



STAFF REPORT

DATE: 04/16/2024
TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members
FROM: City of Corona Police Department

2025-135

REQUEST FOR CITY COUNCIL ACTION

SUBJECT:

CONTRACT WITH FLOCK SAFETY TO PROVIDE HARDWARE, SOFTWARE, TRAINING, AND REGULATORY SERVICES FOR DRONE AS A FIRST RESPONDER PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This staff report asks the City Council to authorize the City Manager to enter into a contract with Flock Safety to provide services for a second-generation Drone as a First Responder program (DFR 2.0). This program will improve the Police Department's emergency response times and provide officers with critical situational awareness through unmanned aircraft systems. The contract includes hardware, software, services, and training necessary to implement and maintain the DFR 2.0 program over a 36-month term. The contract also includes an operating system for the Real-Time Information Center (RTIC) that allows multiple technologies already in use by the police department to be accessed and controlled through a single computer program. Additionally, this request includes funding for necessary infrastructure improvements at three (3) drone deployment sites and one (1) radar site within the city.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- a. Authorize the City Manager, or his designee, to execute an agreement with Flock Safety for a 36-month contract through June 30, 2028, to provide Drone as a First

Responder hardware, software, training, and regulatory services the amount of \$1,528,662.

- b. Make a determination under Corona Municipal Code 3.08.140(E) that competitive bidding has been otherwise accomplished as provided for in the “Basis for Determination of Competitive Bidding” section of this agenda report.
- c. Authorize the City Manager, or his designee, to issue purchase orders to Flock Safety: in the amounts of \$341,258 for FY 2026 and \$593,702 for FY 2027 and FY 2028.
- d. Authorize the City Manager, or his designee, to negotiate and execute any non-substantive extensions, amendments, and change orders up to \$152,866 or 10% of the original purchase order amount as provided by the Corona Municipal Code (CMC) Section 3.08.060(j).
- e. Authorize the elimination of three (3) part-time vacant Public Safety Dispatcher II Flex positions and two (2) full-time vacant Public Safety Dispatch Call Taker positions.
- f. Authorize the creation of a new Capital Improvement Project (CIP) titled, “DFR Infrastructure Upgrades.”
- g. Authorize a budgetary transfer in the amount of \$100,000 from the salaries/benefits category in the Police Department’s operating budget to the newly created DFR Infrastructure Upgrades Capital Improvement Project within the General Fund 110 due to the elimination of vacant positions for required infrastructure upgrades to unmanned aerial vehicle launch sites and a radar deployment site.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY:

On April 13, 2023, the City Council directed the Police Department to move forward with a Drone as a First Responder (DFR) program to enhance police response capabilities through real-time video intelligence. The existing “DFR 1.0” system consists of a drone deployed from the rooftop of the police station that can rapidly respond to incident locations within a 2.5-mile radius. This model requires a rooftop visual observer to scan the airspace for hazards and conduct battery swapping on the drones. A pilot is positioned inside the police department and is responsible for flying the drone and communicating with police officers on the ground. The program has been filled on an overtime basis since May 2024. Between May and December 2024, the DFR program was in service for a total of 374 hours. Drones responded to 540 calls for service and were first on-scene 68 percent of the time. The drone team handled 109 calls for service without the need for ground units.

DFR 1.0 systems are challenging to scale to multiple drone locations as each requires a visual observer, increasing personnel costs. The single-location deployment method

limits the ability to reach most of the city and is often cited as a frustration for drone operators. The proposed upgrade to “DFR 2.0” represents a significant technological advancement that allows a single pilot to operate multiple pre-positioned drones without requiring visual observers at individual launch sites. This next-generation system features:

- Enhanced autonomous capabilities with automated flight paths
- Advanced airspace mitigation management through radar and Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) technology
- Automated battery replacement systems
- Direct integration with the department’s Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) infrastructure
- Increased flight range for each drone

The DFR 2.0 platform enables expanded drone coverage to the entire city while substantially reducing personnel requirements and associated costs.

Several California municipalities have already implemented DFR 2.0 systems with impressive results. The City of Elk Grove’s program utilized DFR 2.0 to respond to 149 calls for service in the first two months of 2025. The drone was first on scene 67% of the time, reducing response time by 75% on average. The Corona Police Department seeks to become Riverside County’s pioneer in adopting this innovative public safety technology.

ANALYSIS:

The Police Department seeks to develop a DFR program that seamlessly integrates with the agency's current technology. A DFR 2.0 program will provide improved technology while saving on personnel costs.

Flock Safety offers a DFR 2.0 program that bundles drones, docking stations, software, regulatory services, training, and warranties. The products offered in Flock’s program integrate seamlessly with one another and offer significant benefits that will allow for enhanced safety and efficiency in Corona when used in conjunction with technologies currently being used by the police department. Flock’s program includes the following:

- Drones and batteries
- Docking stations with automated battery swapping requiring only a two-minute downtime
- Software for the Real Time Information Center (RTIC) that allows piloting of the drones and ingests multiple technologies already in use by the police department such as Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPRs) and city cameras
- Flight logging and analytics providing comprehensive records
- Air traffic awareness module to ensure safe flights
- Training in remote drone operation and safe flights
- Advanced detect and avoid radar to avoid in-air collisions
- Assistance with obtaining required FAA waivers to eliminate the need for visual observers

- Visual observers at two launch locations for 40 hours per week until waivers from the FAA are obtained
- Flock Real-Time computer operating system, allowing the coordination of multiple technologies in a single source

The Police Department is prepared to staff the program full-time with existing personnel and will repurpose existing funding to make it viable.

