



A **Global Payments**
Company

The Operator's Guide to Manufactured Housing Utility Cost Recovery

Modern Strategies for Optimizing 9 Core Utility Tasks

Table of contents.

Manufactured housing investor demand is stabilizing: now what? 03

The crucial next step: optimize operations 04

Utility management is a top operational bottleneck for manufactured housing 05

9 utility management workflows to simplify with automation 07

How to pick the right utility management software 19

Transform your utility operations with best-in-class solutions 23



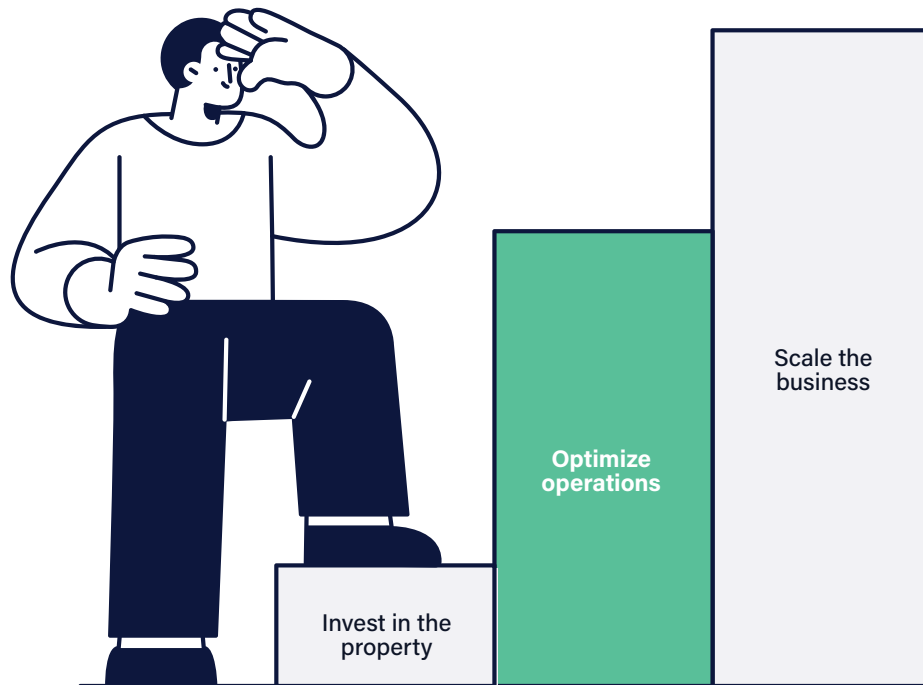
Manufactured housing investor demand is stabilizing: **now what?**

Manufactured housing communities (MHCs) and mobile home parks (MHPs) remain a popular and affordable alternative to site-built single-family homes for working class Americans. In the United States, the average cost of purchasing a single-family home is around \$440,000. Compare that to \$123,300 for a manufactured home. With more than 20 million Americans dedicating 30% of their income to housing costs, residents continue to turn toward MHCs as an accessible solution for renting and homeownership.

On the investor side, steady consumer demand and low resident turnover makes manufactured housing an attractive investment. The combination of these factors, plus lowered interest rates during the early 2020s, turned manufactured housing into a competitive bidding war for investors. As a result, we see that corporations and companies own larger properties and take up about 20-25% of individual parks in the United States today. On the flip side, “mom-and-pop parks” – smaller, private businesses that are often family-run – still own the majority of individual parks nationwide at 75-80%.

The crucial next step: **optimize operations**

Regardless of ownership and portfolio size, manufactured housing operators share common challenges. Most individual parks were developed during a boom between the 1950s and 1970s as a solution for affordable housing. Development slowed in the 1980s, and new-built parks have become nearly nonexistent since then. This means that supply is at a standstill. **Today, most manufactured housing properties in the United States come with decades-old infrastructure and inherited manual workflows.**



While park processes are frozen in time, residents continue to modernize. Residents today expect housing conveniences such as digital payments, self-service tools, and maintenance ticket updates.

