

# **CIVIC SUCCESS PUBLIC SERVICE AT ITS BEST**

## ***SUMMARY***

The mission of the San Diego County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) is to represent the citizens of San Diego County by investigating, evaluating, and reporting on the actions of local governments and special districts. In fulfilling this mission, the 2021/2022 San Diego County Grand Jury has investigated numerous citizen complaints regarding the operation of various public agencies. Some of these investigations may result in the issuance of Grand Jury reports containing recommendations for improving the performance within those entities. Occasionally, while performing its general oversight responsibilities, the Grand Jury discovers noteworthy examples of community service by public agencies and issues a commendation.

In this report, the Grand Jury recognizes the following San Diego County agencies for their contributions to the community:

- Chula Vista Police Department-Drone as First Responders
- La Mesa Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement (HOME)

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The Grand Jury ordinarily reports the results of its investigations together with recommendations to the public agencies or special districts studied. The 2021/2022 San Diego County Grand Jury has found that the performance of the subjects of investigation in the above mentioned three programs has been commendatory and worthy of public recognition as *Civic Successes ~ Public Service at its Best*.

## ***PROCEDURES***

During its studies, the Grand Jury conducts interviews with representatives of the entity under investigation and others with knowledge about the issues, actions, and circumstances involved. The Grand Jury may also collect documentary information relevant to the study from all available sources. Site visits are made when appropriate. All information gathered is carefully weighed by the Grand Jury.

## ***CHULA VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT DRONE AS FIRST RESPONDERS***

### ***DISCUSSION***

The Chula Vista Police Department Drone as First Responder (DFR) program operates drones to investigate, provide airborne support, decrease response times, preserve the peace, and provide real-time information to responding officers before they arrive on scene. In some cases, the use of drones eliminates the need to dispatch patrol units. The program has been operating since 2018 and has expanded to cover the entire city of Chula Vista. With over 10,000 responses since its inception, the DFR program has reduced response times, improved police interactions, and increased public safety for the City of Chula Vista.

The City of Chula Vista laid the groundwork for the DFR program beginning in 2016 when they began looking into utilizing drones. The CVPD met with the ACLU twice in the Spring of 2016 for evaluation of the program's privacy protections.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) selected Chula Vista in 2017 as one of ten test sites nationwide—and the only law enforcement agency—to beta test the UAS Integration Pilot Program, a piloted drone program aimed at integrating drones into the national air space.

In October 2018, the Chula Vista Police Department officially started the DFR program. The DFR program protects the privacy of Chula Vista residents by only launching drones in response to 911 calls; the drones do not patrol. These drones do not enter areas where citizens have an expectation of privacy, such as buildings or fenced yards, except with a duly executed warrant or in an emergency. On the drone's return flight to the launch area, the cameras are stowed horizontally and are not recording video footage.

Each drone has a high-definition digital video camera. The drones weigh less than fifty-five pounds each, are battery operated, and have several rotors like a helicopter. A pilot on the ground operates the drone remotely, using a handheld controller. The pilot also communicates with officers in the field to give them information and tactical intelligence about the situation they are responding to.

CVPD received a waiver from the FAA to fly beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) in May 2019. The BVLOS waiver increases the range from the launch sites from one mile to up to three miles in any direction within city limits, significantly increasing the service area. CVPD also was the first in the nation to obtain a two-to-one waiver, which allows it to launch two drones from each location, increasing coverage for the community and first responders.

The initial launch site was the roof of the Chula Vista Police Department building. Chula Vista added an additional launch site on the roof of the Paradise Valley Hospital in August 2019. This site is approximately two miles south of the police department headquarters and allows the drones to cover the entire western portion of the city. CVPD subsequently added two additional launch sites at Southwestern College and Ayers Hotel in the eastern parts of the city. With the addition of these new launch sites, the DFR program now has city-wide coverage, except for the area over Brown Field.

The CVPD entered into a Subscription Services Agreement with Motorola Solutions in February 2020; the agreement covers the products and services offered by Motorola in connection with CVPD's DFR program. The Grand Jury is aware that members of the public have raised concerns regarding this agreement, but the Grand Jury did not investigate and takes no position on those concerns in this report.

