City of Oceanside

Staff Report

File #: 25-690 | **Agenda Date:** 4/23/2025 | **Agenda #:** 22.

DATE: April 23, 2025

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers

FROM: Police Department

TITLE: **PURCHASE ORDERS TO IMPLEMENT A 13-MONTH DRONE AS FIRST RESPONDER (DFR) PILOT PROGRAM AND REAL-TIME CRIME CENTER (RTCC)**

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council approve a 13-month Drone as First Responder (DFR) pilot program and a Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC); approve a purchase order to Flying Lion, Inc. for staffing of a visual observer position in an amount not to exceed $143,600; authorize the purchase as a sole source; and authorize the Financial Services Director, or designee, to execute the purchase order.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

The Oceanside Police Department has had an Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), also known as a drone program, since 2016. The Department currently has 14 qualified pilots which include three Police Sergeants and one Police Lieutenant. The program is a collateral assignment for the assigned staff. Each member of the team is certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as a Remote Pilot. The team also undergoes annual proficiency testing. In 2023 alone, there were 574 UAS flights with over 114 hours of flight time. The program is operated under a Certificate of Authorization issued by the FAA. The current program involves a patrol-led response. Pilots carry drones in their vehicles and drive to the scene of an active police incident. They deploy the drones to assist other patrol officers who are already on scene. There is a delay in responding to calls for service that require a UAS due to the drive time and equipment set up by the pilot. The current practice requires at least two employees, with one being the Remote Pilot in Command and the other acting as a visual observer. Details of every flight are automatically logged, including the pilots involved, flight path, and duration. This ensures accountability and transparency.

The purpose of a Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) is to provide actionable information to units in the field to promote officer safety, increase efficiency, and provide effective responses to incidents. RTCCs are utilized across the country, with over 50 RTCCs in California alone. RTCCs provide real-time or up to the minute information on criminal activity, including suspect descriptions, victim/suspect histories, and more. An RTCC would provide officers and detectives with critical, real-time information as they respond to calls for service and develop suspect leads, thus ensuring greater public safety.

This program is designed to be a 13-month trial. The DFR program will pre-stage a UAS on a building in the downtown area. The UAS will always be flown by a sworn officer in response to active calls for service. There will be a rooftop visual observer to monitor the UAS and the airspace for any safety issues. This will allow an immediate response to calls for service and it is expected the UAS will arrive on scene to most calls within approximately a minute of deployment. Video footage of the scene will be live-streamed back to the RTCC, Dispatch Center, and responding patrol units. The proposed program will have a variable coverage area due to weather conditions and the placement of the visual observer. It is anticipated that the coverage area will include all areas of the city west of I-5 but will also include some areas west of Canyon Drive, Capistrano Drive, and parts of the Fire Mountain Neighborhood. The coverage area is limited by the visual observer's ability to maintain sight of the drone.

The Drone as First Responder (DFR) program is being widely accepted throughout California and the rest of the nation. Chula Vista Police Department was the first in the country with a DFR program which started in 2017. Currently, 12 other California police departments have a DFR program.

The DFR program provides real-time video and information to the responding ground units. The added information from the UAS is able to assist officers by enhancing situational awareness which can also serve to de-escalate situations. It can confirm, dispel, or expand upon the information previously received. DFR increases the transparency of public safety operations and has the potential to reduce use of force incidents. Automated flight log data and the reason for each flight will be made available on a publicly accessible website. Prior analyses demonstrate that DFR programs can resolve calls without sending an officer in approximately 20% of calls for service.

As with other technology used by the Police Department, implementing these programs necessitates the establishment of clear policies and guidelines to ensure transparency and privacy. The Police Department's Policy and Procedures Manual outlines specific UAS policy in section 606 which outlines data retention schedules and prohibited and permissive use of the UAS to address privacy concerns. All UAS operations must also be conducted in accordance with FAA regulations. FAA regulations include mandatory pilot training, drone registration, operating rules and safety considerations. Additionally, Policy and Procedure section 321, stipulates that all data and usage must be for official purposes. Specifically, personnel accessing all data, including video data, must have a "Right to Know" and a specific lawful purpose for its use, "Need to Know." All records retentions and releases are directed by section 804 which outlines specific responsibilities and provides public access to records in a manner that is consistent with the California Public Records Act.

