

Mistretta, Susan

From: Justin Gagnon <justin.gagnon12@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 1, 2020 7:32 AM
To: City Council - All
Subject: Future of Dover Mounted Patrol

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Good morning,

I am writing the council as a concerned Dover citizen (from Ward 2). Beyond just temporarily "rehousing" the Mounted Patrol unit elsewhere due to police staffing concerns during the pandemic, I've heard rumors the unit has/is being discontinued. Although some may not see as much value in the unit, I believe it is a vital part of Dover's community policing effort and is one of those things that helps to make Dover uniquely, well Dover. I understand manpower must be at least temporarily assigned due to staffing level concerns during the current pandemic, though it seems the horses could have at least remained at their current location in town? I know there is a very dedicated volunteer base devoted to assisting in the care of the horses and upkeep of the stable/paddock. I also know budgets are always a topic of conversation, but it seems like a large extent of the care/funding of these horses is accomplished through volunteers and donations rather than city tax dollars. I believe the only tax payer expense is for the actual officers, which the city would retain those officers even if the unit was disbanded and just allocate them elsewhere. Overall, the return we get from this unit for the amount of tax dollars invested is a tremendous bargain. I feel the recent retirement of one of the officers and one of the horses, the on-boarding/training of a new horse, and events associated with the ongoing pandemic have created a perfect storm to justify the disbanding of the unit. If this is truly the case I find it extremely concerning and disappointing. Not restarting this program would very negatively affect our city's community policing efforts. It seems like there has been already been an uptick in tagging and other incidents in specific locations, such as along the community trail, where the mounted patrol previously patrolled regularly.

The mounted patrol is not just a policing force and to see it as just the allocation of 2 officers I believe is very short-sighted. The mounted patrol is an immense asset in terms of community outreach whether it be with our local homeless, visitors to town, and even just the general public. In addition to being a resident of Dover and living nearby the horses, I volunteer and am on the Board of the Children's Museum. I've seen the impact this unit makes first hand, numerous times, right outside the museum and in the greater downtown area. Losing their unique approach is not a void that can be easily filled by a normal patrol unit, or even officers on foot/bike. The horses help make our officers more approachable to folks and provide a welcoming face for our city. I would love to hear that my concerns are unfounded and that our Mounted Patrol unit will return once this pandemic subsides. If that is not the case, I couldn't let these recent actions go unnoticed, and want folks to understand the tremendous loss and disadvantage this puts our city at.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns.

Justin Gagnon
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