

Council Meeting Staff Report

June 12, 2018

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Indexes (Council Goals):	2018 Council Goal - N/A
Presenters:	Julie Habiger
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Title

Review of Unmanned Aerial Systems (aka Drones) Policies

Body

During the FY19 Budget Hearings, a question arose regarding a request to purchase an Unmanned Aerial System (UAS, more commonly known by members of the public as a drone). The ensuing discussion resulted in a request for staff to develop and present to Council a policy regarding any County-owned drone use.

At present the County owns three drones (within the Community and Public Relations Office, Traffic and Streets Division, and Community Development Department). Several other departments/divisions have considered the utilization of drones and their potential for enhanced delivery of services and/or mitigation of safety concerns.

The Traffic Division staff own and use a UAS for traffic management. For example, the UAS is used for mapping and for overhead photographs, primarily at or around intersections for the layout of new signals, signage or striping.

The Communications and Public Relations staff own and use a UAS - most often to capture video footage of events that can be used in publications or social media videos to promote Los Alamos. Two recent examples: 1) the UAS was lifted up to take an aerial photo of the brand after it was applied to the intersection of 15th and Central; 2) the UAS was lifted up at the parking lot of the Justice Center to take a photo of an event at Ashley Pond Park.

CDD staff is interested in utilizing their UAS to better facilitate roof inspections. The UAS could be safely lifted up to do an aerial inspection, rather than having an inspector climbing up on the roof.

The Fire Department is interested in using a UAS for emergency response. Examples of use include: finding missing persons, search and rescue missions in canyons and forested areas, hazardous material incidents, or fire ground support.

The Police Department is interested in using a UAS to assist them in operations. Examples include: observation of a crime scene, assisting in a search for a fleeing fugitive, storm damage assessment, or a hostage situation.

The Information Management Division staff are interested in purchasing a UAS that they would operate on behalf of the County Assessor to survey properties in Los Alamos and White Rock.

As discussed at the Budget Hearing in April, while individuals had received some general UAS training and had internal guidelines on UAS usage, the County did not have an overarching policy in place governing UAS purchase, usage, training, restrictions or registration. The Public Information

Officer searched a variety of professional resources from other municipalities, focusing on best practices and sample policies or templates that could be used to develop a County Manager policy. A draft of the policy was presented and discussed with the Senior Management Team, as well as those who own or desire to purchase a UAS. Feedback was incorporated to address a variety of needs and situations. The PIO also obtained input from the Airport Manager, the County Attorney and Risk Management staff to help inform and create the policy. As a result of internal discussions, a decision was made last month to have one, over-arching policy from the County Manager, but allow the individual departments to set up further restrictions and parameters tailored to the needs of their own departments. For example, LAFD has a very extensive policy because of their interactions on LANL property, regulations that apply to their LANL contract and Fire life/safety training requirements. In contrast, the Communications and Public Relations policy is less complex. As outlined in the County Manager policy, the County Manager will still need to review each individual department policy and approve them.

UAS are being used more and more by municipalities, providing better safety options and efficiencies. However, FAA regulations are still changing as more UAS are sold and used. For that reason, the policies presented to the Council for discussion this evening will need to be reviewed and refined over time, and, as more information is forthcoming at the national level governing the use of UAS.

Fiscal and Staff Impact/Planned Item

Purchase of a UAS would need to be a funded item in a department's budget. The registration fee with the FAA is minimal. Time will need to be spent by Staff studying for the Part 107 certification and taking the test, which is offered in Albuquerque or Las Cruces at various times. The cost of the Part 107 training course and test will need to be covered in a department's training budget.

Attachments

- A - County Manager Policy 0290 on UAS usage
- B - Department or Division Draft Policies on UAS usage