ROLL CALL was answered by Councilmembers Barry, Bassett, Carlson, Lillquist, Perrie, and Mayor O’Brien. Councilmember Niner joined the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Others present were Community Development Director Witkowski; Energy Services Director Titus; Associate Planner Eyerly; Planning/Permit Technician Johnson; Deputy Clerk Keno; Bill Grimes of Studio Cascade, Inc.; and 25 plus members of the audience.

The purpose of the special meeting is to give Council members an opportunity to review and discuss the content of the draft comprehensive plan chapters and receive public comments on those draft chapters. The draft chapters scheduled for review at this meeting are Chapter 7 Housing, Chapter 9 Economic Development and Chapter 11 Historic Preservation.

Chapter 7 Housing

Chapter 7 examines housing supply, condition, occupancy, and affordability and develops programs for meeting future housing demand.

The community has seen a great deal of population growth in the last 10 years, new residency and residential movement, coupled with an increasing number of homeownership units and escalating rental and home prices. Demand, particularly among those with low and moderate incomes, has not decreased. Approximately 20% of homeowners are paying monthly housing expenses that exceed 30% of household income. Renters are in a tighter spot with more than 60% paying more than 30% of household income on monthly housing.

Ellensburg’s greatest housing needs include a more diverse base of affordable rental opportunities signified by range of rent and housing type, allowing the market to relax upward rental pricing pressure. In addition, the community needs affordable single-family homes. Potential homebuyers are getting priced out of the market due to insufficient income and escalating real estate prices. The seven policy directions identified in the 1995 comprehensive plan are carried forward in this update.

Issues with housing include affordability, density, early stages of partnerships, and the single family housing expansion to the North and Northeast. Policy issues include additional flexibility for housing development, respect of neighborhoods, service of different demographic sectors, lifestyle and socioeconomic issues.

Priority projects in the Housing chapter include: 1) City coordination with the Housing Authority; 2) revision of Planned Unit Development (PUD) standards; 3) permit varied housing types; 4) investigate
funding programs; 5) allow a density bonus program; and 6) conduct an inventory of City-owned property.

Chapter 11 Historic Preservation

The comprehensive plan update carries forward the City’s work in historic preservation. This historic preservation element is included in the plan update as Chapter 11 and includes the downtown historic district, residential historic district and landmarks register by reference. Chapter 11 underscores the importance the community places on historic resources and emphasizes the need to preserve and restore those resources as a fundamental part of maintaining the community’s identity.

Important issues include: 1) a lack of flexible or multi-use zoning alternatives within or around the Central Business District (CBD); 2) multiple property ownerships and parcel configurations in the CBD act as barriers to large-scale redevelopment or to reconfiguration of the commercial and industrial districts to accommodate large retail users; 3) lack of compiled information to address the distinctiveness of the CBD’s architectural features and how the different styles relate to each other; and 4) insufficient local designer and contractor experience in the rehabilitation of historic structures in a manner that conforms with current life-safety building code requirements.

Policy includes facility building reuse, identification and protection of resources, and maintenance of CBD character.

Priority projects in Chapter 11 are: 1) design workshops for contractors to provide training on historic preservation; 2) preservation workshops; 3) development of a CBD plan land use element; 4) development of a heritage corridor plan; and 5) development of a program that uses existing reinvestment incentives and tax incentive programs to encourage development of housing in the CBD in a manner consistent with the area’s historic character. An audit of the International Building Code (IBC) is also suggested.

Chapter 9 Economic Development

Chapter 9 illustrates Ellensburg’s existing economic patterns and potential economic opportunities. Much of this chapter’s material is based on the 2000 Census and the market study prepared as part of this plan update by ECONorthwest. That market study provides an in-depth assessment of the characteristics and anticipated demand for commercial and industrial land. This plan provides policies and programs to help Ellensburg build a promising economic future.

Motives for economic development include local quality of life and competitive advantage (access to resources, capital labor). Economic development polices include 1) encourage basic sector development, 2) collaborate with CWU; 3) encourage local multiplier; 4) establish Ellensburg as the rural center for the lower Kittitas Valley; and 5) CBD vitality.

Important issues in this chapter are: 1) land availability; 2) the presence of CWU; 3) the community’s
central position in the valley and the County seat; 4) the slow fiscal slide of the economy; and 5) public transportation.

Economic development in Ellensburg suffers from a lack of strategy. Without a Port District the County and City are at a disadvantage in attracting new industry. Owners of existing industrially zoned property have shown an unwillingness to make their properties ready for development. In addition, most of the industrially zoned property is in the flood plain and in today’s competitive market, to attract industries communities must have property that is ready to develop in a short time frame. That property does not currently exist in the Ellensburg area.

The chapter provides one preferred economic development scenario that reflects comments made during the plan update process. Ellensburg residents are most concerned with the provision of jobs in the community and with the City’s ability to continue providing services to maintain the community’s quality of life. Residents want to be able to earn enough to be able to afford to buy in to the community’s housing market, and they want to be able to earn enough to be able to stay in town. Job creation has lagged behind population increase, and income growth has lagged behind job creation.

Priority projects include development of a strategic economic development vision; a Central Business District Plan, an integrated research partnership with CWU, and development of the Third Interchange.

Council noted the income numbers in the draft chapter are skewed in terms of funding received by students. Rental market students have more income than is reported. Council requested this distinction be clarified in the chapter.

The public comment cards distributed to and collected from the audience during the meeting were reviewed. Council requested information on the number of out of town owners of downtown buildings.

Council consensus was to proceed with audience comments and not hold a special meeting on March 15. Council listened to comments from eight members of the audience.

Representatives of the Economic Development Group of Kittitas County spoke about the policy issues their organization feels should be addressed in the Economic Development Chapter of the plan.

Martin Kaatz spoke about the Housing Chapter—citing the need for residential concentration and infilling, landscape standards, residential appearance, impact fees, annexation regulations and impervious surfaces.
Beverly Heckart gave comments on Chapter 9 and spoke of the need to identify sites suitable for independent research parks and/or activities.

Michael Williams, Vice President of Work Source, spoke about the need for affordable housing. Ellensburg will become a poorer community if people cannot afford to live here. Ways need to be found to provide workforce housing.

Jeff Hocker, Downtown Task Force representative, presented the Task Force’s responses to Chapter 4 Land Use and Chapter 5 Transportation. The Task Force reaffirms its July 14, 2005 letter to City Council regarding proposals for “regional retail complexes and “big box” stores at Ellensburg freeway interchanges. The Task Force supports Chapter 4 land use scenario #1 and the overlay district concept.

**ADJOURN** Adjourn at 10:15 p.m. Carlson

Affirmed