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Published March 4th, 2009

Moraga's COPS Will Buy Equipment

By *Sophie Braccini*

On February 25th Moraga's Interim Police Chief Robert Priebe asked the Town Council for authorization to spend the \$100,000 grant awarded to the Town under the State of California's "COPS" (Citizen's Options for Public Safety) program on the purchase of equipment, rather than using it to hire a 14th police officer. Priebe said he believes it is likely that the grant will not be renewed after this year, and his department is in critical need of replacement equipment. The Council approved the request.

In previous years, COPS funding was distributed to local jurisdictions in October and had been used in Moraga to fund a 13th police officer. In the heat of the budget crisis, the State did not release funding in 2008 for the current fiscal year. The Town modified its budget accordingly, paying the 13th officer from its own resources. At the time, there was some discussion that should COPS funds be received, they might be used to pay for a 14th officer.

"Recent correspondence with Contra Costa SLEOC (Supplemental Law Enforcement Oversight Committee) warns of future funding cuts," said Priebe. If the funding were to be cut off, the Town would either have to lay-off the new officer or fund the position from the Town's general fund.

"The COPS revenues are required to fund 'front line municipal police services,'" Priebe stated, "this can be equipment, personnel or special programs." He ran down a list of the Moraga Police Department's (MPD) equipment needs. Priebe said that the MPD's cars are equipped with mobile data computers that were purchased used from the County but are now outdated and in need of replacement.

Priebe would also like to equip his officers with new Tasers, explaining, "Right now they have the old model that has the shape of a gun and has been incriminated in the Oakland case." He hopes to provide each officer with a newer model that includes a camera that records video when the Taser is turned on.

The Interim Chief said he also needs items such as a new radio system for better communication, guns, a radar unit, an off-road motorcycle, crime scene evidence equipment, a traffic data collector and specialized training for new officers.

"There are a few things that are just nice to have," said Priebe, those are items that we really need, with the exception maybe of the motorbike." The Council unanimously approved the proposal as Mayor Dave Trotter warned, "But understand that you won't be able to exceed the \$100,000 by a penny."

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