

Notes from the 2nd of 3 Special Sessions of the Neighborhoods Commission to collect public comment on the proposed use of an Unmanned Aerial System (UAS, aka "drone") by the SJ Police Dept.

Meeting was held Saturday, January 17, 2015, 1 – 3 PM, at the West Valley Branch Library, 1243 San Tomas Aquino Rd. (at Saratoga Ave.) in SJ.

Informal notes by L. Ames. [Corrections and additions are welcome!]

Video: <http://youtu.be/dtL51g29sQE>

Panel:

- * Deputy Chief Dave Hober
- * Capt. Tim Porter, Special Ops
- * Lenka Wright, Assist. Dir. Communications, City Manager Office, SJ
- * Ernest Guzman, City Mngr's Office and Staff to Neighborhoods Commission (NC)
- * and me, Larry Ames, Chair, NC.

Also present:

- * Bomb Squad Lieutenant Jason Dwyer

The Library Community Room was full: all ~70 seats filled, with a few standing.

Dept'y Chief Hodor and Capt. Tim Porter gave PowerPoint presentation overview, same as at 1st Special Session.

Questions (Q) and Comments (C) from the public, along w/ answers (A) by panel:

Q: Police already have rules for surveillance from helicopters: won't drones be just the same?

A: Drones can enter buildings.

A: FAA regulates helicopters, but haven't established rules yet for drones. Great pressure to hurry: private industry wants to use drones for delivery.

Q: Why only used "real-time"? For active shooter, etc., wouldn't record be useful for evidence?

A: SJ PD opting to only ask for real-time to avoid all issues related to record keeping, public access, privacy, etc. If, after this 1-yr pilot program, the SJ PD wishes it could store data, it will return to public and City Council for a change in the rules.

Q: Will drone help w/ Staff shortage?

A: Doesn't affect number of patrol officers: drone used for explosives or active shooters; doesn't patrol remotely or autonomously. Might help staff assure area is clear before controlled detonations.

Q: Why not keep the film?

A: Concerns w/ privacy, who sees the film. If not recorded, not an issue.

Q: What's the resolution of the camera?

A: GoPro camera; think it's 1080-i

Q: What's the operational range?

A: line-of-sight control. [a couple blocks]

Q: Only 15 min in flight? Is that long enough? What about a crime-in-progress?

A: Have spare batteries; would have to land for battery swap. Drone can't carry weight of extra batteries, but technology may improve.

C: "Mission Creep" – don't want a Police State, constantly being monitored, military on the corner.

Q: Each use of drone to be approved by a Command Officer? How many are there?

A: 16, but only one in charge of the drone. (If he/she's away, responsibility can be delegated.)

Q: How about having public live streaming of the drone video: let the public watch so that they can see it's not being abused?

A: Learned from the Munich Olympics, which had live-streaming of the hostage situation: the bad guys were watching and could where the police were heading.

Q: How cost-effective is the UAS?

A: Unit cost \$7k, including spare parts. No additional personnel, but might need some time for training.

Q: How many drones?

A: Just this one.

Q: What is the overriding need?

A: To look at bombs; to look for active shooters.

Q: Will drone be frequently used or sparsely used?

A: Just sparsely. SJ PD has no interest in surveillance. This is just "another tool in the tool-box" for PD to use in specific cases.

Q: Could it be used for Fire, or for Search & Rescue? Drones could have been helpful w/ Napa earthquake. Why limit it?

A: Want to start simply w/ pilot program. If Fire wants one for S&R, they can get their own, w/ their own rules and training. SJ PD training for bomb-disposal and active-shooter not readily transferable to S&R.

Q: Will SJ PD report back to Council at end of pilot program? Concern about Mission Creep.

A: SJ PD wants to be proactive; give annual report to Council, and tell how it has been used. For sure, there will be a report at the end of the 1-year pilot program.

