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Liberal Police Chief Al Sill, left, attempts to explain to the city commission during Tuesday evening's meeting why new software is needed to maintain the safety and peace of mind of the community. Ultimately, Sill was allowed to go through with the COPS Grant application process that, if awarded, will aid the city and county with the purchase of new software. Daily Leader photo/Jessica Crawford By JESSICA CRAWFORD • Daily Leader The Liberal Police Department once again wishes to partner with the Seward County Sheriff's Department in an effort to use grant funds to purchase much needed advanced technology. The technology, if grant funding is awarded, will allow officers immediate access to records.

The Seward County Sheriff's Department was granted permission by the county commission to apply for the Edward Byrne Memorial grant Monday evening. The city commission voted to allow the LPD to move forward with the application of the COPS (Community Oriented Policing) Grant during its Tuesday evening meeting.

"Back in April, I travelled to

Washington D.C. to meet with some representatives of the U.S. Department of Justice," Liberal Police Chief Al Sill said. "The purpose of that trip was to seek some grant funding for the police department. I think we have been pretty successful in that because we have been invited to apply for this grant. The application process opened on June 2 and it closes on June 25. So, we are in the process of writing a grant (application) and the grant amount is \$200,000."

Originally, Sill said he wanted to use the possible funding for enhancing and upgrading technology with regard to community oriented policing. He felt the replacement of aging equipment was overdue. However, he saw a greater need. Although the need may prove to be very costly, Sill feels the price can be negotiated.

"Since that time, our focus and interest has now changed, and we are in the process of looking at a new records management system, a new jail management system, a new Computer Aided Dispatch system that is going to benefit the sheriff's department, the police department, communications, and it will even have some impact with county and city fire," Sill said.

"We are looking into a new system for a variety of reasons, but those new systems are going to be very, very costly," Sill explained. "We are in the process of meeting with a couple different companies, we are in the process of setting up some demonstrations and all of that. They have given us some tentative pricing that is quite shocking, one came in a \$1 million and the other came in at roughly over \$600,000. However, I do believe that those prices will come down. I have assured them that they both need to come down in order for us to work with them."

Commissioner Dave Harrison understood Sill must be vague regarding the matter of the

software. However, he wanted to be sure the LPD actually needed the software.

"You are asking for permission to apply for your grant and that I understand," Harrison said. "But one thing you haven't done is given us a case of why you have this need."

Sill explained implementing the software was part of a greater plan he put into place in 2006 when he became the Chief of Police.

"When I took this position over, I set out strategically in listing specific goals that we wanted to achieve throughout the community," Sill said. "The first goal was to reduce crime and the fear of crime in Liberal. I think that we have done that. I think we have shown that we have made considerable improvement.

"Part of our ability to do that was to integrate a Comstat system within our organization," he explained. "We are doing that on an extremely, extremely limited basis. We have no sophistication in the technology with what we are doing. We are basically hand searching data so that we can come up with statistics to provide for people who make decisions on the action plans that we set out. When I developed this plan, I knew that it was a shortcoming of ours."

Harrison commented that, eventually, he and the commissioners must be made aware of why the software is so necessary.

"If it is something that you need, that you have to have, that is one thing," he said. "But if it is just something that you want, that is a completely different thing."

Sill responded as he said the department needed information available to them in a timely manner. The current software does not provide that.

"Ease of operation is what we are trying to improve," Sill said. "Right now, we don't have ease of operation. We are working for the software instead of the software working for us.

"I know I am dumping a lot on you guys," he added. "But we have been working on this for months."

Commissioner Bob Carlile made a motion to allow the LPD to continue with the grant application process. Commissioner Larry Koochel seconded the motion. Sill informed the commission the money, if awarded, would not be in hand until the end of 2010. The motion passed with all five commissioners in approval.

"Commissioner Carlile moved to approve the submittal of the grant application as presented with the intention of changing software subject to final approval of funds upon obtaining the grant," City Clerk Debbie Giskie recited to ensure all commissioners and Sill understood the motion.

"I would like to add that we have seen a significant decrease in crime since 2006," Vice Mayor Joe Denoyer concluded. "I think a lot of that has been due to the technology that we have

allowed our police department to use.”

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