



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Paul Joseph

SUBJECT: Reinstatement of the San
José Police Department
Horse Mounted Unit

DATE: July 28, 2025

Approved

Date:

8/6/2025

COUNCIL DISTRICT: Citywide

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) Approve the reinstatement of the San José Police Department Horse Mounted Unit as a collateral, part-time operation using existing funding for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 and include ongoing funding as part of the development of the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Base Budget as discussed in the memorandum.
- (b) Adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager or her designee to accept a donation from the San José Police Foundation of six horses, two trucks, two horse trailers, uniforms, officer training, and miscellaneous tack and gear valued at approximately \$390,000.

SUMMARY AND OUTCOME

Approval of these recommended actions will allow the San José Police Department (the Department) to reinstate the Horse Mounted Unit (HMU) and thereby expand its visible police presence and increase quality of life enforcement in the downtown area, that uses donations and existing resources for all startup and FY 2025-2026 expenses.

BACKGROUND

The Department previously operated an HMU that provided visible law enforcement presence and effective quality of life ordinance enforcement, particularly in the downtown core. The unit was disbanded in 2018 due to budget and staffing constraints.

Recent evaluations to enhance uniformed police presence in Downtown San José have highlighted the reinstatement of the HMU as a strategic, highly effective solution, and cost-efficient program. This proposal addresses persistent calls for more visible law

enforcement and strengthens the City's broader public safety and community engagement initiatives. The HMU provides a dual benefit—offering both enhanced deterrence and deeper neighborhood connection—through a model that is both operationally practical and symbolically powerful.

Central to the success of this initiative is the City's partnership with the San José Police Foundation, which has pledged critical support in reestablishing the unit through funding and resource coordination. This public-private collaboration exemplifies the kind of innovative civic partnership that allows the City to expand public safety services without placing large additional strain on the General Fund. In doing so, the reinstated HMU aligns strongly with the City's strategic goals of revitalizing downtown, improving quality of life, and fostering trust between the police and the community they serve.

ANALYSIS

Proposal Goal

The primary objective of this memorandum is to reestablish the Department's HMU as a collateral, part-time operation that enhances public safety, revitalizes community trust, and improves the quality of life in the downtown core—all while maintaining fiscal efficiency. The HMU will provide an impactful and highly visible law enforcement presence by utilizing existing staff on an overtime basis and leveraging community partnerships to fund the non-personal/equipment start-up costs.

Rationale for Reinstatement

1. Addressing downtown safety and visibility needs

Downtown San José is a focal point of civic life, commerce, and cultural events, but it also faces challenges related to loitering, open-air substance use, vandalism, and other low-level offenses that impact residents, businesses, and visitors. Community members and business owners have consistently expressed concerns about the perception of safety and lack of visible law enforcement in key areas, particularly during weekends and events.

Reinstating the HMU directly responds to these concerns by significantly increasing uniformed presence in high-traffic areas, deterring criminal behavior through proactive engagement, and supporting officers' ability to quickly respond to incidents that may otherwise go unchecked.

2. Strategic enforcement and area control

Mounted patrols offer strategic advantages in densely populated urban environments. Officers on horseback have a height and mobility advantage over foot or vehicle patrols, allowing them to:

- Cover large areas with enhanced visibility,
- Monitor and deter low-level nuisance crimes (e.g., public intoxication, illegal vending), and
- Provide crowd control and incident response at events, protests, or areas with transient congregation.

This model has proven effective in peer cities across the country, where mounted patrols are seen as a force multiplier in community policing and special event coverage.

3. Enhancing community engagement

Beyond enforcement, the HMU is a unique and effective tool for positive community engagement. Mounted officers consistently draw interest from residents, children, tourists, and eventgoers, creating natural opportunities for relationship-building and informal conversations with law enforcement. The unit reinforces a welcoming, human-centered presence that supports the Department's community policing goals.

In past deployments, the HMU became one of the Department's most recognized and requested assets for parades, festivals, and special events, symbolizing both professionalism and approachability. The return of the HMU can help rebuild public trust in law enforcement and support San José's goals of fostering a more vibrant and inclusive downtown environment.

Operational Strategy

1. Non-Personal/Equipment Costs

Start-up and operational needs—including horses, transportation equipment, uniforms, training, feed, veterinary, farrier, and related gear—are estimated at approximately \$390,000. The San José Police Foundation has generously agreed to support this component through focused community fundraising. This external support significantly reduces the burden on the City's budget and enables a timely reestablishment of the unit.

