CITY OF ELLENSBURG, WASHINGTON
Minutes of Council Meeting, Special Session
Date of Meeting August 12, 2002
Time of Meeting 6:30 p.m.
Place of Meeting Council Chambers, 102 North Pearl Street

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

Others present were City Manager Barkley; City Attorney Pidduck; Senior Planner Smith; Planner Caspar; Deputy Clerk Keno; Daily Record City Reporter Muir; and approximately 29 members of the audience.

JOINT CITY COUNCIL AND PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION - OFFICE LAND USES AND COMMERCIAL ZONING

Senior Planner Smith summarized the staff report. On June 17, 2002 Council held a public hearing to consider amending the zoning text for the Commercial Highway (C-H) and Commercial Tourist (C-T) zoning districts to allow general office uses in those zones. The Planning Commission recommended the text amendments for approval to Council. As a result of the public testimony presented at the hearing, Council tabled the proposed text amendments and requested the issue of offices in commercial zones beyond the central commercial area be docketed as a Comprehensive Plan amendment during the year 2002 amendment process. At the Planning Commission’s request, Council has set this meeting for a joint study session to discuss:

• The issue of allowing general office uses in commercial zones beyond the central commercial core; and

• Policy direction for commercial land uses in general.

Council reviewed a map showing the various commercial zoning districts in the City as well as a chart comparing the amount of acreage in the various commercial zones as of 1992 versus today and the number of zone changes that have been granted since 1992.

General office land uses have not been well-discussed in the Comprehensive Plan; there is minimal policy direction as to exactly where they should be allowed to locate, although there is some policy guidance that new public buildings for administrative purposes should be located in the Central Business District (CBD) and very clear policy direction that general retail activities should be limited to the CBD.

The basic question is whether allowing general office uses in the C-H and the C-T zones will negatively impact the community’s Vision for retaining a “strong mix of commercial, financial, governmental, judicial, professional, cultural, residential and recreational activities” in the downtown.
The arguments on both sides are more subjective than objective, with very little tangible evidence available to support either side.

Advantages, as compiled by staff, for the zoning text amendment are as follows:

• Historically, office uses have been allowed in the C-H and C-T.

• Adding office uses will allow more compatible use development to occur in the C-H and C-T zones where businesses tend to have little interdependence and require exposure to automobile traffic.

• Adding office uses in the C-H and C-T will allow for wider use of existing buildings in those zones that are designed for and occupied by office use.

• Allowing office uses in the C-H and C-T provides for greater flexibility and choice to the business community.

• Limiting office uses to the CBD may also negatively impact the parking situation in the CBD because additional office employees will occupy limited downtown parking spaces. It may also be a negative selling point for potential offices to locate in the CBD as employees will have to move cars periodically to avoid parking tickets.

The Downtown Task Force has drafted a proposed resolution opposing the proposed zone changes and recommends Council turn down the Comprehensive Plan Amendment Proposal concerning additional zoning for offices.

Planning Commission and Downtown Task Force members in attendance introduced themselves.

Jeff Greear, Planning Commission member, indicated the Commission is trying to simplify the zones and has performed a great deal of research on the subject. The Commission’s position is that it won’t make any difference to allow offices in the C-H and C-T zones. In answer to Council inquiry, even though the Commission’s membership has changed the current membership is in unanimous agreement for the zone change.

Martin Kaatz, Downtown Task Force member, indicated the Task Force is concerned with the concept of offices. The proposed zoning change would more than double the area available for office use. The Task Force does not see a problem with lack of office space in the CC and CC-II zones— especially with future development of the vacant University Auto location and the future departure of Kelleher Motors. The integrity of downtown commercial entities needs to be maintained.

Council listened to citizen comments in support of and in opposition to the zone change.

Roger Weaver, Neil Kayser, Jack Piper, Kathy Willett, Tom Morris, Steve Anderson, Bob Hood and Robert Terrell all spoke in favor of the proposed zoning change. Some of the reasons cited in support of the zone change include: 1) a lack of affordable property— inflated land values; 2) inadequate
parking for employees and patrons; 3) lack of modern facilities with technological capabilities and compliance with ADA and accessibility issues requirements.

Dick Elliott, Fennelle Miller, Joe Bach, Frank Erickson, Dorothy Stanley, Jerry Williams, Larry Nickel, Colin Condit, Ken Fyall, Donna Nylander, Ken Munsell and Martin Kaatz all spoke in opposition to the proposed zoning amendment. Some of the reasons cited in opposition to the zone change include: 1) inconsistency with the Vision and Goals Statement of the City’s Comprehensive Plan; 2) protecting the ambience of the downtown and its historic structures; 3) sprawl comes when zoning is not protected; and 4) lack of solid data to support the Planning Commission’s recommendation.

In answer to Council inquiry, no effort has been made to rezone the C-T zone at the West Interchange. Council could do a region-wide rezone or the individual property owners in the area would have to request it.

Council would like to see more facts about vacant properties available in these zones, including square footage and parking areas. Due to the short time frame between now and the August 19 meeting staff would only be able to compile speculative information from talking to local realtors and finding out what is out there. Staff will not able to provide information on redevelopment, ADA or accessibility issues.

Council directed staff to bring the proposed zoning text amendment back for consideration at the August 19, 2002 regular meeting. Council also requested specific information regarding: 1) an inventory of and cost for available office space in the CC and CC-II zones; 2) the potential for office development in the RO zone now or through potential redevelopment; 3) landscaping and lot coverage differences in the CC, CC-II, CH, TC and RO; and 4) a discussion of process issues relating to the Comp Plan amendment vs. zoning code amendment as well as the compatibility of office uses with the T-C zone intent statement. Staff will provide market information opportunities in the C-H, C-T, C-C, and C-C II zones understanding that the agenda report is due on Wednesday.

**ADJOURN** Adjourn at 9:50 p.m. Perrie

Affirmed

Mayor

ATTEST: City Clerk