



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: County Executive
Office
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: May 19, 2009
Placement: Set Hearing
Estimated Tme: 1.5 Hours on 6/02/09
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: County Executive Michael F. Brown
Officer
Contact Info: John Baker, Assistant County Executive Officer, 568-2085
SUBJECT: Aviation Unit Management Structure

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

Set Hearing on June 2, 2009 for 1.5 hours to:

- a) Receive reports from the Fire Department and the Sheriff's Department regarding structural recommendations for operation of the Santa Barbara County Aviation Program; and,
- b) Direct the departments and staff to implement one of the three options for management of the aviation program:
 - i. Return to the combined unit operation; or
 - ii. Transfer operations to the Fire Department management
 - iii. Transfer operations to the Sheriff's department management.

Summary Text:

In February of 2009, the Fire Department withdrew from the combined aviation program with the Sheriff's Department, which was in place since 2004. As part of the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Budget Development Workshop, the Board requested that the Fire Department return with a presentation for the alternative aviation program structure proposal. The Sheriff's Department has completed a similar study, which will also be presented as part of this item. The purpose of this hearing is to provide the Board with the alternative options for management of the aviation program and to provide a CEO impartial analysis of the proposals.

Background:

The Santa Barbara County aviation program was first established by the Sheriff's Department in 1996, utilizing two OH-58 helicopters obtained via Law Enforcement Support Office, Federal 1033 Program. In 1999, the Fire Department began its aviation program utilizing Federal Excess Property Program UH-1 helicopters. In 2004, the two programs integrated, forming the County Air Support Unit. The purpose of an integrated unit was to reduce overhead costs and cross-utilize staff for both fire and law enforcement missions.

The Air Support Unit has successfully accomplished the missions since the establishment; however, structural, management and personnel difficulties arose. Beginning February 11, 2009, the Fire Department withdrew from the integrated program, reverting to a sole Fire Department aviation program operation. The Sheriff's Department continues to operate its aviation program for law enforcement and search and rescue functions. At this time the units continue to share the location for the aviation program under the current lease.

The County Executive Office has reviewed program proposals prepared by the Sheriff and Fire Departments in addition to the integrated structure which was in place until the recent separation by the Fire Department. The following matrix shows a comparative summary of the proposals. Two separate units run by the Fire and Sheriff's Departments were not examined further based on cost considerations. In order to be operationally viable, each unit would require two crews, separate aircraft use, and potentially separate space leading to higher budgetary costs as compared to the three options compared below.

	<u>Option I Combined (Current)</u>	<u>Option II Fire</u>	<u>Option III Sheriff</u>
Level of Service	Fire Suppression, Search & Rescue, Law Enforcement (3 crews, 9 FTE)	Fire Suppression, Search & Rescue (2 crews, 6 FTE) (Law enforcement mission would be diminished based on lack of law enforcement management oversight and limited number of hours under the agreement)	Fire Suppression, Search & Rescue, Law Enforcement (3 crews, 8 FTE)
Cost Comparison FY 09/10 Dollars	\$1.95 million (3 crews) Program cost may be lower if the unit maximizes the use of the newer Sheriff UH-1 helicopter which requires lower maintenance.	\$1.43 million (2 crews) + additional billing to the Sheriff's Department for hours in excess 182 hours per year.	\$1.55 million (3 crews) Program cost difference mainly originates from higher use of the refurbished Sheriff UH-1 helicopter scheduled to begin operation in summer of 2009. Costs are speculative due to no historical data for costs per hour on this new helicopter.
Notes	A combined aviation program between Sheriff and Fire where chain of command crosses over the two distinct management structures is very unique and is not a standard structure used for emergency operations. The dual management and the chain of command have been a challenge for the integrated Sheriff/Fire Air Support Unit.	Most of the benchmark counties for Santa Barbara County do not have a fire aviation program and utilize CDF helicopters run by Fire. The structure of a Fire Department contracting to provide services for law enforcement is very rare or nearly non-existent (no examples have been located).	Law Enforcement agencies are more common to maintain an aviation unit and, in larger, municipalities often provide contract services for fire suppression. Ventura County program is one of the examples of the structure that could be utilized by Santa Barbara County. A Ventura County structure would require roughly \$0.25M in additional budget for an assigned Fire mission helicopter and staff, which would increase the estimated budget to approximately \$1.8M.

Note: All cost estimates exclude costs billable by Fire to State or Federal Governments under contracts and agreements. The ability to pass on the costs under the agreements exists under all of the above options.

Currently, both the Fire and Sheriff’s departments receive General Fund revenues toward their operations that are significant to cover the current costs of the aviation programs. The Fire Department possesses two older UH-1 helicopters, without the title ownership and with restrictions of exclusive use for fire suppression in 90% of the total use of the airframes. The Sheriff’s Department possesses two OH-58, smaller helicopters, with title ownership, which are suitable for observation only. The Sheriff’s Department is also in the final stages of refurbishing a UH-1 helicopter, funded by donation funds for the specific purpose and with title ownership which can be used for water dropping purposes. It is estimated that, given the maintenance requirements, the newly refurbished UH-1 helicopter will be approximately only half as expensive to operate per hour then the older Fire UH-1 helicopters.

