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By JESSICA CRAWFORD • Daily Leader Tuesday evening, city staff as well as city commissioners met for a brainstorming session. Although the City of Liberal is probably the cleanest it has been in many years, city commissioners were seeking ideas to take city beautification to the next level. Mayor Tim Long thanked all city staff present for a job well done in regards to programs available for citizens as well as code enforcement. However, he said, more must be done to make a larger impact on the cleanliness of the city.

“The town looks better than it has in a long time,” Long said. “What this session is about, we want to take it to the next level. We do not want to impose hardships on people and we need to get the community buy in to take pride within the community. We need to help them buy in and help us keep our community clean and make it better. We have come to a level that I don’t think the city has been in a long time. I think we need to move the bar up a little bit.

“I think I can speak for my fellow commissioners, but I want Liberal to be the best place to live,” he continued. “I want it to be a beautiful, clean, safe community. So how can we do this? Can we as commissioners help the departments with the job they are doing? I believe we can set a new standard and take it to the next level. How do we get the community to buy in to take it to that next level? We can clean up as much as we can, but we have a limit as to what we are able to accomplish. But, if we get the community involved to do their part, we can make Liberal an even better place.”

Liberal citizen Evelyn Austin suggested to the commission that city property must be cleaned prior to asking residents of Liberal to step up and clean up their properties.

“I think before you can get the community to buy in, you have to clean up a bit,” she said. “You go over here to the police department and that little strip, there are very tall weeds in that strip. You go to the parks you look around the curb, they do a great job of mowing, but there are high weeds that are just left.

“Another thing is these paint jobs that are going on,” she added. “There is a building down south that is just horrible. They painted it red and it looks terrible. I don’t know if the city has a paint code or not, but that is definitely something that needs to be looked into. Right by my office, on city property, there are three locust trees. Those trees are dead and have been that way for over a year. I know these things can be reported and cleaned up with tax money.”

Commissioner Larry Koochel said as people drive through town, those multi-colored buildings look like a carnival.

City Manager Mark Hall said thus far, landfill coupons that have been placed on the city’s water bill each year have been the most effective clean up method. However, to be taken to the next level, bringing the issue to local school children may be the avenue the city should take, he said.

“Joe Sealey suggested we work with the schools,” he said. “Usually in the spring and fall they do a school yard clean up. The only thing is, we would have to work with the school system to go to the kids and have a contest. If we go to these kids, we will ask the school.”

Hall was fairly certain USD No. 480 would be helpful in regards to implementing a clean up program.

Public Works Director Joe Sealey compared such a program to the Sparky the Fire Dog program conducted by the Liberal Fire Department.

“Look at Sparky the Fire Dog, the fire department starts that with kids in first and second grade,” he said. “That has taken off. Those kids remember that stuff. If we start something like that, it might take us 10 years, but those kids will learn that.”

Hall added that if students are taught to take pride in their surroundings, it may just rub off on the parents. He added the city would be available during such clean up projects with supplies such as rakes, shovels and plastic bags for those residents that may not have such equipment readily available.

“There are programs actually designed for smaller kids to teach them about graffiti and things like that,” Hall said. “These are things we can do, but they are also taking the information home to mom and dad.

“The neat thing is, there is that little kid that goes home and he has this house that is painted and looks new,” he explained. “He is now proud of his home. We have to have the programs in place for the adults so when the little kid comes home and says, ‘My friend just painted their house and it looks neat, can we do that?’”

City staff and commissioners adjourned the meeting with the agreement that all involved would continue to take time to think on prospective project ideas. Rather than simply calling the effort “Clean Up Liberal,” commissioner Dave Harrison suggested the name, “Liberal Pride, Citywide.” The name was adopted and agreed upon by all present.

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