Item 3.B – Rifle Purchase

From Faith Ross:

The Police Chief is asking the City Council for approval to purchase 54 assault rifles. He is asking the City for approval to use almost $80,000 out of his budget. The headline in last week’s Argus Courier was “City budget takes hit during shutdown”. This indicates that those funds could be used (reallocated) for something else, more pressing for our city.

I read the Chiefs concerns about an attack at one of our community events. While I have a concern about large gatherings and the possibility for an assault, arming the police with assault rifles, could possible cause more deaths and injuries if there is not enough training and preparation for such an attack.

Seeing what is going on in our country and in our city today, with the unemployment, food shortages, sickness, etc., this is not the time to buy assault rifles, unless the Chief knows something we don’t.

Faith Ross, Petaluma resident since 1975

From Ellen Obstler

I urge the Council not to authorize the purchase of 54 semi-automatic rifles. Before the pandemic, there was no justification to equip each sworn member of the police department with “a personally assigned dependable patrol rifle.” Yes, the Butter and Egg Day Parade, the Veterans’ Day Parade, and Cruisin the Boulevard Car Shows draw many people. But Chief Savano provides no evidence these events “have become increasingly targeted with violence.” Indeed, I witnessed first-hand the overreaction to community members handing out flyers against the Safeway gas station at last year’s Butter and Egg Day parade. In 2018, PNAS, the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, published a research article about heavily armed local police units and concluded “militarized policing fails to enhance officer safety or reduce local crime,” and “seeing militarized police in news reports may diminish police reputation in the mass public.”
https://www.pnas.org/content/115/37/9181. That rings true as the show of force at the Butter and Egg Day parade was unsettling. And now, there’s even less justification for buying these weapons. The pandemic has hurt so many people, but the possible silver lining is the opportunity to think hard about what we want the post-pandemic world to look like. Hopefully that vision will not include having our local police force armed with rifles. We can and should do better things with $80,000. Thank you for your consideration.

Ellen Obstler

From David Gardner:

Please DO NOT pass this Resolution. It is unwise, ill-advised, unnecessary and fiscally unsound, especially in view of COVID-19 financial issues.

There is absolutely no need for every single patrol officer to have a personal military-grade, high capacity, assault rifle. The rationale offered in the proposal is basically “many others are doing it.” That is the classic teenager response when confronted by a parent for doing something irrational (“everyone is doing it”) to which every parent responds “if they all jump off a cliff would you do it?”

The proposal offers no rationale, justification, or particularized examination of why such weapons in such numbers are needed or even desirable in this city at this time. Nor is there even a generalized examination showing that such weapons reduce crime, increase officer or civilian safety, or increase success in confrontations with armed suspects. No evidence is cited that such weapons reduce crime or increase safety or success because no such evidence exists. On the other hand there IS evidence that shotguns are more effective and safer: https://www.guns.com/news/2015/09/16/3-reasons-shotguns-are-better-than-ar-15s-for-police . And there is evidence that such weapons, and militarizing police in general, DECREASE citizen trust of police and willingness of the public to report crimes to the police. See https://phys.org/news/2018-08-militarization-police-safety-reputation.html
Leaving aside the bigger issues, a much more reasonable proposal is to replace the 16 current rifles and simply equip each patrol car with one.

David P. Gardner  
Law Offices of David P. Gardner  
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Petaluma, CA  94954  
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F: (707) 658-2188  
www.DavidPGardnerLaw.com

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From Lendri Purcell:

Greetings,
I hope this email finds you and your loved-ones healthy and well. As you know, this town as well as the nation is facing the most serious health and economic crisis since the 1918 Flu and the Great Depression. Unemployment is skyrocketing and too many of us can’t pay our rent or feed our families. Study history, well-fed people rarely riot. The best thing you can do to ensure the safety of our esteemed officers and our population is to use this money to increase food security. As you know, the Redwood Empire Food Bank states that “$10 provides 20 meals to children, seniors, and individuals who wake up hungry each morning.” The City of Petaluma could provide almost 160,000 meals instead of buying those rifles which would most likely sit unused in the event of an emergency situation. Well, folks, we are in in a grave emergency and helping people to live and eat will make us all safer in this moment and the long run. It is also your duty. Sincerely, Lendri Purcell

Lendri Purcell (pronouns: she/her)  
Vice President, Jonas Philanthropies  
Co-Founder, FACTS (Families Advocating for Chemical and Toxics Safety)

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From Samantha Sheppard:

Dear City Council Members:

I am writing to express my dismay at the planned purchase of M400 rifles. What on earth do we need them for in our city?

After the purchase of the tactical vehicle, I question this type of purchase, and think you should at least educate the public on why these type of guns are needed, and in such numbers, before spending citizens’ tax dollars on them.

I look forward to learning more about why they are needed. For tomorrow’s vote, in this time of pandemic, we do not need more guns.

