By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times Tuesday, Liberal city commissioners approved more than $10,000 in purchases for new equipment for the community's police department.

More than $5,500 of that was spent on buying nine bulletproof vests for local police officers. Capt. Jon Antrim said the vest manufacture recommends that specific equipment be replaced every five years.

"I have several that are expiring this year of officers that are currently working," he said. "I need two for officers that are fixing to graduate the academy here in about a week so."

Antrim said the Liberal Police Department applies for a Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant through the U.S. Department of Justice, which refunds half the purchase price of the vests.

The LPD also has some residual money it must spend or lose before August.

"The vests actually cost $625 apiece for a total purchase price of $5,625," Antrim said. "We are currently in the process of working on the 2014 partnership grant as we speak. I think the application deadline for it's coming up at the end of the month. We're working on it, so we'll have those monies as we need to purchase additional vests after August and into 2014 as well."

The commission voted unanimously to approve the purchase of the vests with the reimbursement from the grant.

The remainder of the approved money from Tuesday's meeting came in the form of five new Taser X2 units for the LPD. Antrim said Liberal officers began carrying tasers in 2004, and he explained the brief history of the item's use with the department.

"In 2006, we switched to the Taser X26," he said. "Over the years, these things have gotten old. We've put them on a replacement cycle where we buy a few a year to keep the expense down instead of ordering 20 or 30 of them at a time."

Antrim said six of LPD's current tasers are inoperable, and Taser International, the company that makes the units, gave police officials a "no" to request for repairs.

Antrim said the X26 model is now in the process of being phased out for several reasons, primarily design.

"A lot of the programming for this model is in this battery," he said. "This battery sticks out. Officers wear it on their belt. They're in and out of their car every day. They're hitting it, banging it, which causes a disconnect, which causes a spark, which ends up frying the programming inside of the unit itself."

Antrim said the X26 is also a single fire unit, with one probe on its front, which creates another

problem for law enforcement.

“In order to carry a second cartridge in case you miss or there’s more than one suspect, we have to carry it here at the bottom,” he said.

Antrim said the hitting and banging officers put the current tasers through also causes excessive damage to the cartridges.

“Once they get to this point, they no longer can be used,” he said. “These probes and stuff will fall out. We have quite a few that have been damaged by daily use of these officers.”

Antrim explained the two options Taser International has to fix those issues.

“They have the X26P, which is basically a newer improved version of this that’s going to eliminate the programming issues that we have with the X26, but it does not alleviate the money that we’re spending to replace cartridges,” he said.

Antrim said the LPD, though, went with the second option – the purchase of the X2 model – and he explained its benefits.

“The X2 actually maintains and has two cartridges on the front of the unit,” he said. “Those cartridges stay inside of the holster, so the officer won’t be banging them into things or causing damages.”

The X2 likewise offers the advantage of immediate refire, something Antrim said the LPD’s current tasers do not.

“Now, I’d have to fire, change cartridges, fire again,” he said. “This would allow me to fire again in case I miss the first time or if I have two bad guys that I need to take care of.”

Antrim said LPD requested the purchase of five new X2 tasers. The department had budgeted $3,400 for the purchase of four X26s, but with the changes in technology, officials opted to go with the X2 instead.

The total cost of the five new tasers would be $5,760, and in addition to the $3,400 LPD had budgeted, $2,750 was transferred from money the department had saved after purchasing new AR-15 rifles.

Antrim said tasers have a great track history.

“Officer injuries are down,” he said. “No longer are we having to go hands on with people. We’re not having to hit people with our batons. Five seconds, most of the time it’s over. They’re in cuffs. They’re a little sore because they had the best workout of their life the following day.”

As with the vest purchase, the commission likewise voted unanimously to allow the LPD to buy five new tasers at a cost of $5,760.