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MAYOR HOSTS COMMUNITY DISCUSSION OF HOUSING

Missoula Mayor John Engen invited all Missoulians to join him for a community discussion of the challenges presented by housing prices in Missoula on Thursday, March 13, at 7 p.m. in City Council Chambers at 140 W. Pine St. About 125 people attended.

The gathering opened with the new video “Housing in Missoula: A Community Conversation,” produced by staff from the City’s Communications Office and the Office of Planning and Grants with Missoula Community Access Television staff. Mayor Engen is the narrator. The 18-minute movie features a variety of area residents and professionals discussing the effects of high housing prices on quality and patterns of life.

Following the video, the mayor talked about his Mayor’s Housing Initiative, in which he poses four questions:

- Who needs affordable housing in Missoula?
- Where is housing appropriate?
- What should housing look like?
- How do we as a community help pay for affordable housing?

“We need to ask ourselves some important questions as a community, and I think we need to answer them as well,” Mayor Engen said. “They are all very challenging questions, but I think Missoula is up to the task.”

A panel of four people joined the mayor: Perry Ashby of Wesmont Builders, who is a member of the Mayor’s Housing Team; Rachel Bemis, a real estate loan officer at Missoula Federal Credit Union who was a participant in the film as a Missoula homeowner; Nancy Harte, grants

administrator for the City's HUD housing program; and Chad Nicholson, a city firefighter and recent firefighters' union president.

The goal of the initiative is to share information, inquire about solutions, explore ideas, identify what's missing and cooperate on working toward answers.

Missoula's affordability gap has increased in recent years. Last year's median-priced Missoula house, at about \$206,000, cost about \$119,000 only eight years before. Seventy-eight percent of Missoula residents today could not afford that \$206,000 house. Doing nothing in the face of that fact is simply not acceptable, says Mayor Engen.

The Mayor's Housing Team convened in October to help define the problem of affordability in Missoula and help design the search for solutions. Its members include city and county staff members, builders and developers from the for-profit and nonprofit sectors and representatives of nonprofit housing programs. Mayor Engen and the team are interested in a fresh look at the problem and look forward to hearing new ideas from the public.

A packet containing data about the affordability of housing in Missoula and about the Mayor's Housing Initiative is available from the Mayor's Office. If you'd like to receive it, or if you'd like to invite Mayor Engen to show the video and lead discussion at a meeting of your civic or professional group, please contact Ginny Merriam in the City's Communications Office at 552-6007 or at gmerriam@ci.missoula.mt.us.

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