Sincerely,

Samantha Sheppard

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From Eric Leland:

Dear Council Members,

Item 3b calls for Petaluma to spend nearly $80,000 to purchase 54 M400 rifles. The M400 is a military grade weapon designed to inflict mass casualties on enemy combatants at close range.
The request for these funds from Chief of Police Ken Savano reclassifies these military class weapons as “patrol rifles,” and justifies this redefinition by citing in several paragraphs how law enforcement across the nation is similarly adopting these military grade weapons. Just because other police departments are militarizing, doesn’t make this a good idea for Petaluma. This is similar to arguing that lying is ok because President Trump has done so over 18,000 times.

Chief Savano also argues that “law enforcement in the United States has increasingly responded to incidents involving citizens armed with equally powerful rifles.” The criminal threat from military grade weaponry in Petaluma is virtually nonexistent - if it did exist, the Chief would have cited it in his request for these funds. The Chief would like to spend $80,000 to equip “each patrol officer, sergeant, detective, traffic officer and all sworn members of administration” with a military grade weapon against a virtually nonexistent threat.

Police militarization neither reduces rates of violent crime nor changes the number of officers assaulted or killed - this is according to a study of 9,000 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. published in September 2018 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (https://www.pnas.org/content/115/37/9181). The study found that public confidence in the police is eroded when seeing militarized units and gives the impression that a police department is overfunded. Additionally, the study found that predominantly African American neighborhoods witnessed more militarized deployments than white neighborhoods - even when these areas had low rates of crime. In fact, the study found that every 10% increase in the number of African-Americans living in an area corresponded with a 10 percent increase in militarized deployments.

Let’s not waste $80,000 to use military grade weapons as “patrol rifles” when the data is clear. This strategy simply does not work and is in fact harmful to peace in the community.

Thank you,

Eric

Eric Leland (he/him/his)
Principal, FivePaths LLC

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From Joanna Paun:

Hello all,
I am writing regarding Agenda Item #3.B (purchase of rifles) and would like to express my opposition, I respectfully ask that this item be pulled from the consent agenda with the intention of being further discussed.

I find it ironic that I write to you today about the purchase of these rifles on the 50th anniversary of the Kent State Shootings; where approximately 67 rounds were fired over a period of 13 seconds, killing four students and wounding nine others.

I appreciate Chief Savano emailing members of the public who had voiced their concerns to him over the past week stating his position. I also ask that you also take into account the impact this decision has on the residents of Petaluma who like me are people of color, those who are Black and Brown, in a predominately White town, with a predominately White police force. Chief Savano was so kind as to sit down with me last year when at a community forum I voiced my concerns about policing in general. I shared with him the negative incidents I have had with the police growing up as well as the three times I have been pulled by PPD officers. Each time, while waiting for the police to approach my car, a sense of dread overtook me, one I feel even now recounting these incidents. I flashbacked to when I was called a nigger multiple times as a 16 year old by a police officer, and I thought of Sandra Bland, a fellow Black woman who was taken into custody by the police, never to return home again. Now, the thought of being pulled over by a cop with an assault rifle at the ready and at his disposal makes me sick and scared.

What also concerns me is that this purchase will also come with no anti-bias training and mental health supports for these officers. It would make so many of the residents of this town feel so much safer knowing that our officers have been trained in this manner as they interact with the public on a daily basis.
Respectfully,
Joanna Paun
Petaluma City Schools Board Trustee
School Counselor
Petaluma resident & Mother of four

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From Robyn niConney:
I am writing to oppose the purchase of $80,000 in semi-automatic assault weapons for our Petaluma police department.

Not only is this an ill-timed request by the police department, it is a move that seems to be out of step with what our city is and hopes to be.

There is no necessity here for weapons of this kind. Our crime rate and type just does not make this a justifiable expense. $80,000 in drug rehab, homeless housing, or mental health professionals would be a better fit for the kinds of crime we experience.

For the council to approve this kind of request is an outrage. It is a GIANT waste of taxpayer dollars and encourages increased fear of a militarized law enforcement. If anything, we need the heat turned down, not up, here.

We do not need council members to rubber stamp “boys with toys”...it’s an irresponsible move and we, the voters, will remember who voted for this waste of money come November.

Sincerely,
Robyn NiConney
(Petaluma resident-Weaverly Dr)

From Richard Parmer:
The purchase of new rifles should be deferred until at least next fiscal year. Police equipment needs are legitimate but in abnormal times like this it is more important we feed city residents than upgrade police equipment. I am a volunteer for a local nonprofit that delivers food every week to low income, living alone senior City of Petaluma residents who can’t afford to feed themselves. I am also a retired peace officer. It would serve the council better if at least some of this $79,000 proposed expenditure went to support nonprofits who feed our most vulnerable city residents. I am doing my part; the city council should do theirs. Rick Parmer, 217 Fair Avenue 94952

From Martha Ezell:
Please consider this a request for change in funding for automatic rifles to something more helpful for the community.

