

City OKs Ballot Language

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The Daily Record

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Official ballot language approved by the Cañon City Council on Monday would authorize the Hogbacks as recreational space open to public use but close the area to motorized vehicles.

The council's action finalized wording on the Nov. 4 ballot, asking citizens to approve the open space with no new tax, no tax increase and no debt.

"This is the next stage in the process of what, for some, has been a three- or four-year process," Councilman Jon Stone said.

In the absence of Councilman Keith Hovland, who chairs the Hogbacks Committee, Stone said the City Charter requires a vote of the people before the city can take on a new park or open space.

As part of that requirement, the city must develop a Master Plan for the Hogbacks. A draft implementation matrix details 10 immediate actions once the project wins voter approval, including property annexation and zoning, enforcing city ordinances prohibiting illegal dumping and off-highway vehicle use, applying for grant funding, beginning plans for restoration and renovation of natural areas and starting initial work.

The City Charter also requires council to provide a cost estimate, established at a maximum of \$55,000 per year, adjusted annually for inflation.

"It is hoped grant funds and other sources of income will handle this," Stone said.

City Administrator Steve Rabe explained any funding from the city would be included in the city's budget, specifically the parks department.

"I do not want people to think the city's intent is to budget \$55,000 each and every year because we can't," Rabe said. "We cannot be detrimental to our current parks system."

However, the \$55,000 budget limit is for city funding only; no maximum would apply for grants or other funding resources.

Long-term plans for the Hogbacks include completion of restoration and renovation of natural areas, the construction of stormwater facilities and construction of a Floral Avenue trailhead.

City Attorney John Havens said the ballot language approved by the council is a bit unusual.

"This is a little different from many ballot issues the public may see," Havens said.

First, the question is shorter than many; and second, it asks voters to approve the entire ordinance that was presented to city council on Monday.

The ordinance now is available for review on the city's Web site, www.canoncity.org, and hard copies are available at City Hall free of charge. A detailed map of the Hogbacks area, including city-controlled and privately-owned property, is available online, as well.

In other action Monday, the council:

— Approved on first reading a zoning amendment to allow the keeping of "exotic" animals as educational creatures, providing required permits are obtained from the Division of Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Resident Devin Paszek plans to house two raptors for educational purposes.

— Approved on first reading an ordinance authorizing retailers to use a state electronic database to determine appropriate taxing jurisdictions for each sale. The software will not be required but instead will be allowed.

— Approved on second reading an ordinance adopting 2006 editions of international building, residential, mechanical and fire gas codes as well as international energy code.

— Mayor Frank Jaquez proclaimed Aug. 10-16 as National Health Center Week in Cañon City to recognize Valley Wide Health Services, a federally-qualified health center that provides local medical services for those who cannot afford health care or insurance.