The San Jose Police Foundation has committed to funding one-time startup and equipment costs as discussed above. Equipment includes: six horses, two trucks, two horse trailers, uniforms, training for officers, and miscellaneous gear. The following table shows the estimated startup costs.

Item	Cost
2 Trucks at \$65,000 each	\$130,000
2 Horse Trailers at \$50,000 each	\$100,000
6 Horses at \$15,000 each	\$90,000
24 Uniforms for Officers at \$1,500 each	\$36,000
Training for 24 Officers at \$1,000 each	\$24,000
Tack and Miscellaneous gear	\$10,000
Total Estimated Non-Personal/Equipment Costs	\$390,000

In the 2025-2026 fiscal year, feed, veterinary, and farrier services expenditures will be paid for by a rebudget of prior year funds for the Police Mounted Unit appropriation in the Gift Trust Fund. The rebudget will be included in the 2024-2025 Annual Report which will be brought forward for City Council approval in October 2025.

After the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the City would be responsible for ongoing costs, such as feed, veterinary and farrier, and other related costs, which is estimated to be up to \$120,000 annually. As part of the development of the 2026-2027 Base Budget, the ongoing funding need will be included and will be partially offset by reallocating as much funding as possible from the Department's existing budget.

The horses will be housed in the Department's stables facility, which previously housed the HMU when it was operational and is currently being used by the Department for their K9 unit program and other trainings. It is anticipated that the facility is in good condition and will not need any additional funding for capital improvements at this time.

2. Personal Services Costs

The HMU will utilize officers on a voluntary, overtime basis, with compensation drawn from unspent walking beat overtime funds allocated to the Central Division. Due to sustained challenges in staffing walking beat shifts, these funds remain underutilized and otherwise spent on other areas, yet their original intent—to bolster police presence and community engagement in the downtown core—aligns seamlessly with the HMU's mission. This reassignment of funds ensures efficient use of an existing resource. In addition to the officers staffing the HMU, the Department will have a temporary position serve as the Stable Manager. This

position will be funded by savings from a current vacant position in the Department in 2025-2026. Staff will assess the ongoing need of the Stable Manager position and will include necessary actions as part of the development of the 2026-2027 Base Budget.

Conclusion

The Department recommends reinstating the HMU to expand visible police presence and increase quality of life enforcement with minimal new City expenditures. This proposal ensures fiscal efficiency and aligns with public safety and community engagement priorities.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Department staff will assess operational performance and community impact quarterly, with metrics including patrol hours, incident response effectiveness, and public feedback. Adjustments to staffing or deployment strategy will be made as needed.

COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATIONS

In 2025-2026, startup costs for this program, including horses and operating costs, will be covered by the San Jose Police Foundation and existing funding in the Gift Trust Fund. Staffing for the HMU will be using officers on a voluntary, overtime basis, funded by unspent funds for the walking beat overtime in the Central Division. The temporary Stable Manager position will be funded by vacancy savings in the Department.

After 2025-2026, the ongoing funding needs for the unit will be addressed as part of the development of the 2026-2027 Base Budget. Ongoing non-personal/equipment funding, estimated to be up to \$120,000 annually, will be needed for feed, veterinarian and farrier fees, security, utilities, and other costs. The Department will reallocate, as much as possible, funding within its existing budget to help offset the total non-personal/equipment need. In addition, the Administration will reassess the staffing need for the Stable Manager, and if necessary, will include position actions as part of the Base Budget with as minimal impacts on the General Fund as possible.

COORDINATION

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, the City Manager's Budget Office, and the San José Police Foundation.

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PUBLIC OUTREACH

This memorandum will be posted on the City's Council Agenda website for the August 19, 2025 City Council meeting.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND INPUT

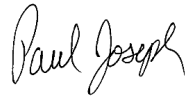
No commission recommendation or input is associated with this action.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP17-003, Organizational and Administrative Activities, resulting in no physical changes to the environment.

PUBLIC SUBSIDY REPORTING

This item does not include a public subsidy as defined in section 53083 or 53083.1 of the California Government Code or the City's Open Government Resolution.



Paul Joseph
Chief of Police

For questions, please contact Assistant Chief of Police Brian Shab at brian.shab@sanjoseca.gov.