

Ketchum signs YMCA lease
Idaho Mountain Express
March 18, 2005

City grants 2.7 acres of Park and Ride lot for recreation complex

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To a standing ovation, Ketchum City Council President Randy Hall signs his approval of a lease that grants a portion of the city-owned Park and Ride lot to the Wood River Community YMCA.

For a group of Wood River Valley residents that has planned for years to build a public recreation complex in Ketchum, history was made Wednesday night.

Ketchum City Council members on March 16 expediently and unanimously approved a 99-year land lease that conveys control of approximately 2.7 acres of the city-owned Park and Ride lot to the Ketchum-based Wood River Community YMCA.

After the 4-0 vote approving the lease was recorded, City Council President Randy Hall signed his name to officially execute the terms of the 26-page document.

"History is being made," said a voice in the crowd of some 40 YMCA supporters filling the council's chambers, prompting a standing ovation and loud cheers.

"It's done," Hall finally said. "We're not there yet, but with a little more work we'll be there shortly."

Cynthia Murphy, chairwoman of the Wood River Community YMCA, was quick to thank the council.

"We're very excited about it," Murphy said. "This allows us to move forward with our fund raising."

The execution of the lease Wednesday was indeed a landmark decision by the City Council.

The city purchased the 5.8-acre Park and Ride lot in 1989, with one of the stated purposes of the acquisition being the development of recreation facilities. In an approximately 10-year span since the early 1990s, an evolving group of Wood River Valley residents has been pursuing funding and land to build a public recreation and community complex in Ketchum. On Wednesday, the two entities became partners.

"We've been looking for a partner in this type of civic association for a long time," said Councilman Baird Gourlay, as he cast his vote in favor of the lease.

In essence, the lease gives the YMCA control over 2.67 acres in the center section of the Park and Ride lot, located at the corner of Warm Springs and Saddle roads. Approximately 1.67 acres has been leased to the YMCA as a site for its proposed 84,000-square-foot recreation and community center. In addition, the YMCA has been granted a landscaping and access easement over one acre of land that would surround the building.

In drafting the lease, city officials included language throughout to ensure the city will not be burdened by the YMCA if it failed to operate as planned. On Nov. 2, 2004, Ketchum citizens voted by a margin of 1,174 to 704 to endorse leasing approximately one-quarter of the Park and Ride lot to the YMCA, if the deal meant the city would not incur any direct costs.

The lease requires the YMCA to provide a \$250,000 "security deposit" to the city and to secure at least \$2 million in liability insurance. The lease also has a provision for the city to terminate the lease if the YMCA does not commence construction of a project within two years of receiving city approval to do so.

Although it provides land through a lease for legal reasons, the city's deal with the YMCA is more akin to a temporary land grant. The rent cost for the property has been set at \$1 per year.

With the lease signed, the YMCA group—which recently gained full-charter status from the national YMCA—plans to quickly move forward with fund raising for the estimated \$16 million project. To date, the YMCA has raised approximately \$6 million, excluding \$1.5 million that could come as part of a challenge grant issued earlier this week.

Teresa Beahen, Wood River Community YMCA executive director, said she is "confident" the group will reach its goal.

"We have numerous prospects that could come forward with the signing of the lease," she said. "I think we're going to be able to deliver on what the voters wanted."

Beahen said the YMCA hopes to break ground on its project this year, if it can reach its fund-raising goal and concurrently gain approval from the city for its building plans.

Leaders of the YMCA have been anticipating being granted a lease for months, stating that having a project site is critical to raising funds. A final draft was nearly completed by the end of 2004. However, as the city was trying to fine tune the lease, Ketchum Mayor Ed Simon sought to delay its approval, saying he believed the city had not completed its due diligence.

Simon was absent from the special meeting Wednesday.

"Ed is sick," Hall told the crowd in City Hall. "I know he would like to be here."

Indeed, the mayor on Tuesday indicated he was battling the flu.

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