Thanks,
A Citizen of Petaluma

From Jerol O’Hare:
I feel that our Petaluma Police Department does not warrant the new guns. I would like to see a study on crime here in Petaluma that would show why these guns are necessary. I think we have more important things to
budget for. Im always reading in the paper about how tight money is in the city coffers so why spend money on guns. If need be which I doubt the National Guard could be called in. No to the Guns.

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From John Hill, Jr.:

Enough is Enough! "We The People" do not want more guns in our neighborhoods. Some, want to do something instead purchasing guns for the police. Like using the money($$$)$79,000 to help the of Greater Petaluma Area. Like taxes and morgages.

Respectfully,
John Hill Jr.

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From Kay Hardy:

It seems unconscionable to me for the city of Petaluma even to consider purchasing Sig Sauer rifles at this time rather than use those funds to mitigate the crisis caused by the COVID 19 virus. Our small businesses and our citizens have dire needs that could be alleviated in some part by financial help. Also I suspect that our city's finances will not reach the amount projected due to lack of input from the tax base of our local business and this may not be a prudent investment to make at this time.

Please vote NO on Item 3B on Monday, May 4.

Thank you,
Kay Hardy, 130C Graylawn Ave., Petaluma

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From Anita LaFollette:

Send the money to the Food Bank instead of buying guns for the Police. Anita

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From Harley Christensen:

This is a precarious time to be alive for all kinds of reasons but the pandemic and enormous loss of jobs is devastating. We need to move as many resources as possible, that are not absolutely critical, to help our local residents. These are times of great despair, many adults have no idea how to move forward, children are going to bed hungry, even the air we breathe cannot be trusted. This is not the time to purchase 54 Sig Sauer M400 rifles at a cost of $79,439.76. This is a time to take care of our community.

Please do not purchase these weapons at this time. Please take this money and invest it in the welfare of our community.

Thank you,
Harley

Harley Christensen
400 Smith Court
Petaluma, CA 94952

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From Linda Judah:
I have a public comment regarding item 3.B on the Council Agenda for the 5/4 meeting. My understanding that this is to approve the purchase of some rifles for the police dept at a cost of nearly $80K. I do NOT approve this purchase. We ought to be looking to disarm our police force (with a possible except for a special unit). beat cops do not need firearms. I would like to see our police force move to non-lethal methods. In addition, if that money could be spent on housing or providing food for vulnerable Petalumans that would be preferable. I realize some funds can only be used in certain ways, so perhaps that isn't possible, but seriously, when spending our limited city funds always ask "Who will benefit, and Who will be harmed." Let us try to do the most good for the most people.

Thank you,

Linda Judah
12 Grandview Ave, Petaluma, CA 94952

From Barry Bussewitz:

This item looks problematic on the face of it. I have not studied the resolution but it appears to be a lot of rifles and a lot of dollars for a city seeking $2.1 million from Congress in a dire emergency.

Thank you,

Barry

From Linda Gavre:

Dear City Council,

I am totally against the plan for the Police Dept. to spend $80,000 on automatic weapons for city officers when 16 automatic rifles are already owned by the Dept. Also, the PPD already has a grant to purchase 10 more rifles.

Automatic rifles such as these are for offensive maneuvers and our Police Officers take an oath to Protect and Serve people in our communities, not attack them. It seems to me that money would be more wisely spent on crisis management and de-escalation training. The CHP is distributing face masks to truck drivers; I would like to see the PPD help Petaluma residents in a similar way.

Especially during this pandemic when so many city residents are unsure about work and housing, as well as struggling to feed their families, I feel these monies can be far better used elsewhere. Food Banks are running out of food and residents who have lost jobs cannot pay their rent or mortgages. In addition many of those who have lost their health insurance as well as their jobs and they need support.

I urge you to reconsider this huge purchase and work with community members to use these monies to help all city residents have adequate food and money for basic supplies, in addition to supporting residents in other ways during this crisis. This would include educating fruit stand workers and restaurant owners about current regulations and helping them to achieve them.

Sincerely,

Laura Gavre
1701 Burgundy Ct
Petaluma 94954

From Erin Chmielewski:

I am writing in opposition to allowing $80k to go towards purchasing semi-automatic rifles for our local law enforcement. There is so much more value to using those funds to support our at-risk and frontline communities. I do not want our law enforcement to have a weapon that can fire more lead into our community members.
We do not need to fight fire with fire. I am not convinced by the reasoning stated by the Police. It is unnecessary to spend that money on that type of weapon, or any like it.

Erin Chmielewski

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From Betsy Burson:

I urge the Council to think long and hard about this. I’d like to know why our current SWAT team is inadequate for the task.

Chief Savano says: "As the need was so great and obvious to maintain the safety of our community, officers requested permission to purchase a rifle on their own so they could have the tool available to them to perform their duties for the City. At that time, our officers, including myself, spent approx $1,000 each, to be ready and able to respond to the most critical threats to the safety of our community. Since then, because of the concerns mentioned above with the shared military surplus rifles, almost all of our officers have made the same purchase to maintain their safety and readiness to respond."

