

**MINUTES
OF THE
LA PAZ COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Tuesday, November 25, 2014, 10:30 a.m.
Worksession**

Chairman Wilson called the November 25, 2014, worksession of the La Paz County Board of Supervisors to order at 10:30 a.m. Elected Officials and Department Heads present were: Chairman Wilson, Supervisor Irwin, Supervisor Clapperton, County Administrator/Clerk of the Board Field, Finance Director Hill, Community Development Administrator Yackley, Sheriff Drum; and Deputy Clerk of the Board Green.

Discussion and presentation by the Sheriff Department regarding the acceptance of a rescue helicopter from the 1033 Law Enforcement Support Program

Lieutenant Epps gave a power point presentation regarding the benefits of acquiring a rescue helicopter and trainer helicopter as offered through the 1033 Law Enforcement Support Program. He explained that this program provides valuable military equipment for law enforcement use, such as the three Humvees, M16s, and M14s, sniper and night vision weaponry the Sheriff Department currently has in its possession.

He explained there is no charge for any of the equipment from this program; it belongs to the government; it is “permanently loaned” to the different agencies, and when it no longer functions, the government takes repossession of it. He stated the Bell OH-58 and Hughes 269 helicopters are both reliable and cost efficient and would be transferred to La Paz County from Maricopa County should the County accept them.

He stated that in 2013/2014, helicopter support was needed approximately 13 or 14 times, including medical calls, and the Sheriff Department had to depend on other agencies for Search and Rescue to assist officers with helicopter support. He stated there were numerous denials from other agencies; medical services needed helicopter support; and it was difficult to obtain Department of Public Safety (DPS) Ranger support.

He stated the use of helicopters provides 30 times the visual range for Search and Rescue for lost, injured and drowning victims; for natural disasters; and for use in drug and human trafficking crimes through two major corridors.

Lieutenant Epps explained that the costs to maintain the units would be provided through a variety of sources. He stated \$10,000 or more is available through High Intensive Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and Operation Stone Garden funds. He stated Arizona Search and Rescue will pay La Paz County for use of the helicopter, up to \$600 per hour; the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) would assist with funding and would provide hanger space and room for equipment; and parts would be provided by the 1033 Program at no cost.

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He added that Arizona 1122 Program is another Federal program in which equipment is available to law enforcement agencies; and the Federal Defense Energy Support Center has fuel available at reduced prices. He further added that numerous grants at the State, Federal and County level are available and are being explored at this time.

He stated that the Maricopa Sheriff Office will “give” the County a large supply of parts already secured for the helicopter; will bring the County’s helicopter pilot “up to date” on this helicopter and put “observers” through a training program.

He stated that Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organization (RICO) funds would also be used to fund any expenditures dealing with the helicopter; greatly emphasizing that no General Fund money would be used to do so or “we won’t fly”.

Lieutenant Epps described the 1969 three passenger helicopter, stating that everything was new, having had \$600,000 invested in rebuilding the unit. He noted that it would cost \$124 per hour to fly at current fuel costs; with a flight radius of 300 air miles for 2.5 hours per tank of fuel.

He stated that the Sheriff Department was not asking for two helicopters, but that the two helicopters came as a “package”; with the trainer helicopter costing \$60 per hour to fly; and would be used for smaller missions, and to train, at a lesser cost.

He added that it is the Department’s plan to make the helicopter a “regional helicopter”; the only helicopter available in a several hundred mile radius; and will provide a service to the people of La Paz. He stated that this would allow the County to bill other agencies for service and/or be paid by the Arizona Search and Rescue program.

He reiterated that the Sheriff Department would not abuse the availability of these units and will do the “responsible thing” and discontinue the program if it does not work as promised. He stated other County’s want this equipment; however, La Paz County had the highest need; therefore, was offered it first.

Supervisor Clapperton stated he wished to ensure the taxpayers that they are protected and would not be negatively affected by accepting these units.

Lieutenant Bagby, with the Task Force, added that they are trying to keep up with the trends and issues with the vast area of desert, clandestine airstrips, and human smuggling investigations; reiterating that HIDTA, RICO funds, and other Federal funds would support the plan. He assured the Board that there would be an accounting at the end of the first year, and any outstanding expenditure would be guaranteed through the Task Force.

He felt that it was important to “keep up with the rest of the world” and not let people come to use this area as a haven for crime, thinking they could get away with something. He agreed this was something the County has not done before; however, he felt that was not enough reason to avoid doing so. He assured the Board that Task Force would support it.

Supervisor Clapperton asked about garaging the units.

Chief William Ponce, with the Colorado River Indian Tribe Police Department, stated that the Department has a hanger available. He explained that the CRIT helicopter program is grounded at this time; therefore, discussed shutting it down because they do not have a pilot. He stated the cost would be substantial to afford a pilot. He added that it was for this reason they would consider entering into an agreement with the County, providing use of the hanger, and assist in funding fuel and parts.

Discussion ensued at length regarding the use of the helicopter by/for other agencies, noting that fuel and insurance would be the “regular costs”. The amount of the cost of insurance was not yet available. Usage would only be on a “strict call out basis” for Search and Rescue, Task Force, and CRIT, and other agencies, including Riverside County.

Supervisor Irwin expressed that there was a definite need for this service in the area.

Sheriff Drum stated that the County would be obtaining two helicopters for “nothing”, which would bring the County up to the standards of sophistication that is needed in the Sheriff’s Department. He reiterated the promise that General Fund monies will not be used to support this equipment. He felt that obtaining these “birds” was “the greatest opportunity handed to us”, recommending that the Board approve this proposal.

Chairman Wilson agreed that there is an obvious need and use of these vehicles for La Paz County and the surrounding area; however, there was coupled with that a responsibility by the Board to be assured of the expenditures.

Supervisor Clapperton asked who would be the mechanic for these units.

Discussion ensued noting that it would be approximately five years before any significant parts would need replacement; and would be available at no charge through the 1033 Law Enforcement Program. It was noted that three mechanics are available in Maricopa County, and they would come down to look at the units, if needed, at a rate.

Lieutenant Bagby felt that additional funds could possibly be available through Operation Stone Garden once it was knowledgeable the County had this equipment.

Supervisor Clapperton asked if there would be a service agreement available between La Paz and Maricopa County to ensure there are qualified individuals that will work on these units.

Lieutenant Epps stated that he felt that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would not be an issue to obtain.

