

Tuesday, June 26, 2007

City looking at ways to make money with balloon

Council affirms Great Park board's recommendation to reject advertising on the big orange orb.

By ERIKA CHAVEZ

and SONYA SMITH

IRVINE WORLD NEWS

Council affirms Great Park Board's recommendation to reject advertising on the big orange orb.

The city's politicians continue to hold out for Great Park balloon rides will be free to individuals and families through 2007, but Tuesday told staff to research ways of making money with the attraction.

The City Council unanimously:

- Directed staff to return in 30-60 days with a plan for setting group rates for balloon rides.
- Directed staff to work with the Lennar Corp. on using the company's \$300,000 a year pledge for "tasteful" balloon-related advertising.
- Held off on hiring a marketing consultant for the balloon.
- Ordered staff return in 90 days with an analysis on the balloon's first few months of operation and possibilities for making more money with the attraction.

Set to launch July 14 at the 1,347-acre future Great Park site, the balloon could have doubled as a billboard 500 feet in the air 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 Great Park Board and City Council agreed that it should remain pristine. The board was amenable to "tasteful" ads on the balloon's gondola.

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

Contact the writer: 949-553-2911 or sosmith@ocregister.com