To explain the "great and obvious" need, he cites FBI statistics of 277 active shooter incidents across the country in 20 years.

I can see how having every cop with their own rifle creates unacceptable liability and practical challenges, but it seems like the new hardware is more to clean up the mess than to deal with an honest need.

Again, why is SWAT not adequate for the job? I hope you'll get answers to that question.

Chief Savano says: Our deployment policy for active shooters who are actively engaged in killing or injuring innocent people is to deploy with a patrol rifle and locate and neutralize the threat. Another question I have: Is this the only time rifles are used? When else?

Chief Savano implies that his officers are afraid without rifles. But that is what all the officers say after shooting unarmed people, and juries tend to agree. So, does having a rifle make our officers less likely to use them? or more?

I remember the Dallas shooting, where 100 armed police were monitoring a protest, and 5 were killed in an ambush. All that weaponry did not protect them, sadly.

The chief says he is sensitive to the optics of militarizing our police force, but this really isn't optics, it is militarizing it. I also remember Kent State.

I ask you all to look long and hard and ask the questions. Stories from 1927 where Petaluma had to get help from the Presidio are not helpful. We have a SWAT team, why can't they manage this?

Thank you!

Betsy

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From Greg Mitchell:

Madame Mayor,

I am appalled to think that the Petaluma Police Department would be making this insane request for rifles at this point in time. With people unable to pay rent, buy food, WORK!, the VERY last thing our town should be doing is buying weapons. I have great respect for the police and what they do, but that they’ve kept this request on the table during this pandemic is unconscionable.

Respectfully,
Greg Mitchell
From Gail Burnett:

I object to the expenditure of $79,439 on 54 rifles for our Police Department. I note that a grant has been received to purchase ten additional new rifles already.

First, I question the need to retire existing rifles. My friend who is an experienced firearms instructor and competitive shooter agrees with me that 10,000 rounds are not significant in the useful life of a well maintained firearm. His personal statement is available should you wish to see it.

The second point is to question the need for each member of the Department to carry their “own” assigned rifle. If you do in fact standardize to one model, why couldn’t rifles be issued at the start of each shift, or issued with a vehicle? I expect there are less than 20 members of the Department on duty at any one time. Without standardization, I understand that there would be more complexity in scheduling to assure that each person gets to use a weapon they have trained with, but if you don’t retire all existing weapons, you would need to purchase far fewer rifles.

I do not see handguns as merely defensive weapons. I also wonder how many times a rifle has been discharged by an officer on duty in the last ten years, excepting practice and qualification. I do not see the need for all of our personnel to be armed with both handgun and rifle in this community. The level of threat we face does not justify this purchase.

Finally, I have to question your priorities for spending, when we know the City does not have surplus funds available.

Sincerely,
Gail Burnett

From Susan Small:

Dear Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council,

I am asking that you deny the request from the Petaluma Police Department for $80,000 (approx.) for semi automatic rifles. While I understand their current cache of rifles are old and used; however, I do not agree with either the extreme expenditure nor the high caliber of weaponry.

At this juncture in our world history with Covid-19 forefront in our minds, this money could be more wisely spent on any number of community preparedness measures, school funding/teachers salaries (as we are expecting to open schools early) and hospital equipment so we are better prepared for future pandemics - the list goes on ad nauseam for a number of reasons.

Additionally, the high caliber of weaponry requested is over the top. Our little town of Petaluma does not have the crime rate or history to validate a semi-automatic weapon for every police officer. The PPD is proud of the outreach and their "Peace" Officers who serve the community and it should continue in this manner.

Again, I respectfully request that you deny this request.

Susan Small
susan01small@gmail.com

From Sam Tuttleman:
By now you have heard or will hear a number of arguments as to why you should vote against this purchase. It gives me pause to imagine that the city where I live would prioritize the purchase of assault rifles over responding to the humanitarian needs of Petalumans during this time of unprecedented crisis. But, I will leave the details of these arguments to others.

We face a City Council election in 6 months. If this council believes that transparency is one of its values then I urge you to remove this item from the Consent Calendar and agendize it as a separate item on an upcoming agenda. This evening there are 6 items on the Consent Calendar. Unless an item is removed from the Consent Calendar the council approves/disapproves all of the items in a single vote. If you do not remove the purchase and the Consent Calendar is passed, the residents of our town will have no way of knowing where each of you stands on this purchase. In effect your constituents will be robbed of our ability to hold each and every one of you accountable for your vote.

As the tragedy of our current situation unfolds it is more important than ever for your council to act transparently in order to allow your constituents to render their judgement on election day.

Sam Tuttelman
419 Keokuk Street.

From Annie Stuart:
Dear Madame Mayor and City Council Members,

I certainly understand the need for our police department to have adequate firearms to protect themselves and to protect the public. And I appreciate the department’s initiative in pursuing a grant to partly fulfill these needs.

