By JESSICA CRAWFORD

• Daily Leader

Editor's note: Economic Development Director Jeff Parsons presented a plan to the Liberal City Commission during its Dec. 21, 2009, meeting to attract businesses to the area. His proposal was met with the praise and unanimous approval of the commission. This is Part 2 in a 3-Part series that will explore the details of Parsons' 2010 Economic Development Programs. The programs are a way of "setting the table" to attract businesses to Liberal, according to Parsons.

Parsons' Economic Retention Programs mainly provide a solution to improve the appearance of the City of Liberal. From North to South Kansas Avenue to U.S. Highway No. 54, Parsons intends to attract businesses by revitalizing the area most travelled by consumers and developers alike.

The Facade Program has been in place for well over a year now and has taken off – especially this year, Parsons said. The program is in the form of a 50/50 matching grant of up to $5,000 to make permanent improvements to store or office fronts, Parsons said. He was also pleased to announce the eligibility area has been expanded.

"The Facade Program has just taken off," Parsons said. "Just drive up and down town, not just

downtown, it starts at 11th Street and goes to Birch and then the entire length of 54.

“We have expanded it this year,” he explained. “What we have done, from 11th Street to Birch, it is the entire length of 54. What we did this year is go into that downtown corridor, which is 6th Street to Trail Street, or the tracks, we said Washington, Lincoln and all of the sidestreets in between.”

Parsons said the Facade Program is a bit of a mini-stimulus package of sorts. He added the funding will remain at $100,000 for 2010.

“That is sort of a mini-economic stimulus for Liberal, maybe,” he said. “Contractors are working, painters and the installation of windows and doors.”

The three Enhancement Programs specifically affect North Kansas, South Kansas and Highway 54. The program intends to spruce up all areas for accessibility and also to make the areas of traffic a bit more attractive.

“The Enhancement Programs, particularly the North and South Kansas programs, they are for aesthetics – to make it look better,” Parsons said. “But, they are also for accessibility because we have gotten in the last year, year and a half, people saying there is no way to get from 15th Street to Wal-Mart if they don’t drive. There will be sidewalk from 15th to Tucker. Then what we will do is tree-scape it along the way and also that median where we can.

“South Kansas is the same thing, but there are some existing sidewalks,” he continued. “There are also areas where there are not sidewalks and so we will sort of fill in the gaps there. We will do the tree-scaping, but we will also do corner lighting, which will be neat to help light that area up, make it more attractive.

“For Highway 54, it won’t be the sidewalk, but it will be the aesthetics,” he explained. “It is actually going to start at the east end of town at the Liberal sign at the entrance to town. We will start there and come east, then we will do trees. Then it will carry all the way through town and to Clay.

Parsons explained the difference in funding is a direct correlation to the amount of sidewalk needed on the north end of town. The North Kansas Avenue Enhancement Program has available funding of $215,000, while the South Kansas Avenue Enhancement Program has been stocked with only $100,000.

“That basically has to do with distance from 15th to Tucker you have about a mile of sidewalk to do,” he said. “And also, there is not as much sidewalk that we would have to do on South Kansas.”

Parsons is excited to see what local involvement of the Facade Program and the fruition of the enhancement programs actually do for the City of Liberal.

“We are hoping what that does is, it will make the town more attractive and make people want to stop,” he said. “We are hoping it will enhance, with the North and South Kansas Avenue program, the ability for people to get to the retail.”