Basis for Determination of Competitive Bidding

Corona Municipal Code (CMC) Section 3.08.140 states that when the purchasing agent and the authorized contracting party, with the approval of the City Manager, determine that it is in the best interest of the city and its administrative operations to dispense with public bidding for non-public projects, any alternative procedure, including no bidding may be used.

Corona Police staff researched and tested DFR platforms provided by the following companies: DroneSense by Axon, BRINC, SkyDio, and Flock Safety. Staff found Flock Safety's DFR system to be of superior quality and performance. Flock covers more miles per drone than its competitors at a lower cost per mile. Flock is also the only platform that offers automated battery swapping, significantly reducing downtime and saving on personnel costs. Additional benefits identified by staff with the Flock platform are the drones' ability to fly at night, requiring only three locations for 100-percent city coverage, best-in-class camera systems, and leased equipment in a rapidly evolving area of law enforcement.

Based on the extensive research conducted, it is the opinion of staff that a formal Request For Proposal process is not in the best interest of the City, as it will not result in additional vendors able to provide the City with the desired capabilities of the products and services included in the Flock Safety package. The expenditure of time and money will not result in an outcome that is more advantageous to the City. Staff recommends that the City Council dispense with the formal request for proposal procedure and authorize the City Manager, or his designee, to execute an agreement with Flock Safety.

A new capital improvement project, DFR Infrastructure Upgrades, will be created to track the costs for infrastructure improvements to fully implement the DFR program. The appropriation request is \$100,000 and will include funding for fiber internet installations, electrical and ethernet conduit, and a Civil Engineer review and installation of a radar deployment site.

ITEM	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28
Infrastructure Upgrades	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	\$0

Drone 1	\$0	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000
Drone 2		\$0	\$75,000	\$75,000
Radar	\$0	\$0	\$157,133	\$157,133
Flock Elite OS	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Hardware to Ingest City Camera Feeds	\$0	\$13,800	\$13,800	\$13,800
SUBTOTAL BEFORE THE 3RD DRONE	\$0	\$163,800	\$395,933	\$395,933
Drone 3		\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000
SALES TAX 8.75%		\$27,458	\$47,769	\$47,769
TOTAL	\$100,000	\$341,258	\$593,702	\$593,702

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Funding for initial costs of the Drone as a First Responder (DFR) program is available through the cost savings from eliminating three (3) part-time Public Safety Dispatcher II Flex and two (2) full-time Public Safety Dispatch Call Taker positions. Approval of the recommended actions will result in a budgetary transfer in the amount of \$100,000 from the salaries/benefits category in the Police Department's operating budget to the newly created DFR Infrastructure Upgrades Capital Improvement Project within the General Fund 110 for required infrastructure upgrades to unmanned aerial vehicle launch sites and a radar deployment site.

The Police Department is taking a strategic approach to offset the costs of the Flock agreement over the 36-month term by eliminating vacant budgeted positions and reducing budget in other areas (e.g. Overtime and Air Support Program) to enhance organizational effectiveness.

The table below provides a comparative analysis of the costs associated with the agreement and the corresponding reductions made to the recurring items budget. This comparison highlights the financial adjustments implemented to accommodate the agreement's expenditures within the broader budget framework. Over the 36-month term, the Department is estimating cost savings of \$14,000.

Fiscal Year	Agreement Year	Cost Type	Cost	Recurring Budget Offset	Cost Increase / (Savings)
FY 2025	N/A	DFR Infrastructure Upgrades	100,000	(100,000)	-
FY 2026	Year 1	Annual Agreement	341,258	(447,530)	(106,272)
FY 2027	Year 2	Annual Agreement	593,702	(547,530)	46,172
FY 2028	Year 2	Annual Agreement	593,702	(547,530)	46,172
			\$ 1,628,662	\$ (1,642,590)	\$ (13,928)

Funding in the amount of \$341,258 for FY 2026 will be included in the FY 2026 Proposed Operating Budget within the General Fund 110. Funding for FY 2027 and FY 2028 will be recommended through the annual budget process.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

This action is exempt pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which states that a project is exempt from CEQA if the activity is covered by the commonsense exemption that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. This action of direct enforcement is minimal and there is no possibility this will have a significant effect on the environment. Therefore, no environmental analysis is required.

PREPARED BY: GARY GRIFFITTS, POLICE LIEUTENANT

REVIEWED BY: ROBERT NEWMAN, CHIEF OF POLICE

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Exhibit 1 – DRONE RESPONSE SERVICES AGREEMENT WITH FLOCK
2. Exhibit 2 – FLOCK SAFETY SOLE SOURCE LETTER
3. Exhibit 3 – DFR BUDGET BREAKDOWN