Property teams must modernize operations not just to boost the resident experience, but also to nurture sustainable cash flow, capture lost expenses, and improve Net Operating Income (NOI).

This is common ground for all parks regardless of portfolio size. Challenges for manufactured housing are similar across the board: lean teams, manual calculations, confusing spreadsheets, low cost recovery, and paper records. Legacy workflows like these prevent businesses from achieving the highest optimal performance.

Fortunately, this means that operational efficiency can only improve. By adopting scalable systems, property teams enjoy simpler processes and boosted revenue.



Utility management is one of the **top operational bottlenecks** for manufactured housing

One of the largest challenges within manufactured housing operations is utility management. Due to the dated infrastructure at parks across the United States, operators have had to find workable solutions for utility billing. Still, utility bottlenecks persist. From reconciling charges between the city meter and individual submeters, to threats of meter leakage and maintenance costs, to recording data, property managers today have inherited legacy processes that are time consuming, costly, and heavily manual. Beyond the resource strain, these systems are also inefficient. **With endless spreadsheets, paper records, and fragmented tools, manual management blocks reliable data, consistent cash flow, and scalability.** Fortunately, with property technology today, park operators can hand off much of that manual lift.

Investing in modern utility management solutions comes with substantial benefits:



Lower operating expenses



Boosted utility
expense recovery



More time back for staff



Less billing errors &
invoice inaccuracies



Automated visibility into
submeter health



Long-term data
intelligence

Building an efficient, connected utility system is the clear next step for owners and operators looking to maintain seamless cash flow, recover costs, and grow their business. In this guide, we identify key opportunities across the utility lifecycle that can be automated by modern solutions. Learn how to transform manual utility expense management tasks into effective, scalable systems.

9 utility management workflows to simplify with automation

The following strategies highlight specific utility management touchpoints where operators can transform operations by reducing manual work, improving accuracy, and recovering more costs..

1	Monitor submeter health	6	Resident billing compliance support
2	Audit utility invoices	7	Deliver and retrieve resident bills
3	Calculate resident utility charges	8	Report utility charges in the property ledger
4	Identify cost recovery opportunities	9	Centralize data for long-term intelligence
5	Automatically keep up with utility expense changes		

1

Monitor submeter health

Property teams have traditionally had to identify submeter problems by manually reviewing meter data or discovering an issue after the fact. To collect readings, an onsite team member may physically review the meter box, install and check an LED display at each lot, or use Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) tech to capture the data and send it to a central hub.

Sorting through consumption data is tedious, manual, and prone to errors. Identifying a problem traditionally entails matching back utility reads to individual spreadsheets or paper records. Identifying leaks, zero usage, or otherwise faulty or broken meters can take hours depending on data accessibility. Costly problems or waste can exist for months before even being noticed. With everything considered, missed submeter anomalies result in drained resources over time.



Fortunately, sophisticated solutions exist to monitor meters and automatically notify operators of unusual activity. This saves costs and time for property managers. Submeter health reports integrate directly into digital utility systems and continuously evaluate meter usage across lots. Meter reads are then made available to operators electronically.

When an anomaly occurs – such as a spike in usage, zero consumption, or missing reads – that data is conveniently flagged for operators to review in the report. These solutions handle the lift of monitoring meters, collecting usage information, and filtering through busy spreadsheets and records for data. Automated submeter health reports are a great way to identify and investigate issues while saving staff time and lowering expenses.



2 Audit utility invoices

When an invoice arrives, the traditional process involves a staff member manually reviewing usage and expenses before entering the charges into a spreadsheet or billing system. Ideally, a team would have time each month to comb through the invoice for inaccuracies. This involves comparing the invoice with previous bills, reviewing individual charges thoroughly, and investigating usage or expenses that seem unusually high. The process can be painstaking for onsite teams that are already pressed for time. **Due to lean teams or limited resources, discrepancies on utility invoices can easily go unnoticed – resulting in accumulated and unnecessary costs for the property.**

Automated invoice audits are solutions that review utility expenses against historical property data and help to identify potential issues. When integrated into a centralized platform, that information is made readily available for operators to review. This is a time-saver for smaller teams operating on tight billing deadlines, and for accounting personnel needing to sort through expenses efficiently. These solutions also help to capture costly discrepancies early, preventing potential issues like faulty submeters from racking up expenses over time.

