



To: Honorable City Council

From: John Moreno, City Manager

By: Margarita Matson, Public Safety Director
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Date: November 12, 2024

SUBJECT: PUBLIC SAFETY DRONE DEPLOYMENT PILOT PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

In an effort to enhance our ability to combat street racing and intersection takeovers, the City has explored different ways to integrate new technology into our surveillance and enforcement practices. One such innovation is the utilization of drones as a law enforcement response support tool. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) deployed a two-person drone team (one pilot and one observer) that was incorporated into the Special Assignment Officer (SAO) Team's weekly street racing operations in April 2024. Unfortunately, there were deficiencies that were identified with the County's drone equipment, deployment policies, and use restrictions, that limited the effectiveness of this pilot program. These results were presented at the City Council meeting on August 13, 2024, at which time the City Council provided staff with the direction to reevaluate our drone deployment strategy and connect with other jurisdictions utilizing drones as law enforcement support tools for additional feedback.

Since street racing and intersection takeovers remain an ongoing issue in the region, the Public Safety Department followed the guidance of the City Council and pivoted to explore alternative avenues of drone deployment that might help us accomplish our initial surveillance and reporting goals. Outreach was then conducted with multiple other municipalities that operate sworn and civilian drone programs in various stages of development to obtain input and discuss best practices. These agencies included Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, Whittier, Norwalk, and Los Angeles County.

DISCUSSION

After a thorough assessment of the City's needs and LASD's drone-use limitations, it was determined that a civilian Public Safety Drone Deployment Pilot Program would be the most effective, efficient, and fiscally responsible way to support the City's law enforcement priorities. A non-sworn pilot program would entail contracting a professional drone company with experience providing law enforcement support to deploy on-demand drone overwatch services during high probability street racing and intersection takeover times. A two-person team consisting of two civilian pilots would be deployed from rooftops or a drone command vehicle in shifts that varied between two and five hours. Multiple

mission capable drones would be available for deployment with features that include infrared capabilities, live stream and recording capacity, and 200 times zoom lenses. The civilian drone pilots would provide surveillance of high-risk intersections and report street racing or takeover activity to law enforcement as it occurs. LASD would then respond to the calls-for-service and enforce as appropriate.

Creating an independent drone program in this manner would allow the City to retain control of its deployment parameters and timeframes, and remove the bureaucratic and equipment-related obstacles associated with the previously explored sworn drone program. After an initial eight-week trial period, staff would then reassess the results, implementation, and budget of the Public Safety Drone Deployment Pilot Program and provide a progress report.

FISCAL IMPACT

The City Council allocated \$30,000 for the Drone Pilot Program, which was included in the FY 2024-25 budget under City Council Priorities. This trial period would utilize these funds with no additional fiscal impact.

VISION, MISSION, VALUES, AND STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

The City's Vision, Mission, and Values set the standard for the organization, establish priorities, uniformity and guidelines; and provide the framework for policy decision making. The Strategic Outcomes were implemented to provide a pathway to achieving the City's Vision. This item aligns with Strategic Outcome No 1: Safe Community - Provide a safe place to live, work, and visit.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Provide direction on the Public Safety Drone Deployment Pilot Program.