

# POLICE COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 25, 2002

The Police Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on March 25, 2002 at 3:30 p.m.

**COMMITTEE PRESENT**

Dennis Kavanaugh, Chairman  
Jim Davidson  
Pat Pomeroy

**COUNCIL PRESENT**

None

**OFFICERS PRESENT**

Mike Hutchinson

1. Discuss and consider the acquisition of a third police helicopter.

Police Commander Steve Toland addressed the Committee and said that the purpose of this agenda item is to present staff's recommendations regarding the City's purchase of a third helicopter. Commander Toland introduced the evaluation team members who participated in this RFP process, including Police Lieutenant Rod Johnston, Chief Pilot Steve Rather, Senior Aircraft Mechanic John Destories and Buyer Darryl Woodson.

Commander Toland reported that it is staff's goal to ensure that a police helicopter is in service over the City 10 hours daily. He explained that scheduled maintenance is conducted on a continual, rotating basis leaving only one helicopter available to conduct patrol operations. He added that if the helicopter in operation requires unscheduled maintenance, both helicopters are grounded at the same time. He stated that it is staff's opinion that the acquisition of a third helicopter will ensure that one helicopter is available at all times to fly patrol missions. He stated that staff projects that the acquisition of a third helicopter will extend the lifespan of the two helicopters presently in operation by approximately thirty months each.

Commander Toland outlined staff's recommendations concerning the acquisition of a third helicopter, including: 1) accept the proposal from MD Helicopters for purchase of a MD 500 E helicopter with certain factory installed options identified in staff's report; 2) issue a RFP for a 7500 FLIR (forward looking infrared) system; and 3) issue a RFP for separate avionics accessories identified in staff's report. Commander Toland explained that staff anticipates that obtaining separate bids for the FLIR system and avionics accessories will result in an overall savings of approximately \$134,000. Commander Toland added that this entire proposal would be funded by available voter-approved law enforcement bond funds.

In response to questions from Chairman Kavanaugh concerning the FLIR system currently used by the Department, Commander Toland explained that the existing system was purchased when the first helicopter was purchased, that the technology is approximately 18-20 years old, and that the new helicopter is not compatible with the existing FLIR system and would require rewiring if a new

FLIR system is not acquired. Commander Toland further explained that the FLIR system hangs underneath the aircraft and is used for searches at night by seeking heat sources and also used to assist the Fire Department by locating "hot spots" in structure fires.

In response to questions from Committeemember Davidson concerning the amount of cumulative hours flown by the existing two helicopters (23,000 hours), Commander Toland advised that maintenance time and weather factors impact the number of hours flown, that the second helicopter was acquired approximately four years after the initial helicopter was acquired; and that absent the acquisition of a third helicopter, the initial helicopter is expected to reach the 16,000 hour mark (projected air frame lifespan) in approximately 30 months.

Discussion ensued regarding the Department's Scheduled Maintenance Program; the fact that although the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires the Police Department to conduct a maintenance program, the FAA does not mandate the specific schedule; and the fact that an FAA representative routinely monitors and approves the Scheduled Maintenance Program conducted by the Department.

In response to a question from Committeemember Davidson concerning the RFP process, Purchasing Director Sharon Seekins explained that every firm that responded to the RFP provided pricing in exactly the same manner, and that although the RFP included the FLIR system and avionics accessories as separate items, it was structured to allow the City the option of purchasing the FLIR system and avionics accessories under separate contracts. She further explained that although companies that sell this equipment were invited to participate in the initial RFP process, no valid bids were received.

Discussion ensued concerning the fact that the Police Committee previously approved the purchase of a third helicopter and directed staff to proceed with the RFP process, and the fact that basic options recommended by staff to be factory installed are included in the MD Helicopter bid recommended by staff for Committee and Council approval.

Committeemember Pomeroy voiced approval concerning staff's efforts to acquire the FLIR system and separate avionics accessories at a reduced cost.

Discussion ensued regarding the fact that helicopter engines are replaced every 3,500 hours; the fact that the 16,000-hour time frame relative to the life expectancy of the helicopter air frame is an industry benchmark, and the fact that although it is possible to continue operating the helicopter past this benchmark, at this point the helicopter must be more closely monitored with respect to deterioration, maintenance needs and costs.

