



March, 2024

To Mayor Davis and the Missoula City Council:

We are writing as a coalition of organizations, businesses, and individuals deeply concerned about the affordability and accessibility of housing in Missoula for people of all ages, backgrounds, and economic capacities.

As all of you have clearly articulated, and as is plainly obvious from the data, ***Missoula is suffering a crisis-level housing shortage, arguably the most serious in our city's history.*** Rents have skyrocketed, with the current average monthly rent at \$1,388. Home prices have gone haywire, with the median home price rising from \$347,000 to \$539,000 in just the last three years. Unhoused neighbors continue to be brutalized by this market and hover near 600 individuals, in spite of Missoula's initiative to eliminate homelessness by 2022.

We appreciate all that you and prior city leaders have said and done to respond to this housing crisis. The adoption of Missoula's Housing Policy, and thus creation of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, is a step in the right direction. The investment in new subsidized housing, including the Villagio and Trinity developments and several community land trust and deed-restricted homes, is welcome and greatly appreciated.

We believe the proposed near-term deliverables are desperately needed and are a step in the right direction, ***but clearly these efforts are not enough in the face of faster-than-ever population growth and housing demand.*** City staff estimates that, based on current housing needs, Missoula has already underproduced the number of dwelling units by 2,000 to 4,000 as of 2021. They further estimate that, in order to account for future growth and the past underproduction of housing units, Missoula will need to produce between 1,100 and 1,500 units per year *for the next 10 years*. Given that the city permitted only 671 units annually between 2016 and 2021, clearly there is a mismatch between our urgent need for housing and actual housing approval and production.

We are well aware that city leaders and staff are attempting to address this issue, especially through the comprehensive update of Missoula's development and zoning code. ***That said, even though nearly everyone is proclaiming a housing emergency, we as a community are failing through policy and production to provide the dwellings that our fellow***

***Missoulians need right now. Missoula's code reform effort needs to provide real solutions that will more forcefully address our housing crisis.***

***With respect for and acknowledgment of all the work that has already been done, we make the following two requests of Missoula's city leadership, staff, and consultants:***

(1) Ensure project completion by the established deadline of January 2025; (2) Ensure that Missoula's zoning code is among the most pro-housing in America, especially for people who need more modest and accessible homes, both for rent and ownership.

1. ***Timing:*** Missoula is in a housing emergency. We need City leaders to direct staff and consultants to complete the process according to its original timeline of January 2025 in order to meet our collective goals. By meeting the original timeline, we will prove to our community that we understand the urgency of the housing crisis and increase our chances of building the needed 1,100 to 1,500 dwelling units annually within the coming decade. A deadline of January 2025 is both reasonable and needed if we are going to meet Missoula's housing needs far into the future.
2. ***Revitalized and Visionary Land Use Policy:*** Dozens of cities across North America, from Anchorage, AK and Alexandria, VA to our neighbors in Spokane, WA and Edmonton, AB, are adopting remarkable zoning codes, housing and parking policies. These sensible policies re-legalize the incremental development pattern that cities were built on prior to the failed regulations of the mid-20th century. Adopting visionary land use policy allows cities like Missoula to plan appropriately for growth and to ensure that new development is spread equitably among neighborhoods, as opposed to low-wealth neighborhoods taking on disproportionate growth. Missoula can learn from these communities and even do better. Our new zoning code should be built on the following four pillars:

*A. Diverse, abundant and affordable housing*

We need all types of housing, and much more of it, to ensure middle-income Missoulians can afford homes without subsidy. There should be options for residents at all economic levels to ensure that the benefits of stable, affordable and accessible housing are available to all. Our current, outdated zoning policy continues to emphasize development of oversized single-family homes versus more compact and centrally located apartment, condominium, and cottage-style dwellings – the kind of dwellings well-suited to increasingly smaller households and seniors who want to downsize and sell or rent their larger homes to younger adults.

- Allow for more density when developing multi-family buildings than for single family buildings to incentivize the creation of more smaller units rather than fewer larger ones.

