



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: CEO
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: 02-05-08
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Tme: 30 min
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Select_From Michael F. Brown, County Executive Officer
Contact Info: Jason Stilwell, Assistant CEO/Budget Director, 568-3413
SUBJECT: Report on Combined Sheriff/Fire Aviation Unit

Recommended Actions:

That the Board receive an informational report and presentation on the Santa Barbara County Aviation Program.

Summary Text:

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board of Supervisors with an overview of the County's helicopter program. The County purchased the first two helicopters in 1995 and 1996 for Sheriff operations. In 1999, the County acquired two more helicopters for the Fire Department. The program has continued to incrementally evolve since. The latest Board action was an approval of a contract to refurbish another UH-1 Huey helicopter owned by the Sheriff's Department. Subsequent to the action, the Board requested an update on the helicopter program.

This report discusses the evolution of the program to the joint Fire-Sheriff program it is today and provides analysis and recommendations.

Background:

The Santa Barbara County Aviation Program is unique in its structure as it is a hybrid between the Sheriff's and Fire departments. Both Sheriff and Fire staff operate and maintain the fleet, the budget for the program is divided between the two Departments, and the operations overlap. Today the County has four helicopters that are utilized for both Fire and Sheriff operations with a fifth helicopter being refurbished. The joint Air Support Unit today consists of seven Sheriff Department's staff and four Fire Department's staff, which jointly make up one on-site supervisor, four pilots, three observers, and three mechanics.

The Fire Department maintains the two larger helicopters, which are primarily used for Fire suppression and Search and Rescue missions, while the Sheriff's Department maintains the two smaller helicopters primarily used for observation. All of the helicopters currently operated by the unit were obtained

through various Federal programs and have certain restrictions placed on them. In addition, the aircraft used by the unit have exhausted or are approaching the life span accepted by militaries and many private industry operators for helicopter airframes.

The total operational FY 2007-08 Adopted Expenditures Budget for the Aviation Program is \$2,388,117, plus a one time \$950,000 contract to refurbish the fifth helicopter. The program is funded primarily by the General Fund, with the exception of intergovernmental revenue that the Fire Department receives from the State and Federal Departments of Forestry; the revenue is budgeted at \$30,000 for FY 2007-08. Of the total expenditures for the program, \$1,152,891 is appropriated from the Fire Department and \$1,235,226 from the Sheriff's Department.

The operations of the combined Air Support Unit include search and rescue, fire suppression, law enforcement patrol, law enforcement assistance in vehicular pursuits, pursuit of fleeing suspects, evidence collection, and drug eradication. Based on 2006 calendar year statistics, law enforcement functions make up approximately 64.4% of total flight time by all helicopters, fire functions make up approximately 27.9% of total flight time, and search and rescue functions make up approximately 7.7% of the total flight time.

The report concludes that the Aviation Unit provides quality service to Santa Barbara County that is very unique in its capabilities and cannot be easily replaced with other means. Helicopters provide unique rescue, firefighting, and law enforcement capabilities. If budgetarily feasible, the recommendation is to place the equipment on a depreciation schedule and plan costs over time. In addition, when future equipment is purchased, it is recommended that a complete cost analysis is performed for different types of airframes which would include both cost of acquisition and cost of operation over time.

Attachments:

Santa Barbara County Air Support Unit Report
Power Point Presentation
Video

Authored by:

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CC:

Sheriff Bill Brown
Fire Chief John Scherrei