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This vacant corner on the north side on east 11th Street running up to Billy's Mexican Grill and BBQ, left, and right to New York Avenue will be the site where developers want to build a new apartment complex. L&T file photo/Giseelle Arredondo

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

It is widely known that the Liberal community has a housing shortage, and city commissioners took steps toward finding solutions to at least part of that problem Tuesday.

Land near Village Plaza in north Liberal could be home to some new apartments after the board approved two items on the meeting's agenda.

The first item advanced an ordinance to a second reading that will rezone lots in the area from “C2” or “general commercial district” to “PUD” or “planned unit development.”

The request, according to information in the agenda packet, was to make improvements in order to build 16-plex, two-bedroom apartments on the property.

City engineer Pete Earles said a total of 64 units in all would be built.

“The concept currently has garages,” he said. “They’re also looking at a common area, a house with a shelter in it as well. It obviously fits well in the area. It will have a drainage pond to the south. The drainage study has not been completed at this time. The land generates slopes from north to south toward 11th Street.”

Earles said there are utilities on sight at the property.

“There’s existing water and existing sewer on sight, which will be connected to,” he said. “The water line will be looped to Yucca Drive and New York Avenue and down to 11th Street and also over to Plaza Drive. The water line will be completely looped in the system. There is a sewer line that runs in that current alley. That’ll tie into that existing sewer line as well.”

“The roadway kind of turns into Plaza Drive and actually lines up with the entrance coming off Kansas Avenue,” he said. “You can come off of that and drive straight in and come in this subdivision that way. You see it coming off New York Avenue as well.”

Earles said after the resolution is approved, the process of completing the PUD will begin, with another visit to the city’s planning commission as well as the city commission itself on the schedule.

Earles explained why the decision was made to zone the land to a PUD.

“Instead of turning into an R-3 or R-2 which has certain setbacks and certain requirements for streets and so on, a PUD basically allows you to go in there and set your homes, layouts and lots according to the property that’s there and not necessarily having to be restricted by certain setbacks,” he said.

The commission voted unanimously to advance the ordinance to a second reading. The board later voted to adopt a resolution and advance a proposed development plan for The Plaza to a public hearing.

Housing and community development director Karen LaFreniere said the item is to introduce a development plan for a development project.

“What this does is introduce the development plan and the development agreement and advances to a public hearing set up for Jan. 2,” she said.

LaFreniere said the development plan is subject to change after reviewing, and that will be the discussion at the Jan. 2, 2014, public hearing.

“This is something we’ve been working on for a couple of years,” she said.

The resolution is to establish the following:

- A proposed Rural Housing Incentive District with legal description and boundaries;
- The proposed development plan for review;

- The date for the public hearing on the development plan;
- Notice of public hearing to other taxing entities; and
- The governing body and employees may take further action as may be appropriate to accomplish the purposes of the resolution.

The project is made possible through a grant from the Kansas Housing Corporation, and LaFreniere and Ross Fogel of Employee Housing Partners of Kansas City, Mo., said pending the results of the public hearing, shovels could go in the ground as early as February 2014.

“We hope to get started by February, but we have some statutory requirements for the RHID that have to be met,” Fogel said. “It’s still a pretty ambitious time frame. We just want to make sure and get as much done in 2014 as possible.”

Fogel said the grant from KHC is one of the largest awarded, and it was absolutely vital to keep the project moving forward.

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