Letters to the Editor (LTE) – Tips and Talking Points

A letter to the editor is an effective way to demonstrate public support for the proposed agricultural land subdivision regulations. Thousands of Missoula County residents read the newspapers every day, as do elected officials and their staff. Letter to the editor also provide sharable content for online social media as well. Here are some instructions, tips and talking points for writing and submitting LTE’s.

General Letter-Writing Tips and to-dos:

- **Be timely**—Responding to a current issue or a recent article or column is one of the best ways to increase your chances of getting published. Be sure to mention the name of the article and the date it was written in the beginning of your letter.
- **Get a new signer**—Most newspapers won’t print multiple letters from one person over a short period of time. If you've already published a letter, get someone else to sign future ones.
- **Keep it short and simple**—Keep your points short and clear, and stick to one subject. Make your first sentence short, compelling and catchy. Keep it well under the word limit.
- **Get personal**—Newspapers, at their core, are community entities. Editors will be much more likely to publish a letter, and the letter will have much more impact, if it demonstrates local relevance. For example, if you or your family owns land or farms, please mention that in your letter.

Sending your Letter:

- Paste your final letter into the body of an email (don’t send as an attachment).
- Put the editor’s email address in the “To” field.
- Put “letter to the editor—farmland conservation” in the “Subject” line.
- The salutation should read, “Dear editor,” and then be followed by your letter.
- Make sure to include your name, address and phone number with the letter. The papers will only print your name and city, but editors must call you to confirm authorship before running a letter.
- If your letter doesn’t appear, don’t be afraid to call the opinion page editor after a few days to ask whether it will run.

Newspaper submission info:

- Missoulian, oped@missoulian.com (300 word limit)
- Missoula Independent editor@missoulanews.com

Follow up: once your letter is published, please post the link to your Facebook page to further expand your audience! Also, tweet it to your network if you are on Twitter.

Main Talking Points (please put into your own words, and add any personal story or specifics):

Core message: I am very disappointed that Missoula County Commissioners Curtiss, Rowley and Rye voted against the Planning Board’s recommendations to protect our disappearing farmland from subdivision and development.

- The proposed rules would have conserved the most important agricultural soil in Missoula County, and were the product of years of community involvement and hard work by County staff, the planning board, local food and conservation advocates.
• The farmland conservation measures that Commissioners voted only applied to the most important soil and farmland, and were recommended by the County’s own planning board.
• The farmland conservation rules were broadly supported by many local organizations and businesses, elected leaders, as well as farmers and conservationists.
• The Commissioners still have an affirmative duty under state law, reinforced by the Montana constitution, to mitigate the loss of important farmland to sprawl.
• Saving some of the last, best soil and farmland in Missoula County is more important than another strip mall or subdivision.
• The failure of County Commissioners to enact clear, predictable rules for development will weaken Missoula’s capacity to maintain a vibrant, local food system well into the future and lead to the continued loss of open space. Their inaction does nothing to resolve the disputes that occur when subdivisions are proposed on important agricultural soil.
• I urge Commissioners to reconsider their decision not to mitigate for loss of farmland.

Why we need to conserve farmland:

• Farmland is a precious, non-renewable, and extremely limited resource, and an important part of our economy, our landscape, and our heritage!
• Once fertile soil is paved over, it’s gone forever – without land to farm in Missoula County, we cannot produce local food.
• According to the American Farmland Trust, the U.S. loses 50 acres of farmland per hour. Here in Missoula County, 30,000 acres of valuable farmland has been paved over—we have lost an average of three football fields of valuable soil per DAY, over the last 30 years.

Benefits of Regulations to Protect Agricultural Land:

• These regulations will provide developers with a clear, predictable and fair process.
• The proposed regulations are recommended by the County’s own planning board, after years of public process that involved many community stakeholders.
• Working farm and ranchland benefit all of the residents of Missoula County. A vibrant local food system enhances the quality of life, fuels our economy, and provides self-reliance in the face of climate change.
• Protecting agricultural land also protects open space, hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities.