

REQUEST FOR COUNCIL ACTION

Council Meeting of 9-19-06
Agenda Item _____

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION – CONCEPTUAL APPROVAL TO PROVIDE AIR SUPPORT FOR THE REDLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

MOTION: I move to authorize the Police Department to develop an *Air Support Unit* Program with the understanding that no money – other than staff time – will be expended without the approval of the City Council.

DISCUSSION:

Last year, Redlands' serious "Part I" crimes increased 20% (Part 1 crimes, as defined by the federal *Uniformed Crime Reports* are murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft, auto theft and arson). Continuing this trend, the first six months of 2006 has been witness to an alarming increase in violent crimes. If the rate of violent crime continues on its current trajectory, by the end of this year Redlands will have experienced a 40% increase in violent crime since 2004. In the face of these increases, the City has been compelled to *cut \$1.3 million dollars from the police department's budget* over the last two fiscal years.

In addition to the increase in the number of serious violent crimes, there has been a substantial change in *who* is committing these crimes in Redlands. The crime of *robbery* illustrates this point.

Robbery is the crime committed when a criminal uses *force, fear* or *both* (i.e. a "mugging," "purse snatch," armed robbery of a person, a "holdup" of a store or bank, a carjacking, etc.) to take property from a victim. It is one of the most violent of Part 1 crimes. The average number of robberies *per month* has jumped from 8 in 2005 to 11 this year.

An analysis of robbery arrests indicates that the percentage of adult arrestees, who are Redlands residents, is declining in comparison to those who reside outside our community. More than 75% of the adults arrested for robbery were non-Redlands residents. This trend holds true overall for Part 1 crimes with the percentage of non-Redlands resident arrestees increasing to almost 60% of all arrests so far this year. This non-resident criminal phenomenon has response time implications that are discussed later in this report.

Albert Einstein, one of the world's greatest thinkers, once said about the need to innovate in the face of recurring problems, that, "the world we created today has problems which cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them." If the RPD is to maintain its current ability to protect the people of Redlands through the suppression of crime, then, now – perhaps more than anytime in recent history – we *must* think differently about police department strategies and the resources it has available to control crime.

This request for the City Council's consideration proposes an innovative strategy that meets Einstein's charge and leverages the investment Redlands taxpayers have made in their police department, crime control and public safety.

The police department is asking the City Council to approve the concept of an *RPD Air Support Unit* and authorize its development. The department recognizes the financial constraints it faces relative to *General Fund* expenditures and stipulates *General Fund* money will not be spent on this project (with the exception of staff time) without the express approval of the City Council. Before any narcotics seizure or traffic impound money is expended the department will return to the Council with specific proposals relating to the purchase, operating costs of the plane, program budget, etc. If this request is approved, the Council will have an opportunity to formally approve the program before the City is committed to its implementation.

The police department's asset seizure and traffic accounts – both of which have non-supplanting restrictions – currently hold sufficient funds to acquire and operate an *Air Support Unit* for more than a year. Historic evidence indicates these sources generate more than enough annual revenue to operate an aviation unit – *without General Fund participation*. In addition, the department is awaiting the results of a *Homeland Security* grant proposal it submitted to help offset the cost of the plane and equipment.

The timing of public safety issues frequently do not conform to the City's budgetary timelines or financial challenges. By their very nature, crime and other public safety issues are unpredictable. However, Redlands' City Councils have a history of supporting crucial public safety needs whenever they present themselves – *especially when a funding source other than the General Fund has been identified*.

One model for leveraging the City's investment in public safety is the time-tested notion of "force multipliers" used by the military. Force multipliers are those factors that dramatically increase the combat effectiveness of a military force. For example, military history is replete with accounts of small bands of well-trained, technologically advanced soldiers occupying "high ground" positions with the sun behind them that were significantly more effective in combat than the substantially larger, ill-equipped and poorly trained opposing forces that were forced to attack uphill, into the sun. In these instances, the force multipliers were superior training, technology, equipment, high ground and the position of the sun.

The force multipliers in policing are those factors that dramatically increase the crime control effectiveness of a police department. Technology, civilianization, forensics, the employment of retired officers, community partnerships and Sheriff's Department aviation support of ground officers are the multipliers actively employed by the Redlands Police Department. Efforts are currently underway to enhance them and the City Council can expect to hear more about them from the department's leadership in the future.

