



Memo

To: Columbus City Council

From: Lt. Darrell Ward

Date: 09/09/2026

Re: Initial planning and fundraising for K9 Unit

The City maintained a K9 Unit many years ago, and I believe the program provided significant benefits to both the department and the community. Given the length of time since the program was discontinued, we would essentially be starting from the beginning.

I previously served as a K9 handler for five years with the Columbia County Sheriff's Office. Through that role, I became very familiar with the training, equipment, ongoing care, and other requirements necessary to establish and maintain a successful K9 program. Based on that experience, I believe there is an opportunity to develop a program that would provide meaningful services to the citizens of Columbus while minimizing the financial impact on the City.

As an initial step in determining whether the program is viable, I have made preliminary contacts with two area businesses that have indicated they would be willing to donate ongoing goods and services if the program is approved. I have also identified a foundation in the Milwaukee area that specifically provides funding for the start-up and replacement of K9 units in Wisconsin, although I have not yet formally contacted them.

Additionally, I have obtained verbal estimates regarding the approximate cost of purchasing and training a canine. Based on the information I have gathered to date, I believe approximately \$50,000 in fundraising would be necessary to initiate the program. My intention would be to explore outside funding, donations, sponsorships, and fundraising opportunities before requesting significant financial support from the City.

I believe a K9 Unit would provide several valuable services to the Columbus community. A properly trained canine could assist with tracking missing or lost persons, searching large areas, locating evidence, and assisting officers during calls involving high-risk individuals. The presence and capabilities of a K9 could also provide an additional level of safety and support for officers and citizens during traffic stops and other potentially dangerous situations.

In addition to these direct public-safety benefits, I believe maintaining a K9 Unit could have a positive impact on the Police Department and its employees. A K9 program can serve as a recruitment and retention tool by providing officers with additional responsibilities, specialized training, and professional development opportunities. It could also attract experienced officers

who are interested in advancing their careers and becoming involved in specialized law-enforcement functions.

Thank you for your consideration.