

Second verse same as the first

CWU survey finds 75 percent in favor of regional retail

BY TRAVIS HAY, *staff writer*

Three out of four, Kittitas County residents are in favor of having big box retail businesses in the county, according to a recent survey conducted by students in a marketing research class at Central Washington University.

The survey, which was conducted during the fall quarter of 2005, mirrors the findings of a separate survey commissioned by the city of Ellensburg that found less than one in five city residents are against regional retail growth.

The survey was submitted to the Ellensburg City Council on Monday and the council will use the results of both surveys during its comprehensive plan draft chapter study sessions. The sessions begin Monday and are one of the final stages in the decision-making process for the comp plan.

While the two surveys came to similar conclusions regarding the possibility of retail growth in the area, they used different methods to get results.



The city's survey was conducted by phone and only included responses from from 500 registered voters who live in Ellensburg. The CWU survey, conducted by a class taught by associate professor Rex Moody, was administered by students who went door-to-door in towns and cities throughout the county. The survey was not limited to registered voters or citizens of Ellensburg.

Rex Moody

The CWU survey was dropped off at 600 county residences and included a stamped, self-addressed envelope; 254 were mailed in, but four were deemed invalid because they were incomplete.

Those surveyed who were in favor of regional retail listed having more shopping options closer to home and a wider variety of retail options as top reasons for wanting retail development. Those opposed listed a possible loss of community culture and retail expansion having a negative effect on local businesses as their reasons for being against development.

Along with the three-to-one margin in favor of retail development, the survey also found that the west interchange is the most desirable location for retail expansion and that those surveyed preferred clothing, home improvement and shoe stores be included in any future retail development in the county.

The survey also asked if county residents would prefer a Wal-Mart in the area and the results were mixed with 46.03 in favor and 53.97 percent opposed to the retail giant opening up in Kittitas County.

"It (the CWU survey results) lends credence to both studies," said Moody.

"The two surveys certainly are similar and revealing and they both seem to say the same thing," said Debbie Strand, executive director of the Economic Development Group of Kittitas County. "People within the community here want to have more shopping opportunities.

Moody's marketing class' survey is one of many pieces of information the city council will have at its disposal when it makes its final decision later in the year.

"As individuals on the council we all use our own tools to make decisions," said city council member Shannon Carlson. "A lot of things will factor into my decision, I don't just listen to a consultant or a survey."

Council member Nancy Lilquist also said she will weigh all the information she receives before casting her vote. "It reinforces the information we've received about the ratio of those who don't want big box retail in town and those who want more shopping options," she said. "They (the surveys) play a role but I am also listening to all the arguments."

Moody said he would like for the survey's findings to be factored into the city council's decision making process. "I'd like to hope that they would use it as much as their own survey and use it as just another piece of information," he said.