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DES PERES BOARD OF ALDERMEN AUTHORIZES CANINE UNIT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

At their meeting held April 25, 2022, the Board of Aldermen give thumbs up to creation of a Canine Unit within the Department of Public Safety - the canine is not an “attack” or “tracking dog” but will focus on detection of weapons and explosives primarily at West County Center.

Under the proposal submitted by Director of Public Safety, the Canine Unit will join the current West County Center Substation detail to add a fifth officer and a canine specifically trained to detect weapons and explosive materials. The annual cost of the program is estimated at \$125,000 with \$50,000 additional in startup costs for acquisition of the canine and training of both the canine and its handler. A current full-time public safety officer will be selected for training as the sole canine handler.

“The addition of a weapon detecting canine is another layered approach to maintaining a safer environment at West County Center. While Missouri is a permissive carry state, the owners of WCC have prohibited both customers and employees from carrying weapons into the center and the addition of a canine unit will help in enforcing that prohibition and minimizing the potential for gun related incidents at the mall”, said Director of Public Safety Eric Hall.

Under current Missouri law, a person carrying a weapon into a posted NO GUNS property is asked to leave the premises and, if they refuse to do so, are subject to a trespassing violation and accompanying fine on conviction which escalates from \$100 to \$500 for repeat offenders. Illegal weapons or those in the possession of convicted felons or parole’s can be confiscated and the individual arrested.

Mall security already includes a police substation staffed with four (4) full-time Des Peres police officers used for crime prevention at WCC in both interior foot patrol and patrol of

parking garages funded in partnership between Des Peres and WCC since 2002. They work in partnership with WCC's internal security and a very sophisticated video surveillance system monitored by mall security.

"Having officers assigned to WCC provides both a deterrent to crime, which is mainly shoplifting in retail centers; provides for an immediate response when incidents occur and does not draw other officers away from community patrols to respond to minor incidents or to take reports when crimes occur on site. The mall is treated as a separate sector for police responses and having officers on-site ensures that activity at WCC does not reduce other community policing activities", said the Director of Public Safety.

"The ownership of WCC has already initiated a 1 year demonstration project to contract for a weapon detecting canine shared among their four shopping centers in the region -the Des Peres Canine Unit will be in addition to their efforts but assigned only at WCC. We are planning to have our Canine Unit operational prior to the start of the Christmas shopping season. Weapon detection dogs have been used widely by federal, state and local agencies in many areas include airports and in other places where large crowds gather such as ing Busch Stadium, concert venues and large shopping centers in other parts of our country", said the Director of Public Safety.

Last year, the Department of Public Safety added new technology - license plate reader camera's (Flock Camera's) at the entrances to the property to compliment other external video surveillance done by WCC. Flock cameras record all vehicle license plates as they enter WCC and alert police when a vehicle enters the property has been identified as stolen or wanted for criminal activity in the region or has been earmarked specifically to license plates of individuals previously expelled from the property for violation of WCC's gun prohibition. It also provides an excellent investigative tool when crimes occur. The Flock cameras have been directly responsible for recovery of a number of stolen vehicles, the arrest of the drivers of those vehicles and the recovery of a number of weapons", said Director of Public Safety Eric Hall.

"The continued success of West County Center is vital to our community. The addition of the Canine Unit in 2022, the license plate reader camera's in 2021 and our on-site assignment of police officers inside the mall reflects the high priority the City of Des Peres places on the safety and security for customers and employees at WCC as well as to the Des Peres community. One cannot measure the deterrence impact of the presence of a canine unit or the Flock camera's but we believe a segment of the criminal population will avoid WCC in favor of locations where that level of security is not present", said Mayor Mark Becker.