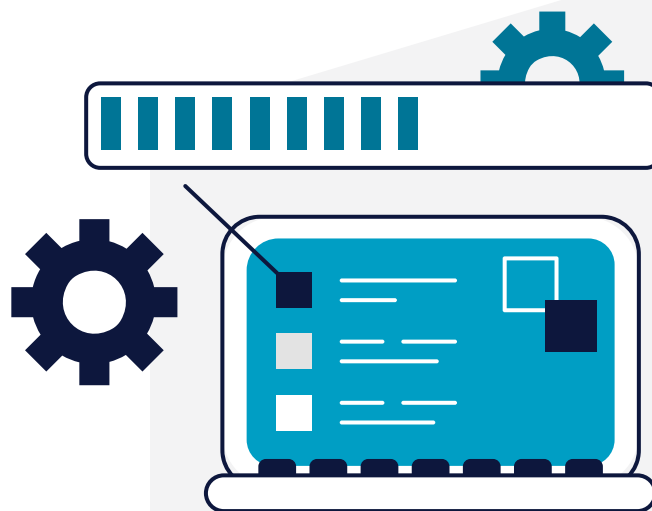


3

Calculate resident utility charges

Once utility invoices are audited, property teams must turn those expenses into charges based on individual usage. Depending on the billing structure, this involves divvying up expenses from the master invoice, applying utility rates, and calculating charges per lot. **Traditionally, operators conduct these calculations manually and then record the charges in spreadsheets.** This leaves resident bills at risk of human error from mistakes like incorrect calculations or typos in data entry. For a property, this can result in over- or under-charging residents for usage. Over time, billing errors significantly impact NOI, with larger portfolios magnifying that risk. Regardless, manual billing processes take hours of repetitive work each month for property teams.

Automated billing solutions simplify the process by alleviating manual tasks such as calculations, bill generation, and bill delivery and retrieval. **These digital tools take the invoice data, review submeter usage, and apply custom calculations to create accurate charges.** From there, depending on the solution, your billing provider moves on to resident bill delivery. Besides eliminating hours of time-intensive tasks for property teams each month, these solutions improve billing accuracy, boost the resident payment experience, and keep cash flowing effortlessly each cycle.

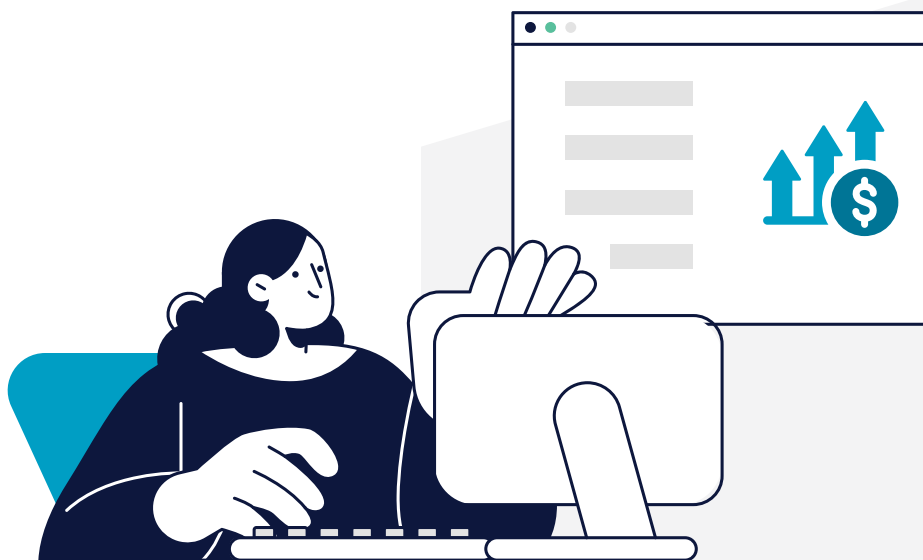


4

Identify cost recovery opportunities

Auditing invoices and generating resident bills is only the baseline for solid utility management. Operators should also identify cost recovery opportunities each cycle. This means ensuring that residents are paying for their fair share of usage. **In a manual setting, this process requires onsite staff to thoroughly compare utility invoices against resident bills.** Oftentimes, operators must refer to one-off spreadsheets or paper files to locate this data. This demands time and close attention – something smaller teams are unable to dedicate when juggling so many other tasks each month. Unfortunately, without an effective cost recovery strategy, the property misses out on opportunities to grow its financial performance.

