

Springfield purchases police armored Suburban

Police compare it to a mom's soccer van

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Springfield police purchase a "discreet" armored vehicle

It's a no-brainer for Springfield Councilor and Lane County Sheriff's deputy Joe Pishioneri that the Springfield Police Department should purchase a police-armored Suburban.

"It's nothing but a rolling [ballistic] vest," Pishioneri said of the armored vehicle during the Feb. 6 Springfield City Council meeting.

The rolling ballistic vest Pishioneri refers to is an armored 2017 Chevrolet Suburban purchased by the city of Springfield after a 5-0 vote in favor, with Councilor Leonard Stoehr abstaining. The Suburban comes with a price tag of \$159,500 and \$4,850 in freight costs.

SPD used federal forfeiture funds to purchase the Suburban. Interim Chief Richard Lewis says the department has used the funds in the past for training and weapons acquisition but there is a limit to how the funds can be used.

Lewis says that the government wants police agencies to use these funds to prioritize drug cases.

Federal forfeiture is money or property seized from citizens, often without court proceedings, and given to the federal government. A percentage is later returned to the law enforcement agency making the seizure. Forfeiture funds often come from alleged drug cases. This is the largest purchase from those funds, Lewis says.

The American Civil Liberties Union calls federal forfeiture flawed, saying, “Owners need not ever be arrested or convicted of a crime for their cash, cars or even real estate to be taken away permanently by the government.”

Before buying the vehicle from Missouri-based Armored Group, LLC, SPD had to receive approval from the Department of Justice, a requirement stemming from Executive Order 13688. The order’s intention is to avoid police equipment purchases that appear too militaristic.

And that’s what the Suburban is, according to Lewis — non-militaristic.

The Armored Group lists the Army, the Department of Defense and foreign governments as among its clients for its armored cars and tactical vehicles.

The vehicle avoids a military appearance like that of a BearCat armored personnel carrier, Lewis says.

“It’s an armored Suburban and should be no different than a soccer mom’s driving down the road,” he says. “You shouldn’t notice it as any different than any other vehicle with the exception of emergency lights.”

The vehicle won’t be on the street daily, Lewis says, but it will still be used on a weekly basis. He hopes it will be in the police department’s fleet for 20 to 25 years.

The acquisition of the vehicle won't make the police department anymore aggressive, Lewis assured the council, after Stoehr referenced the Eugene Police Department's use of a BearCat that antagonized Brian Babb — a veteran with PTSD who was shot and killed during a mental health crisis.

Instead, he says, the Suburban will work as a shield for police officers during warranted searches or cases of active shooters. For police officers, it will offer a shield to hide behind instead of having to hide behind a regular police vehicle.

"I'm trying to afford the police the best protection I can," he says. "This particular vehicle has the armor protection to stop rifle rounds."

The 2017 Chevrolet Suburban has, among other features, a gun port in the rear to return fire if there is a trailing threat, Springfield documents show. But this vehicle wouldn't be used in any pursuits, Lewis says, because of the heavy weight of the armor — documents show the vehicles comes in at about 11,000 pounds, almost 6,000 pounds more than a typical Suburban's curb weight.