

Published July 6th, 2022

MPD discusses military equipment use policy

By Vera Kochan



Bean bag projectiles Photo Vera Kochan

Assembly Bill 481 is intended to increase transparency, accountability, and oversight surrounding the acquisition and use of military equipment by state and local law enforcement, which includes, but isn't limited to unmanned aerial or ground vehicles, armored vehicles, command and control vehicles, pepper balls, less lethal shotguns, long range acoustic devices and flashbangs.

While the Moraga Police Department does not utilize most of the above-mentioned weaponry, nevertheless as of Jan. 1 it is required to obtain approval from the town council through an adoption of a military equipment use policy. The policy must be reviewed and approved annually after a community review process and an MPD report.

MPD Chief Jon King related to the town council during its June 22 meeting that such equipment becomes available to local law enforcement agencies after military action overseas ends. Currently, MPD has less lethal shotguns and bean bag projectiles in addition to two free surplus military generators used to power town facilities during outages.

MPD Chief Jon King related to the town council during its June 22 meeting that such equipment becomes available

"The less lethal shotgun and bean bag projectiles allow officers to confront a potentially armed or dangerous suspect at a longer distance, potentially preventing a deadly force encounter," King stated in his staff report. "The range of the weapons system helps to maintain this increased distance between officers and a suspect, reducing the immediacy of the threat, which is a principle of de-escalation."

Mayor Steve Woehleke asked King if Moraga was excluded from the use of drones, to which King replied, "We do not currently operate drones. We have other agencies who do. For example: Moraga-Orinda Fire District has drones; the Lafayette Police have drones; the Sheriff's Office has drones; and those law enforcement agencies all have similar policies about their use. As long as those policies are abided by on a mutual aid or assistance basis, we could have them assist us, but if we wanted to start a drone program of our own, I would have to come to you [the council] ahead of time and get your approval to make those purchases."

The item will return to the council on Aug. 24.

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[back](#)

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