It was moved by Committeemember Pomeroy, seconded by Committeemember Davidson, to recommend to the Council that staff's recommendations to accept the proposal by MD Helicopters for purchase of a MD500E helicopter with basic accessories and to obtain new bids for the FLIR system and avionics accessories, all in conjunction with the Fiscal Year 2002/03 budget process, be approved.

Ms. Seekins explained that with Council approval of this matter, it will be necessary for staff to immediately enter into a contract with MD Helicopters, although there will be no expenditure of funds until next fiscal year.

Carried unanimously.

2. Hear an update on the Photo Safety Program.

Assistant Police Chief Dennis Donna and Police Lieutenant Steve Farago addressed the Committee concerning this agenda item. Chief Donna reported that because intersection related accidents and the City's overall accident rate have decreased on a per capita basis over the past five years, staff considers the Photo Safety Program a success, despite the cost of the program. He also reported that City auditors recently determined that the program is being conducted efficiently and effectively.

Chief Donna reported that the number of intersection related accidents on a per capita basis has declined approximately 12% over the past five years, which is the equivalent of approximately 600 fewer intersection related accidents during this period. He also reported that the City's overall accident rate has decreased approximately 25% during this period, which is the equivalent of approximately 3,000 fewer accidents. He commented on the volume of Police Department and Fire Department resources utilized to respond to accidents and the resultant losses suffered by Mesa citizens and other motorists.

Lieutenant Farago referred to graphics on display in the Council Chambers and commented on changes that have occurred in the Photo Safety Program since January 2000, including:

- March 2000 - new contract was implemented increasing the number of red light cameras from 10 to 17 and the number of radar vans from 3 to 5
- April 2000 – new fee structure implemented increasing the fee paid to Lockheed Martin to \$48.50 per citation
- June 2000 – red light sanction increased to \$115
- September 2000 – red light sanction increased to \$170
- October 2000 – process service of citations implemented to improve response rate
- November 2000 – yellow light phase increased from three seconds to four seconds
- March 2001 – “zero tolerance” policy implemented eliminating the .3 second delay between the moment the traffic light changes to red and the photo is taken
- September 2001 – number of red light cameras reduced from 17 to 12.

Discussion ensued regarding fluctuations in the number of photo red light citations and speed citations issued since January 2000.

Chief Donna reported that the average net monthly revenue derived from the program is \$43,543, the average monthly cost of operating the program is \$66,766, and the average net cost of operating the program is \$23,223. He also reported that the cost of operating the program is expected to increase approximately 30% this year and that implementing process service of citations has increased the rate of response (payment of citations or attendance at defensive driving class) from 38% to 59%.

In response to a question from Chairman Kavanaugh, Chief Donna stated that despite present budget challenges and the cost of operating the program, staff recommends continuation of the

program because it has resulted in a reduced number of fatal accidents attributed to red light runners and an overall reduced accident rate for the City.

Discussion ensued concerning the fact that the net cost of operating the program is higher than what was originally projected when the program was initiated, and the costs associated with managing and investigating auto accidents.

Committeemember Pomeroy stated approval concerning the effectiveness of the program to reduce auto accidents and improve safety in the City.

Discussion ensued regarding the fact that efforts at the State level to shift the responsibility for photo citations to vehicle owners have not been successful.

Chairman Kavanaugh indicated support for the program and commented on the fact that the program was never intended to produce City revenue and has proven to successfully save lives and improve safety.

Committeemember Davidson requested that staff's report concerning this matter be provided to all Councilmembers.

3. Hear an update on the Crown Victoria police car safety issue.

Assistant Police Chief Greg Fowler addressed the Committee concerning this item and reported that the only new development concerning this issue since staff last reported to the Committee is the fact that the City of Phoenix is testing the use of a fuel bladder system in a police car.

Chief Fowler outlined the modifications made by the City to the 71 Crown Victoria police cars presently in service, consisting of the replacement of a hex head bolt on the brake cable and rear axle assembly and a modification of the brackets on the sway bar assembly. He noted that both of these items are believed to be involved in puncturing gas tanks in high-speed rear impact collisions.

Chief Fowler commented on three fire related rear impact crashes in Arizona since 1998 involving Crown Victoria police cars resulting in the death of two Arizona Department of Public Safety Officers and the serious injury of Phoenix Police Officer Jason Schecterle.

Chief Fowler discussed the fact that only dedicated CNG vehicles have been placed into service in Mesa since 1998 and although several City CNG police cars have been involved in rear impact collisions in recent years, none have resulted in a fuel leak or fuel system related failure. He also noted that nationwide there has been no reported cases of fire related fatalities resulting from high-speed rear impacts involving CNG police vehicles. He added that most of the City's 71 Crown Victoria cars will be retired from service within the next few years.

