By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

• Leader & Times

Tuesday night's city commission meeting started with a proclamation made by Liberal Mayor Dave Harrison for November 2013. November is "Welcome to Liberal, Kansas," month.

Next, in items from citizens, which are limited to five minutes, treasurer of the Southwest Kansas Rifle and Pistol Club Bill Asmmussen stepped forth and voiced his concerns regarding the shooting range.

"I speak today as a concerned citizen and as treasurer of the Southwest Kansas Rifle and Pistol Club, both affected by the latest decisions regarding the shooting range. Since we initiated dialogue with the city manager back in March in an effort to improve the shooting range, we have been continually blind-sided by discouraging revelations," Asmmussen said.

"I now feel that the actions have turned from misleading to vindictive," he continued. "Last Monday, we received a call from the city manager informing us of the current resolution regarding range access as well as a notice that we have until the 15th of this month to vacate the premises as the building was being taken over by the police department for storage.

“I found it peculiar that there is suddenly such a dearth of storage options here in Liberal, Kansas, that the police department needs our 600 square feet or so that is currently in use by both the gun club and Seward County Community College for storage, targets and supplies utilized for public shooting events,” Asmmussen said.

“Obviously, somebody’s feathers were ruffled by our reluctance to kowtow and feels that a lesson must be in order,” he added.

Asmmussen wants the decisions made on the shooting range to be reconsidered by the city.

“I wish to make sure that these final decisions being rendered are informed decisions sanctioned by actual elected representatives,” he said. “It is my assumption, however, that the counsel is aware and does approve of these latest plans, which is particularly disheartening.

“I ask that the city reconsiders recent decisions about the range and to actually solicit input from the primary users and apparent former custodians of the range facility. I also ask that you take a moment to reflect upon whether all decisions made were truly unbiased… and to the ultimate long term benefit of the public,” he said.

Assmussem said he supports access to the public, but not completely unrestricted access.

“Unrestricted access without supervision seems a plan designed to foster an unsafe and trashy facility that would soon fall by the wayside,” he said. “Anybody who thinks that creating a free-for-all situation benefits everyone is either clueless or has ulterior motives.”

Kevin Donovan, another gun club member, pointed out later in the meeting that “there’s some people out there that don’t even know how to point a gun.”

Commissioner Joe Denoyer asked, “This shooting range is a public shooting range. Has the gun club had locks on that shooting range for several years?”

“We have,” Asmmussen said.

“How would the public access that with your locks on there?” Denoyer asked.

“The reason…” Asmmussen continued.

“I’m asking a question,” Denoyer interrupted. “How would the public access a public shooting range with the gun club’s locks on there? How would they get access to that public range?”

“To access the gun club’s locks, you would be a member of the gun club,” Asmmussen said.

“Okay, so if I’m sitting around on a Sunday afternoon, and I want to go shoot, I have to contact one of you guys to get in?” Denoyer said.

“No, that is the city’s provision that has not been in effect for a long time. Previously, they could contact the police department. That fell by the wayside a number of years ago,” Asmmussen said.

“You have had it locked up?” Denoyer asked.

“We have it…,” Asmmussen said.

“I remember talking with Mr. (Jim) Stoddard Saturday night. He said all we would have to do was contact a gun club member and you guys would come out and unlock it for the public,” Denoyer said.

“It has never been our intention to restrict its access,” Asmmussen said.

Locks have restricted the public’s access, Denoyer said.

“By putting those locks on those gates, that is exactly what you have done,” he said.

In regard to the storage facility, Denoyer noted, the gun vlub’s items are locked up, the public does not have access to the bathrooms.

According to Assmussem, the building is locked and the city has a key to the building and to the storage area, too.

Denoyer still didn’t understand how the club is affected by opening the shooting range to the public.

“How is the club affected by opening the shooting range to the public?” he asked. “We have worked with you about how you want to have your shoots, I believe, all you have to do is give a two-day notice of your shoots. If you know in advance, six months down the line you can black those days out.”

Asmmussen replied, “How is that provision currently arranged?”

City manager Mark Hall said, “That’s in the original draft.”

Asmmussen said, “The draft, which the July 23rd meeting said was not in effect?”

“Yeah, it was the draft for review,” Hall said.

“I believe it’s on your website,” Denoyer said. “Once we get everything worked out, they can contact city hall, contact the police department, reserve your spots. You still have your public use.”

“So the police department will not take over the city range?” Asmmussen asked.

“The city range is open to the public starting Friday morning at 8 o’clock until 6 o’clock,” Denoyer said. “I’m still curious how the gun club is affected by opening up the public range to the public?”

“We feel it’s going to lead to a degradation of the range.” Asmmussen said.

“You think that the public is going to tear this stuff up? It’s my understanding that gun owners are probably some of the most responsible citizens in America,” Denoyer replied.

Denoyer then pointed out that people, including his wife, are excited that they are going to get to go out and shoot without having to go through someone else.

The city has released an official statement to the media that, “Effective Friday, Nov. 15, the shooting range will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Sunday.”