

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS POLICY GUIDELINES

- Purpose:** An outline of general policy beliefs and guideline for Missoula Organization of REALTORS® (“MOR”).
- Policy Alignment:** By-Laws Section 9: Advocacy and Section 10: Communications
- Overview:** The Preamble to the REALTOR® Code of Ethics: “Under all is the land. Upon its wise utilization and widely allocated ownership, depend the survival and growth of free institutions and of civilization. REALTORS® should recognize that the interests of the nation and its citizens require the highest and best use of the land and the widest distribution of land ownership. They require the creation of adequate housing, the building of functioning cities, the development of productive industries and farms, and the preservation of a healthful environment.”
- Designated Spokesperson:** MOR policy section 10.1 outlines the president of MOR shall serve as its official spokesperson. Additionally, the President may authorize other MOR members and/or staff to respond to specific requests at their discretion.

### Position Statements

#### **1. Homeownership**

MOR advocates for homeownership opportunities. Homeownership directly impacts neighborhoods, communities, and economic stability. We recognize the need for the production and rehabilitation of quality, safe, and affordable housing in our communities. All persons have a right to own real property and to exercise all the benefits of homeownership without undue encroachment or intrusion by government, groups, or individuals.

#### **2. Housing Affordability**

Availability of housing for all income levels is necessary for balanced and healthy growth of Missoula and the success of our economy. Missoula County has a declining housing affordability index. Lack of housing supply drives up housing prices, placing homes out of reach of many Missoula families. We support simplifying subdivision and development process that encourages new housing construction and does not unnecessarily burden development and homeownership with additional expense.

#### **3. Property Taxation**

We support legislation that will lower real estate property tax rates to help maintain housing affordability. MOR supports an equitable, balanced tax and appraisal structure and responsible government spending. We encourage local governments to explore, utilize and exhaust all other options available for generating revenues. Costs associated with programs for the public good should be shared equitably by all members of the community, real estate should not be singled out to pay for programs and services that benefit the entire community.

#### **4. Environment**

MOR strongly supports the right of every Montanan, as enshrined in Montana's Constitution, to a clean and healthful environment for present and future generations. We are in strong support of green initiatives and ordinances that make homes more environmentally friendly, without unnecessarily raising the cost of homeownership. Efforts to increase energy efficiency should be incorporated whenever possible to do so without creating undue burden upon property owners.

#### **5. Planning**

MOR supports simplified, flexible, and streamlined subdivision and zoning regulations; reflecting contemporary best practices which support development of our communities. We support policies that provide equitable incentives to address housing needs; however, we oppose mandatory programs including inclusionary zoning.

#### **6. Impact / Development Fees**

MOR supports reasonable impact fees to defray the cost of providing public capital improvements which are directly attributable to a new development. MOR believes that impact fees ultimately increase the cost of housing, because these costs are passed to the consumer through increased lot and/or housing prices. Fees should not be used to correct existing deficiencies, to fund a disproportionate share of the cost of off-site improvements, or to deter development.

#### **7. Public Lands**

MOR supports a multi-use approach to the management of our public lands. We support a balance between recreational uses, wildlife habitat and use of natural resources to provide products used in development.

#### **8. Subdivision Law**

MOR supports, easily understandable subdivision laws and regulations that streamline the review process while providing objective review criteria and performance standards. Montana's quality of life includes our river valleys, foothills, mountains and a housing stock that meets market demand across a range of prices. We support subdivision laws and regulations that implement community growth policy, allowing for well-planned development and protection of our natural environment.

#### **9. Inclusion and Non-Discrimination**

MOR has an unwavering commitment to diversity that will ensure the highest level of respect inclusion and nondiscrimination. MOR requests Federal Fair Housing Laws and Montana Human Rights Act be updated and amended to include "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," consistent with the NAR Code of Ethics.

#### **10. Private Property Rights**

MOR supports the rights of private property owners. These essential rights should be fully recognized in all government laws and regulations.

**11. Liability for Environmental Defects**

MOR supports legislation that limits liability for all innocent parties associated with the sale or transfer of environmentally defective properties.

**12. Property Seizure**

MOR believes that it is critical for any legislation addressing the forfeiture of real property because of illegal drug activity to contain language which protects the rights of innocent owners.

**13. Independent Contractor**

MOR believes that the U.S. Internal Revenue Service qualifications are the maximum that should be imposed to qualify for Independent Contractor status. Real estate licensees are specifically exempt from the Montana Worker's Compensation Act and are exempt as independent contractors from the Unemployment Compensation requirements.

**14. Banks' Involvement in Real Estate Brokerage**

MOR strongly opposes expanding the authority of banks and bank holding companies to enable them to engage in real estate brokerage activities. MOR opposes any changes in Montana law that would grant state chartered financial institutions power which are not granted to federally chartered institutions or permit them to engage in real estate activities.