However, spending up to $80,000 on high-powered weaponry when so many in our community are struggling just to meet basic needs is ill-timed and doesn’t seem right. In addition, I wonder if it is necessary.

The background police report states that patrol rifles are becoming standard operating equipment for law enforcement. It also says: “While there has been debate on the militarization of municipal police departments and concern over equipment issued to its personnel, law enforcement in the United States has increasingly responded to incidents involving citizens armed with equally powerful rifles.”

Is this the case in our community? Do we really need to participate in an arms race with our residents in this way?

Thanks for considering other alternatives to this proposal.

Sincerely,

Annie Stuart

Annie Stuart
Encore Editorial Services
707.242.6171
www.encoredit.com

From Dennis Pocokay:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.
I am extremely concerned that the city council is tonight expected to quickly approve a police department request for $80,000 for military-style rifles, including one for EVERY officer on the force. And that this occurs
during the most serious health and economic crisis ever experienced by current residents. And within a few days of reports of a $2 billion budget shortfall, which may well lead to layoffs and additional cuts in city services.

I understand that this rifle “has become standard issued equipment in law enforcement”, but these are not “standard” times. I urge the city council not to simply rubber stamp such requests, but to lead by doing what is in the best interests of all of us. People are short of food, and they are short of rent money; and it is well-known that our local social service agencies are short of what they need to help all those in trouble. Relatively speaking, police rifles must be considered a “luxury” at this time. These dollars should be re-purposed for crisis relief.

Thank you.

Dennis Pocekay
67 Windsor Ln
Petaluma, CA 94952
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From Joanna Intara:

My name is Joanna Intara and I am a Petaluma resident. I have lived here since 2005. I do not support the spending of $80,000 for assault rifles or more guns for the police department, absolutely not. I appreciate my voice being heard.

Thank you. My family of four feels the same way. As do many I know.

Joanna Intara
286 Edinburgh Lane
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From Michael Nagler:

Dear Councilmembers,

I have every respect for Chief Savano, whom I've had the pleasure of meeting, and all the Department personnel who work, sometimes at serious risk, to keep our city safe. I am also well aware of the unfortunate escalation of weaponry available in our society today. Nonetheless, I feel that this is a time to care for the many who are suffering from the effects of the corona virus pandemic and strongly believe that we should be spending the City's funds on food, not rifles. Why not pay farmers who have to destroy crops to instead send their food to the food banks, who are hurting for supplies, or simply give the funds to them?

Respectfully,

Michael Nagler

The Metta Center for Nonviolence, Founder and President
http://michaelnagler.org/. Personal website (in development)
http://thirdharmony.org/. The film
Nonviolence + Science = New Story
Daily Inspiration--and we need some!
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From Vasanti Jayaswal:

The current situation we are in demands that we look critically, as to the needs of this city, and balance it with the proper and timely usage of tax payers' money.

Is Petaluma such a crime infested city that it calls for a massive purchase of rifles for the police?

Will the weaponry that they already possess be not enough?
Are you anticipating some form of unrest or danger from the public, in the near future?

Can we not siphon existing funds to provide much needed meals for the hungry at these devastating times?

Thanks

Vasanti Jayaswal (Vaasi)
210 Baker Street

From Caitlin Quinn:

Hello all,

Thank you for all that you do for the people of Petaluma. I am writing regarding Agenda Item #3.B (purchase of rifles) and apologize for how close this comes to your meeting time. I do not require or request a response, just please read the whole email. I have done my own research and consulted with former colleagues who now work with the Open Society Foundations.

I oppose the passage of Item #3.B as it is currently written. I hope it will be pulled from the Consent Agenda for discussion at the VERY least.

Access and obtainment of these guns will lead to more aggressive tactics that will impact residents of Petaluma, especially Black and Brown residents. There are numerous studies that show these trends among violent police departments, in particular how militarization fails to protect officers and targets Black communities.


Here are a few studies and articles about countries and reasons why police should not carry guns. Access to these kinds of weapons only increases gun violence.

https://theweek.com/articles/795599/police-officers-not-need-guns

I am unsure if you all are familiar with AB 392, the act to save lives act. It took into effect earlier this year and updates California’s “use of force” law to the necessary standard... aka officers can only use deadly force only when necessary to defend against an imminent threat to harm to themselves or others. I don’t know if we have updated our “use of force” standards, but this new law brings reasoning to why departments should not invest in lethal weapons and tactics that only support the use of deadly force.

https://a79.asmdc.org/priorities/california-act-save-lives-ab392

Lastly, due to COVID-19, organizations (including ACLU and the Justice Collaborative) across the country are pushing for their councils to limit enforcement, contacts, and stops. We should not be investing in policing, and our main priority should be on public health, limiting and prevent the spread of the virus. Here are links to those recommendations:

https://thejusticecollaborative.com/covid19/emergency-response-law-enforcement/
https://drive.google.com/file/d/12J7H31NKNWH3sDJP9MuJRJaDsSy6Q_f/view

We have seen quite a bit of violence against civilians from our neighboring jurisdictions and luckily Petaluma PD is far superior to the other policing agencies I am familiar with (and absolutely, 100%, unquestionably the best with survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence) and I personally would like it to stay that way.
Petalumans have enough to fear right now and I have not seen the aggressive anti-bias training OR mental health support for our officers to make me comfortable with this expensive purchase. Thank you for your time.

