June 11, 2021

Open Letter to the Spokane City Council
RE: Spokane Housing Action Plan

To our esteemed decision makers,

After careful consideration, we must formally withdraw our support of the City of Spokane's Housing Action Plan. We find the needs assessment to be woefully inadequate, lacking in any necessary pathways for change and failing to recognize the urgency surrounding the severe need for immediate housing in our community.

From the beginning of this process, we have been concerned with the insistent reliance on out-of-date housing information. Despite our best efforts to supply the city with real time data, and growth analysis by national and regional housing experts, these projections have fallen on deaf ears. We contend you cannot make good decisions with bad data.

When it comes to those who are most affected by our housing crisis, we must no longer turn a blind eye to the impacts in our community from a severe lack of housing. For more than a decade, we have failed to build enough homes to meet demands. As a result, housing prices are increasing at a never-before-seen pace. A median home in Spokane County in February of 2016 would cost you $185,000. Today, that same house price has skyrocketed to over $356,500... and climbing. This lack of housing has a greater impact on minorities and families. It also contributes to nearly every major social challenge in our community, from racial equity to greenhouse gas emissions, to family stability to homelessness.

The reason is simple: Spokane has suffered from a 94% reduction in available homes for sale since 2010, along with a limited supply of buildable land.

- Low inventory has led to thousands of families renting who cannot find a place to buy.
- This has created a dangerously low level of rental vacancies of under 1%.
- From personal health to family stress, to student performance in school, to increased levels of homelessness, Spokane's lack of attainable housing has triggered a severe impact on the health of our citizens – especially among families of color and those families with children.
- Spokane has high levels of cost-burdened families spending more of their income on shelter than most similar cities in the state and the US.

Compounding this problem has been a dramatic shift in housing availability with the bulk of new homes being built across the border in Kootenai County over the past few years. This shift has resulted in lost economic opportunity - $6-billion dollars in wages and employment since 2010, $1.1-billion dollars in immediate and ongoing tax revenues. Not to mention the increased greenhouse gas emissions from thousands of new interstate commuters and the added burden on our roads and infrastructure.

And it will get much worse, before it gets any better unless some serious action is taken to correct it.

We are seeing firsthand, many new homebuyers who are fleeing cities like Seattle, Portland and San Francisco are coming here - adding thousands of new residents.
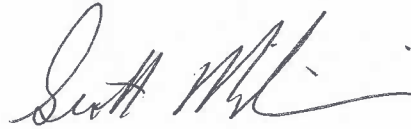
The time to act is now.

We now call on our local leaders to take immediate action. Allow more housing types to be built on our dwindling spaces. Expand growth opportunities. Make home ownership a top priority, reduce and rescind regulatory restrictions and fees on entry level new home construction.

Every day we fail to act, more and more families will be hurt. Already 76% of Spokane families cannot afford to build a new home and for every $1,000 in additional costs, another 189 families are priced out. We cannot make housing more affordable when we keep adding to the expense.

We MUST do everything we can immediately, or for many, Spokane will no longer be a place to call home.
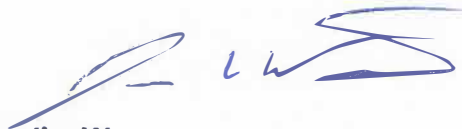
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