Q: Is SJ PD being rushed by the upcoming Super Bowl? Could we have the Feds run the drone instead so SJ PD doesn't have to worry about it?

A: Not being bought for Super Bowl. SB will be in Santa Clara, not SJ. If Santa Clara did need use of drone for bomb or shooter, SJ PD would help.

C: Should have a longer public review process: take a full year to collect public input.

Q: At Nov. 12th NC presentation, talked about downloading video data rather than live-streaming?

A: If data is recorded, have to worry about Public Information Release. For now, don't want to even consider it: not recorded, so not a concern. [LLA thought: misheard "downlink" for "download"?]

Q: How many calls/year to bomb squad?

A: There were 110 incidents last year.

Q: Fly with a backup battery?

A: Can't carry the weight. Would be nice to have longer time aloft.

Q: How long does human look at a bomb?

A: a lot longer than 15 min., but drone will still have time to find useful info.

Q: Can the GoPro be manipulated? Turn and look different directions, zoom, etc.?

A: Yes.

Q: What about other PDs?

A: They have the same issues and concerns. Not common now, will be in 5 yrs. Denver, LA City, LA County all grappling w/ issues; not that many jurisdictions have started using them yet. FAA still working on the rules for flight. SJ is on the cutting edge.

Q: What about that PD survey? What are the results?

A: That was not by PD, but instead an informal, anecdotal survey by one of the Commissioners in the NC. The survey is still in-progress, and results will be released when completed.

Q: How will Fed. Gov't deal w/ local drones?

A: FAA rules, for aircraft safety. Not sure what to do if private individual flies near airport, etc.: SJ PD not set up to enforce drone rules.

Q: Does GoPro have adequate resolution for IDing object?

A: Depends on range, angle, lighting, ... Will not be used at night.

Q: Describing a Pilot Program. At end of pilot, might SJ PD decide it's just not worth the effort?

A: Yes; don't know if this will be useful. Might be worthless, or might need more flexibility – would go to Council first.

A: In law enforcement, hard to say having the drone made something bad not happen.

A: Images collected by drone might need to be reconfirmed by officers on the ground, but if it was useful even once, it could justify the modest cost.

Q: Equip drone w/ light for use in building? Audio?

A: Can't carry weight; can't hear over the noise of the rotors.

A: FAA limits drones to line-of-sight control, which limits night-time use. (Can't see power lines in the dark.)

Q: When is the pilot program?

A: After Council approval; after training; after FAA COA (Certificate of Authorization); then start of the 1-year program.

Q: If can't fly at night, then have to have officer look at bomb.

A: Hard to fly in the dark.

Q: Will people shoot at the drone?

A: Possibly.

Q: Will SJ PD buy 2nd drone? What about replacement if it crashes?

A: Have spare parts. Wouldn't consider 2nd drone until after end of pilot program. If 2nd is wanted, would go to public w/ the NC, and then to Council.

Q: Would drone have been useful if you'd already had one?

A: Haven't gone back thru records.

Q: Cost of the drone?

A: \$7k, including spare parts.

Q: Have you done a risk analysis? Does the drone pose a greater risk than not using it?

A: Will avoid risky situations (windy conditions, night-time, over crowds, etc.)

C: Great idea; nice tool; glad that SJ PD is getting one.

End of public comments.

Total duration: ~30 min of presentation and 60 min of comment, with everyone that wanted to ask something had at least one opportunity to speak. Event ended at ~2:30 (half hour early).

There will be a third Special Session of the NC to discuss the SJ PD UAS Drone program in February (date and location TBD). The NC will consider public comments, and then may make recommendations to the SJ City Council. The Council will likely make decision in April.

Notes from the 1st Special Session, as well as the NC's Nov. 2014 monthly meeting on the subject, are posted on-line at www.WGBackfence.net/NC
Videos of the meetings, taken informally by other Commissioners on the NC, are posted on-line, with links at the above webpage.