

Council OKs zip line course

By Jeanne Davant

A zip line course proposed for the west end of Manitou Springs squeaked by City Council on Tuesday.

Council members voted 3-2 to approve the proposal by Adventures Out West, a Colorado Springs company that operates balloon flights, Jeep and Segway tours, and other outdoor adventures in Colorado and Arizona.

The company wants to string seven or eight zip lines above the hillsides and operate them in conjunction with Jeep tours. The course would operate from 9 a.m. to two hours before sunset on a 30-acre parcel of land near the west gateway.

The business would be a unique attraction, one of about four zip line courses in Colorado and the only one in an urban setting.

The majority of Council members thought the zip line tours would add to the area's appeal for visitors, but the dissenters said they did not think the zip line course would be compatible with the neighborhood and could disturb residents living nearby.

"We intend to be good neighbors," said Greg Wellens, owner of Adventures Out West. Although participants are likely to whoop with joy as they whiz along the zip lines, "the contours of the land probably are going to direct the noise toward the highway," Wellens said.

The zip line course would be professionally designed, and staff would receive safety training and follow procedures developed by a safety consultant, he said.

He estimated 10 to 30 people would use the lines per day and that the course would take about an hour and a half to complete. Tours would be booked in advance.

The Planning Commission approved Wellens' conditional use request in a 5-2 vote on May 11 and specified 10 conditions, including requirements that a portable toilet would be provided on the site, that parking for up to 10 vehicles would be provided at an existing lot near the west arch, and that the planning staff would review the project after six months for "unanticipated impacts."

City Planner Michelle Anthony said neighbors close to the project had been surveyed and that she had received no negative feedback.

But Manitou resident David Combs said he did not think nearby residents understood the impact the project would have on their lives.

"This is a very inappropriate location for this activity," said Combs, who said he had helped build and run zip lines. "The whole idea is to elicit an emotional outburst and have a good time.... At 9 o'clock Sunday morning, if someone wants to go outside and have a quiet cup of coffee, they're going to hear screams."

Council members Michael Gerbig and Aimee Cox voted against the proposal and said they thought the business would significantly impact the neighborhood.

Cox said she was concerned about traffic on local streets such as Mesa that would be part of the Jeep tour.

"I don't think the people on Mesa were notified," Cox said, adding that she thought the zip line course was inconsistent with zoning codes and the safety, health and welfare of the neighborhood.

"I think it's too easy to access after hours and ... creates an attractive nuisance," she said.

Gerbig questioned whether 10 parking spaces would be adequate and referenced a similar zip line business that anticipated 150 guests per day. He wondered whether more people would want to take the zip line tour on busy weekends and how that would impact traffic and parking.

Wellens said his estimates were based on patrons at his other activities and that he expected to conduct one tour at a time every two hours. Some clients would be ferried to the course from his office on 21st Street.

Councilmen Ed Klingman, Matt Carpenter and Mayor Marc Snyder voted for the proposal. (Council members Ingrid Richter and Rick Barry were absent.)

While "there are concerns about noise and the enjoyment of neighbors' property, we don't know whether they're founded or unfounded at this point," Klingman said. "We don't know if it's really going to have an impact; it may not... (We should) try to work with the applicant with these 10 restrictions. In business, if you're presented with problems, you're incented to solve them."

"I'm excited about this," Carpenter said. "There's a real buzz about it. I'd like to see it have a chance."

Snyder agreed, saying the six-month review would give the city an opportunity to mitigate any impacts.

"If it proves to be no problem at all, then we welcome a new amenity into town," Snyder said.

Wellens said he planned to invest \$50,000 to \$100,000 to install the zip lines and was concerned about the possibility that his business could be shut down after six months.

"We want to know we're going to be here for four years with options for seven more," Wellens said.

After the meeting, Wellens said he and his partners would discuss the conditions and decide whether to go ahead with the project within those limitations.

In other business, Council...

- Applauded as Snyder presented certificates of appreciation to Judy Harris' first-grade students at Manitou Springs Elementary for adopting and working on Schryver Park. "We are impressed with... the energy and enthusiasm that you showed in tackling adult-sized garden tools in order to achieve results that will beautify this city park and protect our trees for years to come," the certificate read. The students were praised for "daffodil planting, mulch tree rings, dirt moving, hole filling, branch raking, trash pickup, and general park awareness."

- Passed on second reading an ordinance adopting color coding to identify parking restricted areas.

- Approved vacation of a portion of a utility easement at 5 Keithley Place and passed an enabling ordinance on first reading.

- Authorized Snyder to sign an agreement with the Colorado Department of Transportation to construct Phase 5B of the Manitou Avenue Revitalization Project. Finance Director Mike Leslie said on the project, which will encompass an area west of Ruxton Avenue to just west of Park Avenue, would begin in January and would be completed by Memorial Day 2012.

- Heard a report from Leslie, who said sales tax collections in March exceeded the same month of last year by about 4 percent. Year-to-date sales tax revenues, however, are running about 4 percent behind the same period last year.

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