The drones have responded to over 10,000 separate emergencies from October 2018 through March 2022. Drones as first responders reduce the response time for emergencies and improve

the officers' decision making by providing real-time information to the officers before they arrive on scene. As of March 2022, the DFR program has prevented the need for dispatching a patrol unit over 2,500 times.

The Grand Jury commends the Chula Vista Drone as First Responder program for its valuable contributions to law enforcement and for improving the safety of the citizens of Chula Vista.

## ***LA MESA HOMELESS OUTREACH AND MOBILE ENGAGEMENT (HOME)***

### ***DISCUSSION***

There are many city and county departments as well as numerous private and non-profit groups trying to solve the problems of homelessness in San Diego. The Grand Jury interviewed the leaders of city and county agencies, faith-based organizations, philanthropies, and non-profits, and evaluated their websites. The Grand Jury discovered that the La Mesa HOME program included specific goals and plans, detailed who was responsible for implementation, clearly cited the timeline for the deliverables, and provided a metric for how their success would be measured.

The La Mesa City Council created a Citizen Task Force on Homelessness in July 2019 to better connect those experiencing homelessness with existing County services. This group was made up of representatives from Alvarado Parkway Institute, Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH), Interfaith Shelter, The Salvation Army, Crisis House, Home Start, Sharp Grossmont Hospital, the County of San Diego, People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), and others. At task force meetings, the service providers shared their experiences and challenges with providing homeless and mental health services in La Mesa and the region. The Citizen Task Force then created recommendations that were grouped by In-Program Service Areas, Description of Activity, Potential Funding Sources, Responsible Agency, and Strategies/Five Year Goals. Concurrently, the city sought input from the police department. The HOME team would use techniques designed to reduce trauma and harm with the goal of decreasing interventions by police officers.

In September 2020, the City issued a recommendation that the HOME pilot program be created. This plan included fiscal impact, alternative models, a detailed program including phases, and next steps to achieve their four goals (see Appendix 1):

- Enhance the City's public communication and coordination related to the homeless.
- Improve the City's ability to prevent homelessness, provide direct outreach to the homeless population, address public safety, and respond to nonemergency calls for service.
- Expand the City's ability to connect homeless residents to transitional and permanent housing opportunities.
- Identify viable one-time and ongoing grant funding opportunities.

This program was subsequently adopted. As a result, the HOME program allows for the

reallocation of sworn officers and PD resources to other aspects of public safety, such as community policing, DUI enforcement, and criminal investigation.

The City of La Mesa Homeless Action Plan is readily accessible on the City's website (<https://www.cityoflamesa.us/1646/HOME-Program>) as well as on social media at <https://www.facebook.com/lamesaca>.

The Grand Jury reviewed the agreement between the City of La Mesa and PATH. La Mesa chose the perfect partner. PATH has a long history of success with the homeless in San Diego and was California's non-profit of the year for Assembly District 78 in 2021. The agreement with PATH contained goals, performance measures, and performance monitoring, along with housing resources and supportive services. According to the Action Plan, "the city will partner with the County, neighboring cities, the Regional Task Force for the Homeless (RTFH), and the East County Homeless Task Force to identify suitable sites, apply for funding, and develop political and community consensus to develop housing. PATH will work with local landlords to identify and create additional housing opportunities in La Mesa." To help prevent inadvertent unintended escalation with uniformed officers, two PATH experts, an outreach technician and a clinical homeless outreach specialist were assigned to La Mesa full time for the pilot year. The program even addressed transportation: the preliminary budget included the purchase of an eight-passenger van for transporting homeless individuals to temporary housing.

The HOME website contains a link to the latest quarterly report. These reports are easy for the public to read, are quite informative, and transparent.

The HOME website also contains email and telephone information for the HOME program so the public can easily report someone experiencing homelessness. The HOME program outreach workers involved businesses by providing contact information to get direct help for the homeless.

The City of La Mesa is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of its pilot program: La Mesa Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement (HOME).

The Grand Jury identified the La Mesa HOME program as outstanding in its approach to helping the homeless.

The Grand Jury commends the proactive La Mesa HOME program on its organization, transparency, and publicly available information.