

To: Betsy Craske and Eric Melson
Re: Zoning Designation for Ben Hughes Neighborhood

January 10, 2025

Dear Eric and Betsy,

Thank you for your attention to our concerns relative to the proposed zoning designation for the Ben Hughes neighborhood. We've learned a lot about the planning process along the way and really appreciate Eran's time Friday and her sharing the [Our Missoula Unified Development Code: Zoning District Mapping](#), zoning guidance provided to us on January 5, 2026. It really helped our understanding of the amenity-based approach and informed our comments at the January 7, 2026, Land Use Committee Meeting

The focus of our meeting yesterday was on the upzoning of our entire neighborhood to LU-R2, even though the required 3 amenities needed to upzone only apply to a small portion of our neighborhood.

Our Ask

We ask you to make a motion for a zoning map amendment to make the zoning designation for all of Ben Hughes LU-R1, supported by the details provided below. The LU-R1 zoning designation for Ben Hughes complies fully with the zoning guidance and is **NOT** an exception to any of the guidance provided.

Supporting Details

Eran provided this summary of our January 9 meeting by email.

- We reviewed the amenity score and our application of the map methodology. Jane, Larry, and Christine brought up reasons why the score/application of the methodology should be reconsidered.
- I shared the directive and guidance staff have been working under, which includes:
 - The development of a map methodology and the consistent application of this methodology across the entire community.
 - Where environment constraints are not present, maximizing housing opportunities that are contextually appropriate (through building types, form, height, and other standards).
- Staff feel confident that the mapping methodology has been applied consistency and accurately on the parcels in question. That leaves this as a policy decision/discussion for city council on whether to exempt specific parcels or neighborhoods from elements of the methodology or change the methodology in full, amending the full zoning map as necessary. While, based on our work, we do not recommend either we would work with council to execute these changes if they were adopted.

The following is a summary of our analysis and is responsive to what we learned visiting with Eran yesterday. It captures how we understand what Eran described as the options for Council to change the staff’s recommendations and the impacts of those options.

- 1. If methodology, or definitions of amenities, proximity of amenities, etc., are changed for one neighborhood, it triggers a re-analysis city-wide in order to consistently apply that direction. **We are NOT requesting a methodology change.**
- 2. If methodology is “exempted” for one neighborhood, the rationale for that exemption must be applied city-wide. **We are NOT requesting an exemption from the methodology.**¹

In discussing the zoning designation criteria, the Ben Hughes neighborhood members shared the following analysis and our conclusions with Eran. We added information here that is responsive to the summary Eran shared regarding direction from Council, methodology and options for Council to make changes.

- 1. Three amenities are required to assign an area the LU-R2 zoning designation. See page 5 of Our Missoula Unified Development: Zoning District Mapping below. In the case of the Ben Hughes neighborhood the city has identified three amenities (Developed Park, Transit Stop and Commuter Trail) that overlap our neighborhood to varying extents.

Page 5: ([Our Missoula Unified Development Code: Zoning District Mapping](#)).

“If parcels are Limited Urban Residential:

- 1. Assign all parcels to LU-R1 zoning district.
- 2. If parcel has current zoning that is within the Title 20 RM district assign to LU-R2 zoning district. (*Ben Hughes is not within Title 20 RM*)
- 3. If parcel is within walking distance at least 3 amenities (including any transit regardless of timing) assign to LU-R2 zoning district.”



¹ We continue to maintain our position that neither Commuter Trail nor Developed Park amenities are applicable to our neighborhood. However, this analysis shows that even given these amenities our neighborhood would be appropriately zoned LU-R1.

2. As the map shows, 3 Amenities (Developed Park, Transit Stop and Commuter Trail) overlap only **15-30% of the total lots on the west end of the subdivision and would be assigned to LU-R2**. Yet, the remaining 70 – 85% of the neighborhood was also assigned to LU-R2. Eran informed us that **this upzoning is based on Council direction to upzone whenever possible, even if only a minimal part of an area meets the amenity requirements**. However, we have not found such a direction that applies a “minimal rule of thumb” anywhere in the documentation provided or that we have researched.

Rather, we do find the direction below in the document Eran provided to us and believe it informs this point. Page 5-6: ([Our Missoula Unified Development Code: Zoning District Mapping](#)). **Emphasis added:**

“The final step in mapping zoning districts throughout the city was to “smooth out” the edges of the districts. To improve neighborhood compatibility and provide greater predictability for residents, staff aimed to align zoning boundaries with full city blocks² whenever possible. This step required a manual, block-by-block review in which staff examined the edges of each zoning district to determine which district should apply to the entire block.”

“As a general rule, if more than half of a block was assigned to a particular zoning district, that district was extended to cover the full block. An exception was made when applying that district across the entire block would conflict with the character or zoning pattern of surrounding blocks.

Because this step required staff to hand-draw zoning boundaries rather than rely solely on parcel-level data and attributes, it was the most involved stage of the Place Type-to-zoning mapping process. **This step in the process required decisions to be based on intuition, experience, and judgement by the Project Team and planning staff.**”

Under this zoning guidance, LU-R1 should be applied to Ben Hughes because **70-85% of the lots do not have the requisite three amenities.** Three amenities apply to only 15-30% of the total lots in Ben Hughes. LU-R1 zoning not only implements the zoning guidance, but it also provides for consistency across our neighborhood (which is detailed in direction above) as 10 lots are currently proposed for LU-R1 zoning. To leave the designation of LU-R2 for the whole neighborhood would, in fact, be inconsistent with the zoning guidance.

² Due to the configuration and unified nature of the subdivision, it functions as a “block” and should be considered as such. There are not any immediately adjacent “blocks” nor intervening streets.

In summary, our request is consistent with [Our Missoula Unified Development Code: Zoning District Mapping](#) and meets the goal of consistent zoning, and the general rule of “more than half block,” see text quoted above.

Conclusion

We believe our request is within the purview of the Council to amend the zoning designation to LU-R1 as the decision to designate Ben Hughes as LU-R2 seems to be based on the staff decision to maximize zoning density even though only a **small area of our neighborhood** meets the criteria for LU-R2. We find no written direction that supports a decision based on staff discretion in this manner. ***If such direction exists and if it has been applied to other areas in the city consistently³, we request that information be shared.***

To be clear, we are NOT requesting a methodology change, and we are NOT requesting an exemption from the methodology. We are asking that the methodology from zoning guidance be applied to our neighborhood. In addition, we are not requesting a place type change or a change in the Land Use Plan.

Thank you again for your time and attention. We are always open to sharing more information and learning more about the process.

Jane Darnell
308-430-2204

Chris Everett
Larry Chase

Cc: Erin Pehan

³ **Added note** *unrelated to the presence of three amenities, important relative to consistency with policy direction:* Transit Stop on Highton should be removed from the analysis of our neighborhood, due to unsafe access via the railroad underpass and being more than ¼ walking distance from our neighborhood. Safety and ¼ mile proximity are standards that exist in current direction related to amenities and removing this transit stop from analysis of our neighborhood should not be considered a new methodology or require a city-wide analysis.