



Fidel Barboza, left, with the city's cemetery department, Santiago Cardoza with solid waste and Jose Torres of the Liberal Fire Department are shown with their employee service awards at Tuesday's city commission meeting. All three recipients have worked for the City of Liberal for 10 years. L&T photo/Robert Pierce

By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

After being approached recently by a concerned group of citizens, officials with the City of Liberal came up with a solution to the problem of restricted access to the city's shooting range.

City commissioners voted unanimously Tuesday to put that solution into effect, and the fix involves using reservations for shooters to access the range.

“An individual would be able to reserve a time at the shooting range up to two days in advance,” read the proposal in the agenda packet. “The individual would pick up the key at the Willow Tree Golf Course on the day of the reservation.”



The information also stated that shoots would be limited to two hours, and with Willow Tree open seven days a week, this would increase the availability.

City manager Mark Hall said with seasonal changes and more daylight hours, the shooting range's availability would increase as well. He added the city is likewise looking for a new location for the range.

“We continue discussion with that should there be one in the future,” he said. “Range relocation might be an alternative.”

Mayor Dave Harrison said it is the wish of the commission to find a new location.

“It's a funding issue right now, and we're going to do the best we can with what we've got to work with,” he said. “I think all of us sitting here would love to see that happen.”

Reservations for shooting events would be allowed to be made up to three months in advance to allow for planning and advertising the event.

Law enforcement and the criminal justice program at Seward County Community College would be allowed reservations up to six months in advance to allow for scheduling classes and training.

So, this basically means all of the public will be able to enjoy the shooting range in a more systematic and safe method.

“We would love to see it work for everyone,” said vice mayor Janet Willimon.

Harrison said he believes what was proposed is a good system.

“I think it’s one that should work well for everyone,” he said. “It gives any organization an opportunity three months in advance to block out a date. An individual can actually reserve it two days ahead of time. It’s going to be a work in progress for everybody to get used to how it does operate.”

Commissioner Joe Denoyer agreed, but wanted to give one slight tweak to the proposal.

“I would just ask for some consideration for some signage,” he said. “If it is reserved, the gates will be unlocked for the members who are coming to shoot to get access, which would allow for some other people to come in. Maybe just some simple signage that says ‘Range closed due to private shooting.’”

Willimon said she has received calls from people concerned about reservations.

“After doing some long hard and due diligence and talking to Mark for hours on the phone, I feel we as a commission have come up with an amicable program that we can keep a lot of people happy with it,” she said.

Willimon added the shooting range is available thanks to Liberal’s taxpayers and citizens, and the commission wants to make it as accessible to as many people as possible.

“I think that we can make this work,” she said. “It’s been a lot of discussion, and I’m pleased as of tonight that we have a workable solution.”

Just before the commission took its vote on the proposal, Liberal resident Roger Jacquart, former owner of A-1 Gun and Pawn, spoke briefly, calling the shooting range an asset to the city. He added, though, a new location is something that will likely need to be put on hold for now.

“It’d be nice to have a new range,” he said. “Every group in town wants something new, but as a taxpayer, I’m kind of maxed out. I think this is a very good solution to the problem. It puts all on a level keel to get into the range.”

Jacquart said the shooting range “helps people.”

“Anything we’ve got that attracts people or make their stay a little more pleasant is an asset,” he said.