

the balloon for free through the end of 2007.

While the board has already decided to charge \$20 for adult balloon rides and \$13 for children under 12, member Larry Agran, who is also an Irvine City Council member, has expressed a desire to make the attraction free during an initial introductory period.

"It really is unconscionable, as our first element, to say for a family to go up in this balloon it's going to cost \$70," Agran said at a May 24 Great Park board meeting. "It's just nuts."

Great Park staff has developed a list of possible revenue sources that could replace the money expected from ticket sales, said Rod Cooper, manager of operations for the Great Park Corp.

The list includes parking fees; souvenir photos; food and beverage sales; private events and birthday parties; and logo plantings, where sponsor companies would plant their logos in flowers in various locations around the park.

As for the balloon, a banner ad across the equator of it would generate the most money -- up to \$250,000 per year, according to Cooper. But the Irvine city sign ordinance would likely need to be modified to allow such a large, visible ad.

Cooper said the list is open for discussion, and it's up to the board to decide whether or not ads on the balloon are verboten.

"I'm just laying out a range for the board to consider," Cooper said. "They can tell staff their desires and their comfort level and we'll take it from there."

Other possibilities include banners on the balloon's gondola, signs on the visitors tent and displays inside the visitors center, which would bring in less money but meet with designer Smith's approval.

"It's a fact of life that nowadays, parks need to find ways to generate revenue to support themselves," Smith said. "It's a question of finding the right way of doing it."

Smith is hopeful the balloon ride will be free initially. The attraction will be open Thursdays through Sundays 52 weeks a year, weather permitting.

But he also hopes the big balloon will remain pristine, untouched by corporate logos.

"The balloon is the icon," he said. "It's Orange County, and it's about the big orange."

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No ads on Great Park balloon

Board rejects advertising on the big orange orb but might be amenable to smaller items on the gondola.

By ERIKA CHAVEZ
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Advertisements are out, private parties are in and parking fees are still up for debate.

The Great Park board of directors met Thursday to grapple with how to make the tethered helium balloon attraction accessible yet profitable.

Set to launch July 14 at the 1,347-acre future Great Park site, the balloon could have doubled as a billboard had the board decided to pursue advertisers. The board hopes to bring in enough revenue to provide free balloon rides through the end of the year.

While an ad on the balloon's equator could have brought in \$250,000 annually, the board agreed that it should remain pristine.

Great Park board member Beth Krom said she wants the balloon to be "a beautiful orange orb hovering over the landscape."

The board was amenable to "tasteful" ads on the balloon's gondola.

Board Chairman Larry Agran said he believes private parties will generate the most revenue when the balloon launches, giving visitors a bird's-eye view of the former El Toro Marine base.

He believes companies will rent out the balloon for as much as \$1 million.

Board members disagree on charging for parking. Christina Shea wants to recoup as many costs as possible, while Steven Choi would like the Great Park to be largely free.

The board agreed to re-examine balloon parking fees, eventual admission prices and an advertising campaign in 60 to 90 days.