Technology fills in these gaps. **Automated tools match usage and utility rate data against resident charges, identifying areas for potential cost recovery.** This improves visibility and awareness, especially for smaller teams with dated workflows. Over time, cost recovery improvements lead to smoother money movement and healthier margins. When these tools are integrated into a central reporting platform, the benefits are even greater. Operators can review historical data and are better able to understand the signs and trends that improve NOI in the long run.



5

Automatically keep up with utility expense changes

In today's economy, utility costs are notoriously volatile. Changing utility rates make it difficult to calculate future billing charges.

Operators must rely on up-to-date expenses from their most current bills to achieve maximum recovery from residents. In a manual setting, this requires onsite teams to review every utility bill, take note of the latest data and surcharges, and update expenses or formulas on local spreadsheets. When applied over countless lots across various locations, larger portfolios become more vulnerable to human error and miscalculation. **Due to the time-intensive nature of this task, park managers often only update utility expense data once a year.** This leaves operations susceptible to missed billback opportunities, and parks can end up eating utility costs that are uncovered by residents.

Automated tools reduce that stress by accurately applying expense updates to upcoming resident bills. This is because reliable solutions can pull information directly from the most recent utility bills available. **Updated utility expenses are taken into account each billing cycle, allowing owners to bill back residents at accurate rates.** This greatly reduces the risk of losing money from lost billback opportunities, improving cost recovery and boosting NOI.