Chief Fowler stated that staff will update the Committee concerning the results of the fuel bladder system testing by the City of Phoenix when complete.

Committeemember Davidson stated the opinion that vehicle modifications are the responsibility of the manufacturer and voiced concerns regarding modifications made without manufacturer approval. He said that he continues to oppose the City's modifications of police vehicles in this regard.

In response to a question from Committeemember Davidson regarding the costs associated with the previously described modifications made to the City's Crown Victoria police cars, Chief Fowler advised that the total cost of the modifications was \$25 per vehicle. He added that the cost of the fuel bladder system currently being tested by the City of Phoenix is estimated in the range of \$1,200 to \$2,000 per vehicle. He noted that Arizona Attorney General Janet Napolitano has requested that Ford provide reimbursement for safety modifications made to Crown Victoria police cars.

Committeemember Davidson stated support for the Attorney General's involvement in this issue and voiced the opinion that vehicle manufacturers should be held accountable for their flawed products.

Chairman Kavanaugh concurred with Committeemember Davidson's comments and encouraged staff to support the Attorney General's office in this regard.

4. Hear an update on the East Valley DUI Holiday Task Force.

Lieutenant Farago reported that the East Valley DUI Holiday Task Force operated between December 12, 2001 and December 31, 2001 and included the Arizona Department of Public Safety, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, Maricopa County Parks Service and the Police Departments of Arizona State University, Chandler, Gilbert, Paradise Valley, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe and Mesa. He reported that the Task Force was responsible for a record 1,612 DUI arrests during this period. He noted that the increased number of arrests is attributed to the new .08 BAC limit, increased officer participation in the Task Force and enhanced officer skills related to impaired driver detection.

Lieutenant Farago stated that the Mesa Police Department led all other participating agencies with 480 DUI arrests, which is an increase of 111 from the previous year. He advised that of the total arrests made by Mesa officers, 182 were for Extreme DUI, 56 were for Drug Impairment, 34 were for BAC between .08 and .10, and 37 were arrests of individuals under the age of 21.

Lieutenant Farago referred to charts and graphs provided to the Committeemembers outlining data related to Mesa's participation in the Task Force and reported that during the last five years, Mesa has accounted for 30% of the total arrests made.

Lieutenant Farago said that a combined total of 105 sworn officers, civilians and volunteers participated in Mesa's Task Force, including 16 motorcycle officers (12 full time) and 27 patrol units.

Lieutenant Farago advised that Mesa Police Officer Ron Martinez received the East Valley DUI Holiday Task Force's Top Officer Award for the second consecutive year for arresting 70 impaired drivers. Lieutenant Farago also commented on various arrests and incidents that occurred during this period including the fatal shooting of a DUI suspect who made threatening actions toward officers with a knife and a vehicle. Lieutenant Farago commented on the fact that Mesa has a significantly lower ratio of DUI traffic fatalities than Phoenix and Tucson.

In response to a question from Committeemember Pomeroy concerning the leading role played by Mesa with respect to the number of DUI arrests in the East Valley, Lieutenant Farago said that Mesa officers receive extensive training related to DUI detection.

Committeemember Pomeroy congratulated staff for their efforts to keep impaired drivers off the streets.

Discussion ensued concerning the estimated volume of impaired drivers who are not apprehended.

Committeemember Davidson stated that he remains opposed to the use of DUI checkpoints. He also voiced concerns regarding the method utilized to recognize outstanding officers and voiced the opinion that judging performance based on the number of DUI arrests made is not a valid performance indicator. He urged staff to explore alternative performance measures relative to this Task Force.

Lieutenant Farago advised that checkpoints were not utilized in connection with the recent East Valley DUI Holiday Task Force.

Chairman Kavanaugh voiced appreciation for the update and indicated support for maintaining the City's commitment to this area of law enforcement.

In response to a question from Chairman Kavanaugh, Police Chief Jan Strauss requested the opportunity to update the Police Committee concerning the Department's School Resource Officer Program and the Narcotics Interdiction Program at a future Committee meeting. Chief Strauss also noted that the Department maintains a 93% DUI conviction rate.

5. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Police Committee meeting adjourned at 4:18 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 March 25, 2002. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

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BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK