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## Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND  
CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Christopher M. Moore

**SUBJECT:** POLICE DEPARTMENT'S  
FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT

**DATE:** November 1, 2011

Approved

Date

11/2/11

### INFORMATION

At the September 27, 2011, Council Meeting staff was directed to respond to questions from Council Member Campos regarding the use of the Police Department fixed-wing aircraft. Specifically, staff was asked for information on how often the Police Department uses the Cessna and what it is used for.

The Police Department Air Support Unit's fixed-wing aircraft is primarily responsible for providing covert surveillance services for certain units in the Bureau of Investigations (BOI) and Bureau of Field Operations (BFO). The Unit also provides surveillance services to other county task force groups in which the San José Police Department participates and is available to other units within the Department for transportation, surveillance, survey, or photographic missions on an as-needed basis. Additionally, the fixed-wing aircraft has been utilized to report on natural disasters for the Office of Emergency Services. The San José Police Department is the only law enforcement with a fixed-wing aircraft based within the regional South Bay Area.

The San José Police Department has operated a fixed-wing aircraft for over 30 years. The responsibility for the fixed-wing falls under the Air Support sergeant who also oversees the helicopter. Presently, the fixed-wing has seven members (not including the supervisor), who are assigned collaterally. Six members are senior pilots, and one member is an observer pilot. The current fixed-wing aircraft is a 2000 Cessna, model 182 Skylane.

The fixed-wing surveillance program has been very successful in providing timely, covert surveillance information and services to ground officers. The information and services provided have enabled investigators to successfully complete cases that would have otherwise been compromised or frustrated by using only ground based surveillance personnel.

During the 2010-2011 fiscal year, the fixed-wing aircraft flew a total of 200 missions and over 500 flight hours: 68% for training missions; 11% for investigative missions; and 21% for narcotics surveillance, including Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE) investigations where San José personnel were assigned.

Examples of the investigative and surveillance mission flown during fiscal year 2010-2011 to present are detailed below:

- Fixed-wing personnel support for DEA Task Force investigations. A total of 22 suspects were arrested and/or indicted. Additionally, over 30 vehicles were seized along with more than ten firearms, including four semiautomatic weapons. Also, methamphetamines with a street value of almost \$1 million and \$300,000 in cash were confiscated.
- The helicopter (AIR2) and the fixed-wing units worked in conjunction with Mobile Emergency Response Group and Equipment (MERGE) and the FBI to identify and track suspects involved in a kidnapping for ransom case. The fixed-wing unit also supported the initial intelligence and surveillance of the suspect residence where the victim was being held. Once MERGE decided on a tactical entry, AIR2 supported an aerial perimeter due to the ground units inability to access the rear yard. This information was relayed to MERGE units, and ultimately all suspects were taken into custody and the victim was reunited with his family.
- Fixed-wing officers assisted San José officers assigned to the Rapid Enforcement Allied Computer Team (REACT) Task Force with two different surveillances involving a high profile chip theft case. Multiple suspects were taken into custody without incident.
- The fixed-wing unit provided three transportation flights in support of a joint FBI / SJPD Gang Task Force investigation in Southern California. The use of the fixed-wing aircraft reduced the cost to the Police Department by two-thirds and reduced the investigators time away from the office by 50%.
- The fixed-wing was deployed for an emergency transport of homicide detectives to Santa Barbara County to conduct follow-up investigations and obtain critical physical evidence on a suspect who was hospitalized and in custody.
- The fixed-wing was utilized for 20 hours, over a two day period, to provide covert intelligence during the Hells Angels funeral. The flight crew worked to provide immediate updates to the incident commander so ground units could safely be deployed during a dangerous and rapidly changing situation.
- There were five missions conducted where the surveillance required use of an aircraft. Ground units would not otherwise have been successful due to the suspects counter surveillance techniques and the remoteness of where the suspects met to conduct their business.

The large number of training flight hours that occurred this fiscal year were due to personnel retiring unexpectedly and staff rotations. The training hours used above allowed the Department to maintain a functioning group of pilots to staff the fixed-wing aircraft, and resulted in four new senior pilots whom are qualified, rated, and insured to utilize the Department aircraft for law enforcement missions.

/s/

Christopher M. Moore  
Chief of Police