

Missoula City Council
435 Ryman Street
Missoula, MT 59802

October 13, 2020

RE: Purchase of public trail easement along Schmidt Road to provide a key connection between the Milwaukee Trail and Mullan Road

Dear Members of Missoula City Council:

The Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) enthusiastically recommends the City Council approve an expenditure of up to \$25,000 from the City's portion of the 2006 Open Space Bond to purchase a trail easement along Schmidt Road across the Fox property. The acquisition this easement will secure another critical segment for the highly prioritized Milwaukee Trail shared-use path.

The current trail extends west from central Missoula beyond Reserve Street and terminates near the Clark Fork River. The current trail resulted from decades of open space acquisitions and related planning efforts. More recently, the City acquired the Clark Fork Islands. In 2017, the City acquired the Kolendich-Grove Street property in order to connect the islands to the current Milwaukee trail. And in July 2020, the Park Board adopted the Clark Fork Islands Recreation and Special Resource Management Plan, which specifically contemplates a trail connection across the islands to the west side of the Clark Fork River – and ultimately to Mullan Road.

Currently, three gaps in the anticipated trail exist to the west of the Clark Fork River. This easement along Schmidt Road will eliminate one of those gaps. Ultimately, the trail will allow residents of the growing Mullan area to commute downtown in a sustainable manner. It also will provide access to currently City-owned riparian open space from the west. Overall, this is a unique opportunity to move one step closer to connecting the hub of Missoula with neighborhoods in the Mullan area and beyond.

Shared-use paths allow our community members to access services and amenities, including places of employment, businesses, schools, and parks and open space. The Mullan area is currently undergoing a master planning effort, the Mullan Area Master Plan, and residential and commercial development is expected to increase significantly in the coming years. Capitalizing on these types of opportunities in the near term is essential – especially when a willing seller is present, as properties are changing ownership and property values and development are on the rise.

The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan provides a vision for continuing to expand upon our open space and trail system throughout the greater Missoula area. The plan focuses on the protection of five broad categories of open space, and corridors like the Milwaukee Trail comprise one of those categories. Connectivity is listed as a priority consideration, with an emphasis on expanding “existing commuter networks (Bitterroot Branch, Milwaukee Trail) to under-connected

sectors of town and extend[ing] the networks to provide non-motorized access to surrounding ... recreation areas.” Additionally, the *Activate Missoula 2045 Missoula Long Range Transportation Plan*, adopted in March 2017, recognizes non-motorized projects can have an impact on overall system efficiency, functionality, and safety. It states: “[t]he shared use pathway system along the...Milwaukee Trail [is a] vital component of the bikeway network.”

Providing Missoula residents with a well-connected system of urban and rural non-motorized trails has been a focal point of Open Space Bond projects since the City’s 1980 Open Space Bond protected key sections of Missoula’s trail network. The acquisition of an easement on the Milwaukee Trail and in the Mullan area presents a special and timely opportunity to complete a key connection on a highly utilized corridor and furthers the community-wide goal of a well-connected trail network.

The Open Space Advisory Committee supports and respectfully recommends this acquisition. We thank you for your consideration of our recommendation.



Rob Erickson, Chair
Open Space Advisory Committee