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From: KEENA CORRIVEAU <kjcorri@comcast.net>
Sent: Wednesday, June 3, 2020 12:50 PM
To: City Council - All
Subject: Mounted Patrol

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Dear City Councilors,

I am writing to you in support of keeping the Dover Mounted Patrol. Shutting down the unit would be an unnecessary and enormous loss to the City of Dover. I am a frequent user of the Community Trail and run in many neighborhoods and side streets in the downtown area. I utilize the public lots by the train station and Children's Museum multiple times a week. I encounter the Mounted Patrol frequently while out running and it is easy to see how valuable they are to the city.

Based on comments during the budget hearing it seems to me that the main concern with keeping the Mounted Patrol is staffing. Chief Breault spoke of there being 3-6 "ANTICIPATED" retirements. He felt that given the retirements and lack of recruits coming in he was unable to assign officers and/or continue assignments to some of the community outreach programs (yet only mentioned the Mounted Patrol). There was much talk about recruitment and what the department was doing to gain officers but NO talk about how to retain the officers they have. Has the City thought about a way to keep officers working, even on a part-time basis once they hit retirement age? Police officers can fully retire at 45 years of age and most of these officers are still very physically fit and able to meet all the demands of the job. Retaining officers during times that recruitment is very difficult is a solution and would also result in the elimination of the training (time and fees) and ramp-up periods new officers require. Concentrating on what it would take to not fully lose some of your most seasoned officers seems like a solution to the staffing issue that should be carefully considered. It is impossible to control the job market and interest in this field but it is easy to control retention and is potentially the biggest factor that the department and city could control when finding staffing solutions.

The solution of suspending the Mounted Patrol indefinitely due to "ANTICIPATED" openings is unnecessary and reactionary. Not all of these retirements are happening on the same day. They are stretched over the fiscal year and some of them may even be pushed off. I also couldn't help but notice that during 2014 when the force was at its smallest; suspending the Mounted Patrol was not considered a solution nor was it for a few years afterward while the number of officers increased slowly. Disbanding the unit was not suggested then, so why now?

In addition, Chief Breault talks a lot about how it is important that police officers are highly visible around the city and that given the current climate of mental health, also approachable. He states that the number of homeless people has grown and that the department spends a fair amount of time dealing with the homeless in various capacities. When I run, I see the Mounted Patrol almost every time, they are very easy to spot. I see zero or maybe one cruiser and they are usually just driving by. I typically see members of the homeless population speaking with the mounted patrol, they clue the officers in on the goings-on as well as campsites that are cropping up and are offered help and resources when needed. I firmly believe that the homeless especially but also the average citizen is NOT going to approach an officer in a cruiser. It is just too intimidating. The City stands to lose out on relationships that are formed that give helpful insight to the homeless and their mental health as well as comradery with the city if the Mounted Unit is suspended. Also bear in mind that horses are

able to patrol areas that cruisers cannot (trails, wooded areas, parks, etc). Not only do the homeless frequent these areas but many average citizens do as well further increasing the police visibility.

I can think of multiple compromises or baby steps opposed to an all-out dismantling of the unit. These include; One full time mounted patrol officer with a part-time partner either year-round or as staffing allows. The part time officer could work events or help patrol the wooded areas as homeless camps pop up. The full time officer could also be reassigned during the less busy time of year for the unit and volunteers could take over the care of the horses. The additional officer could also be part of the unit on an overtime basis funded by the DMP's charity. Solutions and compromises don't always have to be black and white, they can be fluid as retirements happen (or don't), calls increase or decrease and the pandemic plays out.

Outside of the staffing issues; it is important to keep in mind that horses are herd animals. CJ cannot be alone, he needs another horse with him even if that horse is just ridden on a part time basis. This shouldn't be a big deal since the care of the horses is funded by the DMP's charity. I understand there is concern about businesses being able to continue financially supporting the unit given the current economic climate. I would encourage you to let the volunteers run additional fund raising events and give them and the community a chance to close any gaps in funding before you assume the charity will face financial shortages. The Dover Mounted Patrol has a very loyal and capable volunteer network that is willing to work hard to aid in the continuation of the unit.

I strongly encourage you to really think about the alternative and innovative ways to retain the officers you already have and insist that the police department explore compromises to keep the Mounted Patrol. The solution is not taking away this extremely valuable resource to the City especially at a time when spirits are low and the need for positive relationships between citizens and officers is so great. Given the uptick in calls specific to the homeless population and mental health, as well as the increase in crime on the trails, this seems like a risky choice. There are many, many ways to potentially restructure the unit to best serve the City given the current staffing limitations while continuing to provide an invaluable service to the City.

Thank you for your service to the city and thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Keena Corriveau