One of these factors in particular – aviation support – has received significant department attention for the last six months due to: 1) Redlands’ rising crime rate; 2) the fact that police personnel resources have not kept sufficiently abreast of Redlands’ growth; 3) the changing nature of local crime; 4) department’s sensitivity to the City’s on-going budgetary challenges in the face of rising crime; and, 5) the widely recognized, invaluable nature of air support to ground officers.

This report outlines a proposed RPD *Air Support Unit* consisting of a used *Cessna 172* plane based at the *Redlands Municipal Airport*, staffed by volunteer citizen pilots and citizen and RPD officer-observers and funded by non-General Fund narcotics seizures and traffic impound revenue sources.

In May, the police department conducted a two-day *Flight Feasibility Assessment* of a fixed-wing aircraft for use as a patrol and surveillance resource for police officers. This was crafted intentionally to test the efficacy of this proposal. Some members of the Council were able to witness portions of the assessment.

During the assessment, 12 realistic scenarios were conducted with each intended to gauge different dimensions of a plane’s value to Redlands. Scenarios portraying narcotics surveillances, lost children, pursuits, an officer not responding to his radio calls, residential burglary alarms, traffic patrol and off-road traffic enforcement and “fire watch patrol” in Redlands’ canyon areas were just some of the tests the plane met. It was the opinion of the police officers, and citizen volunteer pilots involved in the test, that a plane would significantly increase the police department’s effectiveness in crime suppression, investigation and enhancing the safety of ground officers.

One aspect of the test was to determine the feasibility of a light sport aircraft (LSA) as a police aircraft. LSA’s are the fastest growing segment of the general aviation market in the U.S. The police department was interested in this particular plane because of its incredible cost effectiveness (about \$35 per hour to operate).

The department has since deferred its interest in an LSA because the aircraft insurance industry has not yet matured relative to the police use of LSA’s. The department found insurance underwriters willing to insure the LSA but with a restriction of 4-5 pilots to be covered. This was due to the relatively short period of time LSA’s have been on the American market. This is likely to change dramatically in the next few years as the insurance underwriters react to *Cessna’s* recent entry into the LSA market and as the number of LSA’s flown domestically increases dramatically.

Any veteran RPD police officer can recount incident-after-incident in which the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department (SBSD) helicopter crews (commonly referred to by their aircraft’s radio call-sign “40King”) proved to be the deciding factor in the successful conclusion of a multitude of crime incidents. Daily, 40King’s support spells the difference between suspects

being captured or escaping, vehicular pursuits ending successfully or tragically with innocent people being injured or officers engaged in foot pursuits avoiding injury or death when the airborne officers direct other ground officers to them.

Over the last three years RPD officers have been steadily increasing their use of 40King's services. RPD statistics indicate that, in 2004, 40King responded to an average of 9 RPD calls per month, 10 calls per month in 2005, and, as of May, 15 calls per month in 2006 (representing a projected *40-60 hours of total air time* over Redlands). These numbers do not include the occasions RPD officers requested 40King's assistance but the crews were busy on other calls or otherwise unavailable. Nor does this reflect the number of incidents that 40King was on-scene in Redlands, or enroute, but had to "break" from our calls to handle other, higher priority calls somewhere else in the San Bernardino Valley (an area of approximately 632 sq. miles).

The need for an aviation resource dedicated to the RPD was recently underscored than when RPD detectives, investigating a high-profile murder, needed the services of a surveillance plane to assist in following several murder suspects. The law enforcement plane designated for this use was unavailable and the detectives were forced to expose aspects of the investigation and place themselves more at-risk than is preferred in these type cases.

Planes are obviously not helicopters – the preferred aviation resource for many law enforcement applications. They have limitations and any proposed department use of a plane is not intended to replace its current use of 40King at night or during certain incidents where a helicopter is essential. And no one reading this report should perceive this concept as a slight to the professionalism of the deputies comprising the Sheriff's Aviation Division. This report's author has worked with them in one capacity or another his entire career. He has *never* found them to be anything other than consummate professionals. Their service to the people of Redlands has been nothing short of heroic. The leadership of the RPD is honored to consider them colleagues in Redlands' struggle to control crime.

