From: Shields, Amelia
To: Grp. City Council and City Web Site
Subject: Letter to Council
Date: Thursday, June 25, 2020 11:28:58 PM

June 25, 2020

To the elected representatives of the City of Missoula,

I am writing in regard to the Budget Committee meeting on June 26th. I am using this letter as an opportunity to raise my voice as I cannot be physically present. I think that now it is time for the City of Missoula to put its money where its mouth is in regards to its vision to be "an inclusive city where all people can live and celebrate meaningful, purposeful and fulfilling lives through the confluence of unparalleled recreational, cultural and entrepreneurial opportunities." At the present I do not believe that this vision is an attainable goal for the majority of the working class citizens of this city with our current trajectory. We live in a city in which institutionalized racism towards indigenous people, black people and people of color is present in our schools, our law enforcement, our hospitals and other essential public services. We live in a city in which sexual assault is endemic and law enforcement and judicial processes regularly fail to deliver justice to victims. We live in a city with a significant unhoused population. We live in a city that ranks 33rd most unequal in the disparity between the top 1 percent and the bottom 99 percent according to the Missoulian.

I find it embarrassing as someone who was born here that my city council uses such sugary words as "recreational, cultural and recreational opportunities" as a focus for its vision. We have much more pressing issues at hand that need improvement- such as dismantling institutionalized racism, eradicating rape culture, closing the wealth gap, and housing our unhoused population. Paying mind to what is going on nationally I think the City of Missoula should follow suit in the movement towards de-funding law enforcement and other punitive forms of punishment and allocating those funds elsewhere. Speaking as a woman in our community, I have never felt more safe because of the presence of Missoula Police. Personal feelings aside, we have issues that need more funding than punitive law enforcement systems that perpetuate cycles of poverty and escalate bad behaviors.

Extra funding generated by de-funding law enforcement could go instead towards specialized social programs that respond to people in mental/behavioral crisis, medical crisis, domestic disputes, victims of hunger, our refugee population, and the general well being of our community as a whole, not just those who can afford it. It could help us locate and fund a facility for a wet shelter so that people are not freezing to death on our streets. It could help us house our unhoused population and provide real affordable housing that matches minimum wage for lower classes with rent caps and preference for residents of the city (I say real because we don't have adequate affordable housing now).

As a local of Missoula who was born at Community Hospital and has lived here my whole life, I am appalled by the housing situation in my hometown, especially currently with

the situation Covid-19 has created. I have been looking for housing with roommates for 2 months and we have seen inflation of rental prices which were already too high to begin with, as landlords are beginning to realize that people from more affluent metropolitan areas who can now work remotely are invading the housing market and raising the bar for what they are willing to pay for rent and nothing is stopping them from raising their prices. It is displacing the local workforce, who are your taxpayers and constituents. I make $11/hour working for Parks and Recreation. How can I compete with the flood of remote workers who can easily afford to pay upwards of $800/month in rent? Who is going to help me when I cannot find housing and am displaced? Can you please help us?

Besides my harsh criticisms of law enforcement services and the City's failure to protect its working class residents by creating abundant affordable housing and rent caps, furthermore I forcefully protest the proposal for the City of Missoula to buy the Convention Center proposed by Nick Checota for $16.5 million upon completion. I do not see how this will benefit the Community of Missoula as a whole. I do see how it will benefit an elite few in the business class. I will be ashamed to live in this town if the City Council decides that they prioritize a fancy convention center more than the well-being of all of its members, even the ones who can't afford to go to expensive events there. Why doesn't the City spend that money on affordable housing that actually matches the population living at or under the poverty line? Why does the city not allocate those funds towards a plethora of social services we are currently lacking? I cannot believe that the City has the audacity to spend $16.5 million on a Convention Center that the Checotas will then lease from us to profit off of our community like parasites. How do the working and lower class taxpayers in our community benefit from this plan?

If the City of Missoula wants to be inclusive of all people who comprise it, there needs to be a radical shift in our institutional structures and what we allocate funding to. I encourage funds to be revoked from law enforcement and spent instead on equitable medical resources, widespread affordable housing, and individuals and families in crisis. Additionally I advocate for the rejection of the City's acquisition of the multi-million dollar convention center designed to benefit the elite class of Missoula and other similar plans that serve similar unequal interests. Finally, I beg City Council to do something to control the housing market and create preference for local residents and protect the working class so that we are not all displaced by affluent remote workers.

Respectfully,

Amelia Shields