The Combined Aviation Unit used the two UH-1 Fire helicopters and two OH-58 Sheriff helicopters. The Sheriff’s Department is in the final stages of refurbishing a third UH-1 helicopter obtained through

a federal program with title ownership to the Sheriff's Department. The refurbishment utilizes funds from the Sheriff's Council donations, given for the specific purpose. This UH-1 helicopter, given the major refurbishment, is estimated to require much lower maintenance costs and will also provide with enhanced capabilities, including upgraded equipment and ability to fly higher altitudes. The Sheriff UH-1 helicopter will be law enforcement, search and rescue, and fire mission ready. The Aviation Unit consisted of three permanent two men crews or 9 FTE, including one on site supervisor (Sheriff Sergeant).

The Fire Department proposes to create a two crew aviation program or six (6) FTE with a working supervisor (part of a crew). The proposal assumes utilizing one of the older Fire UH-1 helicopters, the new Sheriff refurbished UH-1 helicopter, and one of the OH-58 helicopters. The Fire Department proposes sale of the second OH-58 helicopter and return of the second UH-1 to the Federal Excess Property Program. In addition, the Fire Department is looking into acquiring a newer UH-1 helicopter through a Federal Program 1033, which transfers ownership to the Fire department and does not have restricted use requirements as does the Federal Excess Program unit, which was used by the Fire Department to acquire the two UH-1 helicopters currently utilized. If acquired, this newer UH-1 helicopter would replace the Fire UH-1 helicopter currently included in the proposal. This helicopter does not have restricted use requirements and thus can be used for law enforcement activities. Refurbishment needs have not been examined in detail at this time.

The Sheriff's Department proposes a three crew aviation unit or 8 FTE with a working supervisor. The proposal assumes utilization of only three helicopters: Sheriff refurbished UH-1 and two OH-58 helicopters. An OH-58 unit could be replaced with a newly acquired UH-1 unit being pursued by the Fire Department.

Fiscally, the only venues to reduce costs within either one of the proposals are through reductions of the number of crews and hours flown, leading to lower levels of service, or through maximization of lower cost per hour aircraft. The same variations of scenarios and total costs could be applied to all three options assuming the potential for establishment of mutual agreements to lease capital resources and establish contractual relationships for service delivery.

Aside from fiscal considerations, the three operational proposals for the Santa Barbara Aviation Unit options described above vary in service delivery for specialized missions. The Sheriff's Department missions make up a majority of the day to day operation of the unit given the number of calls for service and hours flown for law enforcement and search and rescue versus the fire missions. Despite some cross training and certifications, the sworn deputy personnel can carry out the law enforcement mission to greater extent than the Fire Department's personnel, including powers of arrest and court testimony.

The Fire Department proposal reduces the level of service to the Sheriff's department. The proposal assumes that the Aviation Unit will not include the Sheriff's Department employees, which diminishes coordination with the overall Sheriff's Department's mission, eliminates on scene powers of arrest, and certain court testimony essential for prosecution. Under California law, certain court testimony rules differ for representatives of law enforcement agency versus a non-sworn employee.

The Sheriff's Department's proposal reduces coordination with the Fire Department due to utilization of Sheriff personnel only. This structure is utilized by other jurisdictions across the state however. None of the benchmark counties to Santa Barbara County maintain their own Fire Department Aviation Unit and

only few maintain a helicopter for the use of a Sheriff's Department. Sheriff's Department personnel can be trained in operations for water drops. As with current personnel, careful coordination with ground forces would be necessary for successful fire fighting and medical emergency operations.

Ventura County is an example of an Aviation Unit management structure that is similar to the Sheriff's Department's proposal, yet, encompasses some of the concepts of a Combined Fire/Sheriff Aviation Unit. Ventura County is a larger size County. The Ventura County Aviation Unit maintains two larger size helicopters and one smaller helicopter. One of the larger helicopters, under an agreement with the Fire department, is assigned specifically for the fire mission and is managed by one Fire Department staff person assigned to the Sheriff's Department operated Aviation Unit. This or a similar structure could be attained in Santa Barbara County if the overall management of the Aviation Unit is transferred to the Sheriff's Department with some additional cost, roughly estimated at \$0.25M to add one Fire Department staff and maintain an additional UH-1 Fire helicopter as a secondary larger size aircraft. This alternative allows for greater liaison with the Fire Department and, yet, minimizes the difficulties of intertwined chain of command that has existed in the Combined Aviation Unit. The additional cost could be reduced by only utilizing the additional Fire staff during the fire seasons or during major incidents.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

The FY 2009-10 Recommended Budget includes status quo budget for the Combined Air Support Unit. Any modifications to the structure may lead to budget adjustments and potential transfer of funds between the departmental budgets.

Attachments:

Fire Department Report & Presentation
Sheriff's Department Report & Presentation
2008 CEO Air Support Unit Report

Authored by:

Xenia Tihomirova, Fiscal & Policy Analyst 568-3421
John Jayasinghe, Fiscal & Policy Analyst 568-2246

cc:

Sheriff Bill Brown
Fire Chief Tom Franklin