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The City of Plains is one step closer to getting a grocery store that could possibly be placed in the downtown area. The Community Enhancement Foundation recently hired a grant writer to go after Kansas Community Tax Credits to help with the funding for the new business. L&T file photo/Robert Pierce

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times A group of Plains residents is moving forward with plans to provide a grocery store to that town and neighboring Kismet.

The Community Enhancement Foundation of Plains recently hired a grant writer, Kent Stehlik, from Dodge City to help the foundation apply for Kansas Community Tax Credits, and CEF President Jeanne Roberts said Stehlik is guiding the group through the application process.

“At this point, we are collecting letters from community members,” Roberts said. “These letters need to state the great need of Plains/Kismet to have a grocery store close by with affordable access to healthy nutritious food. If you would like to write a letter, please do so.”

Roberts said if people are interested in writing a letter, they can contact her or another CEF board member to get an instruction sheet stating who to address the letter to and other details.

Roberts added applications for the Community Tax Credit grant are due May 3. The foundation is eligible for the grant because it serves a community with a population of less than 15,000.

“Anybody that would donate to it would get a 70 percent tax credit on their Kansas returns,” she said. “It’s a refundable credit. If you don’t owe that much Kansas tax, you’ll get the difference back. Depending on what tax bracket you’re in, there’s some people that have actually come out ahead. They would have to talk to their accountant about that. Everybody’s income tax return is different.”

Roberts added though that in order to qualify for the tax credit, a person must donate at least \$250, but any donations are accepted. She said the tax credits are a great way “to make sure your tax dollars stay at home, helping your own community.”

“Urban areas that are awarded the tax credits are given a 50 percent credit on their Kansas income tax return,” she said. “This is one way that Kansas leaders are helping our small towns stay alive and viable. We already know that Plains is a great place to live, but it could be even better with a grocery store.”

The CEF was one of many recipients of \$25,000 grant through State Farm Insurance’s Cause and Effect contest last year, and Roberts said that money is being used as seed to grow more.

“We have other donations totalling probably between \$8,000 and \$10,000,” she said.

Much work remains to be done to make a grocery store a reality in Plains, and Roberts said the main focus of attention is on raising funds at this point in time.

“We’re working with Affiliated out of Nebraska, and they’re doing a floor plan for us,” she said. “After they do a floor plan for us, we can figure out how much equipment we’re going to need. We can get with the contractor, and he can give us an idea of how much the building will cost to build, and we’ll go from there.”

After applications are made for the Community Tax Credit, Roberts said the CEF would find out if they are awarded a grant in July.

“The people donating could donate part in 2013 and part in 2014, and they could donate it all in 2013,” she said. “It’s just however they want to do it.”

The maximum the foundation could get from the Community Tax Credit grant is \$250,000.

“Of course, we’re going to try for the full amount,” Roberts said. “They could award the full amount, or they could award a partial.”

As for what the total amount of money needed to get a grocery store in Plains would be, the CEF president said more work will need to be done before that figure is known.

“Until we have all the plans in and can get an estimate on the equipment, we don’t know a figure yet,” she said.

Roberts said the foundation is looking at other means of funding as well.

“There’s a CDBG grant that comes due in September that we’re going to try to apply for, and there’s also USDA loans we could go after,” she said. “We’re going to try to go for the grants first, and the loans will be for if we need additional funds.”

Roberts said a location has been picked for the store, and the land has been surveyed.

“It’s just trying to get everything done,” she said.

As for now, Roberts said the CEF is simply trying to get information out to the public about what is going on.

“We’re going to do a walk-a-thon the second weekend of June,” she said. “It’s going to be a challenge walk-a-thon where people do it as a team.”

Roberts said that event will be family-oriented and will take place at Southwestern Heights High School.

“We’re trying to incorporate healthy stuff with the grocery store, so fitness and health is the idea of the walk-a-thon,” she said. “It’s keeping the fitness in with the healthy eating.”

Funding from the walk-a-thon will come from registrations and teams raising pledges, according to Roberts.

For more information on the grocery store, contact foundation board members Mark Tabb, Jennifer Miller, Silvia Olvera or Roberts.

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