



September 2, 2020

Mr. DeGrandpre and Members of the Missoula City Council,

I wanted to expand on the agency comment we previously provided by the Office of Housing and Community Development regarding the requested rezone on Expo Parkway.

We are in support of the requested rezone. As Mr. DeGrandpre articulately points out in his staff report, the rezone complies with many of the policies, goals and objectives outlined in the growth policy. It does not comply with all statements and goals and there are real concerns that need to be planned for and mitigated, but on balance the type of development this rezone provides for is what we hope to see in this area.

Specifically, the requested rezone will help us achieve the housing needs defined in the Growth Policy and the goals outlined in A Place to Call Home, our adopted housing policy. The City of Missoula needs approximately 9000 new homes by 2035 to meet modest population projections. We need a wide range of homes to meet this need, both market rate and affordable. While affordable for sale and rental homes will remain desperately needed, market rate housing also supports a healthy market by providing adequate supply that prevents spikes in inflation. Therefore, the requested rezone supports our goals around supply and around affordability.

Neighborhoods like Grant Creek, of which we have several, largely consist of single family homes and are bordered by protected open space – providing little opportunity for the addition of new homes in alignment with the growth policy. This rezone will provide the neighborhood an increased opportunity to contribute to the solution in a way that is supported by the growth policy and that reflects best practices in development trends.

As pointed out in the staff report, this rezone will pave the way for development that provides a transition between auto-oriented commercial development along the Reserve Corridor, medium density multi-family homes, and single family homes. This type of transition supports a healthy mix of development types, and is a keystone in what is termed “missing middle” housing development. Missing middle housing development helps to control the cost of homes by focusing on shared infrastructure while protecting our other values, like maintaining our access to open space – by building more compactly in areas that are deemed appropriate. This is an area that the growth policy deems as appropriate for compact development.

We also want to continue to highlight the equity conversations that are occurring around housing development – and that are important considerations in how we move ahead as a community. This rezone and the resulting increase in homes in the area does present challenges in traffic and access to public transportation. These concerns also apply to other areas where compact housing development is happening in throughout Missoula – including central Missoula and the Northside, where the Villagio is under development. This project alone will construct a similar unit count (slightly over 200 rental homes) as the first two phases of the proposed project, should the rezone be approved. Similarly, the Villagio is not on bus route. It has better proximity to the urban core, but it also has some of the worst sidewalk infrastructure in Missoula. Like the Grant Creek area, there are plans to expand connectivity around the Villagio in the future – but the situation is not perfect today.

We are in no way advocating for poor or unsafe development, it’s quite the opposite. As a community, we need to acknowledge the land scarcity we are working within and the need to get creative in order mitigate problems on less than ideal sites – as opposed to walking away from them. We often hear, “this isn’t the right site, don’t force it, find

something better". I can assure you, there is no site left in Missoula for significant development that does not require trade-offs. Whether it's increased traffic and wait times, loss of key agricultural soils, loss of recreational open space, or further straining inadequate infrastructure. If we are serious about addressing our housing problems as a community, some level of trade-off will be required. The key will be to be clear about areas in which we are not willing trade our identity (such as loss of protected open space) or our sustainability (such as overly straining infrastructure).

Without the requested rezone, these parcels could be developed with less homes and that would still meet a real and present need, contributing to the creation of homes Missoulians can afford. But we do lose the opportunity to create as many homes as we can in alignment with our growth policy and housing policy goals. There are very, very few parcels in Missoula left that will allow us to appropriate build this number of homes. These are opportunities we will not get back.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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