By VICTORIA CALDERON • Leader & Times The city commission has been discussing different housing incentive programs for months. From the Rural Housing Incentive District program, which was passed as Resolution No. 2170 at the March 26 meeting, to the Builder Incentive Program that was amended at the special work session on May 29, commissioners have been working hard to provide additional housing to the citizens of Liberal.

Now, a new proposal based off the changes made to the Builder Incentive Program will come in front of the commissioners at tonight's meeting. The newly crafted proposal is called the Housing Incentive Program, and if passed, will replace the previous program.

Housing and Community Development Director Karen LaFreniere explained the changes made to the program in her letter to the commission. "The proposed changes to the incentive will provide the initial homeowner of a newly constructed home with $4,000," LaFreniere wrote.

The incentive can be used in several ways: special assessments, down payment assistance, or as a cash incentive. The purpose of giving this grant to homeowners is to encourage the purchase of newly constructed houses, and therefore stimulate the new-home market in Liberal.

To receive aid from this program, there are a few conditions the property must meet. The house must have three bedrooms and two bathrooms, as well as be at least 1,200 square feet.

The incentive may be issued at the close of a loan. A check made payable to the title company will lie in wait until the loan on the house is ready to be closed, and will then be used to pay off the loan. If it is a homeowner construction loan, the owner may apply for the funds after the house is finished with construction and ready to be moved into.

Developers can also receive aid from the program. If the house has not been sold within 90 days of being finished and listed, the developer can apply for the incentive.

However, homeowners and developers of new homes are not the only beneficiaries of this program. Owners of newly built rental property are eligible to receive benefits as well, although the guidelines and rewards differ.

For rental property, owners can receive $750 incentives for each unit they have in their property. This applies to up to 10 units. Any unit that exceeds 10 can be granted with $250.

LaFreniere gave an example in her letter:

"A single rental structure/apartment building with 12 units:

• Apartments one through 10 will receive $750 each for a total of $7,500

• Apartments 11 and 12 will receive $250 each for a total of $500

• The total single rental structure/complex incentive will receive $8,000.”

Owners may apply directly to the City of Liberal, and will be granted the funds after an inspection of the property for multi-family rental.

The Housing Incentive Program is subject to budgetary restrictions, and must be approved yearly according the the budget.

The program is on the agenda for today’s city commission meeting, which will be at 6:30 p.m. at the commission chambers, 325 N. Washington.