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Washington Realtors ad campaign focuses on expanding home choices, passage of HB 1727

OLYMPIA – On Sunday (March 18) Washington television stations will begin airing advertising designed to generate the support of the public and the Legislature for House Bill 1727. The House has unanimously approved HB 1727, which clarifies that city and county plans to accommodate growth must provide sufficient land for homes needed to accommodate Washington’s growing population.

“HB 1727 will help provide more housing opportunities by ensuring growth plans match job growth and housing preparation,” said Washington Realtors Chief Executive Officer, Steve Francks. “Every new employee that takes a newly created job needs a place to call home each night. If we’re not ready for that, then we’re encouraging sprawl, driving up home prices, and contributing to traffic jams.”

Francks said that the third phase of a \$1.3-million advertising campaign would begin March 18 to help move forward HB 1727. The campaign is designed to call attention of the public – particularly middle-income home buyers -- to the shortage of affordable homes and the promise of a solution to the crisis. The advertisements may be viewed at <http://www.ItsaPriority.com>.

Home prices have risen by more than 60 percent statewide over the last five years, far outpacing wages, which have risen only about 14 percent over the same period.

The resulting gap has left Washington with the worst home affordability rate in 15 years, according to the Center for Real Estate Research at Washington State University. The Center’s Housing Affordability Index showed that first-time home buyers in Washington generally have

only about 50 percent of what they need to carry the mortgage on a median-priced home. Francks said the gap between home prices and family budget is trapping families in the rental cycle or forcing them to hit the highways to find a home in an area far from the workplace that will not break the family budget.

Washington Realtors estimate that constituents have sent legislators more than 12,000 messages urging their support of strategies to enhance the supply of homes that middle-income families can afford. The ads that begin airing on Sunday, urge Washington residents to contact their legislators in support of HB 1727 and to go to the Internet site www.ItsaPriority.com for additional strategies to enhance the supply of affordable homes.

Francks said data shows that a shortage of middle-priced homes is behind the relentless price increases, and he warned that the crisis demands a legislative solution.

“The ‘market’ can’t correct what it hasn’t created. Of all the factors that influence the price of home, only the price of land is controlled by government — and it’s the only aspect of home prices that hasn’t remained flat over the last several years,” said Francks. “Government decides what can be built and where. Cities and counties provide the backbone — roads, water, sewer and other essential infrastructure — that serves each home. Community planners calculate how many homes will be allowed in urban and rural areas to meet job growth and other factors.”

The bill’s key components include the following:

- Ensures the land-use and housing elements of comprehensive plans adopted under the Growth Management Act (GMA) provide sufficient land for homes to accommodate projected growth.
- Adds mixed-use development and accessory dwelling units to the land-use management techniques that comprehensive plans provide to accommodate housing needs.
- Authorizes counties and cities to establish sub-regions to address housing and employment markets that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

Last week the state House approved HB 1727 on a vote of 97-0. The legislation is now before the Senate Government Operations & Elections Committee for consideration.

For more information, please contact Barbara J. Lally 360-943-3100.