

September 17, 2019

Washington State Department of Commerce, Growth Management Services  
1011 Plum Street SE  
P.O. Box 42525  
Olympia, WA 98504-2525

Subject: City of Yakima Commitment to Affordable Housing Action Plan Project

Dear GMA Grant Section,

This letter is to acknowledge the full support of the Yakima City Council to undertake a Housing Action Plan, as contemplated by E2SHB 1923 and made available by the grant application. Last fall, the Yakima City Council identified the need to address Affordable Housing as one of their 2019 Strategic Priorities. With this focus, City Council directed staff to begin preparation of policy initiatives and tasks that would encourage new construction of housing units, develop strategies to specifically encourage housing for low to moderate income families, maintain existing housing stock and streamline permitting processes. On February 12, 2019, The Yakima City Council held a study session on Affordable Housing at which over 24 strategies were discussed. The Council directed various tasks to the Yakima Planning Commission, the Council Partnership Committee and reserved other items for full City Council consideration.

On May 7, 2019, the Yakima City Council voted to initiate a Housing Action Plan (HAP) that would include a community engagement component. The Council recognized that significant policy changes may impact existing neighborhoods and could benefit from broad messaging, listening sessions and careful presentation to the community. With multiple, complex strategies under review at the same time, there is strong potential that efforts would become fragmented and not produce a cohesive or effective program without guidance of a Housing Action Plan that includes community engagement.

The City of Yakima is committed to developing a Housing Action Plan. Affordable Housing is a top priority for the Yakima County Homeless Housing Network which has provided data and policy suggestions to the City. The Central Washington Homebuilders and the Yakima Housing Authority have partnered with the City of Yakima to explore strategies utilizing non-profit and for-profit approaches to develop more housing units. The Yakima Planning Commission has already held study sessions and public hearings to develop ordinance recommendations to the City Council on revising density in the R-1 Zoning district, to allow duplexes and accessory dwelling units, to utilize the in-fill exemption in RCW 43.21C.229, and to streamline permitting processes. These ordinance changes are scheduled for City Council in October 2019.

The City applied for a \$25,000 Yakima Community Foundation Grant in the spring of 2019 to help support the HAP project, but was not successful in obtaining this funding. City resources are limited, especially for planning efforts. Without grant assistance, the community engagement process may be severely constrained. The City remains concerned about a fragmented approach

to implementing Affordable Housing strategies without the assistance from a HAP. With grant assistance, the HAP can include effective Community Engagement as well as provide a strategy to develop more housing units.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this grant application.

Sincerely,

Kathy Coffey, Mayor  
City of Yakima, Washington

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