From: J. Kevin Hunt
To: Grp. City Council and City Web Site
Subject: How to Evade Legislative Restrictions on City Housing Actions
Date: Thursday, May 27, 2021 4:48:15 PM

May 27, 2021

Dear Mayor and City Council:

In this email, I propose an end-run around the legislative obstacles to meaningful solutions to our housing emergency that were the subject of much well-deserved complaining and justifiable finger-pointing by Councilpersons during the May 17, 2021 City Council meeting, in response to citizen pleas for rent control and inclusionary zoning.

Our housing situation is not a "crisis" but an EMERGENCY. Accordingly, measures taken to relieve the emergency should have results with immediacy that is commensurate with the exigency.

ONE SUCH INITIATIVE would be undertaking the following package of measures, funded from the tax increment reaped from prior TIF projects and, to the extent possible from the City's $14 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds, along with the millions of dollars in savings this plan would achieve in comparison to current approaches:

(1) The City should accelerate acquisition of land for 'land banks,' including via eminent domain where appropriate.

(2) As transitional owner of that land, the City should:

(a) if deemed by land use specialist lawyers to be within the authority of a political subdivision landowner, attach running COVENANTS to city-acquired land that specify INCLUSIONARY MANDATES and AMI-INDEXED RENT CEILINGS on dwelling units constructed on land parcels; and/or

(b) simply transfer these land parcels ONLY to non-profit entities that agree to attach such COVENANTS that run with the land.

(3) The city and county should direct another portion of the millions of dollars currently wasted through often horribly inefficient public-private partnerships enriching multi-state development consortia,* instead to

(a) PUT OUR LOCAL LABOR FORCE TO WORK building truly affordable homes on the banked land; and

(b) DONATE PORTIONS OF THE BANKED PARCELS to Habitat for Humanity, for its program of volunteer/sweat equity home provision.

This initiative would be FAR, FAR LESS EXPENSIVE than the current approach and would yield MUCH, MUCH MORE truly affordable housing, in a MUCH SHORTER TIME FRAME.

Moreover, it would DRASTICALLY REDUCE the amoral, exploitative practices of out-of-state individual and corporate real estate speculators who are a major factor in our rocketing home prices.

Additionally, these measures as a package would put a brake on the dynamic that is perpetuating economic cleansing and that is close to permanently altering the nature and character of Missoula for the worse. By that, I refer to the shocking demographic disruption resulting from the status quo, whereby 40+% of our city population now consists of wealthy passive income recipients of stock dividends and collection of record-high rents. This has made Missoula #33 out of all U.S. cities in income inequality.

This is why it's time to stop wringing hands and to undertake unorthodox approaches that place people before profits — approaches desperately needed if we are serious about tackling this emergency.

As the old TV ad for The Franciscans said: "Better to light one candle, than to sit and curse the darkness."

/s/ J. Kevin Hunt
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* I join those celebrating the groundbreaking for the 200+ unit Housing Authority project for those with incomes 60% or less than Area Median Income. Unfortunately, continued sole pursuit of that approach while in the throes of this prolonged emergency exacerbated by more typical TIF-financed housing projects, cannot provide reasonably speedy relief to the 15,000+ of our residents below the poverty line or the ~ 30,000 Missoulians one or two unanticipated $300 or less expenses away from houselessness.