This purchase requires compliance with AB481 Military Equipment Funding, Acquisition, and Use Policy reporting requirements. Therefore, this item must be approved for use as outlined above by the City Council before acquisition and deployment. Upon approval and receipt of the UAS, it will be added to the AB481 Inventory per City Ordinance and Department Policy.

A Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC) would provide the Oceanside Police Department (OPD) with the ability to capitalize on a wide and expanding range of technologies for efficient and effective policing. It would also be the information "hub" of the Police Department, utilizing non-sworn Crime and

Intelligence Analysts and Community Service Officers. Staff assigned to the RTCC would gather and analyze data from multiple sources - including video, computer-aided dispatch (CAD), automated license plate readers (LPR), criminal databases, and mapping software for the purpose of providing immediate support to officers responding to active incidents. A sworn officer acting as a pilot for the UAS will be inside the RTCC. All operations of the RTCC and DFR will be supervised by the Watch Commander.

Implementation of the Oceanside Police RTCC and DFR would be an ongoing process that will evolve as lessons are learned and new resources become available. Only authorized/trained OPD personnel and IT staff will have direct access to the RTCC. Data and information obtained through the RTCC would only be accessed or extracted for legitimate law enforcement purposes, as stipulated in OPD Policy & Procedure 321 (Information Technology Use) and 804 (Records Maintenance and Release).

The RTCC will operate using the city's existing cameras and infrastructure, with no additional installations required for this project.

FISCAL IMPACT

The total cost of Drone as First Responder and Real-Time Crime Center pilot programs will be funded through the State of California Enhancing Law Enforcement Activities Subaccount (ELEAS), which awarded the City a total of $264,816 through the Citizen's Option for Public Safety (COPS) 2024 grant program.

An additional one-time increase of $406,247 to the Police General Fund budget will be recommended for FY 2025-26 to support overtime costs associated with operating the DFR and RTCC. If approved, these funds will cover overtime for one Police Officer and two Community Services Officers, working four days per week in 10-hour shifts.

The COPS 2024 grant program will fund the following items related to both programs:

Item/ Vendor	Amount	Account Number
Flying Lion - visual observation	$143,600	817140424217.5305
Axon Enterprises- software and support DFR operations	$34,460	817140424217.5355.0009
Fly Motion - purchase of new drone	$33,355	817140424217.5704
Software	$26,700	817140424217.5355.0009
Misc equipment and supplies	$26,701	817140424217.5330
Total	**$264,816**	

COMMISSION OR COMMITTEE REPORT

This item was presented at the Police and Fire Commission's regularly scheduled meeting on March 20, 2025.

This item was presented at the Community Relations Commission regularly scheduled meeting on March 4, 2025

The programs were received positively by both commissions. They were unanimously recommended by the Police and Fire Commission.

Within the Community Relations Commission, there was an expressed desire for increased drone coverage across the city. There were also requests to ensure transparency and to make the program's policies and procedures accessible to the public.
To support transparency, automated flight log data and the reason for each flight will be made available on a publicly accessible website.

The DFR and RTCC programs will adhere to the department's existing policy guidelines and laws to ensure data is collected, stored, and used properly. These programs must also comply with existing policies that govern the use of technology, ensuring that it is used responsibly. These policies and procedures are readily available on the Department website.

CITY ATTORNEY'S ANALYSIS

Does not apply.

Prepared by: Michael Provence, Police Lieutenant
Reviewed by: Taurino Valdovinos, Chief of Police
Submitted by: Jonathan Borrego, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Staff Report

2. Justification for Sole Source

3. DFR Trial Quote - Budgetary

4. Axon DFR Licensing - Budgetary Quote

5. Estimate

6. Justification for Sole Source - Flying Lion Letter

7. Flying Lion - Axon - DFR Trial Description and Staffing and Lease

8. OPD Policy 606 - Unmanned Aerial System (UAS)

9. OPD Policy 804 - Records Maintenance and Release

10. OPD Policy 321 - Information Technology Use