



City of Sebastopol

**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: May 5th, 2026**

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**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
**From:** Sean McDonagh, Police Chief  
**Department:** Police  
**Subject:** Receipt of Information and Update on Community Programs – Police Explorer Program, Community Service Volunteer (CSV) Program, Citizens Academy, and Horse Mounted Unit

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**RECOMMENDATION(s):**

Staff recommends that the city council receive this informational report. Staff will return with additional information regarding budgeting and timelines as part of the city council goals and priorities agenda item, which is scheduled to return for adoption at a future city Council meeting.

**PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:**

- a. Introduction of agenda item by city staff
- b. Questions and discussion from councilmembers
- c. Open for public comment
- d. Council discussion
- e. Receipt of Item. No action is to be taken on this item tonight.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This report provides the requested update on community engagement and volunteer programs for the Sebastopol Police Department (SPD), as directed by the city council at its January 6, 2026 meeting. The update addresses the status of the Community Service Volunteer (CSV) Program, Police Citizens Academy, and the feasibility of revitalizing the Police Explorer Program, as well as exploring a potential mounted unit administered by an external organization.

Over the past year, the department’s primary focus has been stabilizing staffing levels following a prolonged period of vacancies, reduced overall staffing, and a frozen officer position. Through sustained recruitment efforts led by the Chief of Police since his appointment in March 2025, along with a focus on organizational culture and retention of current staff, the department is now approaching full available staffing (15 sworn positions, of which 14 are active and 1 remains frozen) for the first time in many years.

However, newly hired personnel require extensive field training, followed by a period of operational experience, before they are able to function independently or assume additional responsibilities. This includes the ability to oversee or support programs such as volunteer initiatives, a citizens academy, an explorer program, or any involvement in a potential mounted unit.

As a result, the department remains appropriately focused on its core public safety responsibilities, priorities and service delivery. While community engagement and volunteer programs are recognized as valuable, their implementation or expansion is contingent upon achieving sustained staffing stability and sufficient operational capacity. At this time, staff do not have the resources to effectively manage these program areas.

Staff will continue to evaluate these opportunities as staffing is fully established and personnel complete the necessary training and field experience and will return with further information as part of the city council's broader goals and priorities and upcoming budget discussions.

## **BACKGROUND:**

At the January 6, 2026 city council meeting, the council removed from the consent calendar an item related to the CSV Program and Citizens Academy for further discussion. During that meeting, the Police Chief provided an initial update and acknowledged interest in expanding or revitalizing volunteer-based programs.

The council subsequently requested a more detailed report addressing:

- Program implementation considerations
- Staffing and resource requirements
- Potential timelines
- Feasibility of reestablishing the Police Explorer Program
- Exploration of a mounted unit, including risk and liability considerations

This report provides that update. No action is requested at this time.

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## **DISCUSSION:**

### **1. Community Service Volunteer (CSV) Program**

The CSV Program is designed to support non-enforcement activities such as administrative assistance, event support, and community engagement. While there has been continued interest in this program, prior staffing limitations have constrained its development and expansion.

The department is now nearing full staffing; however, resources remain focused on onboarding and training new personnel once they complete the remainder of any background, medical and other 'pre employment' type requirements. Development of a structured volunteer program, including recruitment, training, supervision, and program management, requires dedicated staff time that is not yet available. Expansion of the CSV Program will be revisited once staffing levels are fully stabilized and operational demands allow for attention diverted from core public safety operations.

### **2. Police Citizens Academy**

The Citizens Academy provides an opportunity for community members to gain insight into police operations, policies, and procedures. While the program has historically been well received, it requires significant planning and staffing to deliver effectively.

At this time, the department does not have the capacity to relaunch the program. Reintroduction will be considered once staffing stabilization has been achieved and sufficient resources are available to support its successful implementation.

### **3. Police Explorer Program**

The Police Explorer Program is a youth engagement initiative that provides exposure to law enforcement careers through training, mentorship, and community service. The program existed in the department many years ago and will require considerable available staff time to reimplement and oversee.

Reestablishing the program would require substantial dedicated supervision, coordination with educational institutions, and careful consideration of liability and risk management. While the Chief of Police made

inquiries with school district administration back in 2025, given the current staffing priorities and resource limitations, staff is not recommending reinstatement at this time.

**4. Mounted Unit (Exploratory)**

A mounted unit has been identified as a potential opportunity to enhance community engagement and visibility, particularly in parks, open spaces, and during special events. However, significant liability considerations were suggested to exist, as identified by the city’s risk management authority.

For this reason, staff recommend that any future consideration of a mounted unit involve administration by an external nonprofit or partner organization rather than direct city operation. Preliminary inquiries have been initiated with respect to the establishment of a 501c3; however, department priorities remain focused on staffing and core service delivery at this time.

**STAFF ANALYSIS:**

Community engagement and volunteer programs provide meaningful benefits, including increased public trust, expanded outreach capacity, and enhanced visibility. However, these programs also require substantial and sustained staffing, supervision, and administrative oversight to be effective and responsible.

Given current conditions, the department must prioritize core public safety functions, including patrol operations, investigations, and emergency response. While volunteer programs remain a valuable long-term objective, implementation at this stage would risk overextending limited supervisory and administrative resources.

Deferring expansion until staffing stability is achieved ensures that any future programs are implemented in a structured, sustainable, and effective manner.

**CITY COUNCIL GOALS / PRIORITIES / GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:**

These community programs support the City Council’s Public Safety and Community Vitality goals by enhancing trust between the police department and residents, engaging youth, and increasing positive community interactions. They are generally consistent with the Sebastopol General Plan policies related to public safety and community well-being. Detailed alignment and prioritization will be addressed as part of the upcoming Goals and Priorities adoption process.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

As of the preparation of this staff report, no public comments have been received on this item. Any comments received after distribution of the report will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials. Public comment will also be accepted during the meeting.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

This item has been noticed and made available for public review in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act, at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Staff time to prepare this report is covered within existing budgeted salaries. The fiscal impact of implementing or expanding these programs will be determined as part of the city council’s goals and priorities process and addressed during FY 2026-27 budget development.

**RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:**

That the city council receive this informational report. Staff will return with additional details on budgeting and timelines as part of the city council goals and priorities agenda item scheduled for a future meeting.

**OPTIONS:**

None. This is an informational item only on the update of the volunteer programs. As noted above, Staff will return with additional details on budgeting and timelines as part of the city council goals and priorities agenda item scheduled for a future meeting once staffing is at capacity and they are fully trained and able to operate with the required autonomy.

**APPROVALS:**

Department Head Approval:	Approval Date: 4/27/2026
CEQA Determination (Planning):	Approval Date: N/A
The proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)	
Administrative Services (Financial)	Approval Date: 4/27/2026
Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	Account Code (if applicable)
City Attorney Approval:	Approval Date: 4/27/2026
City Manager Approval:	Approval Date: 4/27/2026