By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times Last Tuesday, Liberal voters elected two new city commissioners and re-elected two incumbents on the board.

Mayor Tim Long, however, was not on the list of those elected last week, and that means Liberal will soon have a new mayor.

The incumbents, along with the newcomers, will be sworn in at tonight's regular meeting, and following that, commissioners will vote to select a new mayor and vice mayor.

Two of the commissioners, Ron Warren and incumbent Joe Denoyer, have previously served in the position of mayor, with Denoyer currently serving as vice mayor.

Before the swearing in, outgoing commissioner Larry Koochel and Long will be presented with awards for their time on the board. Commissioners will also hear from the consulting firm, Retail Attractions, regarding trying to recruit new business to Liberal. In a memo to the commission, Liberal Economic Development Director Jeff Parsons said city staff is suggesting hiring the Owasso, Okla.-based firm. Parsons added staff has been in communication with Retail Attractions President Ricky Hayes for several months about the possibility of hiring the firm.

"Retail Attractions is a firm whose speciality is connecting retail businesses with communities," Parsons said. "Their process will be to build a profile of Liberal to validate us as a location for additional retail and then begin to present Liberal to their national network of retailers, brokers and developers."

Parsons said if projects are developed, Retail Attractions will work with the city, developer and retailer through the entire process in order to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

"There are two significant reasons for hiring Retail Attractions," he said. "First is the experience and expertise of Mr. Hayes, who is responsible for recruiting many millions of square fee of retail to this region. Mr. Hayes has been through the development process many, many times."

Parsons said the second reason is for access to the network Hayes has developed.

"He will access his extensive 'rolodex' of retailers, business brokers, site selectors and developers that has been compiled in years of doing retail recruitment," Parsons said.

The economic development director then said the cost of hiring Retail Attractions would be a one-time charge of $3,500 for a market analysis and leakage study to be used in the recruiting effort and a consultation fee of $1,500 per month for 12 months (which could be extended) for a first year total of $21,500.

"These funds will come from the economic development portion of the 1-cent sales tax budgets

for ‘economic marketing’ and ‘marketing and promotions,’” Parsons said. “Retail Attractions has itemized its process and deliverables in its proposal and reports on their efforts on at least a monthly basis.”

Parsons said city staff recognizes the $21,500 price for hiring the firm represents a significant investment of money in an outside consultant.

“However, if through the efforts of Retail Attractions, we are able to obtain a one-year increase in retail sales of just one half of one percent, we will capture enough additional 1-cent sales tax revenue to pay for their services,” he said.

Parsons said all the pieces are beginning to fall into place.

“Liberal has a provable retail draw and desirable land available in the right locations for retail businesses,” he said. “In the last year or so, we have put into place some good incentives, and we have worked hard on making the development process as seamless as possible.”

Parsons said adding the efforts of Retail Attractions could be the last piece of the puzzle remaining for genuine success in retail recruitment.

Hayes will be in attendance at the meeting and will make a short presentation to the commission highlighting Liberal’s potential for retail recruitment and the benefits of hiring his firm. He will then answer questions from commissioners.

Parsons said city staff is asking the commission to vote to approve the hiring of Retail Attractions for a period of one year.

“At the end of that one-year term, staff will analyze the process of our retail recruitment efforts and relationship with Retail Attractions and make a recommendation to the commission on how to proceed from that point forward,” he said.

The city commission meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. today in the city commission chambers at 325 N. Washington.