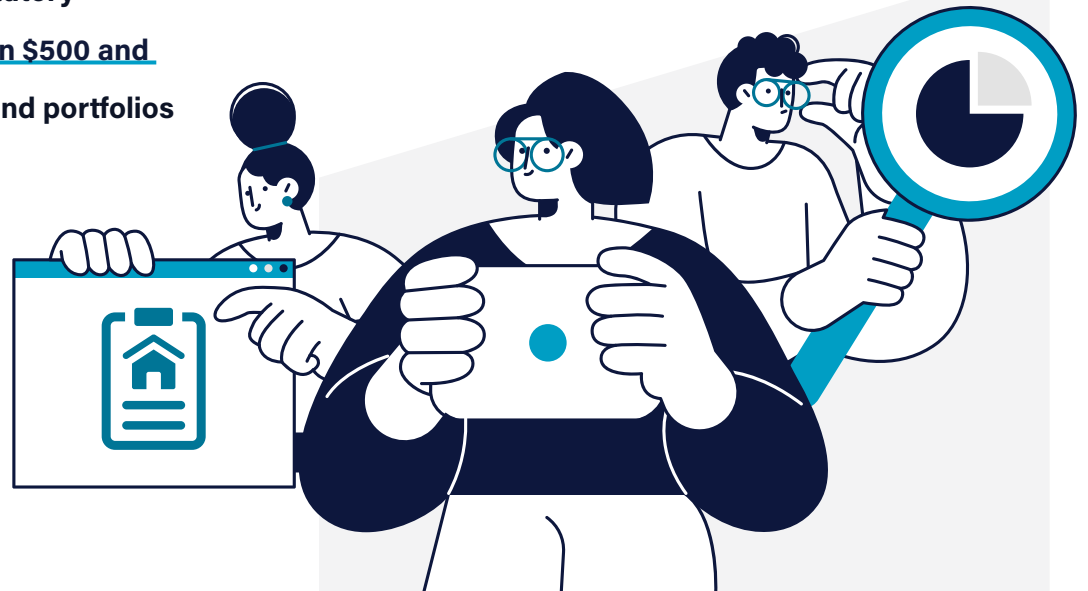


6

Resident billing compliance support

Another challenge for manufactured housing communities is keeping resident billing compliant with local regulatory requirements. Compliance is challenging for both mom-and-pop parks and larger companies spanning state lines and different regions. Individual properties tend to have lean teams relying on legacy processes and institutional knowledge. Changing regulatory requirements demand additional care on the part of onsite teams to stay updated with current laws. Large companies crossing state lines require intensive knowledge for the local and state regulations that apply to each property. **Because compliance issues can be costly to address (statutory penalties in California, for example, land between \$500 and \$50,000 per offence), it's imperative that parks and portfolios of all sizes stay within compliant guardrails.**

When looking for a utility billing vendor, ensure that they provide compliance support. **These teams are made up of legal experts that review your specific properties and provide advice and guidance to stay in compliance with local and state regulations.** This eliminates the risk of accidentally misstepping beyond legal billing safeguards, preventing your properties from being dinged or penalized.



7

Deliver and retrieve resident bills

Once resident utility charges have been calculated, reviewed, and approved, operators must bill the resident. The traditional method is to print and mail statements or deliver them via email. **This process is manual and time-consuming, and if printed, costly and slow.** Down the line, if a resident wants to review a copy of a previous bill, operators must dive back into their paper or electronic records and sort through localized files. This is a great area of utility billing to simplify with automation.

A centralized, digital utility billing system eliminates all the unnecessary steps in bill delivery and retrieval that take up hours of staff time each cycle. **After being reviewed and approved by the team, resident utility bills are sent automatically, residents are auto-notified, and transactions are posted to the ledger once charges have been paid.** Aside from approving bills, staff aren't required to intervene with the process. With the entire monthly billing operation handled, onsite teams are freed up to address resident and property matters that require personal attention.



8

Report utility charges in the property ledger

Once resident charges have been paid, the next step in the utility billing process is to upload that transaction data into the property's accounting software. **In a manual setting, accounting teams must collect billing details, populate local spreadsheets line-by-line, and then import that data into the property ledger.** The process is clunky, manual, and cumbersome, and requires hours of sifting through data to ensure that details across several manual touchpoints are clean and accurate.

When integrated directly into your existing accounting platform, [automated utility billing solutions](#) eliminate the bulk of that manual lift. **Once residents pay their bills, that data is automatically collected and uploaded to the ledger – no need for manual intervention from staff.** This saves a substantial amount of time each month. More importantly, it keeps data moving between systems. The overall utility process becomes more connected and efficient as a result, reducing risks of manual error or delays in the billing cycle.



9

Centralize data for long-term intelligence

Utility data accumulates month over month through each billing cycle. In a manual setting, that information is scattered across spreadsheets, invoices, emails, paper reports, disconnected digital systems, and the accounting platform. Historical data is a crucial part of making informed decisions that drive business growth and financial success. **When data is inaccessible, difficult to track down, or inaccurate, financial performance takes a hit.** This problem multiplies for portfolios with hundreds to thousands of lots as it becomes more challenging to identify issues such as unrecovered costs or unusual long-term usage.

Centralized data is one of the most valuable gifts you can give to your onsite teams. Operators rely on having one source of truth to access historical information. Imagine having a singular platform from which your team can search up meter reads, invoices, resident bills, notes, and more. Centralized data offers the consistency, visibility, and reliability that enables decision makers to confidently steer the ship.



In an ideal system, fully automated utility solutions integrate perfectly together to share and store data across tasks.

Operators have full visibility through one central dashboard to review the data they need without doubting whether the information is up-to-date or accurate. With a solid foundation, property managers can focus on the big picture, identify cost recovery opportunities, and stay on top of all utility happenings across the portfolio.





How to pick the right utility management software

Whether a business owns several parks or a single community, utility management technology moves the needle towards scalable systems and achievable business goals. When implementing new technology, owners and decision-makers should keep three considerations in mind.



