CITY OF ELLENSBURG, WASHINGTON
Minutes of Council Meeting, Special Session

Date of Meeting: June 24, 2002
Time of Meeting: 6:30 p.m.
Place of Meeting: Council Chambers, 102 North Pearl Street

Councilmembers Present: Barry, Collins, Lillquist, Savidge, Sowards and Mayor Bassett

Others present were City Manager Barkley; Parks and Recreation Director Archer; Deputy Clerk Keno; Daily Record City Reporter Muir and approximately eleven members of the audience.

City Manager Barkley distributed a graft showing the increase/decrease in sales tax receipts compared to one year ago from June 1, 2001 through June 2, 2002.

At its March 11, 2002 special meeting Council referred the matter of an off-leash dog park to the Parks & Recreation Commission with the specific goal of developing site specific recommendations, along with a financial feasibility or impact statement. Council also suggested that it would be appropriate for a citizens user group supporting this idea to work with the Commission in developing its recommendations. The purpose of this special meeting is to consider the information gathered by the Commission and user group and to provide further direction to the Commission and/or staff.

OFF-LEASH DOG PARK

Parks and Recreation Director Archer summarized the agenda report. In response to the user group issue, a committee was formed known as the Kittitas County Off-Leash Area (KCOLA). Their stated objective is to "work on proposals and issues regarding an off-leash dog park for Kittitas County". The Commission reviewed Council’s referral over the course of three of its meetings. The KCOLA group performed research and provided significant input during the course of these discussions. The Commission also requested input from Kittitas County which indicated that it currently has no law restricting pet owners from walking their pets off-leash on public lands in the County. The County indicates it has no funds available to participate in the development of a dog park.

Through the course of considering many potential sites, the idea of using the City’s old landfill site near the west interchange was presented. The City of Spokane has successfully developed a similar dog park at its old landfill site. Ellensburg owns 32.59 acres adjacent to the KOA campground and the Yakima River at this site. This property served as the City landfill from 1937 to 1973, and has been essentially vacant since its closure.

Preliminary research done on the property by KCOLA members and staff show that a dog park may be a feasible use of the site. Benefits of the site include its sufficient size, proximity and access to the Yakima River as well as an on-site pond, mature trees for sun and wind protection, access to and visibility from I-90 as a potential visitor’s attraction, and its limited use potential or marketability by
Potential problems with the property include access to the site (it is landlocked by KOA owned property), likely hazardous waste clean-up issues (although the Department of Ecology (DOE) has indicated to KCOLA that funds exist to assist with toxic clean-up for the benefit of reclaiming public lands), and costs associated with development of the property. Parks & Recreation Director Archer indicated uncertainty as to whether the City owns access to the pond on the property.

Joe Blazek, Parks & Recreation Chairperson, advised the Commission collectively supports the City landfill property as the best potential site for location of an off-leash dog park. Due to the considerable amount of time and effort necessary to perform further research and assessment of the property, the Commission did not want to proceed until it had a sense of Council’s level of support for the project. In answer to Council inquiry, part of the site is in the City’s urban growth area and part of it is not. As part of its previous direction Council had asked for a financial analysis. While none of that work has been done to this point, costs are assumed to be fairly significant in addition to clean up costs for the landfill.

According to Donna Duvall, KCOLA secretary, some funds are potentially available through the Department of Ecology (DOE) for restoring public properties that have hazardous waste on them. The landfill has not been looked at since 1986 and it is unknown if the contamination is still capped. In answer to Council inquiry, the landfill was monitored for a number of years and subsequently certified closed by the Department of Ecology.

Council viewed a video on the off-leash dog park at Marymoor Park in Redmond, Washington. Jim & Judy Trockel, representatives of S.O.D.A. (Serve Our Dog Areas), gave a presentation on the development and maintenance of the dog park at Marymoor and offered their group’s assistance with development of such a facility in Ellensburg. In answer to Council inquiry, there are currently 1,172 licensed dogs in the City. The tourism attraction of such a facility as well as its potential for generation of sales tax revenue was briefly discussed.

Fundraising was discussed. State money is available for development of new parks but not for operations and maintenance. The Master Plan for the City’s park system is still in process. Based upon a survey conducted by the Parks Department in January 2002 an off-leash dog park is very low on the priority list.

In answer to Council inquiry, KCOLA has not obtained its 501c(3) tax status and does not plan to do so until a site for the dog park is selected. In order to apply for any grant monies KCOLA will need to obtain its non-profit tax status. In answer to Council inquiry, the City currently has no other plans for the old landfill site.

Council discussed the need for further research on accessibility and hazardous waste issues as well as any other legal problems connected with the site. The amount of staff time this would involve is unknown. Council briefly discussed the issue of using all volunteer labor on such a project and potential conflicts with City labor union contracts.
While generally supportive of an off-leash dog park, Council questioned what it would take to develop such a park and expressed reservations about funding operation and maintenance costs for such a facility. The City has already committed to bringing the McElroy and West Ellensburg Parks projects on line; a considerable amount of money will be spent on operations and maintenance at those facilities. Council consensus was to find out if the landfill site is usable and accessible. Staff will attempt to obtain some initial answers on the viability of the site from the DOE and the Department of Health (DOH) and report back to Council. Staff will research accessibility issues as well as any legal issues. If Council wishes to proceed following staff’s initial report the City may need to enlist additional help.

**ADJOURN** Adjourn at 8:40 p.m. Collins

Affirmed

Mayor

ATTEST: City Clerk