

# Capitola City Council

## Agenda Report



**Meeting:** January 11, 2024

**From:** Police Department

**Subject:** Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Drone Program

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**Recommended Action:** Receive a presentation regarding the new Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Drone Program.

**Background:** On May 11, 2023, the City Council adopted a resolution approving the Police Department's Annual Military Equipment Report, which included the use of drones for public safety activities. The Police Department also included the use of drones in their adopted FY 2023-24 Budget goals.

The rapid advancement of technology has ushered in a new era of innovation in law enforcement, one of which is the implementation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), commonly known as drones. The introduction of drones has presented both opportunities and challenges for law enforcement agencies. UAS devices offer invaluable benefits, such as enhanced public safety and efficient surveying and mapping capabilities. Conversely, their increased prevalence has raised concerns related to privacy and the potential for disturbances.

The Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) regulates and sets guidelines for the safe operation of drones in the United States. Any use of a UAS by the City will be in strict accordance with constitutional privacy acts and FAA regulations. The FAA requires recreational operators to register and mark their drones and to operate them under best practice guidelines. As commercial UAS operators, pilots are required to abide by specific drone regulations outlined in Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 107, obtain a Remote Pilot License Certificate and get an FAA tracking number. All of the Police Department's operators/pilots are considered commercial UAS pilots and will have their Part 107 licenses.

**Discussion:** The Police Department is committed to evaluating and embracing new technologies to better engage in public safety activities. Utilizing funding from the Supplement Law Enforcement Services Fund (SLESF), two Police Department staff members completed the Regional Training Center (RTC) Drone Operators Course and obtained their Pilot Part 107 licenses. The Police Department plans to send an additional four operators through the RTC Basic Course, which includes preparation for taking the pilot license test. All pilots will be cross-trained as observers and will be required to obtain a license before any solo operation.

The Police Department adopted CPD Policy 613 and CPD Directive 2023-2 (Attachments 1 and 2) outlining the program coordinator's responsibilities, privacy concerns, authorized uses, documentation requirements, reporting requirements, and transparency reporting. DroneSense software has been procured as the City's UAS software platform for all public safety applications. DroneSense allows for a variety of UAS models, a consistent flight control interface that automatically logs all flight activity and allows for remote flight streaming. The Police Department has purchased two DJI Mini 2 Drones and one DJI Avata Drone to complement our program. Staff's goal is to add one DJI Mavic 3T (Thermal) Drone to the City's fleet by the end of the fiscal year.

Several agencies in Santa Cruz County have successful UAS programs. The Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office has been operating a UAS program since 2019 and has had successful missions with search and rescue operations, suspect searches, crime scene documentation, and high-risk incidents. As part of the Sheriff's transparency policy, the Sheriff's Office issues an annual report on the use of this technology. The Watsonville Police Department just introduced their new UAS program and Santa Cruz Police will be presenting a UAS program in the coming months.

Fiscal Impact: Staff has allocated \$18,000 from FY 2023-24 Supplemental Law Enforcement Services Fund (SLESF) to fund the initial training and to purchase four drones. We are seeking additional funding from the Capitola Public Safety Foundation to complete the required training for FY 2023-24.

Attachments:

1. Policy 613
2. CPD Directive 2023-2

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