Choose solutions that target your greatest pain points

There are countless solutions on the market that claim to alleviate stress for property managers. Before you begin shopping for vendors and tools, ensure that you've identified your park's greatest operational bottlenecks. Audit the utility setup across your property (e.g. submeter configurations, utilities offered, current invoice and billing methods, existing reporting structure). Once you have detailed out your utility frameworks, create a wishlist. This should include needs that would greatly benefit property teams or residents – for example, automated billing, centralized reporting, compliance support, submeter health monitoring.

The goal is to familiarize yourself with your greatest utility challenges and identify the core areas that require improvement.

You can build a strong utility management foundation from here.

Connect utility processes with the systems you already use

The most important feature you should consider when looking to add solutions into your technology stack is seamless integration. Utility billing doesn't operate in isolation. Everything from invoice data to meter readings to resident charges contribute to your property's larger ecosystem. Your entire utility system needs to accommodate all sorts of data moving between different processes and platforms. Without a well-connected system, data can become fragmented and mistakes can leak into your operations.

If your property already has a solid software foundation – for example, a reliable portfolio-wide accounting platform – look for utility solutions that integrate seamlessly. Strong vendor partnerships greatly reduce friction and keep property operations running smoothly.

The goal is to find utility solutions that connect to your current platforms and reduce complexity across your properties.





Create a centralized view of portfolio-wide operations & data

Following the same idea of keeping systems connected, you should keep your data connected. Having a centralized place to store property data will transform how your teams operate and make decisions.

Traditionally, utility information such as meter readings, invoice data, and monthly resident charges have relied on individual spreadsheets, paper records, and institutional knowledge. These legacy processes can create long-term challenges when trying to pinpoint specific data trends or identify cost recovery opportunities over time.

Centralizing utility processes and data can create clean, consistent records; make information easier to access; and reduce the need to shuffle between systems to track down utility performance.

The goal is to establish a centralized “source of truth” for data and insights to live.

These three principles provide the foundation for building a sturdy utility billing system regardless of portfolio size.



Turn manual utility processes into **opportunities** **for success**

When streamlined and integrated, these individual workflows contribute to an overall healthy utility management system: monitor the data, validate invoices, calculate resident charges, recover costs, keep up with utility expenses, support compliance, bill back residents efficiently, post transactions, and preserve and learn from data. By automating utility management responsibilities, property teams remove the repetitive work and manual hours spent keeping the cycle running. The property eliminates administrative burden, enjoys stronger NOI, and can pursue greater opportunities to scale.

Transform your utility operations with best-in-class solutions

Zego's [utility management solution for manufactured housing](#) is purpose-built to help property teams offload cumbersome manual tasks. **We simplify and streamline various touchpoints across the end-to-end utility billing process – from invoice audits to resident billing and data collection.** Our robust submeter health reports automatically identify and alert operators of potential anomalies, from spikes in usage to zero meter reads. Our utility billing solution manages the entire process for you, from generating prebills and utility calculations to handling resident delivery and bill retrieval. With our data intelligence solution, your team saves time recording information in spreadsheets; we import all integrated data into one central place and automatically upload transaction details into the property ledger.

With Zego Utility, manufactured housing professionals don't need to worry about the nitty gritty. Let us take the manual responsibility off your hands so you can take the next steps towards scaling your business. [Book time with an expert](#) and receive a free utility assessment for your manufactured housing portfolio today.



A **Global Payments**
Company

Zego is a property management automation company that simplifies cumbersome yet critical workflows for managers and associations. Our modern platform accelerates NOI growth and mitigates risk, helping clients to scale resources, build trust, and make data-backed decisions. From payments and utility management to resident engagement, Zego's automated workflows seamlessly integrate with leading property management systems giving users real-time and accurate information at their fingertips.

Since its inception in 2003, Zego (a Global Payments company) has evolved from a leading payments provider to a comprehensive property management automation platform. With more than 350 employees, Zego serves 7,000 residential real estate companies and over 15 million units nationwide. Learn more about what makes Zego one of the best workflow automation platforms for property management at gozego.com.

gozego.com | 1.866.729.5327 | @go_zego



Written by:

Jayme De La Cruz
Content Strategist
Zego (A Global Payments Company)

Designed by:

[Vik Pitones Design](#)