

POLICE COMMITTEE MINUTES

July 2, 2001

The Police Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on July 2, 2001 at 3:00 p.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Dennis Kavanaugh, Chairman
Jim Davidson
Pat Pomeroy

COUNCIL PRESENT

Mayor Keno Hawker

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mike Hutchinson

Chairman Kavanaugh excused Committeemember Pomeroy from the beginning of the meeting. Committeemember Pomeroy arrived at the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

(Items on the agenda were discussed out of order, but for purposes of clarity will remain as listed on the agenda.)

1. Discuss and consider proceeding with the acquisition of an additional Police helicopter.

Chairman Kavanaugh noted that the members of the Police Committee were provided with a revised copy of the Council Report immediately prior to the commencement of the meeting.

Aviation Section Lieutenant Rodney Johnston addressed the Police Committee relative to this agenda item and provided brief historical background regarding the Mesa Police Department's Aviation Section. Lieutenant Johnston stated that in January of 1994, the Police Department acquired two MD 500E helicopters. The aircraft were acquired to assist the Police Department's patrol division in its operations. Lieutenant Johnston stated that the Aviation Section has flown in excess of 21,600 hours with no accidents, responded to 102,000 calls for service, was the first unit on the scene for 72,600 cases, assisted in 5,819 arrests and 1,685 searches for missing persons, and found 302 missing persons.

Lieutenant Johnston explained that the Aviation Section currently averages an estimated 3,000 hours of flight time per year with the two helicopters and said that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires inspections of the aircraft at specified intervals. The current maintenance schedule requires that one aircraft remain in service while the other is grounded for routine maintenance. Lieutenant Johnston noted, however, that in the event of unanticipated maintenance on the available aircraft, the Aviation Section is unable to provide aerial assistance to the Police Department. Lieutenant Johnston stated that the acquisition of a third helicopter would provide the Aviation Section with helicopter coverage at all times, extend the service life of all three aircraft, and increase flight hours and service availability to the City.

Chairman Kavanaugh clarified that staff is requesting that the Committee recommend to the Council that a third helicopter be purchased, but is not at this time specifying which model. Staff will issue specifications and see what responses are received. He added that it is also his understanding that Mike Hutchinson and Larry Wolf have looked at this issue and are recommending that if the Council approves such a purchase, that it be done through bond authorization.

City Manager Mike Hutchinson agreed with Chairman Kavanaugh's comments and added that it is staff's intent to conduct additional research within the aircraft industry relative to the specifications and pricing of a third helicopter and to provide recommendations regarding the purchase and appropriate financing. Mr. Hutchinson added that as Mesa continues to grow, the Police Department can no longer effectively perform its duties without the utilization of multiple aircraft.

Discussion ensued relative to the expanded role of the Aviation Section to include all aspects of public safety.

Finance Director Larry Woolf spoke with regard to the availability of alternative financing options relative to the purchase of a third helicopter at an estimated cost of \$1.2 million.

Committeemember Pomeroy voiced support for this agenda item and stated that during a recent Police ride-along on one of the City's helicopters, he was impressed by the fact that the aircraft was always the first unit on the scene in response to calls for service.

Assistant Fire Chief Gil Damiani addressed the Police Committee relative to this issue and explained that the Mesa Fire Department's utilization of the Police helicopters has become an invaluable tool in the location and suppression of fires and also the detection of hidden fires in attics through the use of infrared equipment. Chief Damiani added that the Fire Department supports the addition of a third helicopter.

It was moved by Committeemember Pomeroy, seconded by Committeemember Davidson, to recommend to the Council that the purchase of a third helicopter be approved and that staff be directed to conduct additional research and develop recommendations regarding the specific purchase (model, etc.) and appropriate financing.

Committeemember Davidson commented that he has not had sufficient time to review the revised Council Report in its entirety. He also remarked that he is looking forward to further discussion of this issue by the full Council but his second to the motion should not be construed as support for the matter at this time.

Carried unanimously.

Chairman Kavanaugh thanked staff for their presentation.

2. Discuss and consider the acquisition of ballistic helmets.

Chairman Kavanaugh noted that this issue was discussed during a recent Budget Review Session, and that staff was requested to provide additional input relative to the type of protective helmets the Mesa Police Department currently provides to its officers and also possible recommendations regarding the acquisition of ballistic helmets.

Police Sergeant Kelvin Smith reported that the Police Department currently issues a polycarbonate type riot helmet to all sworn police personnel, but noted that such helmets do not provide the

officers with sufficient ballistic head protection. Sergeant Smith said that it is the recommendation of staff that such helmets be replaced with tactical ballistic helmets containing an NIJ 3A rating. Sergeant Smith advised that ballistic helmets with a 3A threat level rating are resistant to bullet rounds from 9 millimeter, .357 and .44 caliber weapons. Sergeant Smith noted that the Police Department is currently instructing all of its sworn personnel in Rapid Response tactics and stressed the fact that the ballistic helmet would be an invaluable tool when engaged in such situations. Sergeant Smith added that the ballistic helmet, which was once issued only to tactical officers, is becoming more commonplace equipment among all police officers. Sergeant Smith informed the Committee that the cost to the City for the ballistic helmets, a riot face shield and storage bag is estimated at approximately \$196,000.