From Michelle Kelly:

To Petaluma City Manager and Petaluma City Council:

I'll be attending the virtual city council meeting tonight as I'm very concerned about Item 3b calling for Petaluma to spend nearly $80,000 to purchase 54 M400 rifles. The M400 is a military grade weapon designed to inflict mass casualties on enemy combatants at close range.

The request for these funds from Chief of Police Ken Savano reclassifies these military class weapons as "patrol rifles", and justifies this redefinition by citing in several paragraphs how law enforcement across the nation is similarly adopting these military grade weapons. Just because other police departments are militarizing, doesn't make this a good idea for Petaluma.

Chief Savano also argues that "law enforcement in the United States has increasingly responded to incidents involving citizens armed with equally powerful rifles." The criminal threat from military grade weaponry in Petaluma is virtually nonexistent - if it did exist, the Chief would have cited it in his request for these funds. The Chief would like to spend $80,000 to equip "each patrol officer, sergeant, detective, traffic officer and all sworn members of administration" with a military grade weapon against a virtually nonexistent threat.

"The change in equipment is too often paralleled by a corresponding change in attitude whereby police conceive of themselves as “at war” with communities rather than as public servants concerned with keeping their communities safe. We advocate for a return to a less dangerous, more collaborative style of policing. "We should not be able to mistake our officers for soldiers." ACLU website.

Police militarization neither reduces rates of violent crime nor changes the number of officers assaulted or killed - this is according to a study of 9,000 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. published in September 2018 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (https://www.pnas.org/content/115/37/9181). The study found that public confidence in the police is eroded when seeing militarized units and gives the impression that a police department is overfunded. Additionally, the study found that predominantly African American neighborhoods witnessed more militarized deployments than white neighborhoods - even when these areas had low rates of crime. In fact, the study found that every 10% increase in the number of African-Americans living in an area corresponded with a 10 percent increase in militarized deployments.

Let’s not waste $80,000 to use military grade weapons as "patrol rifles" when the data is clear. This strategy simply does not work, and is in fact harmful to peace in the community.

Not to mention, we are facing the most serious health and economic crisis since the 1918 Flu and the Great Depression. Unemployment is skyrocketing and our friends and family members can’t pay their rent or feed their families. This money could be used to mitigate the tragedy we face here in Petaluma.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Michelle Kelly

From Sheila Morrissey:

Thank you for all that you do for the people of Petaluma. I am writing regarding Agenda Item #3.B (purchase of rifles) and apologize for how close this comes to your meeting time. I do not require or request a response, just please read the whole email. I have done my own research and consulted with former colleagues who now work with the Open Society Foundations.

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https://www.pbs.org/.../police-militarization-fails-to...

Here are a few studies and articles about countries and reasons why police should not carry guns. Access to these kinds of weapons only increases gun violence.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../5-countries-where.../
https://theweek.com/.../795599/police-officers-not-need-guns

I am unsure if you all are familiar with AB 392, the act to save lives act. It took into effect earlier this year and updates California's "use of force" law to the necessary standard... aka officers can only use deadly force only when necessary to defend against an imminent threat to harm to themselves or others. I don't know if we have updated our "use of force" standards, but this new law brings reasoning to why departments should not invest in lethal weapons and tactics that only support the use of deadly force.

https://a79.asmdc.org/pri.../california-act-save-lives-ab392

Lastly, due to COVID-19, organizations (including ACLU and the Justice Collaborative) across the country are pushing for their councils to limit enforcement, contacts, and stops. We should not be investing in policing, and our main priority should be on public health, limiting and prevent the spread of the virus. Here are links to those recommendations:

https://thejusticecollaborative.com/.../emergency.../
https://drive.google.com/.../12J7H31NKNWH3sDJP9MuXR.../view

We have seen quite a bit of violence against civilians from our neighboring jurisdictions and luckily Petaluma PD is far superior to the other policing agencies I am familiar with (and absolutely, 100%, unquestionably the best with survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence) and I personally would like it to stay that way.

Petalumans have enough to fear right now and I have not seen the aggressive anti-bias training OR mental health support for our officers to make me comfortable with this expensive purchase. Thank you for your time.

Sheila Morrissey

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From Marjorie Helm:

Dear Mayor Barrett, City Council and City Manager,

Thank you for your leadership through the COVID-19 crisis that engulfs our city.

