CityofRedmond
WASHINGTON

MEMO TO: Public Safety Committee of the Whole

FROM: Lt. Brian Coats

DATE: February 18, 2020

SUBJECT: Unmanned Aerial System Status Update

I.   PURPOSE ☒ For Info Only   ☒ Potential Agenda Item   ☐ Scheduled for
                                                                        Council Action

II.   RECOMMENDATION

This agenda item provides an informational update on the police department's use of the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS).

The purpose of this item is to update city leadership with a brief review of incidents where the police department deployed the UAS as well as feedback received from the community and media.

III.   DEPARTMENT CONTACTS
Darrell Lowe, Police Chief   425-556-2521
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Brian Coats, Operations Lieutenant   425-556-2588

IV.   DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND

The police department provided an informational presentation of the UAS program at the Public Safety Committee of the Whole on June 18, 2019. Due to time constraints, Police continued the presentation during a council study session on July 23, 2019 and addressed policy-level questions and concerns.

Background

The Redmond Police Department primarily uses the UAS as an investigative tool for traffic collisions, including scene diagraming and reconstruction as well as aerial photography of collision scenes. The department developed this program to replace existing technology; providing a tool that is more efficient and produces a highly detailed representation of the scene. The UAS has been used to document a non-traffic related crime scene and to assist the Redmond Fire Department with the investigation of a house fire.

The department can use the UAS for additional applications warranting a public safety benefit. Such applications include searching for lost or missing persons, natural disasters, and other emergent life-threatening public safety needs. Authorization by the police chief or a captain is required for these types of applications.

The police department developed a detailed internal policy to ensure compliance with local, state and federal laws, FAA licensing, privacy and records retention.

The department uses the UAS program consistent with constitutional protections for privacy and it will not be used to surveil private citizens. Search warrants will be obtained when legally necessary. Additionally, the equipment the department uses does not have facial recognition technology and the department is not seeking to obtain this capability.

The department has one FAA licensed UAS pilot and other officers within the Traffic Division are preparing for the FAA test to provide additional support to the program.

Community Engagement

At the same time as the program roll-out, the police department implemented a communications plan to inform the community about the use of the UAS. This plan included press releases distributed on the city and public safety platforms (GovDelivery, Facebook, Nextdoor, and Twitter) and a press packet was made available to the press and public. The Department reached out to local media partners about the launch of this program and briefed city communications.

The program launch received little interest from the media as this technology is becoming commonplace for law enforcement to use. The department received a few questions from the public via social media platforms. Questions from the council and the public centered around whether the police department intended to use the UAS to surveil private citizens and if the program used facial recognition.

Since the program launched in August 2019 the Department used the UAS successfully several times to document serious injury collisions, a crime scene, and one house fire in mutual support of the Redmond Fire Department's investigation. For traffic collisions, the Police Department realized the immediate benefit of the UAS; major roadways were closed for investigative purposes for minutes instead of multiple hours with the previous technology platform used for these investigations.

V.   TIME CONSTRAINTS

None

VI.   LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – UAS Program Update (powerpoint)
Attachment B – UAS Privacy Policy