

City adds staff to handle growth, development

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The need for housing around Converse County is changing how Douglas is going about the development business.

More than 360 parcels of land could be zoned, platted, structured and ready for houses in the next year. And as contractors and builders wait for the ground to thaw before getting projects underway, city officials are seeking to fill two new positions to help handle the housing bustle.

City Administrator Bobbe Fitzhugh said the city is looking for a new community development director, and a technical analyst position will be added to the development team to help the department sort through its increasing workloads. Current development Director Mike Roy will slide over to fill the analyst's office once a new director is hired.

Roy's new duties will include establishing a credible tracking system for building permits, code enforcement and planning applications for subdivisions, site plans, zoning changes and annexations. He will also work with Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to update and maintain city maps.

A primary goal of the new director will be engaging with contractors, builders, the public and the media on a daily basis. The city hopes to have the position filled by April 1, Fitzhugh said.

Joining the director in the spring will be a comprehensive growth management consultant, who will help Douglas, Glenrock and the county prepare a county-wide Comprehensive Growth Management Plan.

Contracting the consultant is the first step Douglas, Glenrock and Converse County are taking since being awarded a \$25,000 Community Development Block Grant from the Wyoming Business Council in December.

That money, coupled with \$8,500 ponied up from both the city of Douglas and Converse County and \$3,400 from the town of Glenrock will go toward hiring the consultant, who will work closely with the recently formed housing subcommittees, which are comprised of volunteers to assist the city in analyzing its housing needs. The five committees, formed during recent public meetings, include Human Resource Needs, Infrastructure Analysis, Alternative Financing, Housing Needs Analysis and Land Use Regulations.

If we're going to grow, we better make sure we do it right, Fitzhugh said.

The need for the new positions at city hall, the development consultant and the public meetings stems from recent population growth which is driving demand for housing. Proposed projects on the immediate horizon include:

" Two six-unit, handicap accessible town houses near Clay and N. Fifth Street. Keith and Tad Detmer of TK Construction Inc., are seeking a conditional use permit for residential zoning from city council. If passed, building could begin in spring.

" StoneCrest Development of Cheyenne is proposing 72 paired homes, or duplexes, north of W. Richards Street and south of Lone Tree mobile home park. Some homes could be ready for move in by summer, StoneCrest President Rob Geringer said.

" Glen Russell, managing partner of Russell Construction, has 250 lots available between Keith Rider Park and the North Platte River. The subdivision, known as Meadowlark Trails, could be ready for development by the fall. The sites could be sold to contractors or be sold to individuals with plans to build, Russell said.

" The 28-plot Wilson subdivision, located west of the North Platte River near the Holiday Inn Express, could undergo ground breaking by spring. Developer Mike Wilson also plans to build a Sleep Inn Hotel in the same area.

" K&R Construction Owner Ron McNare is finishing the first phase of his 40-unit Antelope Creek Apartments near N. Sixth Street and Willow Drive in the Northgate area. The second phase should begin in the spring after the first 20 units have been rented, he said.

" Russell also mentioned the United One Addition, which consists of eight lots situated on the southwest corner of the intersection of WYO 59 and W. Yellowstone Highway. Specific plans are not being released, but Russell said he expects business development there in the foreseeable future.

" Smaller-sized, single family construction projects could accompany the larger-scale plots in the spring, adding to the total, Roy said. The extra help in the department should come as a relief.

We're looking forward to the help, he said.