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By JESSICA CRAWFORD

- Daily Leader

It is that time of year when not-for-profit organizations plead their case for funding from the City of Liberal. The process remains the same as it has for the past three years, the filling out of a rather extensive application.

According to finance director Chris Ford, the application will help each organization that requests funding fit into one of several possible categories. The thought behind an application process, Ford said, compacts the funding requests into a certain time frame – budget planning time.

“Basically contained within our application, there are some categories that they would either fit into – cultural, recreational, environmental, economical, human services, crime prevention or youth organizations,” Ford said. “Essentially, what our thought on this, this is maybe the third year we have been doing this, digressing from that it has been a method of kind of streamlining the requests we get from different groups, rather than them coming in at all times of the year.

“We want them to do this during budget time so that we can factor it accordingly so that they will either receive approval or they won’t,”

he explained. “That way we don’t have people coming in all year long.

Ford explained the difference between a not-for-profit organization and a business. Although

only not-for-profit entities will be considered for budgeted funds, he did discuss some available funding options for businesses.

“We do call it not-for-profit, basically a particular business could not come in and get that,” he said. “We do have some other funding mechanisms for them whether it be special assessments or some programs in economic development like the facade program.

“Not-for-profit are groups that perform a service that falls in line with the city’s mission,” he continued. “They are here to provide a service, they are not in it to turn a profit.”

Ford explained that the not-for-profit groups most likely perform a service that is an extension of a service that the city already provides.

“There are groups such as Oz-some, which promoting Liberal is something they take on themselves,” he said as he provided examples.

“Great Plains Angels For Animals is another, even though we have an animal control department, we are concerned with controlling animals and they are more concerned with finding them homes.

“I am glad that we do have those organizations out there. I guess that helps us to better appropriate our tax dollars,” he continued.

“They are doing good work and we might help them a little bit with funding. But actually if we tried to do what they are doing, it would cost far more.”

Ford understands the seriousness of actually giving away tax payer dollars, so to speak. He feels very confident that the city commission will make wise funding decisions when the work sessions come up. He added that the available funds are very limited.

“I know there is kind of a debate on giving away tax payer dollars and the commission really has to be assured that this is an extension of the city’s service,” he said. “People are paying property taxes and you are going to turn around and give it away. I know the commission, politically, has a lot to consider on top of just available dollars.

“Basically, funding wise, we are limited on the amount of funds we can provide so as part of the budget process, we do have a work session that is specifically for not-for-profit funding where the commission does consider them and prioritize them, just like our budget,” he added. “Everybody has requests but there is only so much money to go around so we have to prioritize. We have had cases in the past where not every organization has received funding.”

The 2010 budget is only in the thinking stages at this time. Very soon, work sessions will begin and decisions will be made. As for the not-for-profit organizations, only a small amount of funding will be available.

“Regarding the 2010 budget, we are just at the beginning of that process,” Ford said. “We are planning sometime in July, that is yet to be determined, to start our budget work sessions. Later this month I will have an opportunity to work all of those up and see where we are at.

“Regarding not-for-profit funding, I would say just roughly, shooting from the hip – probably five percent comes out of the budget,” he continued. “And that is just based off of historical averages – not knowing what this year is going to bring or what new requests we might get. I guess I am looking at around \$100,000 to \$125,000 of a \$30 million budget.”

Although planning a budget for a city of approximately 20,000 citizens is no easy feat, even in a time of a severe economic slow- down – the City of Liberal is in very good condition.

“Financially, I know we are in good shape,” Ford said. “In fact, last year the auditors made a

comment that the city was in the best shape they had ever seen it in.

“We are on a good mission,” he concluded. “Let’s keep trudging forward and getting good things done.”

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