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Drug arrest money will fund police computers

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Rap sheets will have a different look in Whitehall early next year.

With just a few keystrokes, Whitehall police will know if a suspicious motorist was once arrested for disorderly conduct at a Pink Floyd concert at Ohio Stadium, or if they are wanted for murder in Tennessee.

The information will come from new state-of-the-art Mobile Data Computers in each police cruiser.

Whitehall Police Chief Richard Zitzke pitched the proposal to City Council members at a meeting of council committees Tuesday, Nov. 13.

The new Mobile Data Computers will replace the obsolete and inoperable Mobile Data Terminals police officers currently use.

Zitzke has been trying to acquire the modern technology for several years. In each of the past three years, the city was unable to make the purchase using its general fund.

Therefore, Zitzke suggested the computers be purchased using proceeds from the Law Enforcement Trust Fund, a source funded with money and property confiscated in drug-related arrests.

"We can use money we took from the bad guys and use it to buy something to put even more bad guys away. ... I just love that," Zitzke said.

The system Zitzke proposes purchasing is named Authority Mobile Safety, a collaborative effort between Civica CMI, the division's current technology provider, and the Armada Group, a business founded by a former Columbus police officer.

The cost of the system is \$107,023 -- about half of the cost of the Mobile Data Terminals being replaced.

"The system is nothing short of amazing and is incredibly officer-friendly," Zitzke said.

Mobile Data Terminals allow police to access the Law Enforcement Automated Data System, known as LEADS, as well as displaying where officers are located and logging service calls.

The new system improves all these features as well as placing new tools in the division's crime-fighting arsenal which both strengthen the effectiveness of police and enhance officer safety.

Using LEADS, Zitzke said, often requires police to scroll through pages of text to glean pertinent information. The new system will show scanned images of driver's licenses and instantly warn officers if a suspect is a wanted felon.

The system also will allow Whitehall police to directly communicate with officers from any other agency using the same system, including police departments in Hilliard, Dublin and Westerville.

Officers can send and receive e-mail or a digital picture to determine if police in another jurisdiction have located a missing juvenile or have the correct suspect in custody.

Supporting software will format police reports, automatically placing driver's license numbers, Social

Security numbers and birthdates in proper fields, allowing police officers to quickly complete reports.

"It streamlines the process," Zitzke said. "It puts more cops on the street without actually putting more cops on the street."

Zitzke's presentation received a warm reception at council.

"This is great," said Councilman Zach Woodruff.

The Mobile Data Computers will be coupled with digital in-cruiser cameras to give Whitehall police the latest in crime-fighting technology.

A product demonstration of Mobile Data Computers is scheduled at the next council meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 20 at Whitehall City Hall, 360 S. Yearling Road.

Council members are expected to adopt an emergency ordinance authorizing the purchase of the computers at the meeting.

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--Police Chief Richard Zitzke

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