CITY OF ELLENSBURG

Minutes of Council Meeting, Special Session
Date of Meeting: August 8, 2011
Time of Meeting: 7:00 p.m.
Place of Meeting: Council Chambers, 501 North Anderson Street

Councilmembers Present: Arango, Bottcher, Elliott, Lillquist, D. Miller, F. Miller and Mayor Tabb

Others present were City Manager Barkley, Public Works Director Akers, Deputy Clerk Keno; Consultants Tim Payne of Nelson/Nygaard and Amanda Sullivan of PRR as well as approximately 20 members of the audience.

Presentation of the Result of the Transit Feasibility Study Conducted by Nelson/Nygaard & PRR – Discussion and Direction

The purpose of the meeting is to take the information provided by the consultants and have a discussion about the next steps the community would like to take and that in turn the Council could take to move the City forward if it chooses to move ahead with the discussion on establishing a broader public transit system for the entire city.

Tim Payne of Nelson/Nygaard and Amanda Sullivan of PRR took Council through a powerpoint presentation of the results of the transit feasibility study conducted during late May through June, 2011.

Key observations from the study reveal that transit service in Ellensburg is the result of very successful community coordination and partnership. Ridership, while moderate, has demonstrated transit demand and potential. There are un-served neighborhoods and destinations within Ellensburg that would benefit from the addition of transit service.

The current system, due to financial limitations, has some weaknesses: 1) limited morning service; 2) large gap in service between morning and afternoon; 3) timeliness of service; 4) confusing route structure; and 5) inadequate information.

The public outreach portion of the study was conducted by PRR with the objectives of: 1) educating the public about current transit service; 2) gauging public support for expanding transit; 3) identifying gaps in current service and how it could be improved; and 4) gauging public support for various funding options. Outreach activities included intercept interviews with CWU students and community members, stakeholder interviews and an online survey with 500 participants.

Common themes from all outreach were: 1) the importance of transit service to the community; 2) most respondents do not currently use Central Transit; 3) Central Transit needs improvements such as more stops, longer service hours, shorter wait times and a consistent schedule; 4) strong public
support for expanding transit; and 5) increased tuition fees and/or a minimal sales tax increase are the preferred method of funding transit expansion. Outreach recommendations are to: 1) continue with transit expansion steering committee or advisory group; 2) launch public education campaign to increase awareness and ridership; and 3) form a coalition of supporters to champion expansion.

Should the City decide it wants to be in the transit business the consultants recommend: 1) establishing transit as an official function of the City; 2) forming a Transportation Benefit District (TBD) to provide potential access to new taxing resources; and 3) consider other potential transportation beneficiaries of the TBD, such as funding the Ellensburg Non-Motorized Transportation Plan. A financial advisory committee should be convened. Recommended potential revenue sources are a sales and use tax or a utility sales tax. Potential temporary funding measures could be a motor vehicle license fee or a household excise tax. A property or business and occupation tax is not recommended. Adoption of a fare structure for Central Transit should be considered. Current and long-term service needs should be addressed as well.

Public Transportation Benefit Areas (PTBA), Transportation Benefit Districts (TBD) and fee collection were discussed. A PTBA has to be part of the county; the county has to start and pass forward that recommendation. If the city establishes fixed route transportation it comes with the duty to provide para-transit within the city. Service quality needs would be monitored on an on-going basis and become the city’s responsibility. With regard to a TBD, any tax passed has an automatic ten year sunset. Voters would then have to vote on the tax again.

Council took public comment from the audience.

Ken Swanson, 715 E. Capital, and owner of Rodeo Town Taxi, expressed frustration that his business was excluded from the survey and read a letter into the record.

Von Elison, Central Washington Disability Resources, stated Mr. Swanson’s private taxi service is not available to all persons with disabilities. The disabled use Mr. Swanson’s services. There is a need for public transit.

Steve Ross, ASCWU President, spoke about the college students not being included in the survey (due to timing reasons), suggested a student have a seat on the transit steering committee and supported continued dialog.

Ron Davis, Tri-Cities, COO of TC Transport Services, spoke about his business which provides contracted services for other agencies. Mr. Davis offered his services on the steering committee for informational purposes.

Move to direct staff to bring back to Council the format of documents F. Miller needed to establish a City of Ellensburg Transit Benefit District for further
discussion.

Tom Hanson, WSDOT Transportation Division, Wenatchee, suggested working with the steering committee on the scope of another grant letter to WSDOT.

County Commissioner O'Brien, 501 E. Helena, spoke in his capacity as a Board member of HopeSource and cautioned Council to proceed slowly. Central Transit is a public-private partnership.

Vote on motion. Approved(Elliott—no)

Direct Mayor Tabb and City Manager Barkley to bring back to Council a Lillquist proposal for an expanded steering committee that would be an ad hoc committee of the City Council, including representational slots and mission.

Approved

ADJOURN Motion to adjourn at 9:19 p.m. Arango

Approved

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Mayor

ATTEST: _______________________________

City Clerk