From:	J. Kevin Hunt
To:	Grp. City Council and City Web Site
Subject:	THE EMPEROR"S STRIP TEASE
Date:	Sunday, May 9, 2021 6:07:51 PM

OPEN LETTER TO MAYOR JOHN ENGEN AND MISSOULA CITY COUNCIL:

May 8, 2021

From: J. Kevin Hunt
Resident of Ward 1

Re: The Emperor's Strip Tease — Bizarre and Baffling Contradictory Statements

Dear Mayor and City Council:

An NBC Montana News story today affirmed that the contradictory, confusing and inexplicable babble from those tasked with solving Missoula's multiple crises of housing becomes more incomprehensible with each utterance.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the various statements about the Northside's Tax Increment Financing (TIF)-subsidized, public/private housing project now under development. I refer to claims by Missoula Mayor John Engen, by Master We went we woo woo w we El El Partner Ravara Development Group's Kia Hockstetler, by Seattle development partner InterUrban's Rob Brewster, and by Missoula Office of Housing, Community Development and Innovation Director Eran Pehan and other city housing weeds ße4 — both in terms of contradictions of each other's representations, and in terms of self-contradictions by each in their 4 from assertions made over time.

You will recall that in April 16, 2021 correspondence copied to you, I detailed for you the stark contradictions (a) between assertions to the press by City Housing Director Pehan and statistical reality revealed by official government and academic research data; (b) the same with regard to the statements of developer consortium representatives; (c) the contradictions between the developers and Ms Pehan as to what each said recently, and (d) each one's self-contradictions reflected in their own respective recent statements and what they said in February.

Now we have a very curious statement by Director Pehan for which YOU, the approvers and promoters of policy — not common citizens such as I — should be immediately demanding clarification.

A story published today (May 8, 2021), written by NBC Montana reporter Brady Brewster, highlighted a letter to you by a concerned citizen who, knowing persons in desperate need of an affordable room, implored you to address the critical shortage of rentals (air bnb's, etc.) by adopting regulations limiting the number of days per year that a dwelling unit may be offered for short-term rental. No response from the Mayor or Council to that citizen letter was reported, but Housing Director Pehan provided this statement to reporter Brewster, as recited in the story:

"...As far as short-term rentals crimping the Missoula housing market, Pehan said she hasn't

seen any evidence.

"She said the city conducted research when developing a housing policy a few years ago. 'At that point in time, we found that the number of short-term rentals in Missoula wasn't numerous enough to impact our housing market, so we didn't really explore any further, and I think that's still the case today,' she stated."

Setting aside for a moment that Ms. Pehan dismisses the regulation of short-term rentals on the basis of data from "a few years ago," the effect of which she assumes without any basis to "still be the case today," it's obvious that Ms. Pehan is unconcerned with the number of short-term rentals in Missoula. She acknowledged in the NBC Montana story that with regard to the tally of short-term rentals registered with city as required by local law – 116 — "We suspect there are other short-term rentals in Missoula that have not gone through this process."

Her "suspicions" could have been confirmed by a few taps on her smartphone. As NBC Montana's Brewster reported:

"According to airdna.co, a site that ranks rental markets, Missoula has 360 active [short-term] rentals ...".

The May 8, 2021 NBC Montana story by reporter Brewster goes on to say that Ms. Pehan reiterated that this number is too small to have an effect.

This is, of course, completely contrary to the proclaimed city objective to build our way out of the problem by massively and rapidly increasing supply of TIF-subsidized available (albeit not truly "affordable') housing. As I highlighted in my April 16, 2021 open letter to Missoulian reporter David Erickson copied to you with the invitation to respond (not done by any of you), the Northside TIF project was touted last month (April, 2021) by Mayor Engen as being a "game changer" in the City government's campaign to remedy the crisis in affordable housing. City officials gushed that the "up to 70" units being earmarked as "affordable" (if one makes $41/hr) out of 70 being subsidized would meet 70% of the city's goal of adding 100 units of affordable housing in one year, set forth in its "A Place to Call Home" vision statement.

Assuming arguendo that the "up to 70" out of 270 units were actually to be "affordable" to anyone earning less than $96,000 per year (contrary to reality, as I proved in my April 16 missive), then this obvious question arises: if that constitutes a "game-changer" in ameliorating Missoula's housing crisis as Mayor Engen said in April, then how is it that Ms. Pehan says a few days later that limiting the time span annually within which 360 dwelling units may be offered for short-term rental, in order to increase supply, would "have no effect?"

Surely many others besides me are noticing these baffling, bizarre discrepancies. Some independent local media are airing programs about the many questions arising from the unusual financial schemes employed by the city to publicly subsidize multi-millionaires, big developers and Montana's biggest bank chain in their construction of buildings that do not house a single person or that promise a handful of "affordable" units among the many to be marketed to the idle rich from out of state willing to pay any price to have a top-floor condo in our city, in a TIF-subsidized hi-rise taking the place of existing, actually affordable housing, displacing residents of modest means who face months and even years of couch-surfing given the three-year Section 8 waiting list.

