

By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

A recently passed code of ethics by the Liberal City Commission will soon make doing city business more accessible for the public.

The new code was passed unanimously after its final reading at the Feb. 25 city commission meeting and is already in effect. According to commissioner Dean Aragon, the code has been a long time coming.

“I’m glad it’s in place,” he said. “It should have been in place a long time ago.”



The new code was modeled after similar ethics codes from Dodge City and Garden City along with parts that adhere to state statutes from the League of Kansas Municipalities.

The new code deals with nine different situations: interest in contract/transaction, prerequisite of interest, incompatible service, interest in public contract, participation in non-contract transactions, public property, special treatment, later case interest and disclosure of confidential information.

City manager Mark Hall said that the issue of transparency was what led to the code being adopted.

“An issue now before the public is transparency, and ethics has become a very hot topic,” Hall said. “And an ethics code does do that, that we’re to be as transparent as we can be.”

One major future benefit of the new ethics code is an addendum saying that every year, commissioners both old and new will receive a copy of the ethics code and then sign it, which will signify that they have read it and that they understand it.

“It’s a self-monitoring measure, and it makes sure that there is a formality that they’ve read and understood the code of ethics,” Hall said. “It is by far easier to understand this code than trying to sort through all the volumes of state statutes.”

One major topic throughout the code deals with conflict of interest, which covers three of the code’s situations. All three say that officials and employees can’t vote or take part in any measure or resolution where they may have stake in it.

The code’s guidelines also state that the city attorney will have primary responsibility for enforcing the code. The city attorney will also be in charge of investigations regarding code violations and will have to power to bring civil action against the violators.

According to the code’s guidelines, the penalties for violations can range anywhere from a reprimand to removal from position, which could involve the state’s attorney general.

Liberal Mayor Dave Harrison admitted in the past there have been instances where city employees have exhibited less than acceptable behavior without an ethics code in place.

“Hopefully, this helps prevent that,” Harrison said.

Overall, response from commissioners to the new code of ethics has been positive, and the commission sees nothing but positive outcomes from adopting the code.

“Overall. I like the policy that has been approved, it was modeled after policies of cities of similar size and make up,” said commissioner Joe Denoyer. “Since it is new and each community is different, as are individuals, it may require some adjustments, but it is definitely a good starting point.”