It is clear that certain facts cannot be ignored when considering the notion of a plane as an alternative to the majority of Redlands' daytime aviation needs. Helicopters are very expensive. The least expensive, reasonable, helicopter option of which the department is aware results in a recurring cost of approximately \$400,000 per year (for 40 hours a week of available time in Redlands which includes less than 20 "guaranteed" flight hours, at approximately \$400 per hour).

In contrast to the projected total of 40-60 total annual hours of call-related airtime over Redlands for 40King, the department projects that an RPD plane will spend approximately 800 hours annually flying over Redlands. This translates to a purchase price of approximately \$60,000 for a 1979 *Cessna 172* (which would become a practically non-depreciating City asset) and has a recurring operating cost of just \$48,000-60,000 per year (depending on hours flown, at \$60-70 per hour which includes fuel, maintenance and engine replacement reserve).

The fact that so many of the criminals committing crimes in Redlands do not live here obviously indicates that after committing their crimes they will flee the city. Accordingly, police “response time” is an important consideration addressed by a possible future RPD *Air Support Unit*.

As traffic congestion becomes more problematic for ground officers, a plane’s response time advantage will become more important. In responding to in-progress calls, literally every second counts in the apprehension of offenders. It is common for RPD officers to arrive at a crime scene minutes after the suspects have fled. The proximity of the IS 10 and SR 30 freeways and major arterial streets like Lugonia Ave., Alabama St., Redlands Blvd., Barton Rd. and Highland Ave. make escape from Redlands into another jurisdiction a common occurrence – even when there is a suspect vehicle description.

During the plane feasibility assessment, the department determined that an airborne RPD asset could arrive on-scene anywhere in Redlands within about 90 seconds. This response time increases to about 4 minutes when the aircraft is parked at the end of the airport’s runway awaiting a call. These times are considerably faster than the typical response times of either our car-based officers or 40King.

Airborne officers can see key roadways long before, and search much more effectively, than any ground officer. As invaluable as the aircrews of the Sheriff’s Department are to the RPD, it is not reasonable to assume they will be available fast enough, due to their tremendous geographic responsibility, *unless they happen to be over Redlands at the time the officers need them*. Therefore, the amount of time an aviation asset is over Redlands is key to its effectiveness.

While there are several RPD employees with previous flying experience we do not now have the institutional capacity to meet projected pilot requirements. That fact notwithstanding, Redlands does have three characteristics helpful in addressing this issue: 1) a rich history of volunteerism; 2) enough seasoned pilots to form an adequate pool of qualified pilots; and, 3) Redlands has an airport.

The police department has been discussing this project with a group of veteran Redlands pilots. Some are active-duty, or retired law enforcement pilots conversant with the RPD’s aviation needs. They have given their support to the project and have volunteered to pilot a police plane on a volunteer basis. They have also agreed to serve as a screening and training committee for additional “Citizen Pilots.” They believe it will not be difficult to recruit 10-15 volunteer pilots for this program. This aspect of the program is modeled after our own invaluable *Citizen Volunteer Patrol* (think “CVP’s with wings!”) and the experience of many other law enforcement agencies that utilize volunteer pilots (e.g. SB Co. Sheriff, Washington State Patrol, Palm Springs PD, Indio PD, etc.).

Several Inland Empire police departments have identified an air support unit as so critical to their mission that they either formed their own helicopter air support unit, contracted for these services (e.g., Ontario PD, Riverside PD, Corona PD, Fontana PD, San Bernardino PD, etc.) or have fixed-wing airplane programs in-place or under development (e.g. Palm Springs, Indio, Banning). Several of these programs incorporate the use of volunteer pilots as this proposal suggests.

The City of San Bernardino has the most recently implemented aviation unit. It contracts with a private helicopter firm for the services of a pilot and the helicopter. The San Bernardino Police Department provides a fulltime police officer observer. Both recent news reports, and the SBPD's leadership, indicate that the program is extremely successful and a valuable weapon in San Bernardino's crime fighting arsenal.

It is hoped that the information presented to the Council in this report demonstrates the need RPD officers have for an aviation resource dedicated solely to Redlands to increase their crime fighting capabilities and enhance their "officer safety." Furthermore, it is the opinion of the Chief of Police that Redlands' taxpayers deserve to receive better police services through the force multiplying effects of the proposed *Air Support Unit* that ultimately leverages their existing "investment" in the Redlands Police Department.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no additional impact on the General Fund.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Take no action

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Concurrence:

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