

Staffing changes and economic development ahead for M.L.

By CARA LORELLO

Staff Reporter

The city of Medical Lake's two busiest employees—Administrator Curt Kelling and public works director Doug Ross--will likely have more on their plate to deal with this year with all the switching of duties currently going down at City Hall.

The City Council members gathered for a council workshop on the evening of March 22 to discuss key issues and primary goals that lay ahead for the city in 2005. The council decided earlier in the month, due to conflicts in staff schedules, not to have the first of the two regular meetings next month, but will reconvene on Tuesday, April 19.

Staffing issues was the first topic of discussion that night, a subject involving the removal of two major department director positions in 2000—Parks and Recreation, and Planning—unloading a considerable amount of responsibility on both Kelling and Ross.

"For practical purposes, we have had (since 2000) two people alone who've absorbed the bulk of these jobs in addition to their regular duties," Kelling said.

Kelling currently oversees recreation operations in addition to his duties as administrator, while Ross is in charge of both planning and parks plus the rest of public works. Both have elected to make some changes within their jurisdictions: Kelling will assume all planning operations (which will include the updated Comprehensive Plan, the SR-902 corridor project, and any annexation), leaving both parks and recreation to Ross.

A few changes are expected to happen as well within the administrative office at City Hall. A job description for the full-time city department clerk/court administrator was downsized to court administrator. A part-time court clerk position was added earlier in the year to balance the overall workload. Court administrator Katrin Smith is responsible for overseeing probation, collections, court-related tasks, as well as all accounts payable.

The second topic of the evening was the Metro Parks District, a topic that had not been brought up since an estimated 300 voters turned out last November and voted against funding the project. Last July, the council discussed formation of a metro park district to allow the city to receive compensation from Spokane County's Parks Department so long as the boundaries were kept consistent with those of the district.

Kelling said that no work had been done on the ballot issue since then, although a consensus was made by the council not to run the issue on this year's ballot because the city "does not want to compete with the agenda of the schools."

The plan, however, is to separate the parks and recreation fund out of the city's general fund and assume its own special revenue fund. The city of Cheney does the same with its parks and recreation funds.

"When we go to prepare the 2006 budget in late summer, everyone will have a clear picture...of the revenues and expenditures...which will help see exactly how much goes in to run the department. When we see those numbers, we'll decide whether to run the issue again in 2006."

The Planning Commission will soon be receiving the results from the SR-902 corridor survey distributed to local residents earlier in the year from Studio Cascade. Kelling expects to reconvene with Bill Grimes and discuss details, as well as formation of a citizens committee to review survey information and make recommendations for revitalization projects and present them to both the commission and council.

Before closing, Councilman Jeff King shared a comment regarding the local attitude toward new development within the city's central business district. King believes that more input will be needed from the city's inhabitants if projected goals are to be met.

"The people who live here will have to participate," he said. "If they want to see things change, they have to be active and willing to do their part, too. Business owners will have to see that another store moving in next door...doesn't have to be such a bad thing (for them). It's not necessarily up to the city to decide how things are going to change (economically)."

Cara Lorello can be reached at clorello@cheneyfreepress.com