I am writing to oppose the authorization of the purchase of 54 semi-automatic rifles. I am very concerned about the increased militarization of community police forces. In addition, making this expenditure while we are facing widespread unemployment and a deepening of already existing poverty and increased food insecurity is out of step with community needs.

So many of our neighbors are left out of COVID-19 relief because of their or a family member’s Immigration status.

Please use this $80,000 to forestall layoffs, provide food relief and rental assistance.

Respectfully,
Marjorie Helm

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From Amber Szoboszlai:

I saw the article referenced by our police chief that **detailed the active shooter incidents in the U.S. from 2000 to 2018**. According to that data, 884 people were killed during that time, or an average of 47 people per year. Meanwhile, the average annual number of people killed by law enforcement officers in the U.S. is 978, based on data reported by the Washington Post (**4400 people over 4.5 years from 2015-2019**).

**Each year, as many people are killed by police officers as have been killed by mass shooters in the past 20 years.**

I have so many concerns about the militarization of our police force, but the most upsetting is the larger negative impact on black and brown communities, as evidenced by the Washington Post data cited above:

1. **Black Americans are disproportionately killed by police.** They account for 13% of the U.S. population yet make up 26% of people shot and killed by police.
2. **Black men are more likely to be fatally shot while unarmed.** An unarmed black man is 4 times more likely to be killed by police than a white man.

Although the underlying causes of these disparities remains an important focus of research, the impact on the community is clear: black and brown people are more fearful of police encounters. Just check out the hashtag #LivingWhileBlack or polls from The Pew Research Center to understand why that might be.

We live in a country with a history of racial discrimination and ongoing conditions of racial bias. We are witnessing these racial disparities play out during the pandemic: California's black residents are dying at twice the rate of white residents, according to the California Department of Public Health, likely due to long-standing socioeconomic differences.

Differences in access to healthcare, to wealth, to higher wages, to work from home jobs, to personal protective equipment, to testing, to treatment, to housing security, to job security. A decision to spend our tax dollars on assault rifles at this moment in time is one that fails to acknowledge the struggles of those who could benefit more from this money in the form of rental or food assistance. Buying weapons during a pandemic when people are unemployed, unable to buy food, and unable to pay rent is not the most humanitarian allocation and prioritization of our City's spending.

At this time, our money can and should be going to so many other things than police force militarization, in particular to meet basic human rights and needs like access to food, shelter and healthcare. As unemployment soars to levels unseen since the Great Depression, we must turn our focus toward supporting those most in need, not militarizing our police force.

Regardless, the request for acquisition of assault rifles by our police force does not make me feel safer, it creates a deep-seated fear for myself, my family, my neighbors, and my community. A Petaluma with a police force outfitted with assault rifles is not a place that makes me #PetalumaProud.

Militarization of police forces is occurring across the U.S. but it is not the only answer. As our locally elected officials, you hold the power to make a difference in our communities. As members of the diverse group of people who make up Petaluma’s residents, we must confront the war-focused mentality that is encroaching on our police forces.

I hope that the City Council can do their job to both represent the residents of Petaluma and use evidence-based information that uplifts values of racial justice to guide your decisions on this issue on Monday night's agenda.

Kind regards,
Amber

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From Carol Crabill:
Dear All,

Unlike the Sonoma County Supervisors' relationship to the County Sheriff, the Petaluma City Council has genuine oversight responsibility with respect to the Petaluma Police Department. Though you have been asked to fund a large number of military grade weapons – fifty-four M400 rifles – you have the authority to question why this is necessary, especially in Petaluma.

The front page of the Argus Courier on April 30 featured the headline “City budget takes a hit during shutdown”. Surely, given that COVID-19 has changed everything, this is a time to question expenditures and escalation of any kind.

The Police Department’s arguments as detailed in the submitted resolution are: 1) that the rifles have “become standard issued equipment in law enforcement” (everybody else has them); 2) that officers are already carrying their own rifles, therefore, they should have department issued rifles; and 3) that the department needs OFFENSIVE weapons, not just defensive weapons such as handguns, since we have parades, other large events and schools, which “have become increasingly targeted with violence necessitating the need for properly equipping police personnel with appropriate equipment such as patrol rifles to protect the community” (this argument plays to our fears).

Studies show (see, for example, https://phys.org/news/2018-08-militarization-police-safety-reputation.html) that enhanced weaponry might be and has been used disproportionately in neighborhoods where people of color live and that distrust of law enforcement, already a problem, will be the undesired result. I’m concerned that the military grade equipment will be used in Petaluma in situations where the suspect(s) could otherwise be talked down but the appearance of the equipment will make them more fearful and violent. I’m concerned that by militarizing the police that our officers will feel safe when they are not. And having a highly weaponized police force only feeds the fears of those who think they need a gun to protect themselves from a police state.

This proposal is about escalation, not de-escalation, not slowing down confrontations, creating space, defusing situations and calmly dealing with them. I urge you to question and deny this request.

Carol Crabill

From Alia Beeton:

Item 3b calls for Petaluma to spend nearly $80,000 to purchase 54 M400 rifles. The M400 is a military grade weapon designed to inflict mass casualties on enemy combatants at close range.

The request for these funds from Chief of Police Ken Savano reclassifies these military class weapons as “patrol rifles,” and justifies this redefinition by citing in several paragraphs how law enforcement across the nation is similarly adopting these military grade weapons. Just because other police departments are militarizing doesn’t make this a good idea for Petaluma.

Chief Savano also argues that “law enforcement in the United States has increasingly responded to incidents involving citizens armed with equally powerful rifles.” The criminal threat from military grade weaponry in Petaluma is virtually nonexistent - if it did exist, the Chief would have cited it in his request for these funds. The Chief would like to spend $80,000 to equip “each patrol officer, sergeant, detective, traffic officer and all sworn members of administration” with a military grade weapon against a virtually nonexistent threat.

"The change in equipment is too often paralleled by a corresponding change in attitude whereby police conceive of themselves as “at war” with communities rather than as public servants concerned with keeping their communities safe. We advocate for a return to a less dangerous, more collaborative style of policing. We should not be able to mistake our officers for soldiers.” ACLU website.

Police militarization neither reduces rates of violent crime nor changes the number of officers assaulted or killed - this is according to a study of 9,000 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. published in September 2018 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (https://www.pnas.org/content/115/37/9181). The study found that public confidence in the police is eroded when seeing militarized units and gives the impression that a police department is overfunded. Additionally, the study found that predominantly African American neighborhoods witnessed more militarized deployments than white neighborhoods - even when these areas
had low rates of crime. In fact, the study found that every 10% increase in the number of African-Americans living in an area corresponded with a 10 percent increase in militarized deployments.

Let us not waste $80,000 to use military grade weapons as “patrol rifles” when the data is clear. This strategy simply does not work, and is in fact harmful to peace in the community.

Not to mention, we are facing the most serious health and economic crisis since the 1918 Flu and the Great Depression. Unemployment is skyrocketing and our friends and family members can’t pay their rent or feed their families. This money could be used to mitigate the tragedy we face here in Petaluma.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Alia Beeton

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From Eliza Dodge:

Please listen to your constituents. Buying these war weapons will NOT make Petaluma safer, it only endangers us.

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Thank you for your time.
From **Alexis Tejeda:**

Dear city of Petaluma elected officials,

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Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Alexis Tejeda

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From **Paige Green:**

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Thank you for your work in our community.

Sincerely,
Paige

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From Jerry and Stephanie Wilkinson:

On May 4th you will be asked to authorize the Petaluma Police Department to purchase 54 assault rifles. The police chief states that handguns are only a defensive weapon and not suitable as an offensive weapon when facing an adversary carrying a similar firearm or weapon. The letter from the chief says it is "imperative" that the police officers need such weapons to defend themselves and to protect the community. These statements may hold some water in a war zone, but we don’t live in a war zone. While we must agree that there is always the possibility of a tragedy of the scale the chief alludes to, we must also agree that the likelihood of such is quite low. I do not wear a crash helmet, and I suspect the chief does not wear one either, every time I drive my car though there is the possibility a situation could arise where doing such may be helpful. The same reasoning could apply here.

Furthermore, the chief says that the use of such weapons has been increasing in other departments, that is not a good reason to introduce assault weapons here. Elsewhere he states that this is the required equipment, where is that requirement written?

The request letter states that currently, the department has 16 assault rifles that are fifteen years old and have had 10,000 rounds expelled by them. Given that, and correct me if I am wrong here, but to date, these weapons have only been fired during training, and ideally, that scenario will continue. To this layperson that does not seem an inordinately old or overused piece of equipment.

The clear implication in the Chief’s letter is that we will be under assault and he mentions schools and other large community gatherings as potential targets. While it is tragically true that schools and large gatherings have been targets, I would point out that there are many more schools and communities where such attacks have not occurred than those that have. Additionally, such attacks happen whether or not police have assault weapons. The only use of the requested assault weapons is to shoot back. While shooting back may or may not
be the best response in a given situation it is without question of very limited and specific use. Also, given the potential scenarios the Chief offers, the butter and eggs parade being one, it would seem shooting back amidst a large crowd would quite possibly be the worst response.

I cannot say, nor can the chief say, if any of this will happen, nor can I say we won’t be hit by wildfires or a tsunami or a devastating earthquake. I cannot say that someone won’t come into our community intent on creating damage and destruction.

I can say that our community faces more immediate needs and that there can be no doubt that $80,000 directed towards any number of issues would be money better spent and more useful to the community that you represent, and the Chief is employed to protect. If I am understanding the letter correctly the $80,000 is money the PD has in its budget, how did it get there was this amount already planned for this, if not how do they have an extra $80,000?

I urge you to vote against this request for assault weapons and to direct those funds towards programs and uses that can benefit the community in positive and tangible ways.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Stephanie Wilkinson