- Allow 6-plexes by right city-wide.
- Reduce setbacks to 10' Front, 5' side and 5' rear city-wide.
- Relax height restrictions to 45' city wide.
- As recommended in the interim changes, increase maximum floor area for ADUs to 1,000 square feet.
- Remove buffer zone, activity area, and landscaping requirements for multi-family development.

### *B. Compact, walkable and human scale neighborhoods*

Social connection, human health, affordability, and the climate are all improved by prioritizing interconnected and walkable neighborhoods that are rich in services and amenities. While the focus on housing has often been on the number and cost of dwelling units, another opportunity provided by smart housing policy and development is the creation of wonderful and walkable neighborhoods with safe and contiguous sidewalks, paths, and neighborways minimally disrupted by driveways.

- Eliminate parking mandates for all residential uses of 6 units or less and all commercial uses of less than 6,000 square feet.
- Allow neighborhood commercial uses city-wide.
- Earmark the incremental tax revenue from additional development to support transportation (bus, bike, and walk) and amenities (parks, trails, and Neighborways) that serve more tightly-knit neighborhoods.
- Reduce minimum lot size to 1,200 square feet to encourage innovative development on non standard lots.
- Encourage placemaking by creating a permit pathway for parklets in all neighborhoods.

### *C. Shared responsibility*

It is equitable to legalize the development of diverse and abundant housing as well as small-scale business opportunities in all Missoula neighborhoods. As Missoula's Housing Policy, *A Place to Call Home*, directs us, no neighborhood should take on a disproportionate responsibility for housing our growing population. Every neighborhood should be able to grow and change to adapt to Missoula's future needs.

- Ensure that every neighborhood has zoning which allows an incremental increase in intensity of development.
- Make sure that no neighborhood experiences profound change while other neighborhoods remain the same.
- Simplify the code by reducing the number of residential zoning categories.

*D. Stronger financial and regulatory support for deeper levels of affordability*

We recognize that increasing the supply of available housing alone will not serve all Missoulians, particularly those households which earn below the area median income. In addition to the above recommendations, we need tools to encourage the development of housing that is deeply and permanently affordable. Zoning code reform should create incentives that facilitate the development of more permanently affordable homes while continuing to maintain an accelerated and rigorous volume of housing production overall.

- Create an affordability bonus program that enables greater intensity of development than proposed above for the production of permanently affordable homes.
- Advocate for funding at the national, state, and local levels for subsidized housing.
- Continue to focus Affordable Housing Trust Fund and other public dollars on permanently affordable housing, including deed-restricted units, community land trusts, and Housing Choice Voucher-eligible housing.
- Decrease impact and building permit fees by at least 25% for permanently affordable housing development.

We understand that adopting these reforms and achieving a more diverse and abundant supply of housing is a major undertaking. But it is clear that this is by far the most important issue for Missoulians throughout our community. If we do not act with urgency and boldness, we will see more young adults forced to abandon a hometown they love, more businesses struggle to find anyone to work for them, and more stressed-out people who struggle to pay an outrageous portion of their income for the most basic need of all: a decent home. Just as important, if we do not act boldly now, we will miss a once-in-a-generation opportunity to proactively build housing and related infrastructure that will create truly livable, sustainable, and connected neighborhoods across all of Missoula.

**We ask that you, as our elected leaders, step up to the challenge of this housing crisis, and move assertively and rapidly to finalize a new, visionary development code and approval process for Missoula.** We look forward to working with you and making our beloved city one that is affordable, accessible, and livable for all.

Sincerely,

Your ProHousing Neighbors

**PRO HOUSING** MISSOULA

**North Missoula**  
Community Development Corporation

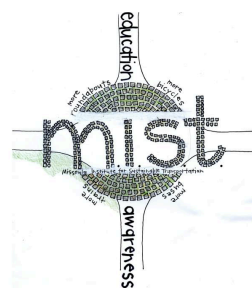


**FAMILIES FOR  
A LIVABLE CLIMATE**  
CONNECT. ENGAGE. ACT.

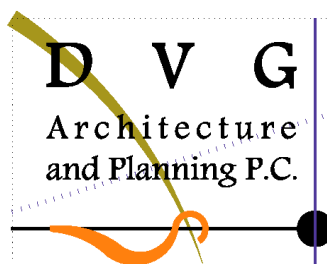
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