In response to a question from Committeemember Pomeroy, City Manager Mike Hutchinson explained that the cost of the ballistic helmets was not included in the budget for FY 2001/02, but if approved by Council, contingency funds would be utilized for the acquisition of such helmets. Mr. Hutchinson added that a possible option to lessen the fiscal impact would be to purchase half of the helmets in one fiscal year and the remainder during the following budget year.

Committeemember Pomeroy spoke in support of this issue, but voiced concerns relative to the manner in which the purchase would be accomplished.

It was moved by Committeemember Pomeroy, seconded by Committeemember Davidson, to recommend to Council that the recommendation of staff regarding the acquisition of ballistic helmets be approved.

Chairman Kavanaugh spoke in favor of the motion and stressed the fact that the ballistic helmet is an essential piece of equipment for the prevention of serious head injuries during any volatile police situation.

Carried unanimously.

3. Hear a presentation on the Narcotics Drug Interdiction Team.

Police Commander Dan Saban provided the Police Committee with a brief update relative to this agenda item. Commander Saban stated that the Narcotics Drug Interdiction Team (NDIT), a unit of the Special Investigations Division, was formed in 1998 to respond to the Narcotics Hotline calls as well as ongoing street-level narcotics activities in the City's parks and neighborhoods. Commander Saban explained that NDIT's responsibilities have expanded to include reviewing all narcotics cases which are filed with the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, responding to the Narcotics Hotline, and dismantling clandestine methamphetamine drug labs.

Commander Saban referred to graphics displayed in the Council Chambers and provided a brief overview of NDIT's recent accomplishments.

In response to a question from Chairman Kavanaugh regarding possible reimbursement to the City for its efforts to clean up clandestine drug labs, Commander Saban clarified that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) provides limited financial assistance to municipalities in such cleanup efforts.

Discussion ensued relative to the manner in which the NDIT unit responds to Mesa residents who initiate calls to the Police Department regarding clandestine drug labs in their neighborhoods.

Committeemember Davidson voiced concerns regarding an increased incidence of methamphetamine labs in Mesa's neighborhoods and encouraged the Police Department to remain vigilant in this regard.

Chairman Kavanaugh thanked Commander Saban for the presentation.

4. Hear a presentation on issues associated with the Crown Victoria Police vehicle.

Assistant Police Chief G.T. Fowler provided brief historical background relative to this agenda item. Chief Fowler reported that in the last ten years, over 15 accidents have occurred nationally, including the death of four police officers, as a result of potential design flaws in Crown Victoria police vehicles. Chief Fowler explained that during rear-end collisions, the vehicle's gas tank, which is mounted vertically behind the rear axle, has been forced into the rear axle or the rear shock towers, and that due to a perforation in the tank, fuel has leaked underneath the passenger compartment resulting in fires. Chief Fowler stated that in conjunction with other local law enforcement agencies, the Mesa Police Department has researched this matter and identified several possible solutions.

Chief Fowler outlined various safety enhancements that could be implemented on 1992 thru 1997 models consisting of replacing a bolt on the rear axle and reinstalling the bracket on the opposite side with an alternative bolt. For model years 1998 and newer, the removal of the gas tank and the installation of a fuel cell in its place would significantly enhance the safety of the vehicle. Chief Fowler noted that both alternatives would significantly reduce the potential of a punctured gas tank during a rear impact. Chief Fowler added that the cost to the City to retrofit the 1998 and newer model Crown Victoria vehicles would be approximately \$1,000 per vehicle.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that since 1999, all new Police Department vehicles are fueled with compressed natural gas (CNG); the fact that there have been no incidents of fuel-tank fires in the CNG-fueled Crown Victoria vehicles; the fact that the Police Department currently owns 243 Crown Victoria police vehicles, of which 103 are gas fueled and 29 are bi-fueled (gas and CNG), and the fact that the Crown Victoria vehicles are also utilized by other City departments.

In response to a question from Chairman Kavanaugh, Chief Fowler clarified that at the present time, Ford Motor Company has not offered to provide financial assistance to the City of Mesa relative to the installation of the fuel cells in the Crown Victoria police vehicles.

Committeemember Davidson stated that although the primary goal of the Police Department is the safety of its officers, he also has concerns regarding potential liability issues associated with the retrofitting of the Crown Victoria police vehicles. Committeemember Davidson added that if the vehicles are defective and have the potential to cause serious injury and death, it would be his preference that the vehicles be replaced. Chief Fowler assured Committeemember Davidson that knowledgeable automotive engineers would perform the appropriate modifications to the Department's vehicles.

Pete Thompson, an attorney for the Mesa Police Department, provided an overview of the Department's legal perspective regarding this matter.

Chief Fowler informed the Police Committee that the Crown Victoria is the only full-size police vehicle currently offered in the United States and added that the only alternative is the Chevrolet Impala which has not been modified to accommodate CNG fuel.

Chairman Kavanaugh advised that this matter will be the subject of ongoing briefings by the City Manager and the Police Department and said that staff will continue to apprise the Council of future recommendations.

Chairman Kavanaugh thanked everyone for the presentation.

5. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Police Committee meeting adjourned at 4:07 p.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Police Committee Meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on July 2, 2001. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

Dated this ____ day of _____ 2001.

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK