

By ELLY GRIMM

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Back in February, the City of Liberal approved a neighborhood revitalization plan tax rebate program for homeowners who perform renovations on their homes or businesses.

At Tuesday night's meeting of the Liberal City Commission, the plan currently in place was rescinded to make way for changes requested by the county for administration purposes.

Karen LaFreniere, director of Liberal's housing and community development, wished to emphasize these changes had nothing to do with the school bond passed in April.

"We had started talking about it before the vote was even taken on the schools, it had nothing to do with that," LaFreniere said. "It all had to do with administration part because the county administers the plan and they wanted the easiest way to administer the plan, so that's what the changes were about."



However, the plan was not completely overhauled, there were only a few changes made. Originally, the plan was just for the city and the county to rebate the taxes – however, one of

the changes the county requested in the plan was to include all four tax entities (the city, the county, Seward County Community College/Area Technical School and U.S.D. No. 480) to be included instead of just the city and the county.

“It’s easier if they’re doing the whole chunk instead of just half the chunk,” LaFreniere explained.

Another one of the changes included the county changing the definition of the improvements to be at least 10 percent of the value on the residential property and 20 percent for commercial property – the original rebates were set at \$5,000 and \$10,000.

With the new plan changes, people who also become delinquent on the property taxes will be disqualified from the rebate whereas before, people could catch up on the taxes and still get the rebate.

LaFreniere said making the changes has been in the works for several months.

“It’s been hard to get with the school, with the college and county together so the county and I met and then we made our changes and then it was hard to get with the school because Mr. Larkin was terribly busy and the college too,” she said. “So the attorneys reviewed it and the school reviewed it, the college reviewed it and it was just a matter of time. We all met, myself and Jeff and Kory all had a big meeting and reviewed the changes, how it would affect the plan (not very much) and there just weren’t very many changes at all.”

There will be a public forum at the next city commission meeting on Aug. 12. Should the changes pass again as with the first reading on Tuesday, LaFreniere said there’s no reason why the changes shouldn’t immediately apply.

“I think it’s important for people to understand this isn’t a grant program. It’s not any money the city’s giving out, it’s a tax rebate and it’s the difference between the property value at the time of the project to the ‘after’ value of the project,” she said. “It will just depend on the project itself. It’s available for single family, multi-family, commercial and industrial property.”

