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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 48-apartment complex. L&T photo/Giseelle Arredondo; Photo illustration/Earl Watt

Apartment complex coming to alleviate housing crunch

By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

- Leader & Times

There had been a request by a developer for an additional district to be added to the current Rural Housing Incentive Districts at the last city commission meeting. The commission approved the request Sept. 24, and 48 new apartments are closer to construction on the north side on east 11th Street and behind Plaza Village.

The RHID is a program designed to aid developers to build housing within communities by assisting in the financing of public improvements.

RHID captures 100 percent of the incremental increase in real property taxes created by a housing development project for up to 15 years.

The property must be within a redevelopment district. RHID is authorized for any city in Kansas with a population of less than 60,000 in a county with a population of less than 80,000 or any county with a population of less than 60,000.

Shovels aren't the ground yet, and the plans are still subject to change, according to co-developer Shannon Francis.

"Well, we haven't finalized our design yet, but we are hoping to have 48 apartments in 12 separate buildings," Francis, who is also owner of Spencer Browne's Coffee Shop, said.

The apartments will include two bedrooms and two bathrooms each, and will be located right next to Billy's Mexican Grill between 150 Plaza Drive and 40 Village Plaza. It will be east of Washington Street.

The fact that the apartments will rise right in the heart of Liberal makes the project unique and interesting, according to Francis.

"We want to have a walkable community. We are hoping to design a walkable community where people can walk to local restaurants, banks, parks and the grocery store," he said.

"There are some doctors in the complex, so there will be doctors' offices close," Francis said. "We think that's what makes the project interesting and unique."

New housing will attract development which would enhance the economic climate of the city and otherwise benefit the city and its residents of all ages.

“We are going try to appeal to younger people in the community that enjoy an active lifestyle, as well as senior citizens that want to be close to hospitals and grocery stores and doctors,” Francis said.

New housing will definitely help with Liberal’s growth, according to Francis.

“As far as the concept – nothing in Liberal can achieve the scale of Oklahoma City or Kansas City or Wichita,” he said. “I think there’s a big need for housing for new people moving to our community.

“They say that affordable housing is one of the weaknesses in our community. In rural America, it can be really difficult to build moderate-income housing because it’s so hard to get the economies to scale cost effectively. In Wichita they got builders that will shoot projects all the time,” he said.

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