The gradual but steady 'reopening' of Missoula as COVID-19 vaccination numbers climb, heralds an impending resumption of the SRO City Council meetings that often lasted until 10 p.m. or even midnight as lines of citizens in queue to speak against TIF-subsidized projects extended beyond the confines of the Council chambers.

With September primary and November general municipal elections looming in which six of the twelve City Council seats and that of our four-term, 16-year incumbent Mayor are on the line, a resumption of citizen investigations of the sketchy housing and Ponzi-esque financing policies and practices that produce a smattering of "affordable" housing that is less so than the unaffordable market-rate housing of 2017, must be making some of the neoliberal incumbents and a few beneficiaries of the regime's socialism for the oligarchy rather nervous.

When faced with the spectre of potential exposure and disruption of increasingly unpopular undertakings that have been obscured by euphemistic double-speak, the Deciders in a municipality often seek to neutralize such grassroots democracy movements by announcing the formation of citizen "task forces" or "oversight committees" appointed by the regime as proof of its commitment to transparency and clean dealings.

I have served on this sort of powerless body that city governments create when there is a purulent controversy growing in the community. Invariably they are touted as "well-balanced," and just as invariably the appointments are allocated in such manner that a majority will approve of the city policies over which oversight is purportedly being done.

And so it happens that yesterday (May 7, 2021) the County made its sole allocated appointment to newly created "Affordable Housing Resident Oversight Committee."

The City Council appointed five persons to the 11 (9 voting and 2 alternate) - member AHROC on April 28.

AHROC bylaws provide that six of the nine voting members consist of the Mayor, the City Council President, and four appointees from various parts of the housing industry.

According to City's web site, the AHROC will "oversee key functions of the Trust Fund" which entails "approving the administrative policies and the annual Allocation Plan," but the AHROC "will not make funding decisions" on projects supported by the Trust Fund.

Thirty-three of 44 AHROC applicants were interviewed by the City Council, according to an April 29 Montana Current story by Martin Kidston. Of those, Kidston reported that "14 applicants represented general community members and seven represented community members with experience seeking housing assistance." He added that "[t]wo interviews were held with members of a housing nonprofit, seven with members of the real estate community, and two from members of the banking industry. The committee bylaws require a mix of all categories."

The Council members reportedly tweaked the AHROC bylaws to provide for its appointment of three, rather than one, "members from the general community."

Councilwoman Gwen Jones — one of the Council voices adamant that critics of the City's 'creative' use of TIF simply "don't understand" Tax Increment Financing — told The Current that the 'general community' slots constitute "truly the biggest category." That is highly

suspect given it consists of merely three out of the 9 voting members and the affiliations of the "general community member" with no such life experience, and of the alternate, were not reported.

A Public Records Act request for copies of the appointees' applications will be forthcoming from me.

Most TROUBLING is that ONLY TWO members are drawn from persons with life experience on housing assistance.

TWO. OUT OF NINE VOTING MEMBERS.

The "Composition" of the AHROC is given by the City Web Site as follows:

* Nine members and two alternates

* Participation is voluntary with no compensation

* Alternate members take part in discussions, share perspectives, but do not vote

* Staggered one, two and three year terms initially, then three year terms running from January 1st - December 31

* Members and alternates must attend Board and Committee training once during their appointment(s). Training is offered twice per year by the City of Missoula or Missoula County.

The "Membership Structure" of the AHROC is described on the City Web site this way:

* The mayor or designee

* City Council President or designee

* Executive Director of the Missoula Housing Authority or designee

* Three (3) general community members, two (2) of which are currently, or have within the last two years, received some form of help in securing their housing

* One (1) member from a housing non-profit

* One (1) member from the field of housing or real estate

* One (1) member from the field of banking and/or finance

* Two (2) alternate members are considered at-large

The appointment details are given as follows:

* Mayor will appoint two (2) voting members and one (1) alternate

* City Council will appoint three (3) voting members and one (1) alternate

* Missoula Board of County Commissioners will appoint one (1) voting member

[NOTE: While the foregoing "Membership Structure" details add up 9 voting and two alternate members, the appointment details add up to only 8 voting members instead of 9.]

THE AHROC MAY INDEED BE a bona fide effort to involve stakeholder groups and necessary participants in the housing crises' (plural intentional) amelioration. The Affordable Housing Trust Fund is a good thing. But the stated function of the AHROC has the appearance of toothless window dressing with token representation of the restless, teeming underclass.

It may, then, turn out that AHROC serves a purpose similar to that of the National Labor Relations Act, the purpose of which was claimed by Congress to be empowerment of workers but that was, in reality, to end the contagion of industrial warfare spreading throughout the nation's factories as laborers rose up to demand their right to organize and to act collectively in pursuit of better pay and working conditions.

Innumerable observers now await the Mayor's appointments prior to opining whether the AHROC is for real, or whether it instead is part of a tactical strip tease, a burlesque routine distracting from the fact that the Emperor has no clothes, thereby quelling a rising populist electoral wave.

Sincerely,

/s/ J. Kevin Hunt
308 Parkside Lane
Missoula, MT 59802

jkhesq23@gmail.comjkh