



**To: Missoula City Council**

**Re: Cemetery Monuments**

The Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce works to create a thriving, safe and economically vibrant community by developing a strong, healthy and encouraging business environment. A healthy business climate provides the community with the jobs residents need and the revenue necessary to drive the economy. With more than 800 members, the Chamber is the largest business association in the community.

The Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce does not believe it is the place of government to take over private industry. In order to continue to grow and thrive as a community, Missoula must be able to attract new businesses, whether home-grown or brought in from outside. To be an attractive location for business, Missoula must be viewed as a business-friendly environment. A government has the unequalled potential to use taxpayer-subsidized advantages to undercut a competitor's pricing and this does not create the image we support.

"Our Missoula business community provides much to the overall community such as helping fund the important work of many non-profit organizations, supporting the University of Montana, and providing much needed jobs for those choosing Missoula as home. We believe the City serves better by creating a supportive business climate by making it easier for businesses to succeed and grow rather than by directly competing against them."

Based on the Chamber's significant pro-business mission, we cannot support the decision by the Missoula Cemetery to enter into the business of creating and selling monuments.

There are currently multiple vendors available within Missoula that serve the public's need in this area. These businesses contribute to the local economy and pay property taxes. The cemetery would enjoy a number of unfair advantages in competing with these businesses. The cemetery's operations are already subsidized by the city providing the salaries, benefits, facilities and insurance for staff. The cemetery also does not, as a city-owned property, pay into the tax pool. All of these contribute to the ability of the cemetery to undercut prices and drive out private-sector businesses from the market.

Additionally, current statutes would create a conflict of interest for the Cemetery Director as well as the Cemetery Board. Current statutes state:

- "Missoula City Cemetery and the Missoula City Cemetery Board of Trustees at their sole discretion shall have authorization to review, approve, or reject any monuments placed or presented for placement on the cemetery grounds that do not meet the integrity of the Missoula City Cemetery."
- "Monuments currently do not have a height restriction. However, the Missoula City Cemetery Director or designated representative and the Missoula City Cemetery Board of Trustees shall