



Memorandum

Date: 7/21/2026

Meeting of: Committee of the Whole - Public Safety and Human Services

File No. CM 26-465

Type: Committee Memo

TO: Committee of the Whole - Public Safety and Human Services

FROM: Mayor Angela Birney

DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR CONTACT(S):

Police	Chief Darrell Lowe	425-556-2529
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DEPARTMENT STAFF:

Police	Chief Darrell Lowe	Chief of Police
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TITLE:

Low-Altitude Radar System & Office of Airspace Management

OVERVIEW STATEMENT:

Low-Altitude Radar System- is a permanent, ground-based radar network that provides continuous detection of aircraft operating below 400 feet over Redmond, Kirkland, and Bellevue, an altitude band federal radar does not cover, and where all drone activity occurs. The system protects Redmond's Drone as a First Responder program, in airspace it shares with commercial delivery drones, recreational operators, and aircraft carrying no transponder, none of which any single system currently sees together. It will be funded through federal appropriations. and carries no facial recognition capability or ground-surveillance function.

The Office of Airspace Management (OAM) will be the proposed permanent City function that would operate and maintain the radar network, coordinate with the FAA, administer the data governance policy, and sustain regional interoperability with King County, Seattle, and venue systems. Radar hardware is a one-time capital purchase; managing low-altitude airspace is an ongoing municipal responsibility. This function is currently being handled by RPD. Staff recommends that the Council examine the scope, staffing, and operating cost of this function at a future study session; **nothing in the current request commits the City to establishing it.**

☐ **Additional Background Information/Description of Proposal Attached**

REQUESTED ACTION:

☒ **Receive Information**

☐ **Provide Direction**

☐ **Approve**

REQUEST RATIONALE:

- **Relevant Plans/Policies:**
N/A
- **Required:**
N/A

- **Council Request:**

N/A

- **Other Key Facts:**

The platform is DEDrone by Axon, the same system that King County and the City of Seattle selected for FIFA World Cup 2026 airspace security, and it is interoperable with radar already operating at T-Mobile Park and Lumen Field. Their deployments are mobile and event-based; Redmond's is a permanent, fixed infrastructure that operates continuously, making it the year-round backbone of a regional architecture that is already partially built. The system uses three sky-facing sensor types: radar for position and flight track, radio-frequency detection for drone control signals, and optical cameras that lock onto airborne objects the system flags. It does not read license plates or track people, vehicles, or phones on the ground. The federal appropriation request is scaled from \$500,000 for two nodes covering core emergency response zones to \$1,500,000 for the full tri-city deployment, with each tier a complete working system.

The FAA has exclusive authority over the national airspace and is responsible for enforcing compliance with federal aviation regulations, including unauthorized drone operations. Safe Skies Eastside does not create enforcement authority for the City; it provides detection and awareness, and any airspace violation identified by the system will be referred to the FAA for action. Where a detected drone is involved in conduct that is separately criminal under Washington law, RPD's response follows existing legal process and existing law.

The radar system changes what we can see, not what we are authorized to do.

OUTCOMES:

Today, no single system can see all drone activity over Redmond at once. Commercial operators coordinate through UTM, a network-based system in which flight intent is shared among participants; public safety drones, including RPD's DFR fleet, broadcast their positions via ADS-B transponders. The two systems were built for different purposes and do not exchange data, nor can they see each other during active operations. A third category, drones carrying no transponder at all, appears in neither. This project produces a unified airspace picture detecting all aircraft below 400 feet, regardless of which system they use or whether they use one at all. Every RPD drone deployment then occurs with live deconfliction data available to pilots, closing a blind spot that exists on every flight today. The City establishes the first quantitative baseline of unauthorized drone activity over the Eastside corridor, replacing an unmeasured condition with actual data. Regional interoperability is confirmed with King County, Seattle, and major venue systems.

COMMUNITY/STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH AND INVOLVEMENT:

- **Timeline (previous or planned):**

N/A

- **Outreach Methods and Results:**

N/A

- **Feedback Summary:**

N/A

BUDGET IMPACT:

Total Cost:

None at this time.

Approved in current biennial budget: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ N/A

Budget Offer Number:

N/A

Budget Priority:

N/A

Other budget impacts or additional costs: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ N/A

If yes, explain:

N/A

Funding source(s):

N/A

Budget/Funding Constraints:

N/A

☐ Additional budget details attached

COUNCIL REVIEW:

Previous Contact(s)

Date	Meeting	Requested Action
N/A	Item has not been presented to Council	N/A

Proposed Upcoming Contact(s)

Date	Meeting	Requested Action
N/A	None proposed at this time	N/A

Time Constraints:

N/A

ANTICIPATED RESULT IF NOT APPROVED:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

N/A