



June 1, 2018

To Missoula City Council:

On Monday, June 4, 2018 you will be considering adoption of updates to the Title 20 zoning ordinances. Many of the proposed updates are appreciated and could help address workforce housing affordability within the community.

One section you will be considering, however, looks to make commercial development within the city more difficult. The section (20.75.170 H), referred to as “Building As Sign” creates a set of rules that limit architectural details as well as the use of “corporate colors” in painting a building.

As I’m sure you’re aware, this section of the updates was pulled from the Design Excellence Project. Part of that report indicated that during the initial surveys and workshops with members of the community, one of the things liked most about architecture in Missoula is the diversity of building designs. By creating strict guidelines that limit the architectural details and color schemes that can be used, diversity of design will suffer.

The proposed “Building As Sign” ordinance is vague and open to personal preference of the reviewer. This creates unpredictability in the development process and increases costs. Should the decision be delegated to the Design Review Board, that would also add additional time and steps, increasing costs.

Increasing the costs and difficulty of building commercial spaces in Missoula may encourage businesses to locate buildings outside the city limits or outside the community altogether. This result would contradict the city’s inward focus goal and would increase the pressure put on Missoula’s transportation infrastructure. Other businesses could choose to locate their building in other communities with less restrictive rules on architectural details and color palettes - hurting the economic development efforts of the community and depriving its residents of employment opportunities.

The motivation for this ordinance has reportedly come from one or two examples of perceived poor design within the community. In a community with literally thousands of buildings, that’s a small number of buildings. The vast majority of new commercial construction has been well-received and shows that most businesses in Missoula already respect the architectural character of the city. This is simply not a big enough issue to justify adding complexity and costs to the commercial development process. Additionally, this adds to the workload of an already busy Development Services staff when reviewing development plans, creating even further delay (and costs) in the process.

The Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce is opposed to the adoption of the “Building As Sign” section of the proposed Title 20 updates. We appreciate the efforts of Councilman von Lossberg to amend the ordinance to allow for more freedom in architectural design. Had the amendment passed, it would have made the ordinance easier for businesses to work with and would have allowed greater creativity with branding a building.



Unfortunately, the section discussing corporate colors remains vague and unpredictable. The lack of clarity on how much use of corporate colors is acceptable ensures this will regularly be sent to the Design Review Board, adding time and costs to the development process. The drawings included in the guidelines give a general sense of how the color schemes will be reviewed but lack clarity in regards to the amount of a building that can be painted with corporate colors. In reviewing the test cases provided by Development Services staff, the determinations provided for which buildings comply and which do not are inconsistent – ensuring a high probability that decisions will be appealed.

The Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce hopes you will consider removal of this section of the proposed Title 20 updates before adoption. There is no need to risk the increased costs to commercial development in the community for a problem arising from a very small percentage of buildings. Instead, allow businesses and architects to continue the recent trend of creative, unique buildings that create the diversity of design so highly valued in Missoula.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clint B.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Clint Burson  
Director of Government Affairs  
Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce