reasonable cost?

A As the old saying goes, it's the first impression that lasts the longest. This is just as applicable to our communities as it is to individuals. Those of us who are involved daily in the approval process for new communities are painfully aware of how the negative images of many older and even some newer communities affect our rezoning efforts. Thus, the "front door" of our communities—the main entrance, the road frontage and the community center—must create a positive impression in both new and older projects. Each new community developed is an opportunity to either move the manufactured housing industry forward toward greater acceptance or to perpetuate the old stereotypes. The cost then, to create this attractive image, is defined both in terms of economics and the resulting positive industry image.

Let me address the three areas of the community "front door."

The main entrance to the community is the most important image element and should receive a significant share of the image budget. An attractive entry sign and structure set the tone of the community and establish the style for other signs throughout the development. Generous landscaping and night lighting make this the focal point of the image area. Larger plants, a mixture of deciduous and evergreen, are required here to give this area an instant positive effect. The cost of these plantings can be offset by using smaller plantings in less prominent areas. Flowers here create a splash of color that draws the eye to the "front door." An irrigation system and maintenance program should be considered for this area to keep it looking its best.

The remaining road frontage is next in importance. An adequate buffer area here will allow for berming and screening of unsightly views from adjacent roads—such as the rear of the homes and their assorted stored items.

Image is created from border to border of the site. Accents at the site's corners should reflect the design at the main

entrance and signal the beginning and end of the property. Fencing here and at other appropriate locations throughout the community can be another unifying element. Weaving fence sections among the plant beds and berms creates a great effect at a reduced cost. Using a variety of plants in large beds creates year-round interest and simplifies maintenance.

The community center and its adjacent facilities make up the last area of the community "front door." This facility can be a great end point for the main entry drive or boulevard; it should be centered on the incoming lane of traffic for maximum effect.

The center's grounds should be the landscape showplace of the community and an inspiration to the residents. Choose groupings of shrubs, flowers and trees for year-round effect, and plant them in mulched beds for easy maintenance. Many community center grounds are mistakenly landscaped in a way that draws attention away from the building rather than enhancing it. Keep it simple.

I encourage you to start establishing an attractive and positive community image early in the development process and to seek professional assistance. Smaller, less costly plantings, installed early on, soon become established and add lasting value to the community and the homes in it.



Don Westphal has over 35 years of experience planning manufactured home communities. He can be contacted at (248) 651-